THE ART OF DESTRUCTION: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE URBAN GRAFFITI SUBCULTURE IN LONDON AND NEW YORK

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the urban graffiti subculture within the cities of New York and London. It was undertaken in an attempt to move beyond some of the negative stereotypes that characterise this subculture, its members and their illegal activities as inherently problematic, pointless and inane. Based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork in London and New York, it argues that graffiti is not senseless and mindless vandalism, but a pursuit that grants its mainly male and adolescent practitioners important and substantial rewards. Most notably these include fame, respect, autonomy, self direction and some sense of masculine status.

Illegality is identified as the subcultural element underpinning these identity enhancing affordances. It is presented, firstly, as a masculine resource; a tool which young men can use to confront risk and danger and gain, through this, the recognition and respect of their peers and the defining elements of their masculine identities. Secondly, it is argued that adolescent subcultural members use their illegal status to promote societal rejection, discourage adult intervention and secure their subculture as a 'world apart'. This free space grants them autonomy, self direction and a chance to escape 'real life' and the problems and restraints which they may, as adolescents, experience there.

On the basis of this, it is argued that three analytic revisions must be made if we are to understand this and other 'illegal' subcultures. First, we must move away from a passive model of delinquency. In this study, deviance is depicted as deliberate, functional and, thus, more than the consequence of an externally applied label. Second, we must move towards a more active model of identity construction. Graffiti writers build and mould their identities through their illegal activities. This defines them as active agents rather than textual subjects who have merely taken up an inscribed position in a provided text or discourse.

Third, we must look at what is being done in conjunction with who is doing it. Subcultural studies of the past have presented the subculture as a working class vehicle of resistance. However, they have rarely problematised its characteristically adolescent and masculine membership. Failure to include and analytically weave together factors of age, gender and illegality will, it is contended, result in a theoretically incomplete subcultural account.

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INTRODUCTION

The term graffiti derives from the Italian, 'graffiare', meaning 'to scratch' (Castleman, 1982) It carries with it a rich and varied history. From the start of humankind to the present day, graffiti has been an important form of social commentary Prehistoric communities chose to adorn the walls of their habitat with such scratchings. The peoples of Ancient Greece and Rome also employed graffiti as a medium for the expression of their thoughts (Reisner, 1971). Like modern society, public reactions to this form of expression were largely unfavourable. However, their deterrent measures have been somewhat modified over the years!:

> "To protect their walls against such defacement, the Romans placed pictures
> of deities or religious emblems upon their toilet walls and called down the
> wrath of heaven against those who were so wicked as to profane what their
> duty as a citizen of Rome required them to revere"

> (Abel & Buckley, 1977:27).

The type of graffiti focused upon in this study is commonly termed 'subcultural'. It originated in New York in the late sixties and has since then flourished and gained popularity in many different cities and towns in America, Europe and the rest of the world (an outline of this subculture's historical development can be found in Appendix A.). It is usually written in spray paint or marker pen and located upon city walls (see Figure 1.), buses, underground and overground trains (see Figure 2). This differentiates it from the more private etchings or, as Dundes (1966) terms them, 'latrinalia', commonly found upon the secluded walls of the toilet.

Figure 1. Subcultural Graffiti on a Wall in New York

Figure 2. Subcultural Graffiti on the London Underground system

Although subcultural graffiti targets an extensive public audience, for those uninvolved, it does tend to blend into its background scenery. I have great difficulty in recalling my considerations of subcultural graffiti before 1990. In truth, I don't believe I ever gave it much thought. Like many other people I have spoken to, unless an interest is kindled, its presence generates little reflection. My past indifference now astounds me. How could I have failed to notice these trademark inscriptions? and Why did their unknown nature not activate my curiosity and inspire me to discover more? What did they mean? Where did they come from? Who wrote them and why? These were questions which eventually took root in my mind, but only after I started work on my undergraduate dissertation on male and female toilet wall graffiti. Searching for relevant literature, I came across the book 'Subway Art' (Cooper & Chalfant, 1984). This photographic account of graffiti in New York includes some text, offering the reader an insight into the fabric, dynamics and functions of this subculture. Its rule bound nature immediately fascinated me, primarily because I had fallen victim to common media depictions of this group as anarchic and lawless. 'Subway Art' dispelled many elements of these portrayals and illustrated that, whilst this may be 'vandalism' by definition, interestingly these 'vandals' work to very clear and emphatic rules and guidelines. At a time when newspaper headlines held 'youth' responsible for the general disintegration of societal fabric, the ludicrous nature of these characterisations was further emphasised. These individuals were not roaming the streets to rob, rape, joyride or burgle. In its simplest sense, they were embarking on all night quests to paint, an activity that was probably part of many of their school syllabuses.

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The disparity between Cooper & Chalfant's (1984) commentary and that of the press inspired me. It became clear that very little was actually known about this subculture. Although some formal and informal ethnographic books (see for e.g., Castleman, 1982; Chalfant & Prigoff, 1987; Cooper & Chalfant, 1984; Romanowski & Flinker, 1986; Mailer et al., 1974) and articles (see for e.g., Brewer & Miller, 1990; Brewer, 1992; Feiner & Klein, 1982; Glazer, 1979; Lachmann, 1988; Ley & Cybriwsky, 1974) have been written, an extensive and analytically detailed account of this subculture, as it stands in America and elsewhere, is lacking. I conducted this study, in both London and New York, in the hope that I might fill this gap. It should be noted that I make no attempt to present this as a conclusive study of the subculture as a whole. There are many other subcultural 'scenes' in other countries and cities worldwide and they may not fit the analytic portrait I have painted here. This work should be read as a commentary on graffiti in New York and London alone.

As the graffiti writers themselves recognise, outsiders lack a full or informed understanding of their subculture. Its *illegality invites negative representation*, which, in their eyes, results in:

"A lot of misunderstanding about it. A lot of people that do graffiti can't work out what all this aggression and hatred is for what they're doing and I think a lot of it is just people not understanding. If people understood a little bit more, then some people might say, 'no, no, I don't like it because it's illegal', but other people would go, 'oh right, I see now'"(Zaki).

The writers as 'kids' and 'Folk Devils' (Cohen, S., 1987) gain little opportunity to debate these views or educate those who fail to understand or appreciate the positive aspects of their subculture. It is generally the press who comment and monopolise these channels of information. I have tried to redress this balance here by allowing the writers to talk, explain and comment on their subculture in the way that they see it. The previously silenced voice of the 'other' dominates this thesis and the (other side of the) story it tells will, I hope, fulfil two main functions;

1. *Enhance our understanding of this subculture, its members and the reasons why they engage in this activity.*

Castleman offered us a descriptive study of this subculture in New York in his book 'Getting Up' (1982). He made no attempt to analyse its meaning or social significance because as he was told by his academic supervisor:

"This isn't the time to worry about *why* people write and fight graffiti, because we aren't sure yet just what it is they are doing. Find out that first. People

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can argue about what it all means later on"

(Louis Forsdale, as quoted by Castleman, 1982:x. Italics in original).

Castleman showed us what writers were doing. I intend to extend his research focus and, through the insights of those involved, explore some of the reasons why they do it.

2. *Provide a more culturally informed and positive account of this subculture.*

This group is often condemned, feared and, in my view, misunderstood. Interrogating the myths and stereotypes which have helped to generate these attitudes should expose their frail nature and invite readers to confront or amend, as I did, some of the misconceptions they might hold.

I conducted this study using an ethnographic mode of enquiry. Fielding (1993) describes ethnography as a method of discovery; a tool which allows us to shed new light on both familiar and unfamiliar aspects of our own society. Hammersley & Atkinson (1983) locate its value in its ability to generate understanding or explanation without the need for the external imposition of logic. Researchers incorporate themselves within 'real life' settings and gain, through a process of exploration and discovery, "a rich and intimate familiarity with the kind of conduct that is being studied"(Blumer, 1940:718/19, as quoted by Hammersley, 1989: 154). Accessing the meanings people apply to their experiences and viewing their life worlds from the insider's perspective are ethnographic priorities.

The intimate quality of this method complements both my ethical and epistemological inclinations. In response to the detached media accounts of this subculture, I wanted an approach which would oppose this distance with proximity and emphasise the importance and utility of the insider's/writer's voice. Media accounts were not the only commentaries I strove to counterbalance through my use of ethnographic method. Work by Marxist theorists in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) on subcultures during the mid seventies could also be characterised as removed and detached. The voices and the insights of those they studied were rarely accessed and the complexities or subtleties of their life worlds were, in my view, lost because of this. As I argue more fully in chapter 1, discourse analysts and postmodern or literary ethnographers may be accused of similar faults. While the former access voice, they do not always listen to or learn from it. Informants' accounts are externally deconstructed and they seldom gain the opportunity to contribute to this process of interpretation or comment on the insights that result from it. Literary ethnographers work to demolish the researcher's usual privilege of power by leaving the insider's voice to speak for itself. In doing so, however, they also leave

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it redundant. In many cases, these accounts are no longer read for content, but rather intent, i.e., the ethnographer's ability to deal with issues of authority and textual representation. Accordingly, this voice begins to take on a rather tokenistic presence.

Breaching this chasm between the researcher and the researched remained my primary concern. The CCCS group used an armchair to formulate their theoretical propositions; I favoured in-depth interviews and some highly active, adrenaline fuelled participant encounters as my tools of investigation. I talked to my informants but, unlike the postmodern analysts referenced above, I also listened to and consulted them in the hope that I might produce a rich, fleshy and subculturally informed account.

The comparatively close and involved investigative stance ethnographic method offered me also satisfied more immediate or practical demands. The graffiti subculture is a relatively closed or secret subset of society. One cannot observe its members' activities from afar because illegality and the threat of apprehension ensures these are shielded from the public eye. Firstly, then, I needed to develop a close and undetached position of involvement. To put it simply, I had to go up close to get beyond their erected walls of secrecy. Secondly, I embarked upon this study with a very limited subcultural understanding. I therefore required an approach which would allow me to capture the complexities of this phenomenon and digest, understand and elucidate these; an approach which would enable me to adapt to the subculture, to feel around, gain a sense of it and discover what was significant rather than impose this. Ethnographic research commits to these ideals.

My analytic focus was wide. I did not identify one key problem or concern and address this through subcultural examination. Essentially, I adhered to the fundamental premise of grounded theory and "let the key issues emerge"(Charmaz, 1995:47). They did not guide my explorations, rather my explorations guided them. Having said this, I was not without inclination. As is now recognised, the researcher as a tabula rasa is an unrealistic characterisation (Charmaz, 1990; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995b; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Extant knowledge and theory plays a crucial role in guiding or shaping our developing research focus. Increasingly, "ethnography begins with prior hypotheses and/or prior definitions"(Silverman, 1993:25). Although I did not enter the field with an explicit set of theoretical questions, I did carry with me the analytic propositions put forward by the CCCS group. In their view, subcultures constitute a symbolic

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solution to class related problems and contradictions. Participation enables working class members to oppose dominant culture's norms and values, resist hegemony and, through this, win space for the co-existence of their own meanings and lifestyles. This Marxist theory guided my wide angled focus towards areas concerning the role or reason for subcultural involvement. What does participation afford members and are these rewards, as this work suggests, primarily class related?

Upholding this theoretical outline did not, as sometimes contended, preclude the generation of new theory. As my research continued, it became clear that the CCCS's class based propositions were somewhat misplaced or irrelevant. I was not just dissatisfied with their untenable vision of a unified society (McRobbie, 1994) and their claims that all subcultural members are working class. More importantly, I felt they had overlooked the characteristically adolescent and masculine nature of these groupings and, in relation to this, misinterpreted the significance of their oppositional and often illegal activities. The CCCS group left a number of important questions unaddressed;

* *Why do so few women or, indeed, adults join in this supposedly class based resistance?*
* *Why does this resistance generally involve high risks in personal safety?*
* *Why do members apparently encourage and celebrate the negative public attitudes which continue to ensure their subordination and social exclusion?*

I have attempted, in this study, to shed some light on these previously neglected areas of concern. In doing so, issues of masculinity, identity, adolescence, independence, freedom and control emerge as core themes. Together, they offer us a rather different subcultural portrait to that painted by the CCCS group. Rather than a site where class related contradictions are confronted and resolved, I present the subculture as a liminal space where more tangible and personal rewards and benefits are realised. Illegality is identified as an important feature of subcultural functioning. Not so much as a portrayal of rebellion or a 'resistance through ritual' (Hall & Jefferson, 1976), but as a tool used to propagate the personal rewards cited above.

I should indicate that although I spotlight, animate and interpret many different aspects of the subculture, the bulk of my analysis draws from and concerns its majority group; illegally oriented male writers.

Those involved in subcultures and those involved in studying subcultures are almost entirely male. This leads me on to my final reason for conducting this study. As I see it, a female gaze on these male forms is long overdue. In the

past, feminist researchers have tended to concentrate their efforts on understanding and elucidating the experiences of women. There are both political and methodological reasons for this. Firstly, drawing on one's own personal experiences has been seen as the key to feminist research (Bola, 1995). Women studying other women facilitates this mode of reflection. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, a focus upon women works to redress the balance that has been traditionally tipped in men's favour. As many feminists see it, men have had far too much of a platform for too long.

As a woman researching and interrogating a very male dominated domain, I cross this boundary and break out of this methodological mould. Contrary to those feminists who oppose the steps some women have taken towards studying men and masculinities, I see this to be a positive and valuable move. Men may have always enjoyed centre stage positioning, but we must consider the role that they have been playing in this position - that of the 'norm', the generic human being (Griffin & Wetherell, 1991). As Beloff (1991) maintains:

> "Traditional psychology has not been about men, it's been about some sort of mutant person, who was certainly referred to as 'he' but not 'he qua he'"
>
> (Beloff, 1991:385).

Men have been talked of and about, but they have rarely been talked on (Hearn & Collinson, 1994). Men have been the focus, but they have rarely been focused on as a questionable topic. I believe that if anyone is equipped to problematise men as gendered beings, it is women. Firstly, it is in their interests to do so. Secondly, they carry with them the insight of the 'other', a vision which sensitises them to features and concerns which men themselves may overlook or take for granted. Angela McRobbie (1980) illustrates this by re-examining two male authored subcultural accounts from a feminist perspective. To put it simply, what they missed, she didn't. As she demonstrates, neither use their observations to develop a fully sexed notion of working class culture. Class or race is used as the key to unlock subcultural meanings, but this analysis is never pushed to unravel further questions on masculinity, sexuality and the redundancy of women (McRobbie, 1980). Why? One could argue that for male researchers these are not immediate or important issues. However, it is more likely that, as issues, they are not always as visible. I am not saying that men are unable to critically assess the actions and experiences of other men. What I am trying to do here is merely illustrate the value of the 'alien' eye. As I see it, moving from the vantage point of the 'one' to the 'other' can gain us much in feminist terms. This thesis is a very limited contribution to that project.

CONTENT REVIEW

Chapter 1. Here I position myself theoretically by addressing some of the epistemological concerns which have shaped my own approach. I illustrate how and why I used an ethnographic mode of enquiry by examining and highlighting some of the problems inherent in both positivist and postmodern approaches to research. Finally, I discuss my own approach as a negotiation and fusion of researcher and respondent subjectivities. I explicitly accept the reflexivity of my informants and outline how I included them in the research process as interpretational consultants.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review of past subcultural research. Functionalist and Marxist subcultural theories are criticised for upholding class as the only issue of concern and neglecting other aspects of subcultural membership. I examine how the CCCS group's methodological approach has enabled and supported this theoretical class bias and outline reasons why this factor must now be considered alongside those of age and gender.

Chapter 3 presents an account of my fieldwork. The research context is situated and the ways I used my methods of enquiry are outlined. Issues of status and access are also addressed. These include the problems I encountered and the additional benefits I gained as an outsider and a female within a largely male dominated domain.

Chapter 4 initiates the ethnographic material of this thesis. Primarily, it serves an informational purpose, furnishing the reader with a basic level insight into subcultural functioning. The graffiti subculture operates a form of internal group hierarchy or ladder of prominence. Writers work to move up this by writing their name and increasing their subcultural fame and prominence. I present this progression as a form of career and illustrate how this develops and modifies as they climb within this hierarchy and enhance their subcultural status. I also highlight the similarities between subcultural and legitimate careers and use these to question the derogatory stereotypes commonly employed to criticise the 'youth of today'.

Chapter 5 focuses on the subculture as a site of masculine construction. The illegal and dangerous aspects of graffiti writing are presented as masculine resources; tools which enable male writers to construct, display and confirm their masculine identities. It is argued that the police and opposing authorities inadvertently work to amplify the masculine significance of writers' actions. Their obstructions and deterrent efforts invite militaristic evocation and transform this forum into a symbolic battlefield, a world of machismo where writers can become brave and fearless outlaws and soldiers. The importance of illegality is therefore identified and the political motives underpinning the CCCS group's notions of

resistance are re-assessed and re-presented as masculine motives of identity construction. A focus on the female writer and her experiences within this male dominated confine concludes this chapter. Male writers' often hostile and exclusionary reactions to her subcultural presence are read as their attempts to preserve their masculine potency and diffuse her threat to this. This is taken to further illustrate the importance male writers place upon the subculture as a confine of masculine construction.

Chapter 6 begins by discussing the problematic nature of subcultural definition. The postmodern challenge to the 'social reality' of these groups or their plausible status as 'sub' or distinct cultures is contested by illustrating how the writers themselves perceive and celebrate their subculture as a coherent 'world apart'; a confine segregated from the wider society which houses it. Another reason for subcultural illegality is highlighted as writers explain how they use this feature to invite societal rejection and dismissal, secure their social isolation and, through this, maintain total control of their 'scene'.

Chapter 7 examines the personal benefits of the subculture as a 'world apart'. In doing so, it calls into question the CCCS's notion of this distance reflecting an escape from hegemony. Independence and self command are outlined as afforded rewards, alongside those concerning identity. It is argued that a subcultural identity provides writers with an alternative persona, one free from the ascribed ties and potential restraints of their 'real life' identities. I also demonstrate how writers gain a non physical or, as I term it, 'virtual' identity through the use of their written names. How this is formulated and how this allows them to further construct their masculine identities without the need to use physical resources is examined.

Essentially, this chapter relates a writer's subcultural involvement to the restraints experienced within 'mainstream' society. Illustrating this, I highlight how the subculture declines in importance as writers age and their societal opportunities and affordances increase.

Conclusions. Here I weave together and present my main theoretical and methodological findings and arguments. The issues raised by this study are examined and some future research directions are suggested.

Appendices. This section has been split into three parts.
Appendix A. provides the reader with a brief historical outline of the graffiti subculture. I chart its development from its germination in New York to its export overseas where it established itself as an international subculture.
Appendix B. contains a journal account of my fieldwork experiences in both Britain and New York.

Appendix C. outlines some of the writers' reactions to my completed thesis. My own thoughts concerning these are also detailed.

Glossary. This section defines some of the subculture's commonly used terms and phrases.

Bibliography.

CHAPTER 1

COMING OUT OF THE CLOSET: SUBJECTIVITY AND REFLEXIVITY AS AN ACCEPTANCE OF FALLIBILITY

Approaches and methods used to generate knowledge are diverse and, on the surface, are often regarded to be a choice concerning pragmatic considerations of time, accessibility and required size of sample. Hammersley (1992) illustrates such a view in his assertion that different methods should not be elevated as superior to one another because their strengths and weaknesses will depend upon the purpose and relevance of the research project. What this 'technical' view (Bryman, 1988, as cited by Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994) fails to acknowledge is that our methodological choices are critically linked to the epistemological and moral value judgements we embrace:

> "It is now quite clear that to be a scientist is to commit oneself to a certain kind
> of morality (Polanyi, 1962), rather than to adapt to this or that technique.
> Investigative techniques are determined by metaphysical commitments not by
> professional affiliations"(Harré, 1993:101).

Our adoption of a research standpoint extends far beyond practical issues because our choices are inspired by values which shape our beliefs concerning legitimate bases of knowledge production. They determine not only how we wish to conduct our research, but also what questions we address, what we conceive to be the objectives of our work and, ultimately, how we treat our data.

Few would deny the influence our values have upon processes of human interaction. Human beings (fortunately) have opinions and, as Berger (1977) recognises, researchers are no exception:

> "The *practitioner of the discipline*, the sociologist, who (after all) is also a living
> human being, must *not* become value-free"
>
> > (Berger, 1977:20. Italics in original).

However, Berger (1977) seems to believe we can suspend these values during the conduct of research to ensure our work remains 'value neutral':

> "The *discipline of sociology*, I insist as emphatically as I can, must be value-
> free"(Berger, 1977:20. Italics in original).

Berger (1977) is emphatic in his assertions, but he fails to inform us how this immunity is made possible. Unlike robots, we are unable to flick a value neutrality switch allowing us to escape the reactivity of our inclusion in the research process. Our values will always interweave, in some form or another, with our research orientation and our personal qualities, quirks and preconceptions will always leave their imprint upon the interactive processes of our fieldwork.

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This fallibility also extends to the scientific paradigm which mistakenly prides itself on value immunity. Interactional effects, interferences and unaccounted 'variables' are apparently eradicated by the use of sterile and controlled environments. However:

"The scientist has to communicate with the objects studied and they with him . . . he is part of the situation studied"(Powdermaker, 1966:286/287).

Scientific objectivity is never really obtainable because relations between human beings will always ensure the pervasive imprint of subjectivity (Harré, 1993; Harré & Secord, 1972; Hollway, 1989). Indeed, the rationale underlying scientific inquiry indicates a bias in itself. 'Subjects' are deemed unable to comment or are even deliberately silenced to afford the scientist the ultimate power position (Hollway, 1989). These beliefs and practices do not just shape this scientific approach, but also its findings and, thus, the very specific form of reality it ultimately presents.

Even the move from deduction to induction cannot ensure a 'true' picture of reality because our observations:

"Are always guided by world images that determine which data are salient and which are not: An act of attention to one rather than another object, reveals one dimension of the observer's value commitment, as well as his or her value-laden interests"(Vidich & Lyman, 1994:25).

Theory cannot simply emerge from data, even if it is grounded in the experiences and representations of others, "because all observation is pre-interpreted in terms set by existing concepts and theory"(Henwood & Pidgeon, 1993:3).

With the realisation that there is no absolute foundation for knowledge, some researchers are now beginning to openly examine the interplay between subjectivity and objectivity in the research process (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1993). This had led to an increase in reflexivity, as theorists attempt to explicate the bases of their knowledge and account for the particular interpretations they present and the consequences that stem from these. With this, the reader is granted 'back stage access' (Goffman, 1959) or a behind the scenes view of the research process. To see a film in the cinema requires little of the audience except enjoyment of the finished product. However, the occasional documentary that outlines the steps and stages of its creation allows this audience to appreciate its often hidden construction. Like film directors, ethnographers have a large part to play, albeit behind the scenes. They are responsible for bringing the culture to life, animating it for the sake of others. This not only incorporates their perceptual

subjectivity, but also the distinguishing traces of their presence as they deliver the culture from its natural to its new setting:

"This transformation, which may at the same time be seen as a process of translation from one cultural context to another, and as one of 'construction' (or 'reconstruction'), is highly symbolic, intersubjective and personal"

(Ellen, 1984: 10/11).

By presenting and embracing their personal imprint and sources of reactivity (Hammersley, 1991), ethnographers acknowledge their vulnerability and strengthen their position upon this representational platform. They openly admit and illustrate the effects of their presence and perceptions and their claims and conclusions gain greater validity because of this. Some theorists see this accountability as resulting in a "*strong* or *subjective objectivity*" (Harding, 1991,1992, as cited by Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995a:17. Italics in original). But then why make reference to 'objectivity' at all if this is a concept that we believe to be untenable? Do we have to justify and validate subjectivity by associating it with aspects of positivism? I, for one, wish to uphold subjectivity as a valued and valid concept in its own right. I do not admit it as a sign of defeat or resignation, but celebrate it for its role in enhancing honesty, clarity and openness. Our values, beliefs and personal experiences should not be viewed as shackles. Just as they can hold us back, so too can they be seen to motivate us. Thus, rather than try to escape them, maybe we should, as feminist theorists advise, use them, informing our audience how by lifting the veil of public secrecy surrounding fieldwork (Van Maanen, 1988).

"At present most ethnographic research does not make explicit the values, purposes and relevances on which it is based; and even where it does, supporting argument is rarely provided"(Hammersley, 1992:27).

Realising we cannot sit on the fence, we need to make it clear where we do sit. I intend to use this chapter to outline my methodological position and the beliefs and values that have led me to occupy it. Van Maanen (1988) terms this mode of reflection 'confessional'. In many ways it is a confession, in that I account for my motivations and objectives and examine how these may have shaped my research approach and my analytic interpretations. However, I do take issue with the suggested implications of this term. A confession implies I have done something wrong. If Van Maanen intends confession to mean admittance of subjectivity, I do so without regret. I make no apologies for the subjective nature of my experiences and perceptions, for I see this to be an unavoidable facet of ethnographic research.

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This chapter should construct a framework which acts as a basis for my subsequent cultural translation (Ellen, 1984). Access and, thus, assessment of this framework, my confession, allows the reader, the jury, to judge whether this translation is justified. Personally, I prefer not to view this process as a trial. This chapter is not presented as a defence, but a willing and honest account of the contentions that have guided my approach and perceptions. Many of the issues raised in this chapter have been extensively debated elsewhere. I acknowledge that my contribution merely scratches the surface of these complex discussions.

SHEDDING THE POSITIVIST PAST - THE ETHOGENIC THEORY

The positivists' controlled manipulation of variables and use of quantification as a means of objectively testing presupposed hypotheses has left many with doubts as to the sensitivity of their approach in generating understanding of human behaviour. I recall my own misgivings in an undergraduate department which privileged quantitative measurement, as opposed to qualitative 'verstehen'. I spent three years with the nagging feeling that things were not quite right, but, for the sake of my degree, I kept my 'subjects' quiet, limited extraneous variables, turned their behaviour into numbers, identified its 'causes' and presented my 'objective' report within the rigid confines of its expected structure. This dissatisfaction has led many, including myself, to turn to alternative means of generating knowledge. To illustrate this, I will use this section to briefly outline the main tenets of the ethogenic theory. I share much of this theory's approach to understanding human behaviour, however, there are points at which I depart from its proposals. Examination of these will help me to elucidate my position more clearly.

QUALITY VS QUANTITY - ACTOR VS SUBJECT - ACTION VS CAUSES

The ethogenic theorists were perhaps the first in psychology to overtly challenge the underlying philosophy and practise of the positivist tradition. The 1970s saw them abandon not only its methods of quantitative enquiry, but most importantly the conceptual bases justifying these. "Conscious awareness, agentive powers and recollection"(Harré, 1993:6), were firmly re-established as universal human endowments, opposing the positivistic treatment of human beings as 'subjects', 'automatons' (Harré & Secord, 1972) or 'judgmental dopes' (Garfinkel, 1967). The ethogenists wished to reverse the conception that people lack agency and intent and "for scientific purposes, treat people as if they were human beings"(Harré & Secord, 1972:84) - that is, self directing agents. Their 'anthropomorphic' (Harré & Secord, 1972:84) model emphasised human beings' capacity to initiate, monitor and control their behaviour, challenging behaviourist views of "the person as an

object responding to the push and pull of forces exerted by the environment"(Harré & Secord, 1972:8). Behaviourist conceptions of 'behaviour' and 'causes' were replaced with ethogenic conceptions of 'action', 'reasons' and 'intentions' and the task of psychology changed accordingly. Rather than speculate on the underlying causes of behaviour, ethogenists worked to identify "the meanings that underlie it"(Harré & Secord, 1972:9). Reynolds (1982) maps out some of these distinctions:

"If we describe what people or animals do without enquiring into their subjective reasons and/or interpretations, we are talking about their behaviour. If we study these subjective aspects of what they do, the reasons and ideas underlying and guiding it, then we are concerned with the world of meaning. If we concern ourselves both with what people are overtly and objectively seen to do or not to do *and* the reasons for their so doing or not doing which relate to the world of meaning and understanding, we then describe action"

(Reynolds, 1982:329. Italics in original).

By emphasising human agency and intent, the ethogenists portrayed individuals with society under their belt, as opposed to on their back. As Harré (1993) contends:

"The only causes of action are persons"(Harré, 1993:98).

This view is also shared by Reason (1994):

"To say that persons are self-determining is to say that they are the authors of their own actions . . . . In other words, their intentions and purposes, their intelligent choices, are causes of their behaviour"(Reason, 1994:325/326).

But are we really this free? In my view, the ethogenists reacted to the unappealing assertions of determinism by overplaying this depiction of unconstrained free will. They failed to adequately account for the reasons why an individual may be pursuing a certain line of action in the first place. Human beings can act with intent and purpose but, as Dilthey, as cited by Hamilton (1994), maintains, this does not preclude conditions that may have brought about this action:

"The human will is not so much free 'from' conditions as free 'to' respond to a multiplicity of circumstances"(Hamilton, 1994:64/65).

Modifying or refining their initial thesis in some respects, Secord (1990) now concedes:

"Persons are neither entirely free, nor is their behaviour determined in any straightforward way by their circumstances. Instead, explaining some acts as done for a reason and explaining some behaviour in terms of causes does not entail any logical contradiction"(Secord, 1990:185).

Actors are, thus, autonomous in some ways, but not in others. Luckman (1982) clarifies this distinction:

> "Personal identity may be persuasively considered as the principle of
> autonomy in behaviour - yet personal identity as a form of life is itself a
> 'product' of evolution and history. Personal identities are constructed socially,
> i.e., historically, in processes in which the individual organisms participate
> actively - but under natural and social constraints"(Luckman, 1982:254).

Harré's recent turn to social constructionism has, in some ways, revised this balance between constraint and freedom. The dualism of society and individuals as self contained and isolated units is dissolved and they are brought together to form a partnership in which they are inescapably linked. Harré now occupies a middle ground position between the extremes of individualism and collectivism (Harré, 1993). However, he remains true to his original assertions:

> "The fact that people are created by other people and that their actions are in
> essence joint actions does not mean that the actions people perform are
> socially caused"(Harré, 1993:3).

Individuals may be socially constructed, but they retain their autonomy and agency within this interrelated framework.

EMIC VS ETIC - COMMENTARY FROM WITHIN

This emphasis upon agency and awareness has important implications for the ethogenic thesis; namely, if people are able to act, then they are able to comment on this action. "Everything we do can be redone by talk"(Marsh et al., 1978:21) because our actions are intentional and we are conscious of our reasons for them (Von Cranach, 1982). Thus, if we want to know why people do what they do, 'why not ask them?"(Harré & Secord, 1972:101).

The ethogenists privilege actors accounts of their behaviour as the only way that "the meanings of social behaviour and the rules underlying social acts can be discovered"(Harré & Secord, 1972:7). To impose an external explanation of behaviour is perceived to be "both chauvinistic and scientifically quite untenable"(Marsh, 1982:232) because "only the actor himself can give an authoritative report on the monitoring of his own behaviour"(Harré & Secord, 1972:8). Insiders' meanings "have priority in the scientific analysis of the phenomena"(Marsh et al., 1978:22) as action "cannot be rendered intelligible using frames of reference current outside of such contexts"(Marsh, 1982:232).

The ethogenists' 'open soul: doctrine' has much in common with the principles of ethnographic research. He·e, too, meanings, as opposed to causes of behaviour, are privileged and these are derived from insiders' phenomenological life worlds in

their terms, not those of a detached researcher uninformed by 'emic' motives and intentions (Agar, 1980). Because theory is grounded in the relevant social context or light of 'local knowledge' (Geertz, 1983), it remains sensitive to its constituted meaning. Insiders' terms and categories are not overwritten by pre-imposed theoretical models (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995a), they inspire them and thus grant them the strength of relevance. Like a seed that is grown from its original site of germination, an 'emically' derived theory is inevitably stronger because its roots are firmly embedded within the theoretical soil of context.

This is one reason why these approaches to understanding social behaviour are attractive. Another is the fact that insider representation is made possible, certainly within an ethogenic framework, by accepting individuals as agentic, reflexive and, thus, capable of explaining their world in the way that they see it. This form of meaning or knowledge production is not, however, without its problems.

WINDOWS ON THE WORLD?

The realist stance of initial ethogenic work located theory within the accounts of insiders, but, in doing so, presented its findings as 'truth'. Meanings were not offered as one of many, but as 'the' meaning and accounts were read, as this quote demonstrates, to disclose a true representation of reality existing beyond them:

> "The things that people say about themselves and other people should be taken seriously as reports of data that *really exist*"

> (Harré & Secord, 1972:7. Italics in original).

Many ethnographers have also attempted to reproduce reality, presenting their accounts as an 'immaculate perception' (Van Maanen, 1988) or a form of window on the world:

> "Implicit in the reproduction model is the idea that there is one true description that the ethnographer's account seeks to approximate"

> (Hammersley, 1992:24).

This work thus strives to uncover 'reality' as it is, existing beyond our knowledge of it in some 'out-thereness' waiting to be discovered.

Postmodernism has served to illustrate the problematic nature of this quest. As it asserts, meaning is not unitary, but fractured, multiple, relative and subjectively situated. 'Reality' or 'truth' cannot be discovered because it takes on many different guises according to our culturally and socially structured positions and angles of vision:

"There is no such thing as the truth or a truth, truth is not one thing or even a system, it is a phenomenon whose contours are constantly shifting and increasing in complexity"(Rich, 1978, as cited by Obligacion, 1994:45).

Neither is the researcher free from these implications. If reality or truth is a social construction, then so is the account that describes it. Relativism, as this position is termed, calls into question the very value of pursuing our quest for knowledge. and this poses a critical dilemma for ethnography. Under these terms, ethnographic work can only offer us entertainment value. To conduct research with the aim of elucidation becomes, as Hammersley (1992) recognises, a futile endeavour:

"We may have to conclude that 'there are as many realities as there are people' (Smith, 1984:386). If this is so, what is the point in spawning more versions of 'reality' especially given the relative costs of ethnography compared with, say, armchair reflection?"(Hammersley, 1992:49).

As epistemological positions, realism and relativism place us in a no win situation and offer us a very depressing choice for the way forward. But need it be? In Hammersley's (1992) view, the options available to us are not necessarily dichotomous:

"There is a great danger of backing ourselves into a corner by deploying a dichotomy which obscures the wide range of epistemological positions available"(Hammersley, 1992:50).

Indeed, although Harré's position is now constructionist, he still adheres to a modest form of 'policy realism' (Harré, 1990), an epistemological stance I also share. The inductive and rational bases of this position provide us with a reason to search for existing entities. However, sensitivity to historical and experiential contingencies ensure we elucidate these without laying claims on truth. By incorporating subjectivity, 'policy realists' claim things as they seem to be rather than as they are, independent of our knowledge of them:

"The policy realist thinks that scientists progress in their projects by achieving a better sample of what there is in the world. The convergent realist thinks that they progress by achieving a better description of the world. The policy realist stocks a museum. The convergent realist stocks a library"

(Harré, 1990:313).

Because this position recognises uncertainty, we can comment, but not beyond dispute. Theories are revisable and presented in terms of plausibility, not 'verisimilitude' - correlated with truth, but not an absolute foundation for it.

This position has much in common with the 'subtle realism' Hammersley (1992) advocates. Here, knowledge is not defined as 'true', but as "beliefs about whose validity we are reasonably confident"(Hammersley, 1992:50). Like 'policy realism', theoretical validity rests on judgements of plausibility and credibility. This allows us to represent some form of 'independent' reality, albeit in a much weaker form. Phenomena exist, but we cannot gain direct access to them because our assumptions and objectives shape our perceptions of them. 'Subtle realism' therefore becomes a particular and tenable representation, as opposed to reproduction, of reality.

Harré (1990) and Hammersley (1992) recognise the existence of multiple, partial and competing realities, but, like Henwood & Pidgeon (1994), they do not believe this "leads to a total scepticism regarding the possibility of arriving at partial warrants for knowledge claims"(Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994:233). They maintain that while we can never find an absolute assurance of 'truth', whatever we can find is worth looking for. For many relativists, this represents an easy way out of an impossible situation. In their eyes, relativism and realism are mutually exclusive positions. An amalgamated and diluted version of these is, thus, a dull and unfeasible compromise. One which enables theorists to have the best of both worlds, whilst ensuring they fail to grasp either sufficiently. I can appreciate the logic of this argument, but, then again, I can't. While we can condemn these theorists for wriggling out of a bad situation, we can also applaud them for making it a better one. Without these compromises and negotiations, we lose the point and purpose of research. Surely it is better to attempt a difficult job, than not to attempt it at all.

ACCOUNTS - ACTION THROUGH TALK OR A TALK THROUGH ACTION?
The epistemological positions we occupy are important in shaping the way we elicit and respond to the data we collect. Within a qualitative forum, 'subtle' or 'policy' realism still allows us to collect participants' accounts for informational purposes. We no longer retain the naive realist's contention that these contain the key to a unitary or universal 'truth' and 'reality'. Rather, we treat these accounts as insights into insiders' own situated meaning systems, in short, their own subjective, partial and variable 'realities'. I emphasise their role in reflecting 'realities' because as W. I. Thomas (1932) stipulates, a view of which I share:
"If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences"
(W. I. Thomas, 1932:572, as cited by Sumner, 1994:44).

Harré's shift to a constuctionist position has not dispelled his need to distinguish between two different types of respondent accounts:

1. Those which can be discursively analysed to reveal the accomplishment of social acts.

2. Those which comment on and theorise about these social acts.

As he asserts:

"Methodologically we shall find it essential to distinguish between discursive activities"(Harré, 1993:117).

His reason for this is that:

"Some of the norms of social action are made explicit in accounts, though for all sorts of reasons. In first order discourse the norms of action are implicit. I shall treat the analysis of first and second order discourses as distinct analytical tasks"(Harré, 1993:117).

Harré embraces both the informational and constructive properties of participants' accounts. I also see their value in both these terms, however, I do veer more towards using my respondents' accounts in an informational capacity. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, I approached this subculture with a very limited understanding or knowledge of its dynamics or purpose. A full blown discourse analytic approach, which looks at talk for the actions it performs rather than the information it provides, would have been impractical because it would not have granted me the scope I needed to explore and familiarise myself with these ground level subcultural details. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, I rejected a fully fledged discursive approach on ethical and epistemological grounds. As a means of clarifying my position, I wish to address and assess the discursive treatment of respondents' accounts in Widdicombe & Wooffitt's recent text 'The Language of Youth Subcultures' (1995).

SILENT VOICES - DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND THE DISTANCED INFORMANT

This book employs a discourse analytic approach to examine issues of personal identity, group affiliation and subcultural membership. Premised on the basis of individuals' reflexivity, the authors reject the treatment of people as 'judgmental dopes' (Garfinkel, 1967) and assert the need for "an empirical attempt to take heed of members' own accounts: their own perceptions, reports, stories and anecdotes"(Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995:28). As they rightly indicate, the insider's voice has been critically neglected within past subcultural work:

"The analytic approach adopted by the New Subcultural theorists ensures that members of subcultures are effectively silenced before they even have been allowed to speak about their lives; the knowledge about them is not written in

their own terms"(Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995:23).

Thus, central to this book's project is an examination of subcultural membership through the elicitation of members' own accounts. This emphasis is commendable, given its neglect in previous work. However, their analytic approach does raise a number of issues concerning the way these accounts are extracted and treated.

I wish to examine these and begin by reviewing the first section of this text. Here, the authors use a discourse analytic approach to explore the importance of subcultural membership and categorisation to the members themselves. Rather than ask them directly, the authors wanted to determine whether their respondents would specify their subcultural affiliations voluntarily:

> "It was important that the interviewees explicitly declared themselves to be
> members of a specific subcultural group. Consequently, the first question of
> the interview was designed to be somewhat vague, and raise at a very general
> level the issue of how the respondents would describe themselves"

> (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995:76/77).

In light of their objectives, I would say these questions were not just vague, but also misleading, e.g., 'How would you describe yourself and your appearance and so on?', 'Can you tell me something about your style and the way you look?', 'How would you describe your style?', 'Tell me something about yourself'. Respondents generally offered a description of their style of dress rather than its particular categorisation. Perhaps they presumed this to be known or obvious. As the authors themselves state:

> "They could infer that our reason for approaching them was related to the way
> that their appearance made available the inference that they were members of
> a specific subcultural group"(Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995:85).

Despite this, and the fact that these questions did not, in my view, invite subcultural categorisation, unmentioned membership was found to be significant. Indeed, requests for clarification, an understandable reaction to the ambiguity of the questions, was judged to be "a method by which the respondent can avoid giving a subcultural self-identification"(Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995:94). This avoidance is read as their attempt to retain some sense of autonomy and individuality (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). Given that this finding serves as a theoretical building block for the entire thesis, these methodological queries and problems do not comment very favourably on this study's analytic foundations. I fail to see why their respondents could not be asked to comment on this interpretation directly. If we accept their ability to do this, their reasons for avoiding subcultural identification could be explored and we would not have to rely

on an external and, in my view, highly tentative explanation for their responses. As it stands, Widdicombe & Wooffitt have sacrificed a learning forum for a testing zone, a move which positions their approach alongside the detached and sterile stance of the behaviourists - Can a rat push a bar or find its way to the end of a maze? Similarly, Can our respondents specify their subcultural affiliations without excessive prompting? As I see it, this imposed distance is unnecessary as well as unhelpful. Why test our informants according to our own generated criteria, when we can learn from them by attending to their own?

Widdicombe & Wooffitt (1995) move on to explore the importance of members' individuality and authenticity in the subsequent chapters of their book. More specifically, their respondents' accounts are used to examine the supposed rewards of group membership, i.e., belonging, identity and security. In response to related questions, members:

> "Provided little sense of subcultures as groups which they joined. Likewise, in their formulations of the significance of being a member, they did not invoke a sense of shared identity, nor the benefits of affiliation with like-minded others"
>
> (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995:216).

A more direct method of questioning was employed, but, again, interpretational privilege rested with the authors. This lack of group cohesion is specified, they conclude, not because in members' eyes this is so, but, rather, because this enables them to maintain their individuality and autonomy:

> "We have seen how particular construction of subcultural groups implicates their basis in individual autonomy"(Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995:217).

On the basis of this reading, theoretical accounts which assert the benefits of group membership are questioned, challenged and, in my mind, unfairly rejected. I feel it is important here to acknowledge, as the members themselves did, the nature of the groups in question. These are only loosely connected on the basis of their shared style alone. As such, they may not enjoy the cohesion and related rewards that other more tightly bound groups do. But, again, why speculate on this? I do not understand why the authors could not be more direct in their consultations, e.g., 'Some people believe subcultures offer individuals security, identity and a sense of belonging, in your case would you agree?' or 'Does being a member of a subculture affect your sense of individuality?'. Respondents could have then clarified the nature of their group, in comparison to others, and the degree of their own affiliations, thus, commenting upon the relevance of this theoretical interpretation.

In some cases, this practice of detached interpretation appeared to facilitate theoretical side-stepping. Responses which explained the meaning of being a 'Punk' in terms of personal preferences and desires for autonomy were accepted for supporting the salience of individuality and challenging the commonly perceived resistant or oppositional significance of this lifestyle. Respondents who did stress rebellion to be a central facet of their identity were questioned as to how this was displayed. Their answers, e.g., refusing to sign on the dole or smiling when locked in a prison cell, were used to highlight the passive, and thus irrelevant, nature of this resistance. However, the authors then take this theoretical challenge one step further by denying these rebellious narratives any degree of explanatory force. As they assert:

> "Some respondents' orientation to the political or ideological dimension of punk
> was obviously resonant with both the sociological and lay theorising about the
> meaning of the subculture. This is not suprising, for sociological
> interpretations have permeated the media and become part of our lay or
> common-sense knowledge about the meaning of subcultures . . . . These
> kinds of explanatory formulations for social behaviour are interpretative
> resources which both insiders and outsiders can draw upon in making sense
> of the subculture. . . . respondents' descriptions of punks' rebellion often had
> the character of formulaic assessments"(Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995:205).

Widdicombe & Wooffitt seem to dismiss these meanings because they concur with external or lay accounts of subcultural involvement. What puzzles me is why this consistency indicates inauthenticity and, indeed, why the authors feel they are qualified to make this judgement. The reflexivity that informants were awarded at the start of this book is suddenly retracted and the authors' initial claims begin to resemble empty and hollow promises:

> "In addition to our interest in what people say about their identity, we are
> keen to explore how they say it. This is not because we doubt the words of
> our respondents; and neither do we seek to ironicise their accounts of their
> experiences by imposing analytic frameworks which provide alternative
> explanations to those offered directly by our respondents"
>
> (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995:71).

One could say that their earlier analysis is a clear example of both doubt and the imposition of an alternative analytic framework.

In most cases interpretation is imposed. Whether this is an alternative to members' own is not made clear because respondents are not included in this interpretational exercise. Commentary is accessed through insiders' accounts, but the analysts retain their interpretational authority as respondents are

prevented from discussing or threatening the salience of these inferred implications. Discourse analysts are correct in asserting the impossibility of unitary meaning. Their interpretations are, thus, presented with the corresponding discourse to allow us, their audience, an opportunity to assess accuracy and formulate our own conclusions. By declaring their interpretations personal, particular, subjective and open to dispute, authority is also seemingly rejected. However, while it may not be exclusive to the analyst, by denying participants' any interpretational input, it is still shared exclusively amongst an academic readership. 'The academic apparently knows best' - we collect accounts and we reserve the right to decree what people are *really* saying or *really* doing through their talk.

I am not denying that social actions are performed through talk, but I am questioning why these, once uncovered, cannot be presented to the speaker for clarification. The danger of eliciting accounts not for what they tell us, but soley how, lies in the token role these accounts now play in the generation of knowledge. For this reason, I see little difference between this approach and that adopted by previous subcultural theorists. The discourse analyst dissects accounts, the CCCS group made semiotic use of style in the same detached manner.

Agency is implicated in the respondent's performative use of talk, but, in my view, this is a token provision, one which, perhaps, helps analysts wriggle out of accusations of discursive determinism. I see no reason why agency cannot be extended to enable informants to contribute as interpreters. I am not saying that we should take their word as truth or that people are always aware of the possible significance of their actions. The researcher as a 'professional stranger' (Agar, 1980) facilitates this vision. However, the fact that people may not have reflected upon things in particular ways, does not preclude their ability to do so when these views are explicitly presented. If people are not 'Judgmental dopes', as the authors of this book claim, then it makes sense not to treat them as such.

AUTHORITY, POWER AND POSTMODERNISM: A GAME OF HIDE AND SEEK

Before providing a final summary and outline of my research approach, I wish to elucidate the position I have chosen to occupy in my role as an ethnographer. My stance was developed early, largely, I believe, through my interactions with subcultural members. Their reactions to my presence and involvement and their own interests in issues of power and authority helped me to formulate a more clearly defined standpoint. Initially, I was left floating with this. It was not until I began to recognise diversity in ethnographic work, that I was able to firm the

ground I was not yet standing on and locate myself within this collective framework.

In an attempt to explicate my place within this, I have chosen to critically assess the principles and objectives of postmodern ethnographers, more specifically, those adopting a literary approach. Their standpoint on issues of power, authority, representation and realism will be addressed and examined using 'Writing Culture - The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography' (1986)', as a framing text.

CONFRONTING AND CHALLENGING THE AUTHOR(ITY)

This book contains a collection of essays written by postmodern ethnographers. As I began reading these, I found myself embracing, what I saw to be, an ethically driven postmodern agenda. Its appeal lay in its objectives - an acceptance of subjectivity, a deconstruction of the researcher's power and authority and an appreciation of the problems of representation. These objectives stem from postmodernism's revolt against authority and signification. In short, its attempt to highlight, celebrate and embrace the uncertain, subjective and fragmented nature of reality and meaning. These crucial issues have been critically neglected by traditional ethnographers. The distance and detachment that often characterised their ethnographic quests allowed them to maintain an undisputed position of power and authority (Van Maanen, 1988). Remote lands were visited and the ethnographer returned home to construct a 'true' account which no one could challenge, except, perhaps, the insider who had neither the access to this finished product or the language or literacy to understand it. As ethnographic method grew in popularity, its study targets started to move closer to home. Changes in setting saw a corresponding change in approach. Work within their own society placed insiders on their doorstep and forced ethnographers to appreciate and recognise their place within the cultural context. Those individuals who had been previously reluctant to take a good look at their limitations (Van Maanen, 1988), emerged from the closet to admit their biases and the potential effects their role and presence had upon the people they studied and the portrayals they presented (Clifford, 1986). This admission of fallibility and resort to reflection uncovered previously buried issues of authority, power and representation and inspired a new climate of ethnographic awareness and honesty.

But did it succeed in stripping researchers' of their formerly unchallenged positions of power? Apparently not. Postmodernists step in here to question this seeming decline in authority. In their view, power positions are created and, thus, maintained, albeit at a more disguised level, through textual (Crapanzano, 1986) and rhetorical devices:

25

"All constructed truths are made possible by powerful 'lies' of exclusion and rhetoric"(Clifford, 1986:7).

As long as ethnographers construct and write their accounts, their constructed positions of power and authority remain intact. Postmodern ethnographers' enterprise is, thus, far more radical. They do not just admit their textual control, they relinquish it in an attempt to 'decentre the author' and obliterate or deconstruct their inherited privileges of power (Clifford, 1986). The omnipotent representer exits and the humble translator enters. By leaving insiders' multiple voices unstructured and untainted (Clifford, 1986), ethnographers allows them to speak for themselves. They do not have to decree truth from non truth as a final verdict and their ability and power to make this judgement is no longer valid. In this shift in approach, they are now the outsider or, as Clifford (1986) maintains, the 'other':

"Ethnography in the service of anthropology once looked out at clearly defined others . . . . Now ethnography encounters others in relation to itself, while seeing itself as other"(Clifford, 1986:23).

Postmodern ethnographers surrender their perch of superiority and step into the cultural midst where they now speak from within, that is, among these other voices rather than over them. Apparently, this makes their accounts more truthful than those which become 'partial truths' through devices of construction and manipulation (Clifford, 1986).

PURSUING UNOBTAINABLE GOALS - REINSTATING UNASSAILABLE PROBLEMS

The postmodernists' goals and objectives are commendable, but they are also, in many ways, unattainable. Although I share postmodern convictions that authority can be smuggled in through the use of rhetoric, I cannot accept that we can eradicate, remove or liberate ourselves from the constraints of representation simply by changing the way we write. Supporting my belief, I began to see disparity in their efforts to link principles to practice. Contradictions emerged, in that the very tools they use to fight these problems, merely disguise, reinstate and reproduce them in a variety of other ways. These limitations lead us back to an epistemological stance which fails, in my view, to incorporate the flexibility or fallibility needed to even attempt to initiate change. Let me now provide my contentions some basis.

Postmodernists have blown the final whistle on neat and tidy packages of culture. Tyler (1986) explains why:

"The urge to conform to the canons of scientific rhetoric has made the easy

realism of natural history the dominant mode of ethnographic prose, but it has been an illusory realism"(Tyler, 1986:130).

Realism is an illusion, so a coherent account is a manipulated truth that generates a false image of authority and validity. Fragmentation becomes the only step towards truth and realism because:

> "It describes no objects and makes no break between describing and what is being described. It does not describe, for there is nothing it could describe"
>
> (Tyler, 1986:137).

Here I depart from postmodern ideals. What I thought an ethically guided project, is one clearly propelled by an epistemological stance I find very difficult to accept. Claims that realism and order are illusory and nothing more than a product of our textual practice are, in my view, problematic. Can it possibly be that simple? To reject realism is to reject suffering and oppression and, thus, feminist goals of emancipation. In the postmodern arena critical voices become:

> "Suppressed - paralysed by the fear that to invoke in an undeconstuctured way the idea (say) that many women routinely get beaten up by their partners, will lead to their being viewed as theoretically naive and unsophisticated"
>
> (Gill, 1995:14).

I do not renounce constructionism in its entirety, but I do question its occasionally extreme orientation. While our realities may be constructions based upon our personal and cultural perceptions and assumptions, does this decree them fictional? 'Construction' implies a process of creation and the existence of some resulting product - in my mind, a subjective reality. This does not define me as a naive realist as there are elements of this postmodern reasoning I share, namely, the rejection of reality as a unified, solitary concept. To assert that one reality fits all is naive because our conceptions of the world vary with our differing experiences and angles of vision. But if we accept reality as multiple, i.e., different to different people, then we must also accept the existence of independent realities, i.e., those unrelated to our own and, therefore, existent beyond our recognition and experience of them.

I am unable to entertain postmodern assertions that authority is an illusion based upon a myth of realism. This struck me as a convenience - we deny realism and, hey presto, problem solved! No realism = no authority - authority ceases to be a sustainable concept. Even if this were a tenable equation, do we need to renounce order and structure to surrender our power and authority as cultural commentators? During my research informants consistently provided me with a shared sense of subcultural order and structure. They represented multiple voices and, thus, presented multiple realities, but they did all apparently share a common

conception of a single, all encompassing subcultural framework. My visions were shaped by their visions. In presenting these, the authoritative position became theirs - they deemed it ordered, I merely translated it.

Hand in hand with relativism comes, in my view, an inescapable set of contradictions and inconsistencies. Firstly, if we commit ourselves to insiders' voices and views, as the postmodern ethnographer does, to deny them the expressed order or reality of their experiences, is to deny them the respect we are attempting to afford them. We also deceive informants by asking for accounts of their realities only to then depart and attack the basis of all they have told us. In this sense, relativists become the ultimate authorities in decreeing *what* others experience and *whether* this is real. The supposed power of the insider's voice becomes invalid and illusory because it is ultimately judged.

Related to this, if claims of order and realism are disputed, how can equally emphatic and extreme views be justified, especially when these fail to be consistent, as evidenced by Tyler's (1986) remark:

"Except for unusual informants like the Dogon Sage Ogotemmeli, the natives seem to lack communicable visions of a shared integrated whole"

(Tyler, 1986:131).

Some people experience order, others do not - where do we draw the line? Postmodernists have responded to naive realists by occupying an equally extreme and precarious position. While they oppose positivists in their appeals to relativism, paradoxically they mimic them in their attempts to justify this as an unequivocal truth. This places them in a predicament; they remain committed to the voices of their informants, yet their expression of a shared reality or order would shatter postmodern visions of disorder and render them authoritative if they chose to illustrate this consensus. Researchers may, therefore, find themselves in an uncompromising position of choice - loyalty to insiders, who may invalidate their propositions, or theoretical commitment, which may necessitate selectivity to ensure they conform to their ideals. In this sense, postmodernists may actively refuse to see order and unity even when their respondents stress it. Just as scientists may be accused of 'imposing order where there is none', postmodernists may be equally fallible in 'ignoring order where there is some'. As such, authority may be seemingly absent at a surface level, but a more dominant and disguised figure of power, in the shape of theoretical conformity, may be present which acts to determine what is or isn't, should or shouldn't be there.

A researcher's power and authority manifests itself at all levels and stages of the research process. Postmodernists fail to acknowledge this. They focus their

efforts on dismantling its influence at a textual level. This may limit their control, but it does not eradicate it because the responsibility for positioning these 'unstructured' accounts is still theirs. Earlier stages of research are also tainted by this imprint of power. The first step into the field sees ethnographers armed with a particular set of interests and concerns. They are therefore in charge of what is to be asked and what is to be answered. At an even deeper level, requests for accounts require informants to impose a sense of order or clarity upon their thoughts so these may be intelligible or coherent to a listener during presentation. True, this is a self imposed order, but the researcher is still responsible for it. To examine authority and power at these levels illustrates its pervasive nature. We may attempt to avoid its influence at later stages, but this is, in many ways, a futile exercise because we have been unable to escape the imprint it has left on our earlier activities.

In my eyes, postmodernists are visionary but over idealistic. The sacrifices they have chosen to make in their quest have merely given their power positions an alternative guise. Whilst seemingly losing sight of authority, we also lose sight of the culture. Issues of intent override issues of content as accounts are now read for their textual concerns (Van Maanen, 1988):

> "We find philosophers, literary critics, and political economists reading
> ethnographies of the Balinese and Azande, not out of intrinsic interest in the
> subject matter, but for their distinctive textual devices and modes of exploring
> theoretical issues in the process of ethnographic representation itself"
>
> (Marcus, 1986:167 footnotes).

We no longer attend to what is said, but how it is said. As such, informants 'voices are just voices; they have no claim to truth, so the search for voice is seen as being the search for any old voice"(Reason, 1994:334). The ethnographer and his/her ability to grapple with problems of representation becomes the new object of our interest. This textual focus removes the spotlight from the culture, which some postmodernists believe enables them to claim value freedom (Gill, 1995). They fail to comment culturally, so they are free from the value constraints which act to motivate and influence this commentary (Gill, 1995). I would, firstly, dispute their ability to nonchalantly shrug off these values. As Gill (1995) maintains:

> "When values are not made explicit, as in some discursive analyses, it is not
> because they are not present, but simply that they have gone underground"
>
> (Gill, 1995:17/18).

Their lack of cultural focus indicates a bias in itself:

> "Epistemological sceptics seem to have reinstated, rather than challenged, the
> notion of value freedom in research. Disinterested inquiry is their regulative

ideal - not dissimilar from that of positivist researchers"(Gill, 1995:18). Paradoxically, this proclaimed value freedom also reaffirms the authority they are trying to challenge because their accounts are now presented as if they were the only portrayal possible (Hammersley, 1992).

Even if value freedom were obtainable, at what a price! Deconstructive - postmodern aesthetics are dominated by a sense of detachment, displacement, shallow engagement (Spretnak, 1991, as cited by Vidich & Lyman, 1994) and brutality:

> "Relativists appear to have no aims but to relentlessly interrogate and dissolve
> every last claim, highlighting its status as construction and deconstructing,
> with surgical precision, each last shred of meaning"(Gill, 1995:13).

Perhaps this is the problem; they have dug themselves into an epistemological hole which they are not allowed to climb out of:

> "Epistemological relativism, I am sorry to say, is more like a play thing for
> intellectuals, a doctrine that no one takes seriously for a minute, but which is
> preached mainly because people argue themselves into it and they can't find
> any way out"(Jarvie, 1984:87).

They cannot comment, so they must defend the value of their empty accounts and derive some shred of purpose through dismembering others' portrayals.

Relativists are the only winners in this game, which means that the very concerns that supposedly motivate them are now being flagrantly dismissed. The insider is donated voice and, thus, respect, but the researcher seizes centre stage positioning rendering this voice unheard and meaningless. As I see it, the culture is 'used and abused'. Voice is no longer presented as voice, but as a platform for an academic display of intellectual gymnastics, a vehicle or an excuse for the ethnographer to spin off into the realms of academia. As postmodernists jump through their epistemological hoops and compete to 'decentre the author', their accounts become increasingly detached and abstruse as a result. They appear to be aware of this concern:

> "Textual, epistemological questions are sometimes thought to be paralyzing,
> abstract, dangerously solipsistic - in short, a barrier to the task of writing
> 'grounded' or 'unified' cultural and historical studies"(Clifford, 1986:24/25).

They respond to such criticism by using epistemological conviction as an impenetrable defence:

> "There has been considered talk about a return to plain speaking and to
> realism. But to return to realism, one must have first left it!"(Clifford, 1986:25).

Again, we are left with no ground to fight on. We cannot return to what wasn't or isn't there, so in trying to reinstate the culture, by making some concrete reference to it, we become 'naive realists'. But do we? I do not believe these positions necessarily correspond. We can reject a unitary conception of culture and accept a fragmentary or multiple version, but does this mean we have to give up the fight? Surely, in line with the goals of ethnographic practice, we must try and illustrate even a fragmentary or subjective picture. If not, I fail to see the point of the exercise. Here, then, we enter into a debate about objectives, not realism. If realism becomes the issue, I see no reason why postmodernists even entertain ethnographic method. If we can't reference what isn't there, as Clifford (1986) implies, we must ask why they are toying with these cultural illusions in the first place. We no longer read for content, so why are these tokenistic cultures even featured? Ethnographic ideals simply fail to complement postmodernists' objectives, unless, of course, they are manipulated, at the expense of the culture, to suit their needs.

As it stands, dilemmas of power, authority and distance have been magnified. The chasm between the 'researcher' and the 'researched', claimed to have been breached by the loss of the author, has been further widened by the loss of the culture. As debate is removed from its context, the researcher's role becomes more removed and the insider's more redundant. What he/she deems to be an important provision of cultural knowledge and experience is, unbeknownst to him/her, likely to become irrelevant. The researcher's power and control is, thus, employed in decreeing the insider's final significance in this portrayal. As postmodernists react to the colonial ethnographer who used his/her powers of detachment to conceal fieldwork processes and personal biases, they fail to recognise their own replication of this supremacy. Their practises and reflections may be exposed, but their objectives remain hidden, maintaining the distance, disrespect and power they claim to have challenged. Their accounts also lose their accessibility. Fragmented portrayals which preclude ethnographic narrative may be true to postmodern ideals, but they remain untrue to cultural members and other interested readers. Intelligibility is obscured, which means these depictions benefit only a minority section of the academic community; those able to grasp and understand their intended message:

> "To those left out, such writing is chilly, masturbatory, restricted by design and directed only to the already-tenured of a special interest club"
>
> (Van Maanen, 1988:28).

In this climate of local ethnographic enquiry and heightened accountability, cultural insiders are slowly being defined as an important audience for our work (Marcus & Fisher, 1986, as cited by Brettell, 1993). This is a new turn in events. In examining the various readers of ethnographic work, Van Maanen (1988), who remains more aware than most, fails to even consider this group as an important part of our readership. 'When They Read What We Write' (1993) constitutes a collection of texts which address the issue of audience and its effects upon our cultural portrayals. Focus is placed on the insider readership and the interpretational and representational dilemmas they now pose:

> "Since the ethnographic other can read, she now presumes to criticize her
> characterization and to clamour for the right to represent herself. Pity the poor
> ethnographer"(Tyler, 1987:49, as quoted by Brettell, 1993:3).

Issues of power and authority that lay previously undisturbed are resurrected and re-examined as the literate insider adds an alternative angle to our insight. Language is highlighted as an important concern in such matters. As Hau'ofa (1975) asserts, academic discourse may act to preclude insider comprehension, deflect challenge and, thus, preserve our benefits of power (Brettell, 1993). Illustrating this, Davis's (1993) work suffered insider criticism and she was advised by fellow academics to adopt a more sophisticated style of language. In effect, she was told to use linguistic distance as a way of deflecting contestation. Sheehan (1993) lacked this discursive defence. Her worries about account accuracy were compounded by her academic informants - a group which enabled her no escape from dispute or challenge. Thus, jargonistic language and an unstructured format can now be used to afford us the distance and defence that geography previously did. Remote cultures might have challenged their ethnographic portraits, but they were not given the opportunity to see or read them. Local cultures can now read and see them, but they cannot always understand them. Cultural colonialism is, thus, merely replaced by academic colonialism, as jargon becomes an 'exclusionary tool' (Becker, 1986, as cited by Van Maanen, 1988) and relativists become relative only to themselves. This must now change. As Myerhoff (1978), as cited by Glazier (1993), observes, insiders' questions have now moved on from 'What do you want from us?' to 'What's in it for us?' Don't we owe them something? I would say at least an intelligible account which provides them with the opportunity to disagree.

Postmodernism has heightened our awareness of some very important ethnographic issues and I embrace many of its ideals. However, while good in principle, I feel many of these have failed in practice. In effect, it has reproduced all it has set out to destroy. This is partially the problem - backed by an

epistemological stance which says it can, it attempts to destroy that which cannot be eradicated - power and authority. Postmodern ethnographers have failed to remove the author(ity), they have merely provided us with a game of hide and seek. The researcher's perch of undisputed authority has been knocked, but he/she has not been toppled from it. He/she never will because, as this section has hopefully illustrated, we cannot ever escape this position. Perhaps, then, we should aim to rebuild this perch according to a different manual of instructions and develop a new position made valid by awareness of our power potential. In this sense, earning our positions of power through ethically guided action (Horwitz, 1993) both in print and in practice. A renewed agenda must also implicate the culture as our guiding light. Issues and concerns initially arise from this context, the culture thus gives them their relevance. Without this cultural anchor, debate becomes detached and these concerns meaningless.

So equipped with the directions postmodernism has given us, now may be the time to get back on board, whilst saving the culture a place, and face these challenges head on. If we realistically accept our limitations and work constructively to try and diminish rather than eradicate them, we may be able to reinstate the respect that has been lost in the pursuit of unobtainable goals.

A CULTURALLY ORIENTED APPROACH TO RESEARCH

Having outlined the epistemological and moral principles that guided my approach to research, I will now illustrate how I put these into practice. My research orientation was shaped largely by the subculture itself. This group receives a great deal of media coverage, much of which is, in their view, biased and distorted. They recognise this to be a result of the media's afforded powers of representation. Consequently, issues of authority and voice are subculturally important ones. In realising this, my own position as a subcultural narrator became more clear. Sheehan's (1993) worries of accuracy were generated by her academic informants and her fears of their informed criticism. Mine were derived from the responsibility I held in presenting an account infused with the often silent voice of a consistently misrepresented group. I acknowledged and wholeheartedly accepted the authority, power and representational control I gained as a subcultural translator. I made no attempt to deny these affordances. However, I did try to avoid abusing their potential.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: A GAME OF TWO HALVES

Informants were generous with their time and guidance and enthusiastic about my desire to understand their subculture. For this reason, I wanted to give them something in return, namely, an informed and comprehensible account that bore

some relevance to their portrayed life worlds. This meant I had to involve myself as a narrator to enhance clarity. An ethnographic researcher has a distinct role to play as fieldwork is characterised by an interplay between proximity and distance and insider and outsider positions. As a 'professional stranger' (Agar, 1980), we use the informed vision of the insider and combine it with the afforded advantages of our perception as an outsider. In terms of insight, no one position is better than the other; they both carry with them particular strengths and weaknesses (Hammersley, 1992). To claim that "the Outsider, no matter how careful and talented, is excluded in principle from gaining access to the social and cultural truth"(Merton, 1972:15), assumes there is a truth to obtain, but also neglects the inherent strengths of the outsider's peripheral position:

> "It is the stranger, too, who finds what is familiar to the group significantly
> unfamiliar and so is prompted to raise questions for inquiry less apt to be
> raised at all by Insiders"(Merton, 1972:33).

Knowledge is specific and bounded by our experiences. Insiders may have valid knowledge concerning their own particular realities, but they may lack the detachment to appreciate these worlds from a wider or alternative perspective (Hammersley, 1992). If research demands the elucidation of all that is tacit (Harré, 1993), then it is the outsider who is able to see beyond the insider's everyday, taken for granted assumptions. Their dual positioning enables them to appreciate the insider's frame of reference, whilst also detect its significance facets:

> "The researcher generates creative insight out of this marginal position of
> simultaneous insider - outsider"(Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983:100).

However, the outsider's is not an isolated vision. It depends, firstly, upon access to and understanding of the insider's phenomenal life world:

> "Only through continued socialization in the life of a group can one become
> fully aware of its symbolisms and socially shared realities; only so can one
> understand the fine-grained meanings of behaviour, feelings and values; only
> so can one decipher the unwritten grammar of conduct and the nuances of
> cultural idiom"(Merton, 1972:15).

In this sense, distance must be complemented by a corresponding position of proximity. We rely on insiders to inform our interpretations and ensure these are anchored and grounded in the context and culture in question (Van Maanen, 1982). As creators of their realities, insiders represent the bearers of whatever knowledge we aim to elucidate. Their views are no more true than others, but if it is their world we seek to understand, they become the ultimate authorities. They

are afforded direct access to their realities by their experiences of them. The ethnographer gains indirect access through their accounts of them. In a sense:

"The activity of understanding (verstehen) unfolds as one looks over one's respondents' shoulders at what they are doing"(Schwandt, 1994:123),

and, I would stress, at what they are saying. Although we can never be or think like an insider (Geertz, 1983), we can appreciate what it means to be one through involving them in the production of knowledge. In effect, they become our socialisers. They familiarise us with the facets of their particular life worlds and they afford us the 'local knowledge' (Geertz, 1983) to present our cultural portrayals.

REBUILDING AND SHARING OUR PERCH OF AUTHORITY - THE FUSION OF SUBJECTIVITIES

I embrace Harré's (1972, 1993) assertions of human agency and reflexivity. This is not to say we have some privileged access to the truth, but I do believe we have exclusive access to the subjective and personal reasons for our behaviour. As researchers, we interpret the actions of others and, thus, combine their vision with ours. But why stop here?

"Orthodox social science inquiry methods, as part of their rationale, exclude the human subjects from all the thinking and decision making that generates, designs, manages, and draws conclusions from the research. Such exclusion treats the subjects as less than self-determining persons, alienates them from the inquiry process and from the knowledge that is its outcome, and thus invalidates any claim the methods have, to be a science of persons"

(Reason, 1994:325).

Given that "participants are always 'doing' research, for they, along with the researchers, construct the meanings that become 'data' for later interpretation by the researcher"(Olesen, 1994:166), why not include them, as Smith (1994) suggests, in a role which incorporates their vision in an interpretational capacity:

"If one's view of a person is as a self-reflexive agent, presumably that holds for the respondent as well as for the researcher. Given that your respondent will therefore be doing this reflexing anyway, why not enlist her/him as a co-researcher in the project?"(Smith, 1994:254/255).

I tried to share the analyst's usual assumption of interpretational privilege (Mulkay, 1985, as cited by Smith, 1994) with my informants by involving them as interpretational consultants.

Firstly, I made our interviews forums where we could jointly examine and discuss the analytic significance and implications of their subcultural involvements. In this

sense, I avoided applying hidden and imposed meanings to their behaviour in the safety of detachment beyond the field. My theoretical ideas and interpretations were exposed as I spoke to them, as were theirs, and together we assessed their relevance and accuracy. Some might question my ability to coerce informants into confirming my propositions during our interviews. However, this would define them as lacking in their own views. This was not the case. Informants willingly voiced their opinions as they enthusiastically incorporated themselves within the 'interpretative community' (Fish, 1980, as cited by Gillespie, 1992) and redressed the balance of power that has been lacking in previously unsourced and imposed media illustrations. The part they played gave them some status of authority, but it also justified mine. Moulding our subjectivities together through this process of negotiation did not ensure objectivity or a guarantee of truth, but it did, in my view, generate a stronger base for the legitimisation of knowledge. Different visions were combined - both were subjective, but mine was grounded or based upon that of the insider's, the creator of the reality I sought to understand.

Hollway (1989) reverses this process by using her own knowledge as a basis to build upon and judge from. As she sees it, treating informants as arbiters of knowledge is naive because we fail to attend to who is producing the account and, thus, the reasons and motives that may shape or distort it. She recommends that we use our own subjective experiences to frame account accuracy. For my area of research, however, this was frankly incompatible. I approached this subculture without the experience or insight needed to check the validity of my informants' accounts. In addition to this, I had no wish to judge their words in terms of accuracy. As Hammersley (1992) contends:

"Whether we should be concerned with the truth or falsity of any account

depends on how we plan to use it"(Hammersley, 1992:53).

I used my informants accounts to understand this initially unfamiliar subculture and to gain insight into their perspectives and views as members of this. For this purpose then:

"We must ignore our judgements about their validity or rationality, since this is

not relevant to the task of understanding them"(Hammersley, 1992:53).

Their views were not always concordant. The subculture is cleavaged by different groups who do not necessarily share each others attitudes and beliefs. I had no wish to define their views and opinions as right or wrong. Rather, they were all different and valid in their own right. I am also aware of the reasons or motives underlying the accounts they gave me. Using a rare opportunity to promote and defend their own particular orientations, all were propelled by a desire to present their approach as 'best'. Although I recognised this, I felt no reason to challenge

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their conceptions. Rather, I wished to understand their accounts as reflections of their own specific standpoints.

As a means of further sharing my authority and power as a researcher, I also gave my completed thesis back to some of my British respondents for commentary (as yet I have only passed on my thesis to one American writer). This allowed me to give them something in return for the help and time they had given me during my fieldwork. Ethically, I also felt they had a right to read what I had written about them and comment on this (see Appendix C. for details of their responses). Additionally, making room for their assessments worked to significantly strengthen my interpretational role. Used as 'logically adequate criteria' (Harré & Secord, 1972), insiders' validations of our analytic portrayals of them can do nothing to harm the validity of our research.

Although I tried to earn members' validation through dedicated, thorough and culturally informed investigation, I did not expect their unconditional approval. While I attempted to limit interpretational biases, I conducted this research as an academic exercise. This compelled me to edit or omit details members might have deemed of ultimate interest or importance. It also meant I had to apply some form of analysis and, thus, strip the subculture down to its bare boned, skeletal framework. This might have deprived it of its vivid and dynamic exterior and resulted in a portrayal that members found unflattering or unfamiliar. I was also left with the difficult task of juggling members' multiple and diverse voices. Inevitably, some gained more exposure than others, which might have, given the subcultural importance of fame and recognition, generated some antagonism.

Despite the contributions my informants made as interpretational consultants, I occupy the ultimate power position in this cultural exchange. As the researcher, narrator, translator and author, I incorporate the analytic concepts and lines of interpretation that act to narrate something compelling and I decide how this story will eventually be told. By recognising, admitting and attempting to share my control and power, I depart from the postmodern agenda. As I see it, better the authority you know, than the authority you don't. Issues of subjectivity, representation and power must be tackled and the values that guide our research practice must be accounted for if we are to produce informed and ethically driven accounts. However, such reflection must also be contained. I do not wish to follow postmodernism and diffuse my subcultural focus by fixating upon these reflexive concerns. I seek to locate the subculture and its members within a centre stage position, giving them voice as voice, not as a vehicle to satisfy my

own needs. I want readers to hear the voice of the other, but I also want them to listen to and learn from "the plural voices of those Othered as constructors and agents of knowledge"(Fine, 1994:75).

In conclusion, I would summarise my stance as culturally oriented. This is not driven by an over romanticised sensitivity to the plight of the underdog, for the members themselves view their involvement as a privilege outsiders fail to recognise and experience. For this reason, I make no attempt to induce social transformation (Gill, 1995). While this is a valid goal in affecting change in the situations of oppressed cultural groups, in this case, members desired respect and voice, not help and intervention. I, thus, join feminists in their ethically driven quest, political in my commitment to afford informants the respect and status they deserve as cultural commentators.

CHAPTER 2

<u>ARE THEORIES OF SUBCULTURE TOO</u>
<u>CLASS ORIENTED?</u>

Two main academic schools have addressed 'the subculture' as an analytic issue; the functionalist anomie or strain theorists and, later, the Marxist CCCS group. These theorists adopt different analytical approaches as we shall see. However, other more subtle distinctions also differentiate them. Most notably, the functionalists treat the subculture as an issue that can be addressed as 'delinquency'. The often deviant or illegal nature of subcultural activity is comparatively underplayed in the work of the CCCS group. Despite this deviation, there are two main points at which these theorists converge - both focus on urban, male, working class adolescents and both share a common concern with the influence of class. They may use this latter factor to outline different reasons for subcultural membership, but, in both cases, it is given central consideration.

I intend to use this chapter to consider the theoretical utility and potency of these theories. Criticisms have been made on a number of grounds. One which deserves special mention is their explicit assertion that all members of subcultures are working class. This is an assumption and, as I will argue, a problematic one at that. The suggestion that subcultures are an inherent 'problem', something undesirable, should also be addressed. There appears to be little analytic space in any of this work for saying something positive about them, except for the fact that they are a defensive reaction or a symbolic solution to the contradictions and difficulties of a working class background.

It is here that adolescent or youth theorists make their voice clearly heard. They concern themselves with the varying social and/or psychological needs of this age group (see for e.g., Coleman, J.C., 1980; Eisenstadt, 1956; Marsland, 1980, 1993). Through promoting and structuring a developing adolescent's passage into adulthood by its offer of autonomy, independence, guidance and support, the subculture or peer group is seen to be a means of meeting these needs. Given their angle of interest, it is unsurprising that these youth or adolescent theorists criticise the CCCS group for promoting class factors above the influence of concerns such as age. An account which ignores the age related benefits of subcultural membership is, in their view, a partial and distorted one. Marxist theorists respond by declaring these youth based theories monolithic, apolitical, ahistorical and, thus, analytically worthless.

I review this debate to clarify their related theoretical positions, but also to underline the neglected association made between subcultures and their

predominantly male membership. The subcultural and the youth/adolescent literatures grant this feature little or, in some instances, no analytic attention. This omission would appear to comment on masculinity's use as an androcentric yardstick of normality, i.e., the pervasive research orientation by men of men, where men = people and women = the 'other'. Here, working class and male culture are assumed to be synonymous. They are not and we must recognise and account for this if we are to develop a sufficient understanding of the subculture's masculine nature and, indeed, its related function.

THE FUNCTIONALIST 'ANOMIE' OR 'STRAIN' APPROACH

The functionalist theories enjoyed theoretical prominence in America during the 1950s. From the starting point of Merton (1938), delinquency was perceived in terms of nonconformity to socially accepted goals and values. Society was viewed as a consensual system where middle class values are universally embraced but prevented gratification by the constraints of a working class background. As a result of this disparity between desired goals and means of obtaining these, 'anomie' or 'normlessness' occurs and the frustrated individual is backed into a compensatory position of delinquency.

In his text, 'Delinquent Boys' (1955), Albert Cohen develops Merton's propositions to formulate his own theoretical framework. Here, the individual, in failing to obtain and fulfil 'mainstream' goals, uses 'reaction formation' to invert these, deny their value and pursue, instead, a career of deviance. The delinquent subculture is perceived as "*non-utilitarian, malicious and negativistic*"(Cohen, A., 1955:25. Italics in original) because it is used by status frustrated individuals as a hit back mechanism.

Cloward & Ohlin (1961) adopt a similar approach and outline three types of deviant subcultures; the criminal, conflict and retreatist. The second represents, again, a violent expression of frustration derived from a working class individual's denied access to society's legitimate opportunity structure.

Miller (1958) takes a radically different stand on these issues. He emphasises the irrelevance of middle class norms and values. In his view, the subcultural member merely conforms to the distinctive value system of his/her own working class culture:

"In the case of 'gang' delinquency, the cultural system which exerts the most
direct influence on behaviour, is that of the lower class community itself - a
long-established, distinctively patterned tradition with an integrity of its own -
rather than a so-called 'delinquent subculture' which has arisen through

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conflict with middle class culture and is oriented to the deliberate violation of middle class norms"(Miller, 1958:5/6).

The subcultures 'focal concerns' - toughness, smartness, excitement, fate, autonomy and trouble (Miller 1958) are taken to reflect working class traditions, not working class frustration.

THEORETICAL LIMITATIONS

Matza and Sykes (1961) step in here to question this apparent disparity between middle and working class norms. In contrast, they view the delinquent as conforming to 'subterranean values'. These are also embraced by the middle classes, but their expression and fulfilment is restricted to the sphere of leisure. The delinquent thus differs only in his/her disregard for middle class proscriptions of time and place.

These similarities in working and middle class values help us to explain why subcultural deviance is often occasional. If the subculture's values are oppositional, as Albert Cohen (1955) and Miller (1958) have suggested, then how is value adherence maintained without constant and persistent law violation? As Matza (1964) argues:

> "Positive criminology accounts for far too much delinquency. Taken at their
> terms, delinquency theories seem to predict far more delinquency than
> actually occurs" (Matza, 1964:21).

Matza (1964) dismisses the image of a committed delinquent and portrays, instead, a process of drift in and out of violation. Parker's (1974) study supports this conceptual shift. As he illustrates, delinquency is rarely a twenty four hour phenomenon. Much time is also spent engaged in conventional activity or 'doing nothing' (Corrigan, 1976).

The functionalists' overprediction of crime can be explained in other ways. Anomie theorists present delinquency as a typical or standard reaction to class contradiction (Heidensohn, 1989; Hirschi, 1969). In doing so, they ignore both working class conformity and the fact that delinquency often decreases after adolescence:

> "Anywhere from 60 to 85 per cent of delinquents do not apparently become
> adult violators. Moreover, this reform seems to occur irrespective of
> intervention of correctional agencies and irrespective of the quality of
> correctional service"(Matza, 1964:22).

Maturational reform leaves these theories with questions that are very hard to answer:

> 'The fact that most delinquent boys eventually become law abiding adults is

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also a source of embarrassment to the strain theorist"(Hirschi, 1969:6).

The picture portrayed is just too static. By focusing on outcomes as opposed to processes, i.e., entry into and exit from subcultural involvement (Downes & Rock, 1982), strain theorists leave the reader with the impression of a lifelong delinquent.

They also leave us with the impression of a socially determined delinquent; an individual propelled into deviant action through structural forces that lie beyond their control. Self will and choice do not figure in these accounts:

"Delinquents are depicted as helpless toy figures moved by outside forces, not as human beings with wills of their own"(Heidensohn, 1989:53).

By equating delinquency with the cultural traditions of the working classes, Miller (1958) paints a similar picture. Little room is left for conformity and crime is portrayed as a predictable or even inevitable outcome of class membership (Matza, 1964).

Reliance on class factors alone omits alternative reasons for delinquency, such as family or school based problems (Gibbons, 1968; Heidensohn, 1989), and places deviance within a vacuum of structural constraint. But this theoretical package is just too neat and tidy - contradictions and inconsistencies, such as middle class crime, are ignored or carefully explained away (Downes & Rock, 1982; Heidensohn, 1989; Hirschi, 1969; Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1985). Albert Cohen (1955) salvages his class based theory by attributing middle class deviance an alternative cause - masculine anxiety. He derives his claims from Parsons' (1942) concept of 'masculine protest', whereby a boy adopts oppositional qualities to the female, namely his mother, in an attempt to establish a masculine identity. Cohen emphasised this to be more extreme for the middle class boy who resides within a family unit which isolates and separates him from significant male role models. Apparently, these figures are more accessible to the working class boy (Cohen, A., 1955), so his deviant motivations remain status frustration and the problems of his working class position.

The more complex postmodernist/psychoanalytic analyses now being developed on gender expose the overly simplistic nature of Cohen's claims. Other writers dismiss this theory in its entirety, perceiving masculine concerns to be just as great, if not greater, among working class boys (Miller, 1958; Wilensky & Lebeaux, 1958). Cohen (1955) himself acknowledges the limitations of his claims:

"We make no attempt here to explore exhaustively, this problem of middle-class delinquency. How pervasive and how intense are these problems of

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achieving masculinity? In what ways are working-class and middle-class delinquency alike and in what ways different? What countervailing pressures are there in the middle-class to the adoption of this mode of masculine protest? All these questions require further research"(Cohen, A., 1955:169). With the apparent admission of no informed or definitive basis for differentiating middle and working class delinquency, Cohen's link between class and crime becomes highly tentative.

Indeed, his entire theory is, at best, speculative because, as he admits, its major tenets all require further research:

* Childrens' awareness of their own and others' social class

> "To what degree are they conversant with this social class system and participants in its workings? It would be rash to speak glibly in the present state of our knowledge"(Cohen, A., 1955:81).

* Internalisation of middle class standards

> "We have suggested that corner-boy children (like their working-class parents) internalize middle-class standards . . . . Again we are on somewhat speculative ground where fundamental research remains to be done"
>
> (Cohen, A., 1955:127).

* Hostility to the middle classes as a result of status frustration

> "We surmise that a certain amount of hostility is generated among working-class children against middle-class persons . . . and against middle-class norms which are, in a sense, the cause of their status-frustration. . . . here too we must feel our way with caution. Ideally, we should like to see systematic research . . . to get at the relationship between status position and aggressive dispositions"(Cohen, A., 1955:131).

This theoretical uncertainty might have been avoided had Cohen (1955) developed an analysis informed by the meanings of the actors themselves (Bloch & Niederhoffer, 1958). On the basis of their in-depth research on gangs, Bloch & Niederhoffer (1958) challenge Cohen's view of crime as a hit back effect and his claim that delinquents invert middle class values and remain unable to defer gratification and make future plans. They also declare these outlined modes of deviance common to all youth, thus, calling into question this theory's emphasis on class over issues such as age and masculinity. This is not to say these concerns have been ignored. Miller (1958), in particular, highlights the centrality of masculine values within the subculture and he must be commended for this. But he diffuses the possible potency of his explanation by failing to consider these values alongside, as opposed to underneath his class focus. Similarly, Cohen (1955) touches on gender issues, but he deems these to be significant within the

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middle classes alone. In my mind, the problem does not lie in where masculinity is more of an issue, but why it is an issue at all. These subcultures are all male dominated and none of these theorists grant this feature a sufficient degree of analytic attention.

Unsurprisingly, the anomie theories were exposed, attacked and rejected for being overly mechanistic and simplistic. As Downes & Rock (1982) have suggested, anomie is presumably more intense for those who fail having once succeeded, than for those who have never achieved. As such, there is no apparent reason why anomie is restricted to the working classes alone. The functionalists' notions of normlessness and universal goals have also been challenged (Downes & Rock, 1982; Heidensohn, 1989; Hirschi, 1969), alongside their mistaken evocation of societal consensus. Because their world is perceived ahistorically, in terms of conformity and nonconformity, evidence of class conflict or struggle is obscured (Cohen, S., 1987; Downes & Rock, 1982) and their actors become nothing more than the passive recipients of a system of rules and values whose dominance is left unquestioned (O'Donnell, 1985).

THE MARXIST NEW WAVE APPROACH - WORK OF THE CCCS GROUP

In reaction to the theoretical stance of the functionalists, the British New Wave Subcultural Theory emerged in the 1970s with a portrayal of 'man' fighting back. This approach draws on Marxist understandings of social relations, which sees society divided in terms of power and control of forces of production. The relationship between the major social groups is defined as exploitative, oppressive and ultimately conflictual, since the dominant social faction gains at the expense of the subordinate. As such, this theory offers a political interpretation of subcultural activity - its response to a powerful movement in the 1960s which sought to suggest that generational rather than class differences were the most relevant and significant divisions in society.

As in the strain theory, class maintains a central analytic position. However, consensus makes a hasty exit in these accounts and conflict takes its place. Functionalist conceptions of 'reaction' are replaced with Marxist depictions of 'action', investing their working class subcultural actors with the will to resist and challenge the dominant framework imposed upon them. They are seen to do this through their oppositional styles and behaviour. These are read as their attempts to resolve, "albeit magically"(Cohen, P., 1972:23, as quoted by Clarke et al., 1976:32), the contradictions of their subordinate class positioning:

"They 'solve', but in an imaginary way, problems which at the concrete material

level remain unresolved"(Clarke et al., 1976:47/48).

The subculture's stylistic resistance is taken to represent unconscious political struggle; its attempt to win space for itself and parent culture by defensively opposing the hegemony and domination of the ruling classes.

Jefferson (1976) puts these principles into practice in his semiotic analysis of the style and appearance of working class Teddy Boys. This he interprets as their "attempt to buy status (since the clothes chosen were originally worn by upper class dandies)"(Jefferson, 1976:85). Their territorial behaviour is taken to symbolise their attempt to maintain the, now, rapidly declining, values and traditions of their working class background. Immigrant groups, perceived to be the reason for change within their communities, become the targets upon which their frustration is expressed.

Clarke (1976a) views the territorial preoccupation and manual worker style of the Skinheads in a similar way - as their attempt to recapture and maintain a sense of working class ethos:

> "We would argue that the skinhead style represents an attempt to re-create
> through the 'mob' the traditional working class community, as a substitute for
> the *real* decline of the latter"(Clarke, 1976a:99. Italics in original).

The Skinheads display their resistance, like the Teds, through their exacerbation of an 'us and them' scenario. However, they differ by embracing their parent culture traditions. Unlike the upwardly mobile style of the Teds, Skinheads adopt a traditionally working class style of dress and masculine behaviour.

Marxist theorists thus reference the past in an effort to understand and decode various elements of the subcultural present. Subcultural members, we are told, use their styles to recreate and express the past solidarity of their eroded working class traditions and communities. Some theorists see this historical picture as just too neat and tidy (Cohen, S., 1997). Others ask if these communities ever really existed in the first place? Many challenge these contentions by highlighting this 'community' as imaginary; a romanticised recollection of a past that never really occurred.

CLASS VERSUS AGE IN SUBCULTURAL EXPLANATION

Although these 'resistant' styles are expressed through the agency of youth, they are said to represent class as opposed to youth based solutions. Subcultures are viewed primarily as class configurations. The prominence of youth becomes a "secondary and dependant or determinate factor affecting the individual or group within those social relations which structure, not just their youth, but their whole

life trajectory"(Smith, 1981:246, quoting Hall, Jefferson & Clarke, 1976:19). A Marxist approach ensures that 'youth culture' is reconnected to its working class roots:

"The political analysis of youth culture must focus on the culture's 'working classness' rather than on its youthfulness"(Corrigan & Frith, 1976:236).

'Youth culture', as a term used to conceptualise the common experiences of this age group, is challenged for obscuring and repressing the structural and historical bases of these groups and sustaining "certain ideological interpretations - e.g. that age and generation mattered most, or that youth culture was 'incipiently classless' - even that 'youth' had itself become a class"(Clarke et al., 1976:15).

The debate between those promoting the theoretical significance of 'age' or 'class' has been long running. Eisenstadt (1956), among others, emphasises the centrality of societal age divisions:

"Age and differences of age are among the most basic and crucial aspects of human life and determinants of human destiny"(Eisenstadt, 1956:21).

Theorists, such as Allen (1968), respond to these views by problematising explanations which isolate age alone:

"This is not to say that generational experiences will not differ, and at times may differ markedly, but we add little to our understanding by ascribing such differences to age"(Allen, 1968:329).

Her main point - yes, youth are powerless, but they are not the only ones. Age as an explanatory tool is denigrated for failing to attend to structurally generated problems:

"Conflicts between generations . . . would be more satisfactorily analysed in terms of the dialectical relation between existing institutions and changes in structural bases of the society"(Allen, 1968:328).

The CCCS group have built upon the foundations laid by Allen (1968) and must be commended for re-introducing the complex political dialect between youth and their class position. However, Allen (1968) is able to question these age classified explanations without denying the shared difficulties of the young:

"Young people in industrial societies share in a common experience of being non-adult and are excluded from full participation in adult society"

(Allen, 1968:319).

The CCCS make no such concessions. In response to the lack of class analysis within youth theorists' accounts, they attempt to strike some sort of balance by tipping the scales the other way. Class alone is examined to the detriment of any

alternative explanation. The significance of age is, as Marsland (1993) suggests, pushed dogmatically to one side:

> "Marxist analysis tends to derogate other differentiating variables aside from class to a position so secondary as to approach invisibility"
>
> (Marsland, 1993:215).

Their approach cannot be justified here because its faults are the very ones it attributes to the youth theories - underrepresentation. Adolescence is an undeniably prominent feature of these subcultural groups, yet it is flatly ignored. The CCCS defend this bias and legitimate their approach by relegating youth accounts to psychological and biological determinism:

> "A focus on the youthfulness of youth culture means a focus on the psychological characteristics of young people - their adolescence, budding sexuality, individual uncertainties, and so on - at the expense of the social characteristics, their situation in the structure of the social relations of capitalism"(Corrigan & Frith, 1976:236).

But does it? These adolescent or youth theorists do not just promote psychological and biological consideration, they also call attention to the social positioning of this age group within society. Although 'youth culture' is seen to be global in scale, at no point do these theorists deny that:

> "Of course youth culture is part of societal culture as a whole. Of course it is itself internally differentiated into a wide range of distinctive sub-cultures of youth. Of course what it represents above all - in its singularity and in its differentiated forms - is rebellion and resistance"(Marsland, 1980:42).

The Marxists occupy a strong position in this debate, but a major flaw in their argument is elucidated by Smith (1981). The CCCS reject the age related connotations of the term 'youth'. In its place they attribute adolescents a 'generational consciousness' (Clarke et al., 1976), determined by their institutional experiences, i.e., school, work and leisure, and mediated by their class membership. But, as Smith (1981) points out, "they still use youth and generation virtually interchangeably"(Smith, 1981:245). Paradoxically, this results in a portrayal of youth as an age status, diffusing Clarke et al.'s (1976) rejections of 'youth culture' as an empirically senseless and unthinkable concept. As Smith (1981) remarks:

> "If youth as a social category does not make much sense, where stands their analysis of age status?"(Smith, 1981:245).

Despite their robust defence, the CCCS have been unable to prevent the implications of age from making themselves felt within their analyses. This, in effect, severely weakens their theoretical stance.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS - THE VALIDITY OF THE CCCS'S APPROACH AND METHOD

Marxist theory rests upon the centrality of class relations. As such, it maintains a vested interest in perceiving phenomena, such as youth groups and subcultures, in these terms - class must be causally identified to ensure Marxist theory is sustained.

Surely, however, this position must legitimate itself through the sustained development and assessment of its own and others' ideals? The 'Resistance Through Rituals' thesis (1976), as Marsland (1980) argues, does not do this. An outline or analysis of opposing arguments is notably absent, identifying an inbuilt bias and indicating the unlikelihood that:

"There was even the slightest possibility that their work might have led them - whatever the logic or evidence - to believe that youth culture could be a valid and important concept" (Marsland, 1980:40).

Likewise, their observations remain destined to confirm their propositions and foreclose the possibility of alternative explanation because Marxist theorists enter the field already armed with the theories they seek to support (Davis, 1990; Downes & Rock, 1982; Smith, 1981). On all counts, falsification remains improbable and this, according to Popper (1972), calls into question the strength of their entire theory:

"*The criterion of the scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability, or refutability, or testability*"(Popper, 1972:37. Italics in original).

For this reason, the CCCS's methodology must be scrutinised. In view of approach and method - How tenable are its representations?

Because objects of the 'everyday world' "can be magically appropriated; 'stolen' by subordinate groups and made to carry 'secret' meanings: meanings which express, in code, a form of resistance"(Hebdige, 1979:18), semiotic analysis constitutes a relevant, valuable and centrally important element of Marxist methodology. It is an epistemologically sophisticated method, but it does provides the theorist with a great deal of interpretational freedom and this, in itself, generates two main problems:

1. The multiplicity of possible readings ensure "we are left with the perennial sociological question of how to know whether one set of symbolic interpretation is better than another" (Cohen, S., 1987:XV).

2. The analyst must decide whether "it is appropriate to invoke the notion of symbolism *at all*"(Cohen, S., 1987:XV. Italics in original).

A simple solution to these problems would be to consult the members themselves on their stylistic intentions, thus complementing this external subjective analysis with an insiders' angle of insight. As it stands:

> "There seems to be little regard for the utility of empirical research, and thus
> these kinds of highly theoretical analyses are produced in isolation from the
> actual behaviour of those individuals whose collective practices these theories
> are meant to illuminate"(Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995:28).

By utilising detached methods of enquiry, the CCCS devalue the subcultural member's personal meanings (Cohen, S., 1987; Davis, 1990; Downes & Rock, 1982; Griffin, 1993), reducing him/her to nothing more than a '"speaking object', a user of codes and symbols"(Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994:467).

This may, however, be their very intention. The CCCS occupy a precarious theoretical position; they must remain loyal to the concept of class, yet an actor who denies this factor importance or significance, renders their analysis redundant. By keeping members quiet, this possibility is avoided. By declaring them ignorant, this tactic is justified:

> "Unless one is prepared to use some essentialist paradigm of the working
> class as the inexorable bearers of an absolute trans-historical Truth, then
> one should not expect the subcultural response to be either unfailingly correct
> about real relations under capitalism, or even *necessarily* in touch, in any
> immediate sense, with its material position in the capitalist system"
>
> (Hebdige, 1979:80/81. Italics in original).

Working class adolescents are identified as "the least articulate about their relationship to the world"(Brake, 1985:54). Why? Because:

> "They are enmeshed in institutions which explicitly devalue and disguise the
> centrality of class inequalities, and offer an alternative conception which
> emphasises the importance of age differences"
>
> (Murdock & McCron, 1976:202).

Thus, in regard to motive and meaning, these individuals are the last people to ask. The reality of their situation is obscured and this will, inevitably, lead them to an inaccurate age rather than class based reasoning for their actions.

This concept of 'false consciousness', as it is termed, seems to emerge as an extremely convenient tool. By renouncing individual intent, the potentially refutational noise of members' meanings is silenced and theorists are left, uninterrupted, to interpret and explain the actions of others in theoretically advantageous ways:

> "The teleological model provides a ready way of dealing with its doubts about

its validity. It incorporates an explanation for the disbelief of others that, effectively, explains it away: disbelief is the product of false consciousness, a failure to recognise the truth because of a false understanding of one's interests"(Hammersley, 1992:107).

I, alongside Stan Cohen (1987), have problems with this image of individuals propelled into subcultural activity with little or no understanding of their reasons for involvement. Surely:

"Symbolic language implies a knowing subject, one at least dimly aware of what the symbols are supposed to mean"(Cohen, S., 1987:XIV).

Likewise, many subcultural activities involve a high degree of risk and danger. With such high stakes in personal safety, I defy any theorist to presume members lack apparent or even alternative motives for their actions.

By the CCCS's own admission, I see no plausible reason to, as yet, assume this ignorance:

"The ethnomethodologists may be correct in claiming that everyone in their own way is a sociologist, but this does not mean that everyone thinks and speaks like a sociologist"(Murdock & McCron, 1976:201).

Maybe not, but whether class awareness is expressed in sociological terms or not, does not detract from the fact that experiences of inequality, poverty and resentment may be cited as lay reflections of class contradiction. Murdock & McCron (1976) continue:

"We cannot take it for granted that class constitutes a central category in people's everyday vocabulary. On the contrary, how far this is the case is a matter for empirical investigation"(Murdock & McCron, 1976:201).

Having just stated the need to validate this absent insight with further research, these authors swiftly assert:

"We need in fact to restore the category of 'false consciousness' to the centre of analysis"(Murdock & McCron, 1976:201).

False consciousness is prematurely encouraged in an effort to be safe rather than sorry?

However one looks at it, the CCCS group shoot themselves in the foot through the use of this concept. If subcultural solutions are 'magical', imaginary and 'secret meanings' so secret that even their authors remain unaware of their function, How can the subculture realistically work to resolve class based contradictions? The theoretical propositions which 'false consciousness' works to strengthen and support are paradoxically weakened, because if problems are real then a symbolic, unconscious or unrecognised response does not constitute an adequate answer. This has been acknowledged, but it does not account for why

many of these styles are short-lived - the problems persist, yet their symbolic and unconscious responses to these do not. Additionally, there is no explanation:

> "Why the 'parent' working-class culture produces a variety of distinct
> adolescent styles which, at any one time, may be competing (even warring)
> amongst themselves"(Davies, 1976:15, as quoted by Smith, 1981:244).

Why did the Skinheads not elect the upwardly mobile stylistic solution adopted by the Mods and the Teds? Reasons for this and the variety of styles chosen by different groups within the same structural position are not provided.

As Stan Cohen (1987) concludes, summing up my sentiments exactly:

> "My feeling is that the symbolic baggage the kids are being asked to carry is
> just too heavy, that the interrogations are just a little forced"

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(Cohen, S., 1987:XV).

</div>

Illustrating this, inconsistent packages come with elaborate vindications included:

* Punks wear swastikas not because they are racist, but because they are not (Hebdige, 1979).

* Working class youth attack other working class community members because they misrecognise their oppressors (Clarke, 1976a).

* Class resentment or an adolescent's quest for independence and control?

> "They're able to punish us. They're bigger than us, they stand for a bigger
> establishment than we do, like, we're just little and they stand for bigger
> things, and you try to get your own back. It's, uh, resenting authority I
> suppose"(pupil's comment on teachers, cited by Willis, 1977:11).

As Marsland states (1980), and I would be inclined to agree with him:

> "They provide no persuasive arguments at all for believing that the behaviour of
> young people expressed through the youth culture is usefully or even
> plausibly interpreted as class action, or that it is directed towards liberation
> from (or mitigation of) class control, rather than towards escape from adult
> control as such"(Marsland, 1980:42/43).

The CCCS decode all aspects of subcultural style and behaviour in terms of class resistance and opposition and this, in many ways, is their downfall. Rather than admit instances, like those above, where this reading may be implausible or irrelevant, they soldier on, side-stepping interpretationally and asking us to make huge leaps in imagination. The result - a theory which is far from robust and a reader who is far from convinced.

The selectivity of their analytic focus installs the same sense of theoretical doubt. New Wave theorists seem quite happy to limit their analyses to those groups who directly concern/confirm their thesis, i.e., the non conformist working classes

(Cohen, S., 1987). In Illustration, Willis (1977) provides us with a vividly detailed portrait of the 'lads', but he devotes little attention to the conformist 'earoles' and offers us no account of the middle class student's attitudes and reactions to the imposed regime of school life. Similarly, Hebdige (1988) perceives the symbolic and physical violence of 'working class, disaffected, inner city, unemployed adolescents' to be a utilisation of their ability to pose a threat. They play "with the only power at their disposal: the power to discomfit"(Hebdige, 1988:18). But what, then, are middle class, rural based, or employed adolescents communicating through the use of similar displays? This is not considered. The middle and working classes are divided into mutually exclusive class categories. Middle class defiance takes place within the 'counter-culture' (Clarke et al., 1976) as opposed to the working class subculture. How, then, is a mixed class opposition defined? It is not because as Corrigan & Frith (1976) go on to assert:

> "Any political judgement of youth culture must be based on treating it first as a working class culture"(Corrigan & Frith, 1976:238. Italics in original).

This comment is illuminating. For a political judgement to be made, indeed to sustain their entire thesis, sub or youth cultures have to be working class configurations. But are they? As my research of the graffiti subculture will show, this is a misconception. A hardy and pervasive stereotype which works to salvage and, as this graffiti writer suggests, enhance theoretical clarity:

"It's easier for them to put it in a neat little package and say this is who graffiti writers are, this is why they do it . . . . It's easier for them than to really stop and think about it for a minute"(Claw).

MISSING LINKS - THE NEGLECTED QUESTION OF GENDER

The CCCS group must be credited for challenging and infusing political consideration into a portrait of youth formerly based on age factors alone. By highlighting the structural influences that differentiate the experiences of those within its boundaries, the concept of 'youth culture' has been successfully politicised. This is, however, "no reason for the finished product claiming a monopoly of truth"(Roberts, 1983:126). The CCCS have raised some very important concerns, but they have not, as yet, justified a complete rejection of other mediating factors. The same applies to the youth theorists. They have maintained a firm position in the face of this attack and appear equally reluctant to take alternative influences into serious consideration. The fervour of this debate has appeared to have locked each side into positions of mutual exclusivity. As Roberts (1983) suggests, the stronger position would undoubtedly be that of compromise:

> "If the New Wave is treated as complementing other contributions,

emphasising hitherto neglected processes and aspects of youth cultures, its position would be impregnable"(Roberts, 1983:126).

Perhaps both sides have failed to fully clarify the complexities of their chosen areas of interest. This exclusive preoccupation with variables of age and class has "meant that few texts examined the dynamics of relations around gender, sexuality or 'race'"(Griffin, 1993:211). In regard to gender:

> "The analysis of sub-cultural 'schools' of delinquency has been generally slow
> to consider the influence of culture of masculinity"(Hudson, 1988:34).

The CCCS offer us very little commentary on the predominance of males within the subculture. Only McRobbie & Garber (1976) tackled this area in any depth. As they conclude:

> "When the dimension of sexuality is included in the study of youth subcultures,
> girls can be seen to be negotiating a different space, offering a different type of
> resistance to what can at least in part be viewed as their sexual
> subordination"(McRobbie & Garber, 1976:221).

Girls display a different response, one which indicates a limited need for the group solidarity and single sex unity exhibited by the boys (McRobbie & Garber, 1976). Male Marxist theorists failed to problematise this gender biased component. Subcultures are presented as 'typical' resolutions employed by working class youth to deal with their class related contradictions. But, as McRobbie and Garber have illustrated, subcultures are predominantly male oriented responses. This finding weakens the validity of the subculture's proposed function as a class related resistance, as females presumably experience these contradictions as well. Secondly, it urgently calls for an address of why boys utilise this forum rather than girls?

The CCCS are not the only ones to have overlooked this question. Although working to a broader conceptual agenda, adolescent or youth theorists also fail to assign adequate significance to the masculine bias of these groups. The anomie theorists remarked upon it but, again, denied it sufficient visibility (Coote, 1993; Heidensohn, 1989) by relegating it to a featural interest positioned in the shadow of class significance. Academic accounts of crime also reveal this theoretical omission:

> "The most significant fact about crime is that it is almost always committed by
> men. Despite this, academic consideration of crime tends to overlook this
> most obvious feature"(Stanko & Newburn, 1994:intro page).

Recent research has seen a shift in emphasis. Masculinity(ies) no longer occupies its previous role as an androcentric yardstick of normality and is now subjected to increasing academic scrutinisation. Reflecting this, the male emphasis of the subculture has now become significant:

"If subcultures are solutions to collectively experienced problems, then
traditionally these have been the problems experienced by young men"

(Brake, 1985:163).

Subcultures are now seen to allow young males "an exploration and investment in forms of masculinity"(Brake, 1985:164). Brake (1985) retains the main tenets of the CCCS's class based thesis, but he widens their theoretical focus by questioning and examining the adolescent and masculine makeup of these subcultural groups. Although he places an exclusive and unwavering spotlight upon the working classes, again assumed to be the only individuals subculturally involved, he does at least go some way towards filling in the gap left by the CCCS group who failed to even acknowledge these characteristic subcultural features (Heidensohn, 1989; Hudson, 1988).

Despite this, Brake still leaves important questions unanswered:

"Brake consistently makes heroic presumptions about 'masculinity'. Why does
it require support? And why subcultural support?. . . As always with
subcultures, the 'answers' are circular"

(Heidensohn, 1989:55. Italics in original).

These questions are denied full exploration within other quarters as well. A well founded reaction to the white, heterosexual, male bias or 'gang of lads' model of these early subcultural theories (Griffin, 1993) appears to have moved many theorists away from these normative 'male' groups to explore other neglected areas of youth research, such as the experiences of young women. I am certainly not questioning our need to move on and attend to these alternative and hugely important concerns, but as McRobbie (1980) warns:

"The danger of this course is that the opportunity may be missed of grappling
with questions which, examined from a feminist perspective, can increase
our understanding of masculinity, male culture and sexuality"

(McRobbie, 1980:37).

She suggests and implements a redirected focus which recognises class alongside the masculine or patriarchal status of these groupings. But why stop here? Yes, these groups are male dominated, but the question why seems to have been, again, ignored. Why do males gravitate to these confines? What male demands are met by this subcultural response? Questions such as these

are never raised or tackled. This may be the influence of postmodernism making itself felt. In line with the postmodern agenda:

"It is now increasingly common to reject a sociology that seeks systematic regularities and patterns of causality"(Coltrane, 1994:52).

But does rejecting rigid lines of causality and assertions of 'truth' mean we have to ignore consistencies and the possible reasons why these exist? In my mind, an overwhelming regularity, such as the subculture's male dominated status, demands analytic attention.

There is one recent text which begins to take us in this direction - 'Masculinities and Crime' (1993) by Messerschmidt, J. Although this work does not focus on subcultures specifically, it is still analytically relevant as many subcultural activities, including graffiti, are officially illegal.

Rejecting the simplistic and over generalised notions of the Sex Role theory, Messerschmidt examines a variety of masculine identities or discourses and attempts to illustrate how these are constructed and expressed through activities such as crime. In this text, crime is interpreted as a:

"Resource for the making of gender, and in most cases that means it is a strategy for masculinity"(Connell, 1993:XI, in Messerschmidt, 1993).

It is also interpreted in terms of social constraint and power. As some groups have limited access to the legitimate constructive resources available to others, crime becomes a valid and attainable means of accomplishing a masculine identity. Messerschmidt recognises 'youth' as one such group. The high percentage of crime committed by adolescents is related to their relative lack of power and, thus, access to alternative masculine resources. The types of crimes perpetrated by this age group are differentiated, but on the basis of ethnic and class divisions alone. Again, age, as a mediating influence, gains relatively little attention. Messerschmidt cites crime as an adolescent's masculine resource, but he does not outline the particular displays we see manifested at different ages or explore reasons for these biographical changes. Questions remain: Why do individuals at certain ages select one masculine identity or discourse over another? Why does an individual possibly replace or modify his masculine identity as he gets older? These age related shifts direct our attention to the functions met by particular discourses at different points of an individual's biographical career.

Messerschmidt (1993) succeeds in outlining the differences existent in the masculine discourses occupied by different social groups. However, by attributing these distinctions to one's class and ethnic background alone and the power and

opportunities found there, his approach begins to resemble the over deterministic strain theory of deviance. Men must accomplish their gender identities, thus in the absence of conventional resources, crime substitutes as a compensatory form of masculine expression. Frustration still apparently figures as blocked opportunities are encountered and compromises are made. Reasons for crime have, it seems, merely been changed from unattainable middle class standards of success to unattainable middle class standards of masculinity. I feel we must first ask if all social groups actually strive to fulfil middle class masculine expressions? Messerschmidt appears to suggest that alternative masculine displays serve no purpose but that of compensation, that delinquent behaviour is nothing more than a last resort resource to accomplish a last resort masculine identity. We should perhaps conclude by also asking whether masculinities really reflect such clear cut 'race' or class based demarcations in the first place?

There seems to have been a tendency in past research to orientate analysis in directions of mutual exclusivity. Functionalist and Marxist analyses of subcultures and deviance isolate class as their primary mediating influence and adolescent or youth theorists isolate age as theirs. Messerschmidt (1993) breaks out of this straight jacket of single variable concern and elucidates, though somewhat deterministically, the complex dialect between class, 'race', gender and crime. At no point, however, do these theories provide an adequate exploration of the relationship between age, gender and delinquency. This interplay emerges from my research with sufficient significance to warrant increased examination. Indeed, it is my belief that unless these factors are given a greater combined degree of analytic attention, an adequate understanding of subcultures and the very real and positive rewards they afford will not be gained.

CHAPTER 3

TALES FROM THE FIELD: DATA SOURCES, GATHERING STRATEGIES AND ISSUES OF STATUS AND ROLE

This chapter will outline my fieldwork experiences and the methods of enquiry and data sources I used in this research. In effect, my methodological standpoint, detailed in chapter 1, will be put into practice. Commentary is located at a more concrete level as role problems and demands and the ways I used my methods are examined in relation to the actual nature of the subculture and research context I worked within. Although this chapter offers a reflexive and comprehensive outline of my fieldwork, a very much more personal and detailed journal account of my subcultural journey can be found in Appendix B.

METHODS OF ENQUIRY

A diversity of data sources and gathering strategies were used in this research. Secondary sources, such as newspaper articles, graffiti magazines, newsletters, books, police reports and graffiti itself, provided me with important research material. Although the internet also offers information relating to graffiti, I chose not to use it as a data source. Firstly, because most of its material is pictorial. Secondly, because much of its information is not specific to my chosen research contexts, New York and London.

Informal in-depth interviewing constituted my core method of data collection. I found this to be the easiest means of initiating research. Because I had no specific location or area in London to go to meet and talk to writers, most informants were initially contacted by telephone. Naturally, it was more appropriate to request an interview than ask to become immediately involved in a participant capacity.

Given the illegal nature of writers' activities, this contact procedure also helped to install trust. I was able to openly introduce myself and my objectives and specify who had given me their name and number. This personal recommendation identified them as a valuable contact, whilst also demonstrating that I could be trusted. In comparison to the occasionally guarded reactions I encountered from writers I met by chance, this method of contact quite obviously fostered a greater degree of confidence. Having established this, opportunities to become involved in a more participant capacity began to arise.

The material I gathered from interview and observational situations, such as painting trips, contrasted in content and angle of concern. Participant observation enabled me to examine aspects of behaviour, dress, procedure, atmosphere and

concerns specific to that moment. These situations also evoked a more spontaneous commentary from writers who appeared to be verbally inspired by their engagement in the actual act of painting itself. Disparity between the act and the account ensured that the feelings, sensations and details of these painting events were harder to induce through interviews. As Drax, a writer, advised me, some things are so familiar they are taken for granted. Participant encounters, thus, allowed me to collate impressions of these, otherwise, obscured aspects of the subculture. Basically, they produced a more natural quality of material because they represented real time interactions where verbal reports were part of the events and actions under study.

Although this highlighted the interview as a somewhat contrived means of accessing accounts about a mainly outdoor, active pursuit, this method was not without its substantial benefits. The fixed nature of the situation enabled me to hold writers' attention and was also more suited to exacting detailed commentary on general or specific concerns unrelated to the act of painting. Together, these methods allowed me to obtain and represent a variety of data bearing on my research topic.

FLEXIBILITY AND SENSITIVITY

Graffiti is, in the main, an illegal activity. Sensitivity and flexibility were, therefore, highly important methodological considerations. Both methods satisfied these requisites. Unforeseen difficulties that arose could usually be methodologically and personally subdued through the adaptive facets of the unstructured interview. I was able to relate to informants as I spoke to them and assess the best means of tackling potential problems. The informal nature of this method also enhanced open and relaxed communication. My most valuable material was obtained when formality was avoided and these meetings represented more of a chat. More intrusive or official methods of enquiry might have threatened the free flow of this commentary and prevented me from accessing many sensitive areas of concern.

Flexibility was also maintained within all participant observation encounters. On these occasions I had to consider varying factors, such as the accompanying participants or the actual situation itself, and adapt my role or orientation to suit these concerns respectively. For example, some instances required me to reduce the potential effect of my presence and adopt a 'back seat' position. Others presented me with a viable opportunity to talk openly to writers and actually participate myself.

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INFORMANTS

I conducted a total of thirty seven informal interviews over a period of two years. Informants consisted of three female writers, twenty six male writers, one English youth worker, the two authors of 'Subway Art' (1984), three film documentors and two members of the British Transport Police - one involved in security and the other the former head of the London Graffiti Squad. Thirteen of the writers were London based and sixteen were from New York. Non writer informants were generally older, however the writers also varied in age, ranging from sixteen to forty years old. Their subcultural involvements were also diverse. Many writers were fully legal, illegal or involved in both areas of activity. This diversity in context, age, orientation and gender granted me a comparative angle of insight and represented a form of purposive theoretical sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Younger informants allowed me to explore active writers' future or current goals, aims and attitudes. Older, less active or 'retired' writers enabled me to draw upon their past experiences and their deeper and often more reflexive levels of understanding. Likewise, legal or illegally directed individuals offered me a comparison of attitudes and realities, as did female writers and those from London and New York.

I spoke to many informants at their own homes, however, the majority were interviewed at neutral locations such as cafés or restaurants. Although I met some writers before and after these meetings, most were only interviewed once. Only two writers were interviewed twice. I also met approximately thirty other writers through participant observation events or chance encounters. I was able to talk to these individuals, however I did not count these situations as interviews as most interactions were brief.

RESEARCH CONTEXTS

Research was conducted in both London and New York. As an ethnography usually constitutes an in-depth examination of a single local culture, two research contexts did diversify this focus. However, as the birthplace of the graffiti movement and a valued component of the subculture's world wide status, New York's inclusion in this study was important. It also offered comparative potential: As a 'scene', New York is both larger and older than London. Subtle similarities and differences in subcultural dynamics and writers' motivations enabled me to "compare and contrast between settings in which similar activities occur"(Fielding, 1993:156). I was also able to observe the subculture's world wide network in operation, i.e., the links and affiliations between writers I had spoken to in both countries and their attitudes towards each other's scenes. The authors of 'Subway

Art' (1984), located within this city, also provided me with a robust resource for triangulating my theoretical propositions. Most importantly, however, New York's inclusion allowed me to meet and interview the inaugural writers of this world wide movement, many who have subsequently gained legal status through their feature in related films, books and gallery shows. Their age and experience were invaluable in enabling them to reflect upon initial reasons for their involvements and the effects of their career transitions.

Nevertheless, the bulk of my fieldwork was conducted in London. This granted me a comparatively deeper and more detailed appreciation of this 'scene's' issues and dynamics. Seven weeks of intensive fieldwork in New York had given me a vague sense of this 'scene' as a whole, but my perceptions were not nearly as focused as those I had developed over the two years of my research in London. For this reason, my American fieldwork complements my documentation of the London 'scene'. In effect, this represents the focus of my study.

TOOLS

All interviews were recorded using a small unobtrusive Dictaphone. Although reception was not always of highest quality, I felt happier using this than a larger, more sophisticated device which might have intimidated or distracted my informants. For practical reasons, the Dictaphone was only occasionally used within participant observation situations.

The tape's purpose as a transcriptive aid was outlined and permission to record was always requested. Informants were also given the right to say if they wanted some of the material to remain confidential. I also made brief notes relating to body language, atmosphere, intonation and subject areas covered during conversation. These were often formulated after the interview had finished as I found it difficult to concentrate on listening, talking and writing simultaneously.

ORGANISATION OF FIELD MATERIAL
INTERVIEWS
Each interview was immediately transcribed word for word by hand. Although this was an extremely time consuming process, it meant I had a very large amount of informants' original discourse at my disposal. A breakdown or summary of the general concerns or topics of this transcript were then page numbered and entered into a coding book under the name of each respective informant. Magazines, newsletters and newspaper articles were also categorised in this way. This enabled me to swiftly reference specific issues or subject areas and related quotations.

INTERVIEW FORMAT BOOK

A basic interview format was designed and noted within a separate book. This included key areas of interest and general questions relating to these. As my research progressed, new issues emerged and this format was extended to include these. Questions tailored to the details and concerns of specific writers and their particular aspects of involvement were also included and classified as 'interview specifics'.

FIELDWORK DIARY

I used this book to document all aspects of my fieldwork. Dated phonecalls, interviews and my thoughts concerning these were all recorded. This included the subject areas covered and how the interview went generally - ease of communication, atmosphere and general behaviour characteristics, such as inhibition, vocality or enthusiasm.

My participant encounters were also documented here. These were dated, described and detailed as fully as possible; who I went with, where, when, how and who else was there. My own impressions of these occasions, such as writers' behaviour towards me and others, my feelings and experiences and the possible effects my presence had upon interactions, were also noted. An outline and description of the graffiti I saw, the places I visited alone and my chance meetings with other writers were entered here as well. Basically, this book represented a complete chronological account of my fieldwork progress and experiences in both London and New York.

ANALYTIC DIARY

All the conceptual and theoretical formulations I made during my research were entered, dated, assessed and reflected upon within this journal. Issues that arose concerning my outsider, researcher or female status were also detailed, alongside the interview, participation or access problems I experienced and my attempts to reduce or solve these. Essentially, this diary chartered my analytic progress and provided a reflexive documentation of my fieldwork concerns and difficulties.

DEVELOPING AND ADAPTING MY STRATEGIES OF ENQUIRY

DEPTH BUILDING - THE PROMOTION OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

As my research progressed the way I used my methods of enquiry changed. The early stages of initial groundwork led me to construct a fairly basic but, according to my awareness at the time, comprehensive outline of concerns. This incorporated the main areas of my understanding and specific questions relating to these. My lack of confidence prompted me to adhere to this format quite

closely during my first couple of meetings. However, as my understanding increased I gained assurance. This enabled me to reduce my investigative control and allow respondents a greater direction of this focus. By avoiding a specific schedule of questions and prompting only general areas of concern, informants were more able to guide their own input. This placed them in an authoritative position and effectively defined our interactions as "transactions between cultural teacher and ignorant but eager pupil"(Rabinow, 1977, as cited by Cohen, A. P., 1984.226).

By relinquishing some of my control, interview directions began to breach the former boundaries of my awareness. As Cohen, A. P. (1984) explains:

"We have to navigate the river in order to discover its interesting features.

Were we simply to pursue a schedule of our own devising we should then

merely be displaying the contrivances of our own minds, rather than

discovering the minds of those we want to study"(Cohen, A. P., 1984:225).

Formerly unfamiliar areas, that would have remained concealed had I maintained my focus control, started to emerge. Changes also occurred in the form of my understanding. Old concepts were not necessarily replaced by new, but informants' self directed input served to sharpen focus, enhance detail and donate their depicted life worlds more complex and elaborate dimensions. Basically, a clearer portrayal developed and the subculture became more personalised. I gained awareness of different writers, their groupings, reputations, attitudes and the various events and occurrences that had taken place. To employ the use of an analogy, I felt I was descending into the deeper levels of the subculture's makeup. As I graduated, my understanding became increasingly similar to those subcultural insiders who lived and existed within these immersed frames of reference. In effect, this submergence afforded me a form of 'intersubjectivity'. Through this, I was also able to fine tune more analytic lines of enquiry

DEPTH MAINTENANCE - THE SUPPORT OF 'LOCAL' DISCOURSE

In giving informants directive freedom within interviews, I still needed to prevent them from locating their accounts at a level of complexity deemed suitable or necessary for an outsider with only a basic subcultural orientation. Although I could easily demonstrate I knew more than most, I was still, in their eyes, an outsider and thus respectively ignorant. I had to indicate that I was able to manage more 'local' forms of insider commentary and secondary sources proved to be an invaluable aid in confirming this. As Cohen, A. P. (1984:225) recognises, we must:

"'Tune in' to local discourse in order to discover its germane issues and, thus,

render ourselves competent to ask questions which will be meaningful in our informants' terms".

The various magazines and newsletters that circulate within the scene, target writers as their core audience. As such, they reflect a very advanced frame of reference. I took these publications to represent 'local discourse'. By asking writers to clarify related issues or offer their views concerning matters raised within these articles, I was able to demonstrate my knowledge and locate the interview at a corresponding level of complexity.

Diversity in writers' involvements generates diversity in opinion. While these publications portray insiders' concerns, the views they express may not be shared by all. Introducing these and requesting comments, thus, also enabled me to recognise differences between varying members and their viewpoints. The analysis of graffiti itself also helped to illuminate these divergences. Through the use of particular written symbols, writers are able to indirectly insult, disrespect or affiliate with each other. By observing and decoding these messages, I was able to collate impressions of group interplay or cleavage and, from this, assess possible reasons or incentives for particular writers' commentaries.

While these visual and documentary materials furnished my analytic resources, they also helped to counteract the potentially detrimental effects of my outsider status. Graffiti is, in the main, an illegal pursuit and writers face a constant threat of apprehension. Although I did not request incriminating evidence, at the time of my fieldwork any of my questions could have been perceived as threatening. A clamp down by the Graffiti Squad and the Transport Police had sent the London graffiti scene into a state of panic. 1992 represented a year of paranoia. Many writers adopted low profiles, communication declined and, as this writer recalls:

"Secrecy hit an all time high and shit went underground. This was due to increasing grass rumours and the shock Christmas crackdown mounted by the Graffiti Squad"('Londonz Burning' Magazine 2).

If time has an important influence upon behaviour, attitudes and, thus, theoretical formulation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983), then mine was less than perfect. As an unknown stranger I entered a subculture rife with paranoia and thus hardly given to uninhibited communication. Although I could not be sure this affected writers' disclosures, their graffiti and magazines compensated for this possibility. These alternative data sources enabled me to locate and reduce notable gaps in my knowledge, therefore providing me with informational support.

JUGGLING VOICES - ACCESS RESTRICTION

Writers' varying orientations and, thus, opinions and attitudes towards certain matters led to the emergence of a related dilemma - means of accessing these alternative voices. I relied initially on, what I term, a process of 'successive access', that is, writers I spoke to would put forward other names as potential contacts. This approach raised problems. Writers were inevitably eager to present their commentaries as 'truth' and 'stage-manage' themselves in a favourable light (Berreman, 1962, as cited by Goward, 1984b). This meant that their nominated leads were typically close friends or contemporaries who shared and supported their sentiments and concerns. So while 'successive access' allowed me to analyse patterns of connection between writers, it did block avenues leading to multiple voice representation. Without this, their accounts remained undisputed and I remained unable to examine the possible reasons for their construction. Recognising my need to obtain the other side of the story and a theoretical sample which would allow me to examine the degree of fit among these divergent subcultural positions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I made attempts to contact opposing writers through other means (see Appendix B. for details).

However, my contact with writers from alternative cleavages of the group introduced an additional problem - the alienation of former respondents. Writers may have used my attention to denigrate others and put forward their own 'valid' perspectives. My associations with their adversaries could quite easily have been construed as an act of betrayal or a lack of respect for their views. The connected structure of the London scene did present this as a significant risk, but a necessary one if I was to provide a representational outline of this subculture.

The majority of writers seemed interested in my former contacts. I would always be asked, usually at the start of the interview, who else I had spoken to. As my awareness of group affiliations and frictions increased, I began to recognise the need to exercise caution in my name specifications. While certain names may act to elicit trust, this did depend upon their relationship with the participating informant. The name or opposing views of an adversary may implicate bias or impartiality on my part, generate distrust and, as Goward (1984b) warns, close channels of communication. The simple remedy to this lay in avoiding the mention of certain names. However, this would mean I gain trust but lose a possibly illuminating retaliation of opposing views and a commentary upon the former writer's claims. The other option would have been to present myself as an ally, openly condemning these views to provide my informants with the confidence to do likewise. Goward (1984b) recognises this to be an often necessary measure:

"The fieldworker is often forced to take one position, or at least to sympathise

with a particular point of view, simply in order to elicit information from anyone"

(Goward, 1984b:111).

For my purposes, however, the benefits of this practice did not outweigh its inherent costs. If my sympathetic views had been exposed, I would have alienated opposing informants and lost writers' respect generally by my pathetic attempts to ingratiate myself. I would also have appeared two faced which would have devalued the neutral and trustworthy persona I was trying to promote. My outsider status helped me to solve this dilemma. By adopting the 'naive cloak' of an ignorant outsider, I could disguise my awareness of group politics and remain open and honest about my previous interactions. My feigned naivety reduced the possible threat of my knowledge and encouraged writers to try and influence my opinion through presenting their own views. Different sides of the story were, thus, safely elucidated.

Participating encounters and the occasional group interview I conducted erased these aforementioned complications by providing a form of internal triangulation. Although participants were generally friends with similar views and opinions, they did debate certain issues which allowed me to elicit interplay between their standpoints and attitudes and appreciate, perhaps, more subtle differences in outlook. Writers' attempts to 'stage-manage' or 'bullshit' were blockaded by others present and their exaggerated portrayals were generally disputed and exposed. This is not to say one view was more 'true' than the other, it merely allowed me to observe divergence in opinion and perspective.

RE-EMERGENCE - THE CLOSE OF FIELDWORK

My less enthusiastic quest for knowledge during the closing stages of my research suggested that it was now time to terminate my fieldwork. Like Eberhart (1977), I became less inquisitive and surprised as my discoveries declined (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Final informants were unable to uncover new areas or angles of interest and this signified the completion of my learning process. It appeared I had obtained all the information I could gather.

My saturation had also begun to disturb the optimum interactional processes of my meetings with writers. Their control of the interview's focus and direction enhanced my learning, but it also proffered them a tutoring role and a satisfying sense of authority. The final levels of my knowledge and understanding lessened my ability to realise this passivity. As opposed to listening and learning, I found myself interrupting and informing writers. This was undoubtedly irritating as it effectively reversed our roles and diminished their status as subcultural tutors.

The close of my fieldwork emphasised the extent of my progression. Many inaugural areas of insight were now familiar as opposed to strange, their significance lost.

> "Before embarking on any major writing up, therefore, one has to undertake a
> further task of estrangement"(Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983:212).

To provide a comprehensive account, I needed to retrace my steps, stand back and recognise all stages of my fieldwork education. My fieldwork journals helped here by enabling me to recapture and appreciate the former levels of my understanding as a newcomer to the field.

However, the greatest help to me were the brief interviews I conducted with two individuals with no apparent knowledge or understanding of the subculture. Their perceptions reminded me of the lay person's level of subcultural understanding and took me back to where I had started. Through this, I was able to identify the subcultural aspects or details which I now took for granted and climb back out of the subculture so to speak.

REACTIVITY: THE INFLUENCE OF ONE'S ROLE, STATUS AND TEMPERAMENT

> "In the field, one's basic humanity is emphasised and such essential traits as
> age, gender, temperament and ethnicity become, if anything, magnified"
>
> (Wax, 1979:509).

MANAGING IMPRESSIONS

I would have been naive to believe I could fully prevent my disposition from affecting or influencing my fieldwork interactions. However, like Read (1965), I worried that my essentially shy nature would prevent me from establishing rapport and handicap my research (Goward, 1984a). Some decision of how I was going to present myself needed to be made because, as King (1996) maintains:

> "This leaves a deep impression upon the informants and has considerable
> influence upon how successful the study will turn out to be"
>
> (King, 1996:177).

Recognising this, I adopted a form of 'impression management' and established, what I saw to be, an optimum guise of personal presentation. This involved generating an air of confidence and conviviality. While this probably reduced writers' own feelings of inhibition, it also allowed me to conduct myself in a manner conducive to trust. Had I displayed signs of unease or discomfort, informants might have suspected the existence of a hidden agenda and been less open with me. Some writers exhibited an interest in my own background. By answering all

of their questions, I could indicate I had nothing to hide. This exchange also increased rapport because it allowed me to give something back, making our interactions less one sided and less official in quality (Kemp & Ellen, 1984).

PROXIMITY - SIMILARITIES IN AGE

> "Young people have certain distinct advantages and they can do certain kinds
> of research which are out of bounds for older persons"(Wax, 1979:517).

On the basis of my research, I would be inclined to agree with this statement. The majority of writers I met and interviewed were young, like myself. This lessened disparity and enabled me to avoid the problems encountered by Honigmann (1970), an older researcher who found it difficult to establish and maintain contact with younger and deviant informants (Hammersley, 1991). Likewise, being younger than many of the journalists or youth workers who have helped to generate feelings of distrust doubtlessly worked in my favour.

Most importantly, however, I felt my youth helped to diffuse some of the negative effects of my researcher status. Informants' expectations commonly lie in models of the researcher as a critic or an expert (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Perceptions of me as an expert were unlikely as outsiders are generally seen to be subculturally ignorant. However, given the illegal nature of this activity, conceptions of me as a critic could have been highly probable - were it not for my age. I believe my youth helped me to avoid this characterisation by overshadowing the official nature of my role. As Wax (1979) maintains:

> "In many societies being young and inexperienced can be an advantage
> because many people regard a young stranger as ignorant, helpless, and as
> standing in need of guidance. Like a child, the young person is relatively
> harmless and threatens no one"(Wax, 1979:517).

Rather than a critic, I became an unthreatening contemporary, even an ally perhaps.

In the process of 'humanising stereotypes' many researchers have been criticised for their overly sympathetic cultural portrayals (Agar, 1986). I too found myself appreciating the beneficial aspects of graffiti, perhaps more than the negative implications of its illegality and inherent dangers. This raised important questions concerning my age, my possibly related moral standpoint and my levels of impartiality. I had to query; Would an older or more right wing researcher have seen or presented things differently, focusing, perhaps, on the negative rather than positive side of this subculture? Maybe issues of age and politics are irrelevant. My supportive stance may merely reflect my deeper levels of subcultural understanding.

Interacting with other people whilst maintaining the objective lens of a researcher is, in Middleton's view (1970), a difficult task (Goward, 1984b). But is it or should it be one we all strive to fulfil? The value of impartiality (if this is indeed possible) must surely depend upon the nature of the culture or group under study. In the majority of cases I genuinely shared writers' sentiments and this undoubtedly helped to shatter stereotypes of the 'critical' outsider. A more detached or confrontational (Kemp & Ellen, 1984) approach might have elicited some very interesting material, but it would have also probably annoyed or alienated my informants. My supportive stance served to lessen gulfs of detachment, which, in regard to this subculture, seemed more conducive to the elicitation of trust.

DISTANCE - THE MARGINALITY OF OUTSIDER AND FEMALE STATUS

I entered the field fully expecting my gender to have a profound effect upon my dealings with members of this male dominated subculture. In retrospect, there was no denying its potent significance. Because this factor could not be disguised or modified, I maintained an acute awareness of the varying dimensions of its influence.

Firstly, my gender must be considered alongside the initial difficulties I experienced in sustaining consistent and involved levels of contact with many writers (see Appendix C. for details of how this has changed since I completed and handed back my thesis). Although this may be defined as an inevitable feature of a researcher's temporary and specific role (Goward, 1984b), I felt our sex differences were more influential in generating this erratic exchange. The graffiti subculture is primarily a male culture. Because informants "will always try to place the fieldworker within their own framework of social statuses and values"(Goward, 1984b:112), I had comparatively little place within this as a female. This was not an insignificant concern:

> "The contemporary ethnographer now increasingly experiences the
> requirement to reveal competence as a member of the society studied, or to
> suffer the social consequences"(Cohen, A. P., 1984:228).

While I could demonstrate competence in certain areas, I lacked the ingredient which effectively defines a subcultural member - male status. This might explain why I was allocated a more distant subcultural positioning. Supporting my contention, Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant also shared comparatively different relationships with the writers they worked with during the documentation of their book 'Subway Art' (1984). Apparently, Henry was able to develop a closer and more involved association with these male writers. Martha, in comparison, lacked

the scope to bond with them on this level and her dealings were less intimate because of this.

Much feminist research is conducted and legitimated on the basis of shared experiences and similarities between the researcher and the researched:

"These are often used and discussed in research articles as a source of

empathy for and a means of building rapport with participants"

(Bola, 1995:293).

Some researchers have tried to lessen gender incongruity and enhance this rapport by employing the use of a same sex research assistant within the field (Diamond, 1970, as cited by Ardener, 1984). These views and measures seem to suggest that incompatibility degrades the quality of interaction and data and raises questions concerning the legitimacy of the research. But, as Hammersley & Atkinson (1983) assert, data in themselves cannot be valid or invalid, what is at issue are the inferences drawn from them. Aside from this, Does disparity even work against a researcher? Must rapport or legitimacy depend upon this fit? On the basis of my experiences as a female researcher, I would be inclined to agree with Hammersley (1991) that:

"Some overemphasise the natural rapport among women and exaggerate the

obstacles to rapport between women and men"(Hammersley, 1991:80).

While my gender created some restrictions, it also afforded me some peculiar and highly valued advantages.

During the early stages of my research an informant advised me to take what most writers told me with a pinch of salt. He predicted their accounts would be exaggerated and inaccurately self important in an effort to impress me. In retrospect, his warning appeared to be unnecessary. I was rarely provided tales of bloated bravado, if anything my gender generated the opposite effect. Writers gain respect for their artistic skills and abilities, but masculine displays of daring and resilience work to enhance this recognition. The need to prove themselves in the eyes of their audience, namely other men, is of central importance. My female status seemed to diminish their need for this masculine portrayal, affording them an opportunity to safely reflect on alternative concerns.

My first meeting with Drax illustrated this most clearly. In accordance with his commanding subcultural presence and his notorious reputation as the 'hard man' of graffiti, I assumed I would be provided with a commentary incorporating self promotion, bravado and assurety. My expectations were not confirmed and the emergent dynamics of this interview were a surprise to me. He was both open

and honest and volunteered sensitive recollections of his father's death, the resulting void this created in his life and the way in which he used graffiti to fill this.

Not all writers were, initially, as forward in offering this personal level of commentary. While this form of reflection was valuable, I was aware that bombarding writers with such personal questions could cause understandable alarm. I raised these concerns with Drax who confirmed I would need to tread carefully:

"Yea, I think it would be too prying to ask a lot of people because they might not want to talk about it. I mean if somebody said the same to me I probably wouldn't discuss it because my back would go up . . . . I think just slowly introduce the conversation and see what they say"(Drax).

Drax helped me to overcome these difficulties by offering me the use of his name. By prefixing 'Drax said' before introducing sensitive areas, I could indicate these as his claims and thus prevent them from being classified as the predictable assumptions of a nosy researcher. He took responsibility for their inclusion and he justified their presentation within the interview.

Many writers seemed suprised by the candour of Drax's admissions. It became clear that writers rarely discuss such personal issues with each other. His name also appeared to act as a measure of reassurance. Drax is a highly respected subcultural figure, so hearing that he had opened up to me on this level seemed to give other writers the confidence to do likewise. As a result, I obtained some deeply personal and intimate accounts of writers' needs, problems, insecurities and their use of graffiti as a means of solving or compensating for these.

In my view, these details would not have been as accessible to a male researcher. Not because he is unable to appreciate this form of commentary, but because male writers would probably react to his presence by upholding their masculine composure and closing channels of personal admission. This allowed me to appreciate the inherent benefits of my marginality. Supporting Ardener's (1984) claims, I was able to penetrate these private male domains because as a female, and, thus, true outsider, I represented a safe audience. Vulnerability was facilitated because there existed no threat of judgement and risk of losing face. My female status also seemed to enhance my interactions with female writers. The three I spoke to were open about the difficulties and problems they encountered within this male dominated subculture. They appeared to relate to me as a form of ally, someone they could confide in.

Although I could invite a more reflective quality of commentary from male writers, my gender did appear to affect the open expression of other concerns. My queries concerning the absence of female writers within the subculture were generally answered in terms of the inherent risks and dangers of this activity. Graffiti was defined, in so many words, as 'men's work'. However, this declaration did not always come without apology. Many writers recognised and tried to diffuse the potentially offensive nature of their claims by prefixing an admission of their chauvinism before replying, e.g., "I know this sounds sexist but . . .". This practice illustrated their awareness of my possibly divergent views as a female. Despite the difficulties female writers experience in gaining respect and recognition from their male counterparts, the majority of male writers I spoke to openly accepted their involvement. Yet, when I asked for the benefits of their inclusion, my question was generally met with customary sniggers. Although Drax chose to reply, indicating the benefits of a mixed subculture in credible and unsexist terms, others chose to verify alternative reasons for his acceptance. Only one writer dared to state the obvious, claiming female writers would provide him with an opportunity to have sex! Although this view was presented in jest, it did represent a possibly common attitude - one which could not, it seems, be admitted in the presence of a female.

Although my gender did appear to discourage the open expression of writers' sexist views and opinions, again, I would deny this to be a limitation. As Bola (1995) contends:

> "Outlining the differences one has from the subject matter and participants can
> be as informative as the similarities that are seen to exist"(Bola, 1995:293).

While a male researcher could, I admit, create a safer environment for the expression of these views, his sex may render him less aware of the more subtle suggestions of these. As a female I was able to observe the signs of embarrassment or discomfort that stemmed directly from my presence and my questioning. Accordingly, rather than handicap me, I felt my female distinction awarded me a more focused appreciation of the masculine dynamic of this subculture.

In conclusion, I engaged in this research as a 'true' outsider. I was neither a writer or a man which denied me any real sense of subcultural incorporation. Although this prevented me from bonding with writers in masculine terms, this was easily compensated for by the very valuable merits it also afforded me. Aside from those outlined above, there is one more that should be detailed, a benefit which only became clear when this resulting distance was breached. A relatively close relationship with one of my early informants enabled us to interact as friends. I

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met this writer on a number of occasions, one of which he was introduced to a female friend of mine who was also present. To avoid unnecessary elaboration, he developed an attraction for her that she did not share. His corresponding frustration began to affect my relationship with him. He started to use me as a mediator to relay messages and gain information. When I finally refused to continue in this capacity, he terminated his contact with me. The closure of distance had made my dealings with this writer unnecessarily complex and threatened to jeopardise the progression of my research. Because of this, I tried to maintain some degree of detachment in my transactions with other writers. This not only eradicated the problems cited above, but it also helped me to withdraw from the field. Writers were accommodating, yet undemanding, which allowed me to retreat without disrupting the functioning of the subculture.

CHAPTER 4

A SUBCULTURAL JOURNEY: AN OUTLINE OF GROUP DYNAMICS AND FUNCTIONING

Those new to this subculture may well have little understanding of its underlying rationale. This chapter will, therefore, 'set the subcultural scene'. Although some interpretative analysis will be made, its purpose is primarily informational. Readers will take a participant observer's journey through subcultural terrain and gain a basic but detailed overview of its nature and purpose; an appreciation of what graffiti writers work to achieve and the way in which these ambitions are realised.

The career pattern that characterises most writers' involvements will be used to frame this outline. Readers will ground themselves subculturally by following the steps and stages of a writer's career. While this passage through the structured and ordered nature of the subcultural experience aims to ease an outsider's subcultural induction, it will also, I hope, work to challenge possible preconceptions of this group as anarchic, lawless and chaotic.

GRAFFITI AS A CAREER

As a means of describing deviant progressions, the 'career' has enjoyed wide usage as an analytic concept. Most notably, Becker (1963) used the notion of career to highlight the sequential stages of drug usage and, through this, articulate the arbitrary distinctions between deviance and respectability. Likewise, qualitative studies of gang members, drug traffickers and football hooligans have also employed this concept to illustrate the regulated and disciplined nature of deviant behaviour (see for e..g. Adler, 1993; Bing, 1991; Marsh et al., 1978; Parker, 1974; Virgil, 1988; Williams, 1989). Perhaps the most direct connection between deviant and legitimate careers is made by Letkemann (1973) in his text 'Crime as Work'.

However, as Best & Luckenbill (1981) ask, Are such analogies valid or justified? Can deviant careers really carry the connotations of occupational careers? They identify some important distinctions and conclude:

> "Deviant and respectable careers display very different characteristics. Deviant careers are less likely to develop within a well-defined organisational hierarchy and they are less likely to follow standard career paths leading upward. Reward and security are less likely to increase as the deviant career continues and career progression is less often public. Finally, deviant careers are more likely to feature multiple short-term involvements"
>
> (Best & Luckenbill, 1981:200).

While Best & Luckenbill are right to remind us of these potential differences, deviant activities differ and their analogous features will vary accordingly. Occupational and graffiti careers are obviously not identical, but there are, I feel, sufficient similarities to warrant the usage and maintain the analytic power of this concept. Indeed, many of the distinctions cited above are, in fact, dissolved. A series of established and standard stages of activity define writers' developments and their completion sees them moving up a form of internal group hierarchy. The higher they rise, the greater the rewards. In many ways, the subculture can be compared to a corporate company. Like an employee, writers start their careers at the bottom rung of a hierarchy and through hard work attempt to promote their position and status upon this.

Nevertheless, some important and substantial differences do remain;

1. Writers are younger than most wage earners and their careers are considerably less enduring. As these British Transport Police figures confirm, the majority of 'active' writers fall within an adolescent age bracket:

"It can be seen quite conclusively that the ages 15 to 19 years are the ages that appear to be most at risk from the temptation of committing graffiti based offences. After the age of 19 years, the instances of persons being detected committing graffiti offences decreases dramatically"

(British Transport Police Annual Report, '91).

2. Possibly explaining this, their careers offer no form of concrete or material gain:

"You're not being financially rewarded, it's your own reward"(Claw).

"It's a non paying career, it's just something you dedicate yourself to"(Sae 6).

The subculture translates financial reward into symbolic capital, namely some degree of fame, recognition and respect:

"There's no financial gain, I suppose getting the respect of total strangers is payment enough really"(Mear).

Symbolic or not, as Mear and the writers below all confirm, this capital constitutes a highly valued wage:

Jel:*"I did it for the fame, that was basically it"*

Sae 6:*"Same, yea, that's the number one answer, it's the fact that just because of your name, you get respect, you know"(Jel & Sae 6).*

"Fame and respect, there's the two driving forces"(Acrid).

The name pictured in Figure 3. says it all.

Figure 3. I Am 'Known'

As fame and respect is earned, a writer's self concept correspondingly modifies:
"When you start off doing graffiti you're more or less like a nobody and you just work your way up"(Col).

Writers move up this hierarchy and change from a 'nobody' to a 'somebody'. In this sense, their progressions most accurately reflect the development of a 'moral career' (Goffman, 1968), that is, "the regular sequence of changes . . . in the person's self and in his framework of imagery for judging himself and others" (Goffman, 1968.119). Drawing upon Goffman's work, Harré (1993) explains the moral career as a life trajectory defined in terms of public esteem. As he asserts:

> "The pursuit of reputation, in the eyes of others, is the overriding preoccupation of human life"(Harré, 1993 32).

Accordingly, many individuals undertake a secondary career within confines which are specially designed and sustained to facilitate this goal (Harré, 1993). Marsh et al. (1978) present football hooliganism as a pertinent example of this. A 'hooligan' develops a career by proving himself in confrontational situations, earning the respect of his peers and elevating himself upon the group's status hierarchy. Here, careers are seen to be "available structures in a youth culture for the establishment of self"(Marsh et al., 1978:64).

In this analytic light, graffiti represents a moral career in its purest sense. The attainment of respect and fame is openly recognised and expressed as a writer's primary objective and subcultural dynamics are fully oriented to support this goal. The work metaphor writers use to describe this process also conforms to the analytic work model Harré (1993) uses to portray social behaviour as "deliberate action directed towards certain ends"(Harré, 1993 181). Just as individuals work

to produce concrete and material things, so do they work within the social realm to produce abstract or expressive products, such as respect and reputation (Harré, 1993).

Harré (1993) upholds this work metaphor as an explanatory model. However, for writers it is more than a convenient analogy, it is a meaningful way of life:

"It takes a lot of work, you can't be half hearted about it . . . . It's the work ethic"(Claw).

If you want fame, respect and status:

"Then you've got to do something to earn it. It will not come to you in one day either - it's got to be worked at"(Fire - 'Graphotism' Magazine 5).

Commitment and a high degree of application is required. For writers, like any individual desiring success, there is no escape from the arduous climb up the career ladder:

"If you get sucked into it, it's like a job, it has to be successive for it to be successful. Like, if you really want a career in a business, you have to sort of get your head down and get into it and I think with graffiti, with the element of extremism and wanting to be the best and the most up and all the rest of it, you get into it and it just takes on the same role as what a job would"(Drax).

Unlike a nine to five, a writer's 'job' involves a huge degree of overtime:

"Over and over I watch people getting into it and gradually it takes up all their time, I mean all of it"(Henry Chalfant).

Fame and respect, as valued rewards, ensure that graffiti becomes a full time occupation:

"You can do it twenty four hours. Basically, your life can revolve around graffiti"(Acrid),

the most central and pervasive aspect of a writer's life:

"It becomes like your lifestyle, you know what I mean, it's a full time thing"(Sae 6).

These writers comment on the ways they live out this demanding lifestyle:

"When I was doing six or seven hours work in an office, there'd be times when I'd do all three nights in a row. During my lunch hour I'd plan the pieces, finish work at six, go to the shops straight after work to steal my paint. . . . I'd have some dinner, leave my house at half ten, get to the depot at twelve, go in at two, finish at four, won't get home 'til six or seven, then go to work. I did that for about three days in a row and, like, come Friday, I was asleep at work on my desk"(Acrid).

"When we were painting trains . . . you stay until the sun comes out, then you've got to climb back in the train, you're all dirty, it's early in the morning, you didn't get no sleep, all you do is go right back to the bench and wait for the trains to come by. See what I mean, you're living this whole thing. You know, you go home, you finally get your pictures, What do you do? Go straight to a discount store, you go steal more paint and you go through the same thing the next night, you know"(Sae 6).

Col illustrates the mental, as well as physical commitment, that stems from his subcultural participation:

"I do graffiti twenty four hours a day. I go to school, I sit at my desk and I draw. I don't pay attention in class because I just can't. I write tags [signatures] in my books, like do throwups [larger signatures] on my school bag, I just do that and then you fail everything, but you know!"(Col).

Graffiti pervades all their waking and, in Akit's case, also sleeping hours!:

"I'm just bang into it. I enjoy it, I love it, I dream about it. I wake up and I've got these letters in my head and colour schemes and I freak out when I see graffiti, it's just wicked. I'm totally obsessed with it, twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, I swear it's on my mind all the time, all the time!"(Akit).

Graffiti can dominate writers' lives and other concerns or activities may decline or suffer as a result. Despite this, they remain committed. Graffiti affords fame, respect and status - real and immediate rewards that play a centrally important role (Harré, 1993), especially within the lives of young people (Eisenstadt, 1956; Coleman, J.S., 1961; Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1985). Reflecting this, their groups "usually evolve a status system of their own, which allocates prestige according to their own specific goals and value emphasis"(Eisenstadt, 1956:98). This is what we see here. The subculture operates its own status structure and its own criteria for awarding individuals a place on this. Writers start at the bottom and, like any individual with ambition, work relentlessly to secure elevation and the respect which accompanies this. Graffiti is adopted as an informal occupation, a career which is lived out within all facets of their life.

THE STEPS AND STAGES OF A WRITER'S CAREER

This section examines this career in greater detail. It illustrates the paths writers take and the progressions they make in their quest for success, alongside the actual part graffiti plays in this enterprise.

SPARKING AN INTEREST

Graffiti involves the public inscription of one's name or 'tag' (see Figure 3.):

"Each person had their own tag, kind of like a logo in advertising, and it was the logos of those names I was initially inspired by"(Futura 2000).

These names inspire because they become familiar:

"It was seeing the names and saying, 'I saw that on the last train', you know, I started identifying those names"(Iz).

This recognition illustrates the fame that subcultural involvement can afford:

"At the beginning you don't really know nothing, what you see is the writing on the wall and that sort of turns you on, because they're like famous"

(Sae 6).

While fame is seductive, these names can also present an element of challenge. Evidence of others' capabilities inspired Jel and Col to assess their own:

"I remember the first time I saw it and, like, I was always amazed how everybody could do this and get away with it, so I was like, 'I want to try this'"(Col).

"It starts by you looking at the walls. I'd seen everybody doing it, so I was like, 'oh, I wonder how long it would take me to do that? . . . I said, 'I want to be better than those guys, I want to get up more than them'"(Jel).

The city's walls thus act as a form of subcultural advertisement. Together with graffiti related books and films, they indicate what can be achieved and they provide a guideline for these goals:

"See, it's like you grow up as a little kid and this is what you see and you just keep going and going and writing and eventually you also become big"(Az).

THE NAME

Having developed an interest, writers must then decide upon the name or 'tag' they plan to use. Due to the illegal nature of their activities, writers very rarely use their own names. A new name also defines this involvement as a new start, an existence separate from their 'real' lives. Most writers have one main name, but very active writers may also use a 'ghost' (replacement) name:

"You'd have three names, so if one name was hot [wanted by the authorities], you could write under another name"(Futura 2000).

Claw explains how she uses her ghost name to avoid detection:

"If you notice to my house, there's no tags on my street because I don't want to leave a trail, so I'll like write Yenta instead of Claw. . . . Because now that I'm well known, I'm kind of wanted"(Claw).

Writers use their tags to gain fame and recognition. The adoption of a new one may, therefore, jeopardise this profile. As Drax explains:

"Yea, you don't get so much fame out of it, but it's like with the fame, comes the police grief... so you have to be prepared to, sort of like, get some silent fame"(Drax).

However, this precaution is generally only used by very active or prominent writers and, as Kilo maintains:

"Once you get so far along the line, people recognise your stuff anyway"(Kilo).

PREPARING THE NAME FOR FAME

Illegal graffiti involves a celebration of one's name. As respect and fame can be derived from the way in which a writer inscribes this, others' judgements are an important consideration:

"I've just been doing it really gradually. I haven't done a lot because it's only recently that I thought I'd got any good .... I didn't want to start busting my styles and everyone would go, 'what's she bothering for, she's making a fool out of herself', wait 'til I'm remotely good before I started doing anything proper like piecing [more complex name designs]"(Akit).

By developing her skills slowly, Akit avoids premature exposure and the unfavourable appraisal that this may generate. In effect, she negotiates one of the hazards that make up a moral career (Goffman, 1968). These are basically occasions "on which an individual can gain the respect or risk the contempt of his fellows"(Marsh et al., 1978:19). Recognising this risk, writers generally start by practising their skills on paper at home:

"You start alone ... it's like practice and that, and you do that for ages and ages because you don't want to do any old crap when you go out, you have to think about it"(Ego).

When they feel ready, the name is introduced into the public forum:

"There was, like, six months to a year that I had the name Futura 2000, but I didn't have a signature that was like worthy of going public, so I worked on my technique for a little bit until I went public"(Futura 2000).

At this point, a writer switches from a private to a public orientation.

MAKING A SUBCULTURAL ENTRANCE

Although some writers work legally, the majority initiate and sustain their careers within an illegal sphere As an interest is generally activated by illegal others, this constitutes a suitable starting point. Indeed, the illegality of the exercise appears to play a large part in captivating a writer's attention:

"Unless your goals are illegal when you start, you would never do graffiti. If your goals were legal, you would go to art school and be a brilliant illustrator or a brilliant artist. . . . It all started in our adolescence, we were all pursuing the same sort of goal, be it on walls or trains, to destroy"(Proud 2).

Stemming from this, adrenaline fuelled thrill and excitement is also offered. As Teck explains, these rewards cannot be found within a legal environment:

"I made a fair amount of money doing art for TV commercials and other film endeavours. In actuality, all of this paled to the thrill of being chased through back streets and narrowingly escaping the beam of police headlights. Living precariously against the grain took precedence in my daily routine"(Teck - 'Urb' Magazine 37, '94).

The illegal sphere represents a more relevant and, indeed, practical point of initiation. For a new writer, technically:

"There's so much to learn, from, like, what are the best markers to use, what are the best pens to get stains on trains with, what are the best colour inks to use. I mean, there's so much to learn"(Mear).

Tools of the trade are assimilated through experience:

"See, when you start you don't know nothing, but as you get more into it you start learning more and more about it, like how you go about doing things"(Jel).

In this sense, illegality provides writers with their subcultural education. As Zaki recalls:

"When I first started out on my own, I was doing a lot of illegal stuff and that's where I learnt the ropes"(Zaki).

Older writers are more prevalent within legal forums because they carry with them the necessary skills and experience:

Nancy: *"Does the illegal side become a sort of apprenticeship period then?"*
Rate: *"Yea, yea, sort it out on the illegal side, get your style . . . . If you notice, it's always older writers, like about twenty five, always doing exhibitions and the younger ones are just doing trains, bombing and that"(Rate).*

This is not to say all writers graduate to legal involvement. An illegal education merely enables them to make this move if they so desire:

Nancy: *"So Inky's making a living out of it now?"*
Ego: *"Yea, you know, he's made his name, got his preparatory skills as such"(Ego).*

As Ego confirms, Inky obtained his skills, but he also 'made his name' before moving into legitimate work. This is perhaps the most important reason for an illegal career start. It is here that writers earn their prominence. Fame, recognition and status, the reasons for subcultural involvement are secured within an illegal confine

MAKING A NAME

The claiming of fame is referred to as 'making a name' Different forms of illegal graffiti are all variations of the name and, at a basic level involve one of two activities - a stylistic or a prolific inscription of this word Despite these differing paths to prominence a writer's career progression will usually follow a common pattern

"Usually every writer starts off on paper, works their way to paint and bombing and then works their way to doing pieces and they get better as they go on"(Col).

Following the practice of their skills on paper, writers generally

"Start off tagging, that's how it evolves"(Dondi).

'Tagging' or 'bombing' involves the extensive inscription of one's name or signature upon the surfaces of the city (see Figure 4) As the most simple or basic form of name presentation it is generally seen to be a new writer's 'natural' starting point

"It's a very natural process. I mean you start and I don't know if you've ever used spray paint, but it's not an easy medium, so you start by tagging because it's the easiest thing to do"(Freedom).

"Because you've got to learn the basics of painting, you spend more time getting up [tagging] than you do dropping [painting] pieces, because you can't make pieces until, you know, you've got the skills to do it"(Stylo).

Figure 4 The Tagging of One's Name

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Aside from practicalities, young writers are also expected to begin at this level in line with the subculture's proscribed pattern of career development. Many subcultural activities are regulated by a set of expectations and ethics that foster conformity. A writer's progression is no exception:

"You can't just pick up a spray can and start doing pieces and that . . . It isn't really the right thing to do. You've got to do your fair whack of putting your tag up everywhere"(Steam).

"You've got to bomb up, you've got to go through your tagging years"(Kilo).

Tagging represents the first step of the writer's career, his/her 'roots'. It is, as Steam implies, a suitably lowly position of initiation:

"If you haven't done your roots, tagging and stuff like that, you can't really call yourself a graffiti writer. You've got to go through the whole process . . . it's like anything, you have to go up the ladder. You can't just walk into McDonald's and go from floor sweeping to being manager or whatever, you've got to learn to do everything, go up the ladder"(Steam).

Seeming chaos is, thus, regulated by a deep rooted sense of order and discipline.

'GETTING UP'

New writers must establish themselves in the eyes of others:

"When you're younger, you've got to get credit, you've got to tag up, put your name everywhere to get known and that. Until you've done that, you're nobody really"(Steam).

Tagging or 'getting up' affords them the levels of exposure needed to do this:

"More importantly than doing pieces is tagging, if you want to get your name up, you want to get it all over and you want people to know you, recognise your name"(Claw).

Essentially, this vehicle:

"Lets everyone know that you've arrived"(Acrid).

Tagging represents a writer's first attempt at securing recognition, so the pace of activity is usually frenetic:

"When you start you're trying to get a rep, so you're kind of all out"(Stylo).

"A big part of it is getting known and once you're known that's it, but it takes a good long while to get known. You have to put tags up every single day . . . like, going out at night, putting your name up on walls, buses, trains, everywhere you can think of, until you get so well known, people wonder who you are"(Steam).

Productivity gains the new writer profile, but it also reflects the criteria governing this form of activity. A tagger is highly active because:

"The underlying rule is just get up, put your name everywhere, do as much as possible in as many places as possible"(Dondi).

Taggers are judged on the quantity of their inscriptions. Proliferation invites respect:

"You try and earn the respect of other writers by just getting up everywhere. . . . People start seeing that name and you start getting, sort of like, respect. If you're a writer and you don't get up, there's no point, you know what I mean?"(Rate).

Extensive writers are complimented as being 'up'. This label confirms the prominence of their name and also comments upon the moral development of their careers:

"If other writers know us, we're making something of ourselves"(Col).

Respect and fame not only increases with the amount, but also the coverage of a writer's name. Taggers may start 'getting up' locally, but their target area is soon expanded to incorporate other areas of their environment:

"You just venture out or other people from different areas will hear of you"(Mear).

A writer strives to be 'all city', a label used to describe an individual whose name can be identified within many different areas of the city or underground system. Respect is attributed accordingly:

"Some writers stay in the same depot [train yard] all their graffiti careers, but they don't get as much respect for it as someone who does all the depots or all lines"(Acrid).

As a writer progresses, he/she may start to experiment and compete or 'get up' using other forms of graffiti:

"It starts off with the tag and it just gets bigger and bigger, you develop a tag and then you start to master spray painting"(Dondi).

Many writers complement their tags with the use of 'throwups'; simple, but larger outlines of their names. As illustrated in Figure 5., these are formulated using characteristic 'bubble' letters and an optional white or black 'fill-in' (interior letter shade). Like a throwup, a 'dub' is differentiated by its distinctive black 'outline' and silver or gold 'fill in' (see Figure 6.). As writers gain greater fame, they may transform these designs into 'three-strokes' (see Figure 7.):

"A three stroke is, basically, a throwup with one letter of your tag, probably the first letter. Like, if you write Cherish, you just do a big bubbly C and everyone knows it's Cherish"(Mear).

If writers are well known, their authorship is generally recognised. This profile may also enable them to inscribe their names using a mingling of letters, resulting in a distinctive shape as opposed to a legible word (see Figure 8).

Figure 5. A Throwup

Figure 6. A Dub

Figure 7. A Three-stroke

Figure 8 A Name Written Using a Mingling of Letters

These name designs signify a writer's subcultural progression. However like the tag they are relatively simple and demand little evidence of artistic ability. A graffiti form of this kind generally represents the tool of a 'bomber', a writer who competes through productivity and coverage as opposed to artistic competence. His/her aim lies in securing the title of 'king'. This is a prestigious award donated to the writer considered to be 'all city' or the most 'up' on a certain train line:

"King of the line, that's when you've got tags, ups and everything on trains and walls, electrical boxes, all along one line. Someone might say, 'oh Drax is king of the Northern line', and that, because he's got tags on every station or whatever"(Steam).

Writers, like Iz, may even extend their activities to claim this title upon more than one train line.

"I wasn't just the king of my 'home lines', I was the king of many train lines at one time or another"(Iz - 'Graphotism' Magazine 2).

Validating status is easily recognised, so this award is not usually officially declared:

"It's obvious who's up the most, there's no real need for it to be said"(Mear).

This does not, however, preclude disagreement or challenge. Writers may claim their own occupation of this title verbally or visually, through adorning their name with the symbol of a crown or the word 'king' (see Figures 9. & 10.). However, they will have to support this assertion:

Nancy:*"So there's no consensus, not everyone will agree?"*

Acrid:*"Yea, but that's the good thing about it, because you keep having to prove yourself. Like so and so may think he's done more insides than you, or he's got more Northern lines running or more Pics [Piccadilly lines] or whatever and you think, 'no he's not, I'll have to do some more'"(Acrid).*

This position is highly revered so competition for it is fierce. A king has to work consistently to ensure his/her name is 'up' in greater quantities than others:

"The number one qualification for king to us is momentum"

('On The Go' Magazine, Dec. '93).

An erratic or insufficient display of activity will mean:

"You get stopped by all those other people who want to be in your position"(Acrid).

Writers must be successive to be successful. This distinction separates 'true kings' from one hit wonders:

"You just keep going, you know. It's no use starting out, make a name for yourself over say a year, reach a certain peak and then give up, you know, because then people just look at you as a no one who came and done something for a year and that's it"(Mear).

Figure 9. The Use of a Crown to Claim the Title 'King'

Figure 10   'Cap' - King of the Line

A bomber engages in a highly competitive forum where time is an important commodity This may explain why this career facet generally lies outside an older writer's domain

"It's really difficult to stay king because you're getting older, you haven't got time to keep putting your tag up every single night and that, so it is difficult to keep your title"(Steam).

Ideally, tagging or bombing suits younger writers those with more need to make a name, less responsibility and, thus, more time to maintain this frenetic demonstration of worth. Because it lays no stress on artistic capability, writers without the ability to meet greater stylistic challenges can also use it as an optional route to success

"If you don't have any real artistic talent, which a lot of graffiti artists don't have, then you're going to keep tagging"(Futura 2000).

PIECING

An older writer with the experience, skill and desire to meet more challenging demands may graduate in his/her career to more sedate levels as a piecer. Sae 6 recounts this change in his career direction:

"You just started writing your name around the neighbourhood, you know, and as time went on you wanted to be more productive, because you saw that people were doing more than just writing their name. . . . So I started getting into what other people were doing, like piecing trains and all that"(Sae 6).

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As Figure 11. illustrates, a 'piece' is a larger, more elaborate, colourful and stylistically demanding depiction of the writer's name.

Figure 11. The Piecing of One's Name

Because a piece is larger, time for extensive coverage is reduced. Accordingly, one's former tagging activities now serve an additional purpose:

"See a lot of writers that piece and don't tag, they don't get respect, because people say, 'who the fuck are they?. . . Tagging supports your name, because people say, 'Claw, oh yea I've seen that before', and they don't know where, exactly why, but they've seen it"(Claw).

Writers may continue to tag or bomb, but, as Claw illustrates, this pursuit tends to take on a largely sideline role:

"I try to do two pieces a week on walls or on trains and I try to go bombing at least one night. I used to really like to go bomb. I used to really like seeing my name everywhere, but now it's sort of maintenance, it's sort of making sure, it's boring now"(Claw).

For Claw, tagging now functions as an occasional means of name maintenance; a practicality, rather than the vocation or enjoyable exercise it was previously.

Although piecers cannot be as prolific as taggers, they must still maintain their fame through some indication of activity:

"You can only do no pieces for so long before people start going, 'wait a minute, he's not doing anything', so you have to still do something to keep the fame thing going"(Zaki).

The levels of activity necessary to cement prominence are, however, respectively lessened. Drax outlines these criterial differences:

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"If you had a piece in every borough, okay, as opposed to fifty or sixty tags in every borough, you would be considered more up really than the person with all the tags, although you haven't got as many pieces of art work. . . . But if you were just a really good artist with a few pieces you wouldn't necessarily be compared to someone who was everywhere tagging. There has to be a lot of coverage and the more you do the better and the ability and the quality of the work you put up is all taken into consideration as well. I mean the ideal thing would be to be absolutely everywhere, nice pieces everywhere plus your tags as well, but that's hard to achieve. I suppose the aim is to be the most up and the best"(Drax).

The ideal scenario prescribing abundance and quality is hard to achieve, so writers usually focus on one means of name promotion. These options are not usually compared. Tagging and piecing are different activities so appraisal involves different criteria

"There's two trains of thought, it's like how much you're up and then how good you are at actually painting. If you can get up a lot and paint well then you're going to zoom up there"(Zaki).

Because piecers are dealing with more complex and time consuming designs, their work is assessed for its quality rather than quantity At this point a writer's 'style' comes into play as a central component of his/her work Achieving fame through this channel requires proficiency in technique and skill and writers are judged on varying aspects of their designs Detail accessories such as shadowing, highlights, overlapping letters three dimensional effects fading, arrows, sparkles, stars, characters, backgrounding and colour schemes are all taken into account in the overall assessment of the piece (Figure 12 evidences many of these design details).

Figure 12. A Piece Showing Some Design Details

Most importantly, however, writers must 'carry good style' and show accomplished writing technique through the competent execution of their letter forms. Letters remain a writer's primary consideration:

"Letters should stand on their own with no help of colours or elaborate techniques. . . . Colours and designs are secondary, focus in on the primary concept in graffiti and master your letter forms"

(Professor P-Kay - 'On The Go' Magazine, Dec. '93).

A writer's letters should be neatly executed with a clear, straight and dripless outline. Proficient and sophisticated methods of letter connection, filling in and backgrounding must also be evidenced.

Emphasis is also placed upon innovatory lettering styles and colour scheme usage. Originality is a pertinent concern:

"I mean, graffiti was always based around writing your name, bigger, better and more stylised, more original"(Drax).

Although piecers push themselves to invent new styles, the scope for innovation has declined somewhat over the years. Because of this, writers will generally formulate their name using one of the subculture's many established and recognised styles. Their personal imprint will usually offer these designs a unique flavour of their own:

"Everyone steals ideas from other places, little dots and stars and designs and stuff and a lot of people just rip off complete styles, but the combination will usually be, like, unique to somebody. . . . The style of the lettering they use, the use of colours and specific little things, it's authentic, to them it's original"(Drax).

Once established, a writer's style becomes his/her hallmark:

"A writer usually has his own style. Some people's style you can basically tell straight away. . . . I can tell a Drax piece a mile off or a Cherish piece or an Acrid piece, just by some of the colours they use or just by the shapes of their letters"(Mear).

Piece appraisal, therefore, incorporates a wide range of differing considerations. Originality, innovation and proficiency represent the most central. A piece fulfilling these standards will be labelled a 'burner'. Substandard work is generally described as 'wak' or 'dry'.

THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEXT AND SIZE

To gain respect, writers must display their skills for the recognition of others. The places where they paint are, thus, inevitably public and exposed in nature. Areas

and surfaces, such as trains and track or street walls, ensure a wide audience. The traditional use of the underground or subway system remains the optimum medium for an illegal artist's work because:

"The trains moved, they went from one borough to the next and back. . . . We pieced on buses for a while, but it didn't work that well. They clean it really quickly and buses are kind of local, they'll only remain in one borough. The trains were the perfect medium, they went underground, they went everywhere"(Dondi).

Trains act as a travelling canvas. They carry writers' names to many different areas of the city and, thus, extend their potential audience.

Public graffiti is illegal, so assessment of a writer's work will also consider its location. Because painting in a train yard is hazardous, a train piece is viewed as a greater achievement and is, thus, granted more respect than one upon a wall. As risk increases, stylistic expectations correspondingly decrease:

"You might do a piece and it might not be all that good, but because you've done it in a certain depot or certain night or because the yard is considered hot [risky] and you've still gone in there, you still get respect"(Acrid).

Similarly, a tagger or throwup artist can enhance respect through:

"Tagging in difficult places or places that are hard to get to and that, say on the top of bridges or like high up places"(Steam).

The greater the danger, the greater the respect. Unusual locations or those which beg questions concerning possibility, e g. the graffitied pillars in Figure 13., may also increase a writer's fame and profile.

Figure 13. Graffiti in a Difficult or Unusual Location

Mear recounts the reaction that followed his use of space in this way

"The whole side of this building was scaffolded, so we climbed up the scaffolding and did these gold little dubs and you couldn't see them. And then a couple of months later they'd taken down the scaffolding and so there was these two pieces of graffiti right in the middle of the building. It was like, 'How the hell did they get up there?'. . . That was one thing I got a lot of respect for or a lot of fame. A lot of people talk about it"(Mear).

In conjunction with style and location, piecers also use scale as an additional indication of their skill. A typology of the differing sizes and positions of a piece upon the carriage surface of a train allows writers to distinguish and label these works accordingly

"There's top to bottoms, there's end to ends, top to bottom end to ends, whole cars and there's window downs, which is below the window and there's panel pieces, which are just pieces between doors"(Zaki).

Figure 14   A Window Down

Amplified size and coverage increases piece prestige and respect because it indicates that the writer has spent a greater length of time within this pressurised environment and has also extended him/herself physically in order to cover this abundant space. For most illegal writers the pinnacle level of achievement is the completion of a whole car top to bottom

"A whole car top to bottom, those are the best, that's a big thing for writers to accomplish"(Cavs).

As detailed in Figure 15., these pieces cover the entire surface side of a subway car, from the top to the bottom and including the windows.

Figure 15. A Whole Car Top to Bottom

The respect earned from this accomplishment is enormous, ensuring that it represents a writer's ultimate ambition:

"Every graffiti artist wants to do a whole car top to bottom or whole carriage by himself, which not many people in London have actually done"(Mear).

CAREER DECLINE

We can now begin to see the patterning that characterises a writer's subcultural career. As other theorists have observed, new members start at a more frenetic pace because their needs lie in establishing the prominence of their unknown names (Marsh et al., 1978; Parker, 1974; Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1985; Werthman, 1982; Williams, 1989). These, or highly active writers enjoying the merits of recognition, have little incentive to slow down or curtail their careers. The promise and taste of fame and respect ensures absolute devotion is maintained:

Nancy:*"What would make you give it up?"*

Acrid:*"The loss of my arms and legs! I dunno. . . . Even if I started absailing, rock climbing, travelling the world and that"*

Nancy:*"You'd still take your spray cans!"*

Acrid:*"Opportunity arises!"(Acrid).*

Writers at this stage live in the present and at this point extreme activity is required:

"I consider it as like a career now, because I plan to bomb and piece until I die. I don't plan on stopping"(Col).

Martha Cooper, a renowned photographer, perceives graffiti's influence to be the same as any successful career:

"They're getting positive feedback, just the way you probably are and I was. . . . My guess is that when you have been that good at something, how can you give it up? . . . It would be like me giving up my photography"(Martha Cooper).

Yet, writers do slowly decrease the amount and extent of their activity:

"Your most important years are your younger years because when you're younger you write on anything, you're just on a quest, it's, like, write, write, write, get up more and more. Now as you get older, you start slacking off"(Jel).

As a writer moves up the subculture's hierarchy, the pace of his/her career starts to decline:

"A lot of us now are not really so hot, running about trying to put as many tags up as possible. . . . By the time you're somebody you don't have to do as much, you can quieten down a bit, you know"(Mear).

For a 'somebody', a writer who has made his/her name and secured his/her prominence, the need and, indeed, appeal of this exertion appears to diminish:

"I think you need that enthusiasm, you know. I don't want to go out on a wet Saturday night, spending my time in a train yard, running the risk of getting my hair fried or whatever . . . I haven't got that passion anymore"(Proud 2).

Proud 2 lost his enthusiasm, suggesting that this display and its resulting rewards became less important to him.

However, an adequate understanding of these transitions must also consider the age related changes that may be occurring in other aspects of a writer's life. Firstly, an increase in age involves an increase in penalty and responsibility:

"It's a younger thing because it is actually something, unless you become a legal artist, that takes a lot of work and doesn't actually have any financial gain at the end of it and a lot of older people don't have the time or the dedication to want to do that kind of thing, you know, because they might have families or responsibilities. They are also going to be viewed more harshly by the courts and stuff if they're caught"(Drax).

Zaki also locates this point of career decline at an age where responsibility and the serious consequences of apprehension start to gain relevance:

"It's no coincidence that most people in graffiti are about twelve, thirteen, fourteen when they start and most people when they get to twenty, sort of,

slow down. I think there may be several reasons for that, i.e., you've got to go out and earn a living and it's against the law and it takes a lot of time and effort. . . . You calm down a little bit, you don't take so many risks, but it's usually financial, like, you've got to pay a mortgage or you've got kids or something like that"(Zaki).

As a writer ages, the primary difference between this career and any other becomes more apparent. This career doesn't pay the bills:

"I mean they buff [clean] the trains and that's your career, your subway writing career, it's been cleaned in one swoop. Now you have nothing. Now all you have is a rep to live on, but that doesn't pay the bills. I mean, all these things come into play when you're graduating high school"(Dondi).

Dondi's point echoes Phil Cohen's (1972):

"In subcultures . . . there are no career prospects as such"

(Cohen, P., 1972:26, as quoted by Clarke, 1976b:191).

As a writer gets older and becomes self sufficient, prior levels of subcultural devotion become harder to maintain:

"If I could just give up working and paint, I could get a lot accomplished. But I have to work in between my schedule. I also have someone else to worry about, meaning my wife. There's responsibility in the household, so there's a lot of interferences"(Iz).

Financial concerns begin to overshadow subcultural ones and a 'mainstream' career begins to overshadow its subcultural counterpart:

"Once you have a nine to five job, you start to grow up. You don't have the energy you had as a teenager and only your weekends are for graffiti and the rest of the week you have to do some stupid job for someone else and that takes away your spirit"(Pink).

The career, formerly pursued as a full time occupation, is either curtailed or, as Claw demonstrates, adapted to partime status:

"I mean I still tag, I try to do it once a week, you know, when I go out, I bring a pen. But, you know, I have a life other than graffiti. I have my friends and my art, I'm starting my fashion again. . . . I'm a writer first and foremost, but I'm also a graffiti writer last in my whole life, so I just incorporate it into my life by making small changes"(Claw).

Claw's status as a writer is still important to her, but it is less central. For a younger writer with no financial burdens or distractions, this identity occupies a pivotal self positioning.

CAREER CURTAILMENT

The development of an identity or reputation depends upon an audience - they validate and confirm it and, thus, grant it its reality. However, this audience also introduces a degree of inertia into our identities (Emler & Reicher, 1995). One cannot, as Emler & Reicher (1995) contend, be a Catholic today and a Protestant tomorrow because one's acquaintances will not accept such shifting claims. The graffiti subculture works to break down this inertia. Writers move through recognised stages of activity which legitimate changes in their identities. Illustrating this, an established or 'veteran' writer with other responsibilities and concerns can discard a 'delinquent' identity and adopt a 'conformist' one by announcing his/her 'retirement':

Nancy:*"So it gets slower as you get higher?"*

Sae 6:*"Yea, not slower, you just sort of semi retire, you know"*

Jel:*"You've been accepted"*

Sae 6:*"You made your mark on society, that's what it is, and now you've been accepted by the top writers, you've already proved yourself"*

(Jel & Sae 6).

A retired writer is generally one who has made his/her name and is, thus, well known within the boundaries of the subculture. Commenting on an eminent older writer, 'Iz' (35 yrs), Cavs declares:

"You know, he's done his share. When he made a name for himself, he did it for so many years, he has nothing more to prove. . . . He's just doing it, just to let people know he's still around"(Cavs).

'Veteran' writers have proved their worth and 'paid their dues' (demonstrated a sufficient level of career commitment) and continued career development is no longer expected of them. The name has been built and this lessens the need for its further construction or support:

"'Prime' doesn't do a lot, but what he does is quality. He doesn't need to do a lot, he's got such a name"(Kilo).

Subcultural standards operate so that well known writers can legitimately decline or relinquish their illegal activities. Their 'veteran' status also absolves them of the need to demonstrate continued stylistic excellence. As Zaki remarks:

"The pressure is a lot less on me now. . . . If I went and did something now, it wouldn't matter if it was really shit. People would probably go, 'oh, wicked', because I'm probably thought of as the granddad now, so I'm not meant to be running new styles or being the best"(Zaki).

These exemptions are made because the established writer has already secured a distinguished reputation through his/her former activities. A career decline or curtailment will not, as Col illustrates, jeopardise his/her recognition or status:

Col:*"See, you can go to the top of the line, stop completely, just catch a tag here and there"*

Nancy:*"And that's okay, you're still top?"*

Col:*"It's fine, you're still there, you're the top"(Col).*

With a place established at the pinnacle of the subculture's hierarchy, these writers remain etched in the minds of others:

Nancy:*"Does Blade still do graffiti?"*

Cavs:*"Yea, occasionally he'll go here and there, but he does canvases and stuff like that now. He doesn't have to write no more, the guy is almost forty years old"*

Az:*"Yea, he made his mark"*

Cavs:*"The guy made history, he's out there"(Az & Cavs).*

A writer's illegal career thus reaches its closing stages. Although this signifies an end of 'active' career development, many 'retired' writers may continue to do the occasional piece of illegal work:

"To let writers know you're still around"(Cope 2 - 'Graphotism' Magazine 6), and to maintain their place upon the upper echelons of the subculture's hierarchy. Alternatively, they may choose to extend this career down avenues located beyond these illegal confines.

MOVES TO LEGALITY

Some writers 'move over' and recommence their activities legally, participating in paid commission or gallery work. For Mear, this move represented a form of progression:

"I could have stayed doing illegal stuff and never looked at the legal side of it, but the legal side just opens up another door"(Mear).

This door offered Ego an alternative to the risks and legal liabilities of illegal involvement:

"I'm painting in the beginning, doing all the illegal stuff . . . How old am I now? Twenty five. You know, if you're arrested again and again, eventually, because of your age, you're going to get put inside. It's like fuck that, you can't be a phantom all your life"(Ego).

Ego's move from illegitimacy to legitimacy appears to reflect an adjustment in perceived status. Jel elaborates on this shift in orientation, attitude and status below:

Nancy:*"So how old were you when you started thinking, 'maybe I'll do a bit of legal work'?"*
Sae 6:*"When I started turning like twenty one, twenty two"*
Jel:*"I guess that comes when you get old and you start maturing and you start knowing that you want to be serious in life . . . you want to be responsible, you know keeping up with yourself and doing the right things in life"(Jel & Sae 6).*

The legal realm offers writers a potentially desired sense of legitimacy and maturity. Kilo defines this as a 'next level viewpoint':

"He's got a next level viewpoint, where for him it's not worth getting involved unless there's money involved in it, which is okay, I suppose, he's got a kid, he's twenty six this year"(Kilo).

The writer referenced above made this legal career shift to meet financial demands. As Sae 6 explains:

"Your parents aren't supporting you anymore, so you've got to take the only thing you know how to do best and say, 'maybe I can make a living out of this'"(Sae 6).

With increased responsibilities:

"You just find ways of turning your hobby into something which will pay the rent"(Proud 2).

Paid legal work moves writers out of the boundaries of the subculture. They no longer paint for their peers or perhaps themselves, a new external audience is introduced. However, writers can occupy both legal and subcultural status. 'Halls of fame' (legal painting sites) enable writers to display their skills within a subcultural arena that lacks the risks of apprehension.

Figure 16. Graffiti 'Hall of Fame' - New York

These sites afford writers an internal audience and, thus, a source of fame and may even allow them to establish themselves upon the subculture's international hierarchy of prominence. Drax explains the rationale underlying this extension of a writer's profile:

"For bigger writers and more accomplished ones, once you've proven to everyone in London you do it and earnt your respect in London, you have to move on from that. You know, you've got to crave for something more, world wide respect . . . because you can only achieve so much here. Once you get that big as well in the illegal scene, you're going to be so much in the eye of the police and stuff, it's going to be impossible to do anything, so you need to, kind of like, expand beyond that"(Drax).

So how does a writer enter this competitive international forum?

"It would happen automatically to you if you were good enough and doing enough stuff. People start mentioning you in magazines or letters or you would just go into the world and meet writers who'd heard of you because your fame has travelled"(Drax).

Writers produce their own magazines. Because many of these enjoy an international readership:

"It's heavily competitive too, more so on a world wide level because of all these magazines"(Futura 2000).

This exchange has activated an international level of challenge and competition which allows writers to develop their reputations and progress their subcultural careers beyond their own individual 'scenes'.

This chapter has outlined the career structure that defines a writer's involvement within the graffiti subculture. It should be stressed that this is a general as opposed to a uniform framework. There is no absolute blueprint of this progress and writers may differ in the paths they choose, the time they spend engaged in various levels of activity or, indeed, the points at which they begin or end their careers. I have presented a conventional or typical career outline, one specified by the majority of writers I spoke to. Most make these general transitions and most do appear to decelerate their illegal careers in their late teens or early twenties and, at this point, either decrease, relinquish or continue their subcultural involvements within a legal sphere.

What all writers share, however, is a common motive. All enter the subculture with an ambition to be the best, driven in their goals by the element of competition that runs through its fabric:

"That's what keeps it going, competition breeds us"(Acrid).

Writers work to surpass each other for one reason - the respect and fame that is awarded for this achievement. This makes the graffiti career a 'moral career' in its purest sense. Their activities all lead to one openly recognised and expressed goal - a strong self concept. If the attainment of this is, indeed, one of the most fundamental concerns of human life (Harré, 1993), then a graffiti career merely represents a raw or alternative manifestation of the progressions we all strive to make within the social sphere.

The universality of this subcultural incentive lends little support to individualised accounts of crime which relate infraction to some internal psychological deficit, such as lack of intelligence, control, morality or social skills. It can also be used to confront many widely held conceptions concerning 'youth' and their societal status. Stigmatised notions of this group as problematic and indicative of degenerative moral values are no new thing. Folk devils and moral panics have existed for as long as we have been able to define a 'teenage' strata of society. Teddy Boys, Mods, Rockers and varying other subcultural configurations have all received a societal vote of no confidence and the graffiti subculture is no exception. Yet, while this activity may bear its label as vandalism, it cannot carry the connotations usually associated with it. Graffiti is neither mindless nor senseless. Writers do not invest time and energy into a meaningless destruction of public property. Their devotion reflects an underlying rationale and serves, as we have seen, a clear and coherent purpose.

In this light, the main tenets of Albert Cohen's (1955) subcultural thesis must also be reassessed. Graffiti is not an act of spite, malice, resentment, a 'for the hell of it' crime which socially divorced groups use to attack the middle classes at their most vulnerable, i.e., through their property (Cohen, A., 1955). Graffiti maintains its own audience and its own agenda, one which clearly questions 'hit back' motives or attributions of 'status frustration'. Writers strive to reach their own goals, not other people's. Indeed, the very presence of these forces us to reconsider Albert Cohen's portrayal of impetuous, impatient or unambitious subcultural members. Writers do have long term objectives and the incredible levels of industry they display in their quest to reach these also needs acknowledgement. To use Willis's (1990) words:
"There is work, even desperate work, in their play"(Willis, 1990:2).

Far from 'lazy young layabouts', writers are productive to the extreme and productive to an end which does not, unlike many other 'crimes', offer payback in concrete or financial terms. It is here that Cohen's thesis is perhaps at its

weakest. If one looks beneath the surface, the middle class values honoured within 'mainstream' society are not rejected or retracted, they are fully embraced. The graffiti writer exhibits the same dedication and commitment to secure the same status and standing as any individual within a professional environment. Martha Cooper draws upon her experience as a professional photographer to highlight these affinities:

"I can easily relate it to my photography and getting fame through having my pictures published and doing it once definitely isn't enough. . . . In order for your name to be around, it has to be around as many different places, as many different magazines as possible. . . . I understand perfectly why they want to do it again and again, they want everyone to see their name"(Martha Cooper).

Like a photographer, the writer works to expose his/her name. The greater the exposure and respective quality of this presentation, the greater the generated fame, respect and subcultural prominence. From this angle, the writer differs little from an academic. Like writers, these individuals progress their careers through exposing a notable quantity and quality of 'writing'. If this is extensive and sufficiently accomplished, the respect and recognition of their community is obtained and they are elevated within its hierarchy.

The subculture shares obvious similarities with many other respected sectors of society, yet it fails to enjoy such legitimacy. The media picture painted is one of lawless chaos and anarchy. External symptoms may well suggest misrule and disorder, but surface impressions are clearly misleading. The members of this subculture are not a breed apart or a seething mass of testosteroned adolescents hell bent on destruction. They are a group of young individuals working hard to conform to their own meaningful guidelines and structures.

CHAPTER 5

DESTRUCTING TO CONSTRUCT: GRAFFITI AS A TOOL OF MASCULINE CONSTRUCTION

This chapter looks beyond the attainment of fame, respect and status to explore other reasons for writers' subcultural involvements. What else do they gain from participation? A member of the CCCS might say a chance to resist hegemony and solve, "albeit magically"(Cohen, P., 1972:23, as quoted by Clarke et al., 1976:32), class related problems or contradictions. But does this theory or explanatory model hold good? Recent theorists have said no (Griffin, 1993; McRobbie, 1994). During the mid eighties, postmodern critics stepped in and sent Marxism, in its various guises, into a state of crisis, attacking "its teleological propositions, meta-narrative status, essentialism, economism, Eurocentrism and its place within the whole Enlightenment project"(McRobbie, 1994:44). Marxists' notions of resistance started to crumble (Griffin, 1993), alongside their totalising and overly simplistic vision of a unified and fixed society, and moves beyond this theoretical vocabulary started to be made (McRobbie, 1994).

I share these departing moves, but my reasons perhaps differ from those cited above. It was not so much their appeal to a rigidly defined class system that worried me, but rather the broad brush way in which groups were unproblematically assigned to these single structural categories. Illustrating this, Clarke et al. (1976) distinguish:

> "Respectable, 'rough', delinquent, and the criminal sub-cultures *within* working class culture . . . though they differ amongst themselves, they *all* derive in the first instance from a 'working class parent culture'"

(Clarke et al., 1976:13. Italics in original).

But do they? In my view, these theorists were almost obsessive in their attempts to squeeze subcultures into a working class mould - a mould which the graffiti subculture does not apparently fit. Although I had no definitive means of checking its class and ethnic make-up, the writers I spoke to were keen to illustrate this class stereotype as exactly that:

Nancy:"A *lot of people seem to believe it's a working class thing"*

Acrid:"No, *that's a load of bollocks . . . . You can't say you have to be from a certain area or your parents must have split up or you have to be a certain colour or creed or you have to be an only child or whatever. It's open to everyone, you just have to start doing it"(Acrid).*

This subculture defies class categorisation:

"You'd be suprised how a lot of kids come from really good families, upper class, upper middle class"(Pink).

"Graffiti permeates throughout the educational spectrum. Expensive fee paying schools can produce the worst offenders"

(M K Scanes, Graffiti Management Ltd - 'Developing Metros', '91).

It also resists definition in terms of 'race' or colour:

"I know tons of Jewish writers that come from these wealthy families and I know these black kids from the projects and I know these white kids, so I think graffiti really spans everything"(Claw).

It appears that graffiti:

"Has infiltrated all walks of life"(Iz),

making a categorical niche for this subculture difficult to find:

"Graffiti writers come in all shapes and sizes. . . . I can't mass categorise why people write except for the fact that it becomes a total obsession"(Claw).

In this case, then, a Marxist subcultural model could be seen as too absolute and limited. Working class subcultures and middle class countercultures are distinguished and differentiated, but little concession is made for groups which seem to incorporate a mixed class or ethnic base, such as this one. My reasons for rejecting this theoretical model were, thus, primarily practical. With this class base shattered, a Marxist framework ceased to offer any degree of analytical utility.

Where, then, does this leave me as a subcultural theorist? In McRobbie's (1994) view, with a greater degree of theoretical leeway:

> "Now that the search for the fundamental class meaning underpinning these
> formations no longer constitutes the rationale for their cultural analysis, we can
> also afford to be more speculative, more open to reflecting on meanings other
> than those of class."(McRobbie,1994:156)

I intend to use this freedom to consider and address possible reasons for the collective feature this subculture does display - a predominantly male membership:

"The sex of graffiti offenders appears to be almost entirely male, only 0.67% of people arrested are female"

(British Transport Police records, Jan. '92 - Jan. '94).

This figure presents us with an essential question; Why do males rather than females embrace this activity? If we wish to explain this, gender becomes a truly critical issue (Heidensohn, 1989). Yet, it is one that has been barely acknowledged or ignored:

> "Gender relations . . . have generally been obscured from practice and

academic debates with the implication, for example, that class relations are of greater significance"(Hudson, 1988:41).

Alternatively:

"If gender is discussed at all, it is always with women as the focus"

(Stanko & Newburn, 1994:i).

The customary spotlight placed upon reasons for the female's subcultural absence may have denied the male's presence a sufficient degree of analytic attention. In which case, a shift in emphasis is now due:

"Instead of maybe questioning why more women don't do it, maybe we should question why men do. Maybe that's more of a question, why are men always constantly striving to do?"(Zaki).

My contention is that, here, men 'do' because 'doing' appears to play an important role in formulating and validating one's masculine identity. Accordingly, the ritual cited below is not read as a hegemonic resistance, but as a male demand for some process of masculine construction:

"It's mostly a male thing and I think that points to the need for some kind of ritual especially for males on a world wide scale"(Henry Chalfant).

The 'doing', the active ritual, the actual nature of writers' activities retains a central place in my analysis. I, thus, deviate from the CCCS group who placed a primary focus upon the subculture's 'style':

"Roughly, this is what the actors wear and how they wear it"(Brake, 1985:12).

These ensembles are read as commentaries of resistance, depictions of class related problems and an actor's attempt to resolve these. But style as a signifier perhaps facilitates this reading. If we consider the often illegal, dangerous, violent or adrenaline fuelled exploits that accompany or overshadow these stylistic displays, alongside the subculture's male membership, we attain, in my mind, a different portrayal of resistance and a less ambiguous representation of subcultural function.

We also gain, in the case of this subculture, a more focused picture of the meaning of respect, status and reputation and its generating force. In their study of football hooliganism, Marsh et al. (1978) consider the hazards individuals overcome and thus the perilous context in which this symbolic capital is earnt. They also recognise, as do Emler & Reicher (1995) in their study of deviant reputations, the bravado, daring and machismo that is displayed to secure these rewards. However, in both studies the implications of this setting and the qualities that are paraded within it are only touched on. They are not fully explored. I also read these actions as attempts to build an esteemed persona or reputation, but, more specifically, an esteemed masculine persona or reputation.

Maintaining this analytic angle, this chapter moves beyond an ethogenic level of analysis to examine the subculture as a space for the construction of masculinity. In doing so, it also moves beyond the main tenets of the labelling theory. If writers use their activities to actively construct a masculine identity, then deviance becomes deliberate, purposeful and more than just the consequence of an externally applied label (Becker, 1963).

I have divided this chapter into three main sections. The first two centre primarily upon male subcultural members. The type of masculine identity they build through their involvements and the subcultural facets which lend themselves to this formulation will be explored, alongside the important part respect and status play in confirming or validating this persona.

The female writer's presence, albeit minimal, will be addressed in the final part of this chapter. Here, male writers' reactions to this minority group are outlined as a means of illustrating the particular emphasis they place upon the subculture's gender constructive role.

MASCULINE CONSTRUCTION AND CONFIRMATION THROUGH ILLEGALLY DERIVED TEST AND CHALLENGE

'What are you a man or a mouse'? This question is irrational, the answer is quite obviously evident. However in asking it, we are asking someone to prove their allegiance to the category 'man' through demonstrating the skills, attributes and qualities which are taken to define this membership. In this sense, then, masculinity is not an inborn quality or an inherent essence one naturally exudes, it is something which gains its meaning through some process of construction and display:

"Nobody was born a man; you earned manhood"

(Mailer, 1968:25, in Gilmore, 1990:19).

It is also something which is constructed, displayed or earned in different ways. Moving away from the overly simplistic, reductionistic, apolitical and ahistorical notions of the sex role theory, masculinity is now recognised within a multiple light; as a relational construct within a range of competing and changing identity expressions (Edley & Wetherell, 1993, 1995; Hearn & Collinson, 1994; Kimmel, 1987, 1990; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Messerschmidt, 1993; Mort, 1988; Pleck, 1981; Rutherford, 1988; Stanko & Newburn, 1994; Westwood, 1990). Gender construction is no longer a matter of adhering to one set of prescribed rules, it is a complex process of negotiation, an articulation of identity through the use of many different tools, resources and discourses.

Realising the work that goes into producing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987), male crime is now increasingly recognised as one such resource or "*one* means for developing an identity as a man"(Hudson, 1988:37. Italics in original). Rather than a passive enactment or expression of the already defined singular male sex role, crime is now seen as the active negotiation of an identity which gains a different pronunciation as it is spoken through different classes and races (Liddle, 1993; McCaughey, 1993; Messerschmidt, 1993; Stanko & Newburn, 1994). Just as there are varieties in types of crime and the individuals who engage in these, so too are there varieties in the types of masculinities constructed through these different activities.

These reconceptualised accounts fill in some of the gaps left by those who either ignored or oversimplified the links between masculine construction and crime. However, theoretical problems do persist. Masculinity is attentively scrutinised, but it is rarely problematised. What is masculinity? Can we, as analysts, be sure that the actions and qualities we so readily describe as 'masculine' are indeed unproblematically so? To put it another way:

> "How is the theorist to identify instances of 'masculinity'? . . . by what *criteria*
> are these instances identified?"(Coleman, 1990:189. Italics in original).

A framework which allows us to classify and, indeed, defend the behaviours we choose to count as 'masculine' is clearly needed. In Coleman's (1990) view, the meanings of those who engage in these actions can begin to offer us this. If, "competent persons-in-the-society can be assumed to be skilled in the attribution of, avowal of, use of, and engagement in gendered activities"(Coleman, 1990:195), then what is often missing, and what I intend to provide below, is some illustration of how the writers themselves 'define' their activities in masculine terms. A combination of both 'insider' and 'outsider' definitions will allow me to talk meaningfully about these 'masculine' actions without risk of lapsing into externally imposed stereotypes.

'MEN'S WORK'

By locating their risky illegal endeavours within a clearly bounded male domain, Drax and Steam convey the 'masculine' nature of their activities:

"I think it's attractive to boys because of the so called machoism with regard to risk and adventure"(Drax).

"Not many girls do it . . . it's more of a guy's thing because of the risks you take and that"(Steam).

Interaction with risk and danger is clearly defined as 'men's work'. In expanding upon this point, Steam indicates why he believes boys relate to these features:

Nancy:*"So what is it about graffiti that appeals to boys alone? Why do you think more girls don't get into it?"*

Steam:*"Because there's too many risks and I couldn't see a girl going into a train yard"*

Nancy:*"Yea, but before that, what was it that made you think, 'oh I'd be into doing graffiti?'"*

Steam:*"I dunno, it's just rebellion isn't it, it all depends what attitude you've got"*

Nancy:*"But girls can be rebellious can't they?"*

Steam:*"Yea, but I can hardly see them going to a train yard and stuff like that"(Steam).*

A writer's involvement is seen to depend upon a rebellious attitude; an attitude which girls may share, but fail to express. Steam implies cowardice to be the reason for this. In this case, then, female absence is taken to reflect diminutive levels of stamina. Others that chose to comment also referenced or implied this female lack:

Nancy:*"Why do you think more girls aren't involved?"*

Sae 6:*"Because it's a rough job, it's going in the tunnels, it's fighting, it's carrying the axe, it's dangerous"*

Jel:*"There's a lot of dangers and risks"*

Sae 6:*"It's a hard-core thing and plus it's even more hard-core to a female when she hears our stories, you know"*

Jel:*"Imagine a girl going into a train yard where they know there's a rat, a live rail, it's dirty"*

Sae 6:*"You hear the stories right, so you've got maybe eighty percent of the girls that hear these stories are really scared to begin with. Here they are hearing us talking about, 'yea, we was at that tunnel, these guys rocked up with bats and the cops came and they chased us and the third rail', you know that's a turn off to girls"(Jel & Sae 6).*

These accounts all highlight intrinsic differences between males and females. This is 'men's work' because girls do not come equipped with the qualities which enable them to face the inherent pressures of this environment.

How, then, does a female writer explain this female absence? Pink illustrates:

Nancy:*"So why is it more women aren't into graffiti?"*

Pink:*"Because it's a dirty job, a dirty hard job. You have to carry paint in the dark, crawl through God knows what and hide behind disgusting things and scale big fences. Basically it's men's work . . . . It's that, you know, most girls are raised to be little feminine things . . . . It just takes some*

qualities and girls are just way too feminine and they don't have nearly as much guts to do such daring things like that"(Pink).

Like the accounts above, Pink defines graffiti as 'men's work'. Her focus upon its dirtiness, as one reason for this, is interesting as Griffin (1985) also found that girls preferred office jobs for their cleanliness. Pink activates gender stereotypes, however she denies these an inborn or inherent character by referencing socialisation processes Girls lack resolution because, unlike boys, they have not been raised to display this or the other qualities that graffiti demands. Despite this admission, female absence is still explained in terms of female incapacity. In Pink's account, girls still lack the courage and resilience which enables male writers to overstep the boundaries preventing female participation. As such 'masculinity' still remains the all important factor of distinction.

Figure 17   'Men's Work' - Painting in a Train Yard

Not one of these writers has, as yet, considered a difference in girls' interests or desires. In Brake's (1985) view:

"The 'absence' of girls from subcultures is not very suprising. These subcultures, in some form or another, explore and celebrate masculinity"

(Brake, 1985 182)

Correspondingly, the image or identity a writer formulates through subcultural engagement does not, perhaps, present itself as relevant or as valuable to a female construction of selfhood. In this case, girls may be brave enough, but not sufficiently interested to participate. Kilo and Lee mirror the tone of explanation provided earlier, but deviate by considering this possibility:

Nancy:*"What is it that makes it such a male activity? Why do you think girls aren't into it?"*

Lee:*"It's dangerous to go in yards and that"*

Kilo:*"I suppose, I dunno it's a bit macho, you can't say it, but would a girl sort of really want to be out in the freezing cold or whatever, like painting at night?"*

Lee:*"Girls have more sense"*

Kilo:*"Yea, maybe that's what it is, it probably is, well they say girls are more mature and that"*

Nancy:*"Would you say it's the risks as well?"*

Kilo:*"Yea, the risks involved as well, you know. I mean if a girl really wanted to do it, no problem, but you just don't find that many girls interested"*

Nancy:*"So what is it that attracts boys rather than girls? Is it the excitement, the challenge, the kind of risks and danger?"*

Kilo:*"I know it's those sort of things that attracted me to it. You know, the buzz you get out of the challenge involved . . . pushing yourself to the limit"(Kilo & Lee).*

In this quote, graffiti is defined in terms of masculine relevance as opposed to female incapability. Graffiti's perilous backdrop is, as Kilo suggests, more attractive to boys who use this challenge as a means of pushing and testing themselves. Accordingly, danger is no longer just a female deterrent, but rather a less emphatic deterrent to boys who remain dependant upon its use in constructing, what Flannigan-Saint-Aubin (1994) would describe, 'hard-(w)on' masculinity. As noted below, this is an identity that must "put itself constantly on the line to prove itself and to merit its status"(Flannigan-Saint-Aubin, 1994:254):

Nancy:*"So why are blokes so into it?"*

Prime:*"It's part of the image. There's the macho thing to it, the superman, superhero thing is very much prominent, 'no one can do what I can do, no one can go through what I've gone through'"(Prime).*

Writers, thus, define the masculine nature of graffiti using accounts that take two main forms. In one, we are told that, unlike boys, girls lack the ability to cope with the demanding strain of this activity. Here, then, the 'masculinity' of the exercise is

clearly emphasised. In the other, boys and girls are differentiated on the basis of motivation alone. Again, however, we see the male writer as more motivated than the female. Using either account, we gain a vivid depiction of firstly, the 'masculine' meaning of writers' illegal endeavours and secondly, the way in which male writers use danger and risk to construct and comment upon this.

THE NATURE OF 'MEN'S WORK'

As a forum for constructing masculinity, the subculture embraces a doctrine of confrontation and achievement (Gilmore, 1990). Writers confront risk and danger and achieve, through this, the defining elements of their masculine identities; resilience, bravery and fortitude. In this sense, graffiti may be viewed as a form of 'initiation rite' (Eliade, 1958; Young, 1965), a process which allows young men to "undergo trials of strength or endure great physical hardship in order to become men"(Phillips, 1993*b*:195).

Pressure, test or ordeal remain the all important facets of this constructive enterprise. As Werthman (1982) remarks:

"It is difficult to gain a reputation for being 'tough' unless the skills involved are occasionally put to a test"(Werthman, 1982:293).

This helps to explain why this masculinity is cut against an illegal background. As a working environment, illegality presents writers with a series of contextual hazards. These include the dangers of oncoming trains, the electrified third rail which powers these and, perhaps most importantly, the judicial threat of detection and arrest. In combination, these difficulties transform a writer's artistic quest into a challenging exercise of self evaluation:

"It's challenging yourself because nowadays you've got to have the guts to go"(Col).

"You'll go and do it any time of the day, sometimes not even at night, just to see if you can get away with doing it in broad daylight"(Ego).

These writers approach this trial with questions of capability. Its ultimate seduction, thus, lies in its point of completion - the time when these questions get answered:

"When I go on the train to do a piece . . . my heart is racing and I just feel that I'm going to vomit. I get out there and I'm like, huh, huh, huh and I start painting and then when we actually get out of there I feel great, I'm happy, I'm on the train going home, I feel happy, it's a wonderful feeling of, 'oh wow, I just did this'"(Claw).

If masculinity is something that is directed towards certain goals (Flannigan-Saint-Aubin, 1994), then this is the point at which these are realised:

"It's a different buzz altogether doing illegal stuff. . . . It's the fact that it's dangerous and you've done it"(Ego).

"I think it's being able to go in, do it, pull it off, come away with photos and know you've done it"(Kilo).

Danger and fear have been confronted and dominated and a writer walks away with a more clearly defined sense of masculine status:

"It was a kick when you came out of a train tunnel after you did a piece and I think part of it comes down to keeping grace under pressure. You know, you have trains burrowing down on you, cops chasing you, you have different gangs in there, you don't know what's going to happen and when you finish and you come up . . . you're walking through some ghetto, which makes you feel kind of manly anyway, and you're thinking, 'yea I did it'. So there's a certain sense to the illegality"(Freedom).

Masculinity is self satisfied through this test of endurance but "to be a man it is not simply enough *to be*: a man must *do, display, prove*"(Miles, 1991:205. Italics in original). The presence of an audience is all important because the private claim to any identity "depends upon public acceptance of that claim and social support for expressing that claim"(Emler & Reicher, 1995:229). Reflecting this, a writer's masculine status is also presented for the recognition of others. Through writing his name on a train or in an illegal area, the writer effectively says, 'I was there and it was my courage and resilience which got me there'. The nature of this challenge and the masculine qualities which enabled its completion are recognised and authorised by this signature:

"If your name rode by on a train . . . that implies that you ran up a train tunnel, probably late at night, left your parents, faced the gangs and everything else and wrote your name on it. So that's what it was about and the better you did it then the more it implied, like, you stayed there longer, you did it better, you know"(Freedom).

The demonstration of one's 'masculine' achievements appears to represent a writer's incentive. As Mear illustrates, great lengths will be taken to this effect:

"We used to cross tracks at stations, which is a real risk. You'll be standing on the platform, jump down onto the tracks and tag the opposite wall. There's three rails and you've got to cross each one to keep your balance to reach the other side. . . . If you're on it for long enough and the train's coming, you're definitely going to get fried!"(Mear).

So what drives writers to risk life itself merely for the sake of a written name? Quite simply, the social reward they gain for doing so:

"Among these kids you get positive feedback for doing something dangerous and difficult and illegal"(Martha Cooper).

This is offered in the form of recognition or respect:

"I respect someone, like, new security fences, guards, cameras . . . they went in there by themselves and didn't have anyone looking out for them, they pieced and bombed the trains and then they got out"(Acrid).

In this light, the meaning of this symbolic capital becomes more clear. Writers do not earn recognition, respect and status for any old endeavour but, more specifically, for their 'masculine' endeavours - those that incorporate a display of resilience, bravery and exertion (Ryder, 1991). As Prime indicates, no pain, no gain:

"To me the essence of graffiti is working hard, developing style and being able to pull it off under extreme pressure. Only then do you earn the real rewards of respect from people who know the difficulties, seeing your piece run where you managed to retain the style in near complete darkness, hanging off a rusty pipe or standing on a rickety crate inches from a live rail. And of course while you're doing all this, you're shit scared that you're gonna be raided by mad cops and thrown in jail"

(Prime - 'Graphotism' Magazine 3).

If respect and recognition approves writers' 'masculine' performances, then effectively it also serves to confirm and validate their status as men. Observing respect to be an important currency among sportsmen, Messner (1991) draws a similar conclusion, explaining it as:

> "A crystallisation of the masculine quest for recognition through public achievement"(Messner, 1991:69).

We can now see why the name plays such a central role within writers' activities. Without this, masculinity loses its accountability and thus the recognition it needs to confirm its potency (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Messerschmidt, 1994; Westwood, 1990). As Kimmel (1994) contends:

> "Masculinity is a *homosocial* enactment. We test ourselves, perform heroic feats, take enormous risks, all because we want other men to grant us our manhood"(Kimmel, 1994:129. Italics in original).

The approval or validation men gain from others for 'proving themselves' completes the final, and perhaps most vital, part of this constructive process. Indeed, writers clearly illustrate its importance by upholding respect and status as their primary reasons for subcultural participation. Its pertinence is further reflected in the subculture's hierarchical configuration which ranks writers in these

terms; the greater the danger and risk and thus necessary daring and machismo, the greater the respect, the greater the status, the greater the man.

The use of this hierarchy or masculine measuring rod also works to comment upon the competitive way in which this identity is constructed. As Acrid confirms: *"Basically, you're proving yourself to be the most artistic, the most innovative, the most daring, the most suicidal, sort of thing"(Acrid).* Writers must be more daring, more suicidal, more artistic and more innovative than their peers because:

> "Contest/opposition appears to be the masculine modality par excellence and
> the obvious route to self-identity: I come to know myself only by knowing that
> something else is not me and is to some extent opposed to or set against me"
> (Flannigan-Saint-Aubin, 1994:244).

Masculinity is not an attribute that confines itself to its individual author, it is one which remains dependant upon comparison and, thus, competition and challenge for its significance and profile. This might explain why writers' subcultural activities are so compulsive. If others' achievements can reflect upon and, thus, potentially threaten one's own masculine status, then masculinity cannot be solidified through a singular process. It "must be proved, and no sooner is it proved that it is again questioned and must be proved again"(Kimmel, 1994:122). In responding to others' developments, writers must produce and keep producing verification of masculine status in order to achieve and maintain their cultural prominence and standing.

MUSCULAR CREATIVITY?

The subculture functions as a site of masculine construction by locating itself within an illegal sphere. Used as a masculine resource, illegality allows writers to oppose risk and danger and develop, through this negotiation, some sense of identity or character:

"It's like sports or anything else, kids prove themselves under immense pressure. They prove themselves to be leaders, followers, cowards, you know maybe a streak of courage that you didn't know you had and under all that pressure character develops"(Pink).

Pink identifies a similarity between this constructive process and the 'rite of passage' an individual may undertake within a sporting environment. As Whannel (1992) argues:

> 'There is a close fit between sport and masculinity; each is part of the other, so
> that prowess in sport seems to be and is seen as the completion of a young

boy's masculinity"

(Whannel, 1992:126, as cited by Williams & Taylor, 1994:215/16).
Here, masculinity is formulated through similar displays of endurance (Messner, 1991, 1987; Westwood, 1990; Willis, 1990) and within similar competitive structures:

"The sports world is extremely hierarchical"(Messner, 1991:64).
The tools used to confirm this status are also comparable. Like graffiti, one's audience becomes an important source of validation (Messner, 1987), a means "through which the athlete attempts to solidify his identity"(Messner, 1987:61).

These affinities locate graffiti, sport and their masculine definitions within similar constructive confines. However, an important difference does remain; graffiti places comparatively little emphasis upon physical skill, force or stamina. While it is demanding, eradicating its potentially effeminate artistic associations:

"It's not as if it's boxing, which is just stupid men hurting each other"(Zaki).
Boxers or athletes earn their respect through an overt presentation of physical skill and endurance. Writers, however, employ courage, daring and cunning as their primary resources. They break into train yards to illegally inscribe their names and they are recognised and rewarded for their bravery and dexterity; mental representations of masculinity as opposed to physical ones.

Despite this distinction, the masculine connotations are seen to be synonymous. In the extract below, Cavs awards illegal train work the same significance as a physical display of strength and stamina:

Cavs:*"You missed out, Iz and him were arm wrestling and he beat Iz and then Iz caught him back"*
Kirs:*"He didn't get me back man, that's Iz the Woz"*
Cavs:*"But he's out there doing freights pal, he's out there doing more than you"(Cavs & Kirs).*
Similarly, Freedom and Proud 2 equate graffiti with the masculine implications of football or fighting:

"You know what differentiates graffiti from, let's say, the football player on the high school football team that takes the hardest hit and gets seven stitches in his jaw, that everyone goes, 'oh look', and, 'ah', the next day, 'did you see that hit he took?', and everything else. That's the exact same parallel with a graffiti writer at the age of fourteen, fifteen years old"(Freedom).

"The guy that puts the hammer over someone's head is the one they're going to look at in the pub and go, 'oh yea, he's well hard', and he gets the

same sort of respect that someone like Drax will get for being everywhere. It's just a different way of interpreting that energy"(Proud 2).

The writer is granted the same recognition as the footballer who is esteemed for his resilience and endurance, the fighter who is respected for his 'tough' or 'well hard' persona or the arm wrestler who confirms his masculinity through his physical strength. Yet, he enjoys this without having to negotiate physical requisites which he may not have. On this pitch there are no losers:

> "Vandalism may be attractive not only because it provides a 'game' in which a
> boy can prove his manhood but also because this 'game' is one at which
> every boy can succeed"(Gladstone, 1978:26, as quoted by Coffield, 1991:49).

Crimes like graffiti introduce risk and danger into this masculine equation and reduce an emphasis on physical skill and ability as a result. Offenders must be brave rather than strong and cunning rather than fast. Theorists rarely go this far in explaining crime's masculine affordances. While it is acknowledged for overriding material or financial restraints (Campbell, 1993a, 1993b; Coote, 1993; McCaughey, 1993; Messerschmidt, 1993, 1994; Jefferson, 1993), it is seldom seen as a means of avoiding or reducing physical ones as well.

URBAN WARFARE: ENHANCING MASCULINE SIGNIFICANCE

> "War makes strange giant creatures out of us little routine men who inhabit the
> earth"(Ernie Pyle - 'Here Is Your War').

The main setting for an illegal writer's work has always been the train yards of the underground or subway system. For a young writer with a taste for adventure, these dangerous and forbidden territories represent, as we have seen, a thrilling and compelling challenge; a site where risk and danger can be confronted and a masculine identity can be constructed. However, this is not all they represent. Skore, among others, also perceives his working environment as:

"A battlefield where we can get out all our pent up frustrations"

(Skore - 'Londonz Burning' Magazine 2).

This is just one of the many militaristic metaphors writers use to characterise aspects of their subculture. As in many other all male groups or gangs (see for e.g., Bing, 1991; Bloch & Niederhoffer, 1958; Katz, 1988; Miller, 1958; Yablonsky, 1962), warfare and combat themes feature heavily in writers' verbal and physical activities. The promotion of this militaristic narrative is, in my mind, pertinent. I intend to present it as evidence of the extra work writers put into creating, sustaining and amplifying the masculine significance of their actions.

'THE THEATRE OF WAR' - INSPIRING, MAINTAINING AND SUPPORTING MILITARY MOTIFS

I have chosen to introduce this theme and the factors inspiring it using Harré's (1993) dramaturgical model or metaphor. Writers present their actions in military terms and I re-present them in theatrical terms, as a form of performance or production. While this helps to highlight the constructive processes at play, it can also be used to show the 'style' of the display - that is, how one does things and the character one aquires from this (Harré, 1993).

SCRIPT WRITING

Their are two main performers on this illegal stage:

1. The authorities or, more specifically, the graffiti squads who have been assigned to control and obstruct subcultural activity in both New York and London.

2. The writers who resist their deterrent efforts.

Their opposing incentives, and the antagonistic relationship they share as a result of this, has given writers all they need to reconstruct this illegal stage into a theatre of war:

"It's a lot like a war, everyone sneaking around in dark clothing at night, that kind of thing"(Pink).

A new script is written and roles are changed accordingly; writers now play the outlaws, the authorities their enemy:

"To go bombing, it's like everybody on the outside is your enemy. It's like do this and you don't know what's going to happen"(Col).

The old plot is also modified. The enemy's actions are no longer read as deterrent measures, but rather battle tactics which writers oppose in the hope of securing victory. Their mission:

"To take over London and to fuck LRT [London Rail Transport]"

('Londonz Burning' Magazine 1).

The battle centres around a contest for power and control of the subway /underground system. Although writers don't and will never literally control this, their graffiti is used to represent their symbolic domination and command. As Prime asserts during a particularly prolific period of subcultural activity:

"Early eighty seven, the underground system nearly got completely taken over"(Prime).

The authorities' inability to maintain these surfaces free of graffiti is taken to signify subcultural supremacy; 'we're running this system', declared one piece of graffiti I saw.

PROP CHANGES

In keeping with and supporting the storyline of this new script, old props are also replaced. By using military terminology to classify and describe their actions and inscriptions, writers transform their spray can into an implement of destruction, a symbolic weapon of war. As Proud 2 observes:

"It's almost exchanging a gun for a spray can"(Proud 2).

Through this, the writer fires **'hits'** (tags) like bullets. Unlike the 'tag', which declares 'I'm here', **'hits'** proclaim, 'I'm here and I have the power to wreak havoc and destroy'. Although **'bombing'** involves the same action as 'tagging', the emphasis on name exposure is coupled with a desire for destruction, power and control:

"Bombing rampages . . . think about the sheer power of it, the power to shock, to disgust, to excite, to destroy, all in the same instance"

(Drax - 'Graphotism' Magazine 3).

Similarly, pieces are **'dropped'**, like missiles, to **'burn'**, **'kill** and **'destroy'** the trains and walls they land upon. Even their names (see Figure 18.) and styles orientate towards this warfare:

"His pieces are well armoured with style for combat"

(Prime - 'Graphotism' Magazine 6).

Figure 18. 'Atak' on the London Underground System

The resulting damage may be 'buffed' (chemically removed), but, as depicted in Figure 19., the trains must still carry the resulting **'scars'** of this battle; faint and jaded outlines of destruction which stand in testimony to subcultural victory.

Figure 19   The Scars of Battle

COSTUME DESIGN

By using their inscriptions as weapons writers fight rather than paint
Accordingly a costume change is also called for   Writers exit as a band of artists
and as pictured in Figure 20 , enter as an army of soldiers

Figure 20   Dressed to Kill

The evocative imagery they use to depict themselves (see Figure 20.) and describe their actions suggests this to be a desired identity. This excerpt describes, from a writer's view, a scene during a 'train jam'; an organised attack upon the underground system by a large group of assembled writers:

"Slowly hits are beginning to appear, . . . everybody is fighting for the best panels, the carriage stinks and is thick with mist. With the carriage totally killed, we move down to the next one, fucking that too. . . . We're clambering down across the tracks and battering the outside panels . . . . A tube pulls in next to us, the doors open, 'rads!, fucking loads of 'em!' We run down the train, force into the driver's cab and kick open the backdoor. Everyone is pushing to get out. We jump from the train and run off down the tracks . . . the rads are everywhere. The escapes that night are stories in themselves"(Kers - 'Londonz Burning' Magazine 1).

This account presents this event as an episode of warfare. The writers' actions are portrayed as a form of military exercise, a manoeuvre which is disrupted and abandoned as the enemy launches an unexpected attack and the writers disperse. The press appear to be equally charmed by this militaristic narrative (Katz, 1988). In reference to the above event:

"The invaders 'bombed' six trains in the space of about two and a half hours. . . . They say the operation was well organised . . . . Most of them managed to escape through the system's maze of tunnels"

(Newspaper excerpt in 'Londonz Burning' Magazine 1 - source unknown).

This reporter joins the subculture's script writing team; the 'invaders' (writers) 'bombed' (vandalised) several trains during a seemingly organised 'operation' (enterprise). . . . But most of them 'escaped' (got away). The military identity that writers embrace is clearly reinforced by this journalist's selective choice of words. This might explain why it was found proudly displayed within their own magazine.

An army is defined as 'unified body'. Its relevance as an identity is, thus, further enhanced by the sense of cohesion and connection writers must attempt to maintain within this fight:

"The new jacks are too busy going for self instead of unity. Together we stand, divided we fall"(Iz).

Graffiti magazines provide writers with the collective voice they need to sustain this perceived status. Using this vehicle, Prime alludes to the writers as a unified whole bound by their common goal:

"One chief of BTP [British Transport Police], asked who he thought would win the fight for the lines, said the writers would because there's too many writers and too many yards that can't be covered at the same time. Damn,

look what's happening now in the nineties, we're giving it to them! So be careful, develop styles, be professional and, most important, keep your house clean. Without hard evidence, their hands are tied"

(Prime - 'Graphotism' Magazine 3).

Like a military figure, Prime provides his army important tactical advice and attempts to rouse their spirit and resolve. Recognising how combat intelligence ensures a stronger position, the writer below urges others to share their knowledge with the uninitiated; the lower regiments of the army who urgently require this expertise:

"The writers are very inventive. Pens are made to make fat marks and new inks are mixed to repel buffing. . . . All these are highly secret tactics in the war and new writers have to really struggle to find out methods . . . . New writers must be schooled by those for whom it is too late, so that the culture learns by its mistakes"('Londonz Burning' Magazine 1).

By working together in this way, vital information regarding enemy territory can also be relayed:

"People do trains in certain spots and it's a done thing to discuss what they did, where they did it, when they did it, how easy it was, did the security come and also show off their photographs. You know, it, like, keeps the networking going"(Drax).

Writers' crews (a group of affiliated writers) represent an important source of security in this respect:

"It's like you start moving in a firm. You get information about where to get your paint from. If they go to a yard and it's safe, they phone you up and go, 'yea, that yard's safe'. We're like a gang sort of thing"(Rate).

Crew members may also paint together as allies, accomplices they can trust to support them within dangerous illegal sites:

Nancy:*"So what's the point of a crew?*

Kilo:*"Security . . . you know if you're going to a yard, you want to be with someone you know, someone who's not going to grass you up if they get caught, someone who's going to look out for you, like you'd look out for them, sort of thing"(Kilo).*

A crew could, therefore, be seen as a subunit of this subcultural army, a writer's squadron, as it were. Popz makes this implication explicit:

"The crew or platoon I currently paint for is KIA, Killed In Action, a strictly Nottingham crew consisting of various artists and vandalz from the city who come together to form an understanding. We shall overcome"

(Popz - 'Londonz Burning' Magazine 1).

Writers use their illegal status to transform their subcultural sphere into a world of warfare. Exploring and interpreting this translation within a dramatic frame of reference enabled me to accentuate its constructive significance. This is not really a war, the subway system is not really a battleground, the writers don't really fight, the spray can is not really a gun and the subculture is not really an army. They become these things through the creational work writers put in both on stage and behind the scenes. They write the script, they act the parts and they design the costumes and props which work to sustain the authenticity and quality of this production. While the media also help out, one more name must be added to this list of final credits - the authorities. Ultimately, they play the most influential, albeit inadvertent, part in this production; the leading role. Without their opposition, there would be no enemy and without an enemy, there would be no war. As a means of illustrating this, the spotlight will now be placed upon the actual site of this battleground, the confrontational confine which feeds this militaristic portrayal. This scene change will enable us to see how themes of combat gain their significance through action as well as talk.

BREAKING AND ENTERING ENEMY TERRITORY

A writer's first task involves entering the train yard (see Figure 21.). Proud 2 draws this comparison:

"I mean if you go into a tube train yard, if you did that in World War two, you'd be going into a city and trying to blow someone up"(Proud 2).

Acrid illustrates the pertinence of this analogy. Read his account of this procedure out of context and one would have difficulty distinguishing it from a scene out of an old war film:

"I went out the front of the station pretending I was waiting for a night bus, just killing time. . . . The security guard drove past me . . . and it goes down to the car park, parks in the corner with all the lights off and, basically, what they do is watch everyone jump over the fence, let them do their pieces, then call the police straight away. By the time they arrive everyone gets caught. So I have to think. I have to do this yard, there's no two ways about it, like this guy's not going to stop me. . . . So what I did is come from the other side. There was these bushes . . . and I crawled underneath, . . . and it was raining, so I was really filthy . . . . There's offices above, like LT [London Transport] offices, and there were people in there, so I got myself in a position so, as I get the moment, I'll run across. So it takes me about two hours to get into this depot and I was crawling and being really careful so they can't see me. So I see it's all clear, I run under the platform, over

the lines and climb in between trains, so I can't be seen. So I start my piece and the paint is, like, clogging up because of the weather, because it's so cold and my fingers are going numb, so I'm having to use really thick nozzles so paint spurts out and there's less control of it. So it takes me two hours to piece this piece that normally take three quarters of an hour. . . . Then I went and bombed all the other trains, including the one right in front of the security guard . . . I ran out of the yard as fast as I could, up the embankment and stashed my paint"(Acrid).

Figure 21. Enemy Territory - A Train Yard in New York

Like a soldier entering enemy territory, the writer must circumvent security measures, secure yard entry and complete his/her mission without detection. The authorities' obstructions make this a hazardous and gruelling task. But they also make it an exhilarating one:

"It's like one big adventure everytime we go to a depot"(Acrid).

"It's a lot more exciting . . . for the sake of playing the old cops and robbers kind of thing. You get to run and hide and the rush of getting away with it, so it's more like a game"(Pink).

The risk element constitutes the all important ingredient (*Campbell*, 1993*b*; *Katz*, 1988; *Lofland*, 1969; Shaw, 1931; Willis, 1977). Without this, the adrenaline

fuelled excitement or 'buzz' factor is lost (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) and this venture becomes a routine exploit as opposed to an attractive adventure:

"We do trains because it's a buzz. To do a wall ain't the same, it's just dead, no excitement"(Rate).

My own inclusion on a trip to a train yard in New York allowed me to appreciate the important role these elements play. Our need to make a careful and full survey of the area, hide within undergrowth from oncoming trains and maintain a constant and vigilant alertness to security threat, served to intensify the whole experience. It was dangerous, exhilarating or:

"A buzz as people say. It's exiting, it's funny, it's adventure. It's an adventure which is criminal, but not madly criminal, get into a bit of danger, you know"(Stylo).

This trip also enabled me to understand how important victory within this battle actually is. The difficulties we faced did not inhibit my chaperones, ironically they appeared to increase their resolve and determination. For a writer there is no such word as can't:

"That just makes the thrill more exciting, trying to get in . . . . There's always a way, there's always a way in, always a way"(Mear).

The authorities present writers with an irresistible challenge and strategies will be employed to ensure this is always met:

"The average graffiti offender appears to keep a potential target under observation for a considerable amount of time before the actual attack and, to be quite frank, they appear to be better at seeing police in sidings than we are at seeing them!"

(Inspector Connell - British Transport Police Annual Report, '90).

Mear confirms Inspector Connell's suspicions:

"Almost every yard is barbed wired now and has got security guards walking round every ten minutes or every half an hour. We've been to yards and sat somewhere and watched the whole depot for like three or four hours, just timing the security guards, what time they came out the shed, walked round and went back in . . . . We'll let them get on with it and then they go back in the shed for half an hour and we jump down, do what we got to do in half an hour and get back out. So by the time they walk round again, it's already there. . . . I've done something, come out and just watched them come back in the morning and they see it, 'those bastards have done it again!"(Mear).

The scenario evolves into a form of chess game as writers pit themselves against and attempt to surpass the authorities' deterrent measures. Challenging the view

that young offenders are impulsive, unintelligent and unrestrained (Willetts, 1993), the writers' moves are strategically planned and ceaselessly enterprising:

"What they do now, they just, at random, pick a yard and go and raid it. . . . We was just monitoring their program at the time. We'd, like, work brains with them because, like, we'd do it for a couple of months in a row at, like, twelve o'clock and they'll be in there at one o' clock thinking we're still in there and the piece will already be done. . . . Then we'll go in there at three o'clock in the morning . . . . We were just running circles around them. Keep a little pattern going for a while and when we think they're onto it, change it"(Mear).

STRATEGIES ENSURING WORK EXPOSURE

Subcultural victory still awaits the 'running' of the writers' work upon the underground system. This circulation indicates that the authorities have been unable to prevent them from entering the yard, have not detected them at work and, finally, have been unable to stop the train from running. This exposure of their work is an important symbol of triumph:

"It's a real show of defeat if they send it out"(Zaki).

But writers also depend upon it for fame, respect, inspiration and, thus, subcultural sustenance:

"Graffiti survives because it feeds off itself. The more that's seen, the more is done"(Prime - 'Graphotism' Magazine 3).

Recognising this, the squad employ their own tactics:

"Graffiti breeds, therefore the adoption of a quick clean policy is of paramount importance"

(Inspector Connell - British Transport Police Annual Report, '91).

Writers are fully aware of this policy and its apparently selective and inconsistent application. In Kilo's view, the Transport Police are not lacking in their own astuteness:

"If a train's been bombed, like totally insane throwups, tags, whatever, they'll run that for about six months . . . . But a piece, if someone did a window down, whole car top to bottom, whatever, full colour, they'd never run that unless they had to. . . . They're worried people might see it and like it . . . . They're worried the public might think, 'why are they spending all this money, it's not that bad', as long as they run the bombing"(Kilo).

As always, writers rise to a challenge. Mear outlines some of the tactics they use to impede this particular practice:

"What we'd do is go to a depot like Gloucester Road. There'd be five trains in there, we'd do a nice whole car on one and totally abolish the other four,

just battering it, so they'd have to pull out the other four and let the half decent one run with the pieces on it. . . . Or you go to a depot and if there's five trains in there, you take ten writers and you piece all five trains, so there's no way they're going to pull out five trains in a day"(Mear).

Using either method, the writers push the authorities into a corner, forcing them to run their pieces by leaving them no other option. Writers may also use their extensive knowledge of transport schedules and procedures to their advantage:

"They don't like cleaning trains on Sunday, so we'd do Sunday, eighty to ninety percent of it will run. The worst day is Friday because they just keep the trains in and do them over the weekend"(Acrid).

"If you know the train positions in a depot and you know the ones they can't take out of service, like the early morning ones, once they're running, they have to run all day. . . . Basically, the trains on the outside of the depots are less likely to run. The ones in the shed tend to run more often"(Acrid).

The writers delight in outwitting their enemy. This game of cat and mouse appears to represent an almost greater source of enjoyment than the actual act of painting itself:

"It's a big game. That's why I do a lot of graffiti, you play games with them"(Acrid).

Acrid's comment reminds us that:

"It is not so much what people do, but how they perceive and interpret what they are doing that makes the activity enjoyable"(Csikszentmihalyi, 1975:x).

Perceiving this confrontation as warfare changes a writer's priorities, objectives and pleasures. Outsmarting and humiliating the authorities is no longer a means to an end, it becomes, as Mear illustrates below, the whole point of the exercise:

"Drax and Skip did a piece right opposite the police headquarters and it's still there . . . . I mean if that's not a blast in the face to the police! It really makes them look stupid. It's like doing a whole piece on the side of Scotland Yard and getting away with it"(Mear).

As the context of this work suggests, the enemy ceases to be a sideline concern, an obstruction that must be avoided, they become the focus of writers' activities:

Lee:*"A lot of people just bomb because of the BTP [British Transport Police]"*

Kilo:*"Yea, I think it's like a revenge thing more than anything"(Kilo & Lee).*

Kilo references revenge as a reason for the directed nature of this fight. However, as I go on to illustrate, this is not the only factor inspiring the ferocity of this war.

INCENTING FACTORS: REASONS FOR THIS DEDICATED AND DIRECTED OPPOSITION

THE SUBCULTURE AND THE SQUAD AS TWO OF A KIND

The writers' relationship with the graffiti squad is distinctive, differing from their relations with uninvolved outsiders. As often exemplified in 'cops and robbers' style dramas:

Kilo: *"There's probably even a certain amount of respect between us and them to a degree, that weird sort of respect, I don't know what they call it. But it's like when I was getting dealt with in my court case, the BTP guy who was dealing with me, we was like on first name terms, like dropping in for tea and stuff and trying to get me to grass myself up"*

Lee: *"Yea, but he's sly"*

Kilo: *"Yea, he was sly, but like in a certain way"*

Nancy: *"Was it like a game?"*

Kilo: *"Yea, yea, yea, it was . . . he knew, when he was trying to do me, he knew exactly, he knew it was me, but he just couldn't prove it. As I said, he was just trying to, like he came into my work, like twice, trying to interview me at work. It was funny"*

Lee: *"They're pretty crafty"*

Kilo: *"Oh, but they've got to be though"(Kilo & Lee).*

Kilo seems to suggest almost a bond between them. This apparent connection has been noted by others (Campbell, 1993a, 1993b) and related to the similar values that cop and criminal cultures embrace (Campbell, 1993a, 1993b; Fielding, 1994; Reiner, 1992). Reflecting the writers' stance:

> "Undoubtedly, many policemen see their combat with 'villains' as a ritualised game, a fun challenge"(Reiner, 1992:113).

We see this affinity expressed and, indeed, recognised in the account above. By referencing their mutual respect, Kilo implies a sort of mutual understanding, an appreciation that they are players in the same game. Bringing this relationship even closer, they also play for the same prize. Like the writers, the squad are engaged in a fight for the control of the underground/subway system. What is more, their attitude towards this contest bears striking subcultural similarities:

"Don't ease up. The risk of relaxing in the fight against graffiti can be sadly demonstrated by a look at Brussels"

(M K Scanes, Graffiti Management Ltd - 'Developing Metros', '91).

Like the writers, this confrontation is perceived to be a fight. The rousing tone of this address is also culturally comparable.

The writers can be seen to intensify these apparent similarities by viewing the squad within their own frames of reference. In this next quote, Mear refers to the squad's attempts to raise their profile in subcultural terms, as a desire to 'make a name for themselves':

"They had new people join the graffiti squad and they wanted to make a name for themselves, so they started raiding quite a few people just for the hell of it"(Mear).

Further affinities are playfully illustrated in the quote below:

"The Vandal Squad love graffiti. Their job requires them to forage for graffiti as much as you do. When you wreck enough walls, they'll want to meet you. Just like jock swingers [adoring fans], they'll recite every spot you hit"(Mark Surface - 'On The Go' Magazine, Dec. '93).

In New York, this correspondence is very much enhanced by the squad themselves. As Cavs explained to me:

Cavs:*"See this piece here, it got crossed out. See the 'V', the cops crossed it out. They do 'VS' for the vandal squad . . . they do that 'V' and then they circle it. They do that so that by crossing my piece out, that's like a warning, you know"*

Nancy:*"Does that say toy [incompetant writer] there?"*

Cavs:*"Yea, the cops did that. Yea, they know all about it, they know everything, that's their job, you know. . . . See all the V's, they ragged [ruined] our whole car. Look at this beautiful whole car and the cops crossed it out. You know why? Because that's disrespecting us"(Cavs).*

By using their own distinctive 'tag', employing subcultural terminology and crossing out writers' work to indicate disrespect in subcultural terms, the squad remove their 'official' mask and effectively present themselves as a rivalling graffiti gang. In this sense, they voluntarily embrace a clearly defined 'insider' positioning.

Their stance might explain why subcultural opposition is so personal and directed. The writers' fight for the lines becomes less a subculture opposing an authoritative body and more a confrontation between two rivals of equal and similar status. Furthermore, in relating the squad's intentions to their own, their deterrent actions start to represent a competitive attempt to claim pre-eminence. When the meaning of this supremacy is considered, reasons for this culture clash become even clearer.

CHALLENGE OF MASCULINITIES: FIGHTING FOR MASCULINE SUPREMACY

Although Messerschmidt (1993) places a central focus upon the varying ways masculinity is articulated through crime, he also presents police work as a gender constructive resource. Through controlling crime, police officers formulate a collective form of heterosexual, hegemonic masculinity (Fielding, 1994; Messerschmidt, 1993). Through evading this control, writers construct a similar form of identity. As masculine expressions, both celebrate mastery and control (Campbell, 1993b), and virtues of stoicism and fortitude (Fielding, 1994). Like the subculture:

"The police world is one of 'old-fashioned' machismo"(Reiner, 1992:124).

Although these identities are linked in their similarities, they are also joined in their differences. Where one succeeds, the other fails. Where one wins, the other loses. The police must control deviance to claim their identity, the deviants must evade this control to claim theirs. One is always constructed at the expense of the other. The battle we see here can, therefore, be viewed in masculine constructive terms. Not so much rival versions of collective masculinity competing for hegemony (Connell, 1989), but more similar forms fighting for potency.

In this light, warfare now represents combat, not just for system control, but for the masculine supremacy that this represents. In view of the effort writers put into securing this status within their own internal masculine contests, it is little surprise that its group equivalent is so fiercely defended against this external challenge. The stakes are high. Losing this battle involves the degradation of masculine group status. It implies that the losing party was not cunning enough, daring enough, tough enough and, therefore, 'masculine' enough to stand the pace. Given this, subcultural victory becomes understandably important:

"Whatever they do, there's always a way . . . they're doing all that, it just makes you more determined to beat them"(Kilo).

By presenting their obstructions, the authorities effectively ask writers to 'come and have a go if you think you're hard enough'. Basically, they lay down a challenge and ask their opponents to defend their masculine honour and dignity through acceptance (Polk, 1994). As reflected in their determined resolve, writers take this challenge very seriously. Dignity is an important concern, especially for an adolescent group such as this:

"Some recent studies of adolescence have shown many young people to have
an almost obsessive interest and preoccupation with the maintenance of
dignity and the careful scanning of the social environment for occasions and
acts of possible humiliation. When such acts have been identified some
adolescents may undertake violent retaliation, which in their view has the aim

of restoring the dignity that they have lost"(Harré, 1993:30).

Illustrating this:

"We have just recently come through a huge onslaught of action by the British Transport Police graffiti squad, one, it must be said, we didn't even see coming. Admit it, we lost that battle, . . . So wake up Britain, the war is on again after the recent heavy defeat at the hands of the graffiti squad in our last battle. Don't deny it, face the facts, learn the relevant lessons, re-arm, re-group and analyse strategy, for this war is far from over"

(Drax - 'Londonz Burning' Magazine 2).

Perceived defeat provides little deterrent. Writers only work harder to overcome the obstacles that lie in their path to pre-eminence:

"They don't understand, the more they try to stop it, the more it will keep up. . . . I'm telling you, the more you put pressure on, the worse the destruction will become"(Claw).

When victory is secured, it is celebrated. By dedicating their completed pieces to their defeated enemy, writers revel in their glory:

"You can leave a message to the BTP like, 'ha, ha, caught you sleeping', or, 'phone crime line', something like that, that's going to get to them"(Steam).

"The graffiti squad have really taken some stick in the past . . . . You do a whole car and you put, 'PC Knight is a fat git', on the end and that bit will run for months and everyone will see it and he'll probably see it everyday running past Baker street [Squad headquarters]"(Mear).

Writers use their inscriptions as weapons of humiliation, deriding reminders of the squad's inefficiency. Even face to face, provocation prevails. The squad's failure to secure Drax's long awaited prison sentence provided him with another opportunity to exult their incompetence and mock their defeat:

"The whole graffiti squad, every single one of them, was at my court case on the Monday. They had a whole section of the seating . . . . There'd been all this big hype and big roll with graffiti and stuff, okay, and I think I was just going to be the icing on their cake . . . . And then, of course, when I got my fine and community service, it just totally backfired on them. It was hilarious . . . . Steve Cattel, who was in charge of my case, had always been alright, always been totally fair, always been friendly, like jovial . . . but then when I came out afterwards and was like, 'nice one Steve', he just looked at me and his face was, like, so gutted, really, really, like badly, just so gutted!"(Drax).

What we see here is a celebration of masculine supremacy. On these occasions, the writers were more cunning, astute and skilful and the authorities lost their fight

for this status. Any attempt to do this quietly or gracefully was also denied. Through using these antagonistic gestures, the writers uphold the Squad's failings and force them to recognise and remember their perceived impotency.

CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITY THROUGH CONSTRUCTIONS OF WAR

Like brothers in arms, writers join as one in this fight. Masculinity becomes a group attribute and a matter of subcultural pride and dignity. However, it is still the individual writer who defends and bolsters this. How, then, does this 'war' affect or influence individual constructions of masculinity?

WARFARE AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING AN ENHANCED MASCULINE IDENTITY

Warfare has always carried masculine connotations (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978). One only has to observe how new recruits used to be lured into service to see this association; 'Join the army, be a man', 'The army will make a man out of you'. Such promises are, in many ways, understatements. The army celebrates and fosters extreme masculine virtues (Coote, 1993). In doing so, it does not merely offer soldiers a chance to be or become 'men' (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978; Rutherford, 1988; Coote, 1993; Segal, 1990), it offers them a chance to be or become 'supermen', men of all men:

> "Of all the sites where masculinities are constructed, reproduced, and deployed, those associated with war and the military are some of the most direct. . . . the warrior still seems to be a key symbol of masculinity"
>
> (Morgan, 1994:165).

The militaristic setting writers have chosen as a backdrop for their activities therefore carries significant constructive implications. It not only transforms the subcultural storyline and the writers' role in this, more importantly it pumps a massive measure of machismo into their already 'masculine' actions;

* *A writer that gains entry into a yard, breaks into enemy territory as a soldier.*

Individual displays of daring and stoicism translate to reflect the more extreme exertions of a brave, honourable and dedicated soldier. One who no longer confronts the dangers of mere arrest, but risks capture by the enemy and, thus, jeopardises his freedom for the sake of his side.

* *A writer that inscribes his name upon a train, missiles and bombs enemy confines.*

Working with the aim of defeat, the aggressive nature of his actions are amplified. The name now represents a tool of destruction. It is no longer just an indication of daring and bravery or a means of claiming fame and prominence, it is the weapon that solidifies the strength of the writers' cause.

In changing the script, writers have transformed their illegal site of masculine construction into a militaristic world of mass machismo, an environment "within which the cult of masculinity, *per se*, is celebrated"(Campbell, 1993a:45. Italics in original). Here, young men do not just become tough and daring writers, they become brave and strong soldiers, warriors or, as Morgan (1994) maintains, 'key symbols of masculinity'.

WARFARE AS A MEANS OF CONFIRMING AN ENHANCED MASCULINE IDENTITY

A writer works to validate his masculine identity through the respect and recognition of his peers. The introduction of an enemy ensures this process no longer rests among writers alone. The authorities' attempts to apprehend writers identifies them as an important audience. One which can, through targeting or donating a writer attention, supplement the respect and recognition they gain from other subcultural members:

"Fame and respect, there's the two driving forces . . . not just from the scene, even the graffiti squad give you a certain amount of respect"(Acrid).
Coming from an outside source, this attention carries extreme prestige:

"We were the most wanted graffiti crew for two consecutive years. I was the most wanted graffiti writer, with 'The Fabulous Five', in seventy seven and seventy eight by the TA [Transport Authority]. And those guys are priority number one!"(Lee).

Lee recounts his wanted status with a sense of pride and it is not hard to understand why. If being a famous outlaw is the whole point of the exercise, then what better way is there to have this confirmed or, indeed, magnified than having one's name etched on the enemy's hit list:

"Nobody wants to get caught, but after they've been caught, which they nearly always do at first, they think they're there now, known to the police and, 'I've got a name, you know, I'm a big boy now, you know the police know who I am, they'll be watching out for me'"(Mear).

Further opportunities for glorifying this status are presented in the theatre of the courtroom (McCaughey, 1993):

"A lot of officers were involved in my court case and the amount of witnesses! If you had come to my court case there was boxes and boxes of paperwork like no one's business and there were eight defendants and seven barristers between them, like seven clerks. The big day of the sentence, the court room was absolutely packed, like, relations in the

gallery, reporters, the old graffiti squad, the new graffiti squad. Like, when I was going up there, I'd be getting photographed and all that"(Acrid).

Here the writer takes centre stage. A small bit part swiftly becomes a leading role and the show sells out as the public cram in to watch the celebrity in action. After show reviews follow, but their negative write ups remain unimportant. A folk devil, as Acrid illustrates, can easily be subverted into a folk hero (McCaughey, 1993):

"I made front page, like I made every national newspaper, radio and TV. I was treated like a celebrity in the pub and all that. . . . Like my cousins, when they went to school, they were like, 'oh my cousin's Acrid', or whatever, 'he's been on TV', superstar sort of thing!"(Acrid).

Contact with the authorities may therefore have its drawbacks, but it also clearly has its perks. This attention does not just validate a writer's self importance and identity as an outlaw (Gibbons, 1968; McCaughey, 1993; Yablonsky, 1962), it also bolsters it by extending his/her notoriety both within and beyond subcultural confines. With one's name in lights, apprehension begins to lose its detrimental significance:

"If I get caught, as long as I'm on the nine o'clock news, I don't really mind!"(Akit).

The last two sections of this chapter have presented illegality as a tool or resource writers use to display, confirm and, indeed, amplify their masculine identities. In doing so, an important point has been reiterated - this crime has a purpose. It is not a mindless or aimless destruction of public property, it is a means to a masculine end. This introduces an agentic angle into the picture of crime, one which is very much lacking in the analytic portrait painted by the labelling theory (Emler & Reicher 1995):

> "*Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance* and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders"(Becker, 1963:8/9. Italics in original).

Making a link between deviance and society is useful, but a focus on the reaction alone obscures the motivations or causes precipitating this infraction (Downes & Rock, 1982; Heidensohn, 1989; Sumner, 1994). We see the actor as acted upon rather than acting, labelled through no fault of his/her own. The underdog comes out on top, but they are stripped of intent and motive and portrayed as nothing more than the "passive playthings of labelling processes"(Gouldner, 1970, as cited by Heidensohn, 1989:76).

What is neglected here is the function of deviance. Like many features of the subculture, mistakenly perceived by the uninitiated to be pointless and arbitrary, illegality plays a coherent and internally recognised role:

"It defeats the point if, all of a sudden, you're allowed to do it . . . it's not the same as blatantly running around and just going on a mission"(Akit).

Illegality represents the subculture's backbone. Without it, the threat, danger, challenge or test and the fame, respect and masculine identity writers earn from completing this, would, as Iz implies, be lost:

"It was wanting to belong to something that I thought was creative and dangerous. It helped me build my masculinity"(Iz).

Fun and enjoyment must also be added to this list of illegal affordances. These aspects of crime are often overlooked (Jefferson, 1993; Katz, 1988), but for writers, illegally derived threat ensures illegally derived pleasure:

Nancy:*"If it was legal would it lose its appeal?"*

Col:*"Yea, because then there'd be no threat, graffiti would be a waste of time. I go bombing for the excitement, it's like I get a great adrenaline rush out there, I really do"(Col).*

Nancy:*"So what if it was legal?"*

Claw:*"I would never do it. If it's legal anyone can do it, who cares! . . . If they said, 'hey come bring your little card, you can get spray paint, you get a designated wall', it would be utterly boring"(Claw).*

The hazards associated with breaking the law transform a writer's quest for masculine definition into an additional search for thrill and adventure. And both these observed affordances transform breaking the law into a gesture of action rather than mere reaction (Emler & Reicher, 1995). Becker (1963) fails to acknowledge that deviance often has a purpose. That, in cases such as this, breaking the law is not accidental, it is deliberate.

In accounting for the ways in which social control amplifies deviance, Wilkins (1964) makes the same mistake. Again, the deviants are victims rather than perpetrators. Deviance is seen to escalate, not because individuals gain from this process, but because they lose:

> "The definition of society leads to the development of the self-perception as
> 'deviant' on the part of the 'outliers' (outlaws), and it is hardly to be expected
> that people who are excluded by a system will continue to regard themselves
> as part of it"(Wilkins, 1964:92).

While it is important to recognise the power and inertia of institutional forces, in the words of Emler & Reicher (1995):

> "It is equally important to recognise that people may also adapt, shape and

seek to use for their own ends the definitions thrust upon them"

Emler & Reicher (1995) rewrite Wilkins's (1964) chain of events by making the reputation one gains from deviant action its cause as well as consequence. Graffiti follows this modified script. Writers maintain their activities because they wish to retain the image or definition that has been imposed upon them. It is not a gesture of frustrated alienation (Wilkins, 1964), but a gesture of celebration. Writers strive to be outlaws. The construction of this identity remains a vitally important reason for their subcultural involvements:

"It's against the law, you know at that time when you're growing up it's like you're just an outlaw, you know. You don't have a horse, but you can be like an outlaw, you're out in the wild west . . . . The whole thing about graffiti is being an outlaw"(Sae 6).

The part the defining agencies play in intensifying deviance has, therefore, been miscast. Yes, declaring this activity illegal and reacting to it as such sustains its existence (Wilkins, 1964):

"I think that the actual essential thing is the fact that it is illegal. If you took that away from it then it would never exist or it wouldn't carry on to exist"(Proud 2).

But for different reasons. Its proscribed status and the counteractive measures of others infuse excitement into this endeavour, whilst also donating writers the tools they need to fashion and form their desired masculine identities. Just as masculinity is carved out of conflict with school authorities (see for e.g., Connell, 1989; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Messerschmidt 1993, 1994; Willis 1977), so is it defined in similar ways through opposition against this body of law.

The masculine product that emerges from this contestual relationship helps to sketch in one of the areas left unexplored in Emler & Reicher's (1995) theoretical study of delinquency. They account for the predominance of male crime by calling attention to the more negative attitudes boys hold towards formal authority. However, explanation is left at this. They do not go on to explore why boys are more adverse to authority than girls. In short, they do not make it clear that boys gain something from this opposition that girls do not, namely a relevant and meaningful identity. While delinquency or the defiance of authority can be seen as "a form of self-presentation through which young people manage their public reputations"(Emler & Reicher, 1995:7), in this case it is perhaps better understood as a form of masculine presentation through which young men manage their male reputations.

FEMALE PRESENCE WITHIN A MALE DOMINATED CONFINE - INVOLVEMENT AS THE SUBCULTURAL 'OTHER'

Having focused on the subculture's male majority, I wish to conclude this chapter by placing a spotlight on the female writer. Her influence within this subculture is minimal. Girls constitute a minority section of membership. The three I interviewed, namely Pink, Akit and Claw, represent at least a half or probably even a majority of all those currently writing around the world.

The absence of girls within subcultures is well recognised and has been related to their experience of greater parental control, their domestic apprenticeship within the home (Frith, 1978, as cited by Brake, 1985) or their differential interests and concerns (McRobbie, 1980; McRobbie & Garber, 1976, 1991). I would endorse one more reason for this. Namely, that girls, perhaps, "organise their social life as an alternative to the kinds of risks and qualifications involved in entering into the mainstream of male subcultural life"(McRobbie & Garber, 1991:7) because these risks and qualifications offer themselves as tools for a typically masculine as opposed to feminine identity construction.

Researchers have been slow in acknowledging the subculture as a site of masculine construction and, thus, slow in observing the related implications of the female member's absence or indeed the inferior and secondary role she occupies when she is present. Previously, this role has been interpreted as reflecting the sexism of the outside world (Brake, 1985) and the female's subordinate place within this (McRobbie & Garber, 1991). However, located within the subculture's constructive framework, it is perhaps better understood as a position that has been enforced upon her by boys who are attempting to maintain and protect the conditions which enable them to formulate their masculine identities. If boys use their subcultural activities to comment upon their masculine status, then a girl who involves herself in the same way dilutes this masculine commentary, refutes their claims to manhood and thus essentially represents a threat. This threat can be deflected and denied through exclusion and relegation; a girl on the sidelines has very much less to say than a girl on the pitch.

An examination of the difficulties Claw, Pink and Akit experience as female writers will be used to illustrate how male writers cherish and attempt to protect the subculture's masculine constructive role. It will also be used to fill in some of the gaps left by previous theorists. Many accounts tell us that girls are subculturally excluded and relegated, but they do not tell us how. Likewise, their response to this subordination is also neglected, leaving us with a static picture of

unquestioned and accepted gender relations. Referencing the often silent voice of the 'other', this section will bring this picture to life. Male writers work hard to exclude and suppress their female counterparts and, recognising this, female writers work hard to oppose and override these measures of marginalisation.

It should be noted that this is a typical, rather than uniform, outline of subcultural gender relations. It is possible that other male writers hold attitudes and other female writers have experiences that deviate from the ones presented here. On the basis of their cross cultural membership (New York and London) and their similar commentaries, this section provides a standard portrayal of male reactions to female inclusion and the obstacles they confront within these male dominated boundaries.

HURDLES OF ACCEPTANCE - OVERCOMING FEMALE DISTINCTION

Let us start by looking at some of these obstacles. This section will examine female status as a hurdle of acceptance; a blemished distinction that female writers must try to suppress and obliterate to earn subcultural recognition and acknowledgement.

HOLDING BACK THE TEARS AND THE FLOWERS

Very few girls do graffiti because, in light of writers' earlier comments, they lack bravery and stamina. Those that do express an interest, thus, override these previous rationalisations. Again, however, girls were referenced as behaving differently to boys. Despite their willing and courage, they are still seen to be incapable of coping with the difficulties of a train yard:

Steam:*"I couldn't handle going to a train yard with a girl hanging by, then all of a sudden we get raided and, like, this girl would be panicking, she wouldn't know where to run, what to do, she wouldn't be able to run that fast and she would get us all caught. I wouldn't take a girl to the yards"*

Nancy:*"What makes you think a girl couldn't handle it?"*

Steam:*"I don't reckon they could. Like, say, for instance, we go to a train yard and all of a sudden we get a raid, what would you do?"*

Nancy:*"I'd run wherever I came in"*

Steam:*"What would you do if you got caught? Would you inform the police of where they live or whatever? Say, for instance, they said to you, 'you can either go to prison or you can tell us about these other people?'"*

Nancy:*"I don't think I'd react any differently to a bloke"*

Steam:*"I dunno, I reckon you would, you'd crack under pressure"(Steam).*

Again, the masculinity of the exercise is emphasised; she may have the daring to go, but, unlike males, this resolve would quickly diminish within the situation itself. Pink and Akit recall this as a common reaction to their requests to accompany male writers on train yard trips:

"They didn't take me seriously, some little girl like, 'take me to the train yard, take me to the train yard', and they wouldn't have anything to do with it. . . . I got the things, 'oh you'll scream, we'll have to protect you' . . . . Some people don't want that added responsibility, you're worried for your own ass as it is"(Pink).

Nancy:*"So writers are not keen to take you to a yard?"*

Akit:*"Oh no, they think I'd cry and go, 'boo hoo', you know if someone comes along I'd just go, 'alright then take me'. But I'll be running faster than the rest of them man! I'll leave 'em for dust, I don't care, I'll just run"(Akit).*

Girls enter the subculture and gain an automatic and stigmatised set of stereotypical feminine qualities. As such, they face a hurdle that boys do not. While they start already equipped with the masculine status that ensures their acceptance, girls start with a feminine status that must be disguised, rejected and suppressed:

"Guys can't lose face by wimping out in front of a girl, I couldn't do that either. I couldn't go off and cry and scream and carry on like a girl because that's what they expected, so I can't do that. I had to prove myself too, that I wasn't a wimp and I could carry my own paint thankyou"(Pink).

The female writer's task is a difficult one. Male writers work to prove they are 'men', but female writers must work to prove they are 'women'. As Pink illustrates above and below, they must replace all signs of femininity (incapability) with signs of masculinity (capability):

Nancy:*"So would you say a lot of the qualities you need are traditionally masculine, macho?"*

Pink:*"Yes, I had to adopt all of that. I had to be an aggressive little thing and dress like a boy"(Pink).*

She also had to paint like a boy which she failed to do. As one male writer comments:

Freedom:*"It's unfortunate that her earlier work was as feminine as it was because I think that turned off guys. Guys wanted to paint guy stuff"*

Nancy:*"Right, and if she was going to be part of this then she would have to paint like a guy"*

Freedom:*"Yea, and she wanted to paint flowers"(Freedom).*

Pink's floral style failed to conform to male standards of stylistic excellence. In maintaining this 'feminine' and deviant orientation, she sacrificed the recognition that was granted to male writers of equivalent artistic ability.

FINDING THE 'BALLS' TO BE ONE OF THE BOYS

Subculturally, there is little room for a woman to represent herself as a woman. As Fine (1987) also found within other male dominated groups, men set the standards that women must live up to and masculinity remains the yardstick against which women are judged. As this comment implies, it takes *masculine* courage and daring to perform under these conditions:

"It takes a lot of balls and skill to go out and paint a good piece"

(Eez - 'Freestyle' Newsletter 5).

A girl desiring acceptance must, as in anywhere in society, behave in a way that compares to a boy. She must act as if she has 'balls', that is, she must exhibit the same qualities that boys are thought to possess:

Nancy: *"What qualities would a girl need to get involved?"*

Col: *"We'd, like, put her on a mission to, like, see if she gets up enough, if she's got the balls to go"(Col).*

Masculine correspondence is upheld as her objective. Consequently, when she satisfies this, male writers signify and approve her worth by comparing or assessing her in male terms:

"Lady Pink was like just another one of the boys. She was down, she used to go hard, she'd do like handball courts and stuff, she was really good"(Col).

Pink is credited because she acted like 'one of the boys'. Similarly, once Claw demonstrated her commitment, her distinction as a female was removed in reward:

"What happened with 'The Violators', they were like, 'ooh check her out', and then they saw that I could do this and I am serious and now it's like, 'yo, this is Claw'. The first time I was like the little princess, now I'm just one of the boys"(Claw).

To be treated like 'one of the boys' is an evident sign of accomplishment. It indicates that the girl has behaved in a characteristically male way and has, thus, successfully diminished her distinction as a female.

However, the female writer still has more to prove. She may dress, behave and paint like one of the boys, but her female status remains highlighted until she demonstrates that her incentives are legitimate.

DEDICATION AND COMMITMENT AS UNOBTAINABLE MEASURES OF FEMALE AUTHENTICITY

Dedication and commitment are centrally important subcultural values. While they serve a practical purpose (fame is only obtained through continued activity), they are also embraced and upheld as the measuring rod by which writers are appraised:

Nancy: *"So what qualities do you need to be a good writer?*

Kilo: *"You've got to go through it all really . . . . You've got to bomb up, you've got to go through all your tagging years, if you get busted you've got to continue sort of thing"*

Lee: *"It's dedication, isn't it"*

Kilo: *"Yea, that's it really, like you said, that's the one word that sums it up"*

(Kilo & Lee).

Writers who have satisfied the stages of productivity cited above are said to have 'paid their dues'. This indicates that an active and full service of illegal work has been completed and a sufficient display of dedication has been evidenced. Writers are legitimised by such industry. Measures which offer a short cut or alternative route to fame and profile are only sanctioned if the writer has already 'paid his/her dues'. Illustrating this, Smith comments below on Revs and Cost, two writers from New York who are currently enjoying enormous fame from their use of sticker based messages (see Figure 22.)

Figure 22. Revs & Cost's Sticker Based Messages

While disapproving of their nonconformist subcultural activities, Smith legitimises Revs, the writer with a past history of industrious work. Revs's partner, Cost, has

not, in Smith's view, 'paid his dues' and, thus, earnt his right to this immense prominence or 'cheap fame':

Smith:*"Revs used to get up on the trains and he did some nice pieces. Cost never really did trains, the little bit he did he was considered a toy [incompetant artist] by the older generations"*

Nancy:*"But they've made a massive name for themselves"*

Smith:*"It's hard to say, because there are other graffiti writers, like myself, who are concerned with what they do with graffiti, so it's kind of hard to respect them for those things. . . . I guess I give Revs more respect because I know who he was"(Smith).*

Individuality and uniqueness is, thus, complemented by conformity - to stand out, one must fit in and conformity comes in the shape of dedicated work through established and legitimate stages of activity. This declares a writer's commitment, but it also acts to confirm his/her subcultural fidelity and devotion:

"See the more you get up, the more respect you get. Other people will say, 'oh he's done a lot give him respect'. . . . If you do just one thing, then they will say, 'hey, you're not really dedicated to the art form'"(Smith).

A faithful or dedicated writer is one who is undeterred; one who continues to demonstrate subcultural allegiance and commitment despite passing trends, external concerns and obstacles that make curtailment tempting:

"I remember in the mid eighties writers were like, 'oh graffiti's played out', see it was like a trend to certain people, like fashion and all that, graffiti was like that for them. But the real dedicated would ignore that, they would keep doing it"(Cavs).

Kilo:*"If you're not dedicated, the first time you get arrested you're going to give up"*

Lee:*"Then you're not a writer in the first place, because if you were you wouldn't give up just because you got caught"*

Kilo:*"Yea, it wouldn't stop you"(Kilo & Lee).*

A dedicated writer is, as Lee confirms, a 'writer'. Fidelity, commitment and conformity grant a writer an authentic subcultural identity. This construction is not, however, equally accessible to all - remaining, in many ways, a male privilege. While the female writer can attempt to establish these constructive foundations, she does not, as we shall see, get the same chance as male writers to do so.

Firstly, expressions of dedication and fidelity are blockaded by the female writer's characteristic subcultural incentive; her male writer boyfriend. All three female writers reference a boy as the factor that initially fuelled their interests:

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"I met some girl at my school and I got mates with her and she had an older brother and he was into it and I kind of went out with him for a little bit. . . . He would do outlines for me and all that and I thought, 'that looks alright', you know, and I started writing on a bit of paper"(Akit).

"It was over a boy, he was like my first boyfriend. . . . They sent him away and I was heartbroken, my very first boyfriend, so I hooked up with his friend and learned how to write his name and continued writing his name on the streets and in school"(Pink).

"I had met Sharp and Sharp and I instantly fell in love . . . . He put me up, whenever he wrote a tag it was Sharp Claw. . . . He went away for three months and his friend, Sane, kind of felt like a lost puppy, so he stuck really closely to me and he was the one that took me writing"(Claw).

Male writers I spoke to would always highlight this connection, attributing the female writer's involvement to another male:

Kilo:*"You do get the odd one, like there was some girl that was recently writing Lady"*

Lee:*"You usually find that it's just the writer's girlfriend"(Kilo & Lee).*

In the quote above, 'the writer' claims a male definition. The female writer is denied this status and receives, instead, her label as 'the writer's' girlfriend. She is recognised and defined through her male affiliations because, ultimately, they claim responsibility for her presence:

"A lot of them have been involved in it because of their boyfriends. . . . My sister painted trains in seventy four because her boyfriend was a painter, so he got her into it"(Lee).

The female writer must always escape the stigma that is set against her in these terms. Namely, that she has not entered the subculture through an authentic interest or desire to participate, but has rather fallen into it through a wish to subscribe to her boyfriend's preoccupations:

"A lot of girls get into it in a little way, you know, because they happen to meet a guy and he's into graffiti and all. That's the only way they really take notice of it most times"(Mear).

Male writers use the female writer's attachments to reverse her loyalties. Her boyfriend becomes her focal concern, rather than the subculture, and her interest, commitment and dedication becomes superficial and ephemeral as a result:

"It was just another pastime for them at the time and now they're no one. . . . I don't think there's any girl out there who's dedicated enough. I mean it's a matter of putting in years now to make a name"(Mear).

Claw demonstrates how attitudes changed when she confirmed her desire to prove her worth:

"It was interesting the last time I went painting with Pink and Smith, we went to do freight trains in Queens. We met there and there were two other writers that came that I didn't know and they were, like, acting to me, like, 'oh who's fucking girlfriend is this? What the fuck is this chick doing here? What the fuck!', you know, they were, like, kind of rude to me. . . . When we got to the yards and I pulled out my paint, they were like, 'well, what do you write?', and I said, 'well, why don't you watch'. So I wrote Claw and they were like, 'oh baby Claw, Claw lover, that's you?' and I was like, 'that's me', and then they were so like, 'hey, I think that's great"(Claw).

Illustrating the affliction that girls must suffer, Claw was initially dismissed and, therefore, denigrated as merely a writer's 'girlfriend'. The prominence of her name, however, appeared to endorse her commitment and present her as worthy of respect and approval.

Again, however, a female writer's legitimacy is conditional and limited to reflect her current orientation alone:

"A lot of people are pessimistic about it, 'oh yea, she's a girl, yea sure'. They, kind of, respect that she's getting up, but know she'll give up in six months . . . because most women just start writing because some guy they like is a writer or something like that. I mean I know it sounds terrible, but it's true. Most guys just see them as here today, gone tomorrow"(Drax).

Her commitment is seen as transient and is expected to curtail alongside her supposed source of inspiration, her boyfriend:

"It tends to work out like if there's a girl writing, she's going out with a graffiti artist. . . . Like, as soon as Nicola stopped going out with her boyfriend, she stopped doing graffiti and Sue soon stopped after that, when we split up"(Acrid).

In many ways, the female writer cannot win. She must behave like a male, yet, when she does, she is still judged harshly in accordance with her female status. This remains highlighted, subjecting her to different treatment and presenting her with different objectives. While male writers fulfil subcultural standards of assessment to gain recognition and respect, the female fulfils these to diffuse stigma, deflect male condemnation and gain a sense of acceptance. Akit recognises this distinction, yet she asserts her right to pursue her career with the same intent and pace as any other male writer:

"If they're wanting me to sort of prove myself or something, I'm not going to go out of my way. I don't do it just so they can say, 'oh at least she's doing

it'. I just do it for myself . . . I'm not constantly out to go and, like, prove something and say, 'look I'm here and I'm staying', you know"(Akit).

Even if a female writer did choose to prove she can work as hard as the rest of them, she is still, through no fault of her own, at a serious disadvantage. She is an unusual subcultural member and her ability to earn fame and prominence is both greater and quicker because of this:

"I was already famous as soon as I started, just because I was a girl"(Pink).

"If you're a girl, you've bigged yourself up already, sort of thing"(Acrid).

"You get a lot more famous as a girl"(Smith).

Although this may look a bonus, in subcultural terms it actually represents a hindrance. If a writer gains a sense of legitimacy from a display of dedication and hard work, then being female severely hampers one's ability to confirm this exertion:

"A girl could get away with doing less than a geezer because she's a girl. I know it's sexist and that, but that's the way it is"(Acrid).

The female writer suffers rather than gains from her increased profile. She acquires a shortcut route to prominence which prevents her from fulfilling the conditions which grant writers authenticity. For the female writer, as Akit illustrates, this status remains elusive:

Nancy:*"So you get the feeling they're not taking you seriously yet?"*

Akit:*"I don't know about yet. I don't know, they'll always be ones who think, 'oh she shouldn't do it, she's a girl, what's her problem? She's mad', or whatever. I don't know what I've got to do to prove myself really. You know there was all this rubbish about, 'you're not a proper writer until you've painted a train', so I thought right I've painted a train, what more have I got to do? And someone else says, 'you're not a proper writer until you do a top to bottom whole car', you know what I mean?"(Akit).*

When Akit attempts to attain legitimacy, her endeavours are blockaded and the rules appear to change. The authenticity that male writers enjoy appears to lie just beyond the female writer's reach. She gains an alternative form of acknowledgement, one, as Pink recalls, based upon her activities as a women:

Nancy:*"Were you judged by the same sort of standards as the boys? Did you have to prove yourself and do as much to get respect and status?"*

Pink:*"Um, it's kind of weird, guys are still, they're like, 'yea that's really good for a girl', and stuff like that"*

Nancy:*"So there's double standards?"*

Pink:*"Yea"(Pink).*

Perhaps, as Freedom testifies, female writers like Pink will never obtain the recognition that other boys would be granted:

Nancy: *"Was Pink judged by the same standards as the guys?"*

Freedom: *"No, not at all, no, anything she did was going to be jaded. People would look at it and they would either, A. patronise it and say, 'ah well, that's a good piece', whether it was good or bad or, B. they would just dismiss it because it was Pink. It was one of the two and she would never get the credit she deserved for being a fine painter, which I think she is"(Freedom).*

The subculture's beliefs and standards work to make female recognition elusive. Boundaries of acceptance are narrowed or closed and testimonies of achievement remain intangible. Unable to escape her female distinction, the credit she supposedly earns from masculine correspondence stands unrealised. These outlined obstacles begin to afford us a sense of the female writer's unwelcome subcultural presence.

THE UNWELCOME 'OTHER'

As Akit's experiences testify, females can encounter a hostile reception from other writers, one which clearly acts to signify their unwanted inclusion:

"I haven't been anywhere with all them top bods and all that, like half of them don't even talk to me. I don't know what their problem is . . . . Like I saw 'Teach' at Fulham and either he was bloody stoned or I don't know, but I nodded and goes alright and he just looks straight through me and a few of them are like that as well"(Akit).

Deliberate indications of disrespect work to convey the same message. While painting at a hall of fame:

"I went off for, like, half an hour and when I was gone Diet turned up with Hash, Skore, Mear, Mess and, like, Elk was there painting at the same time. And, like, Skore comes along, 'oh that's that Akit bird', they were all standing there talking about me and Max was painting away listening to them and Skore was going, 'yea, I wanted to paint that wall, I might just go over it', even though I'd just finished it. I was just thinking, 'fuck off, oh what's the point', you know I've never even chatted to the bloke"(Akit).

Skore's proposed actions represent an emphatic insult. Writers do not paint over other writers' newly painted pieces unless they wish to signify their insignificance.

In both cases, then, male writers openly demonstrate that Akit is supposed to admire what they do, not do what they do. This message is received and understood:

Nancy: *"Do you think their attitudes might be to do with the fact that it's so male dominated, that you shouldn't be involved in their eyes?"*

Akit: *"Well yea, I'm sure. It's a totally male dominated thing, like totally. It's a bloke's thing, graffiti, you don't associate it with girls at all, it doesn't come into it really"*

Nancy: *"So they're sort of possessive about it?"*

Akit: *"Yea"(Akit).*

This is masculine territory and like women who invade other male dominated confines such as the police force (Fielding, 1994), the factory shop floor (Messerschmidt, 1993), the military (Morgan, 1994) and football (Williams & Taylor, 1994), the female writer clearly represents an unpopular visitor. Why?

NO PLACE FOR A WOMAN - THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER CONVENTIONS

Although the subculture itself represents a blatant rejection of the conventional, attitudes towards gender remain paradoxically traditional (Brake, 1985). Conventional sex roles and the pressures of heterosexuality are not escaped, as McRobbie (1980) has suggested, they are reproduced, maintained and reinforced (Messerschmidt, 1993). Illustrating this, Iz locates a woman's expected role within a conventionally passive or peripheral domain:

"Girlfriends of writers, let me tell you something, the shit they have to go through because they're loving and caring and know the risks and dangers involved"(Iz).

While the man performs his role as the warrior, the woman should stand at the sidelines anxiously awaiting her hero's return. In deviating from this script, Pink clearly overstepped observed boundaries of female respectability and conformity. Her male contemporaries extended their gender roles through subcultural participation, but she offended against hers:

"A lot of them were old school Latin guys and a woman's place is not in a train tunnel competing with them. That's the main thing I give her a lot of credit for, not even so much for what she did, what she didn't do, but for sticking it out because it's a hell of a ride"(Freedom).

The message is clear; a hazardous environment designed to facilitate masculine competition and display is no place for a woman. Men work to ensure this is fully understood:

"I think Sharp didn't want me to write and he has a problem with me writing now. We're broken up, but he told me that he doesn't like it. He asked me if I was doing it to bother him and no I'm not"(Claw).

Although involved himself, Sharp found Claw's activities difficult to accept. Lee, a writer, adopted a similar attitude to his girlfriend Pink's involvement. While

sympathising with his motives, she could not abide his attempts to dictate her behaviour:

"He wouldn't allow me to paint trains and all that because he knew how dangerous it was. I mean that's just a boyfriend's kind of protectiveness, it's just, 'forget it, my girl is not going into danger at all'. . . . He wouldn't let me hang out with graffiti writers or paint trains, so I rebelled against that and after a few years that was that"(Pink).

Akit offers a similar commentary, viewing this control as a violation of her self command and freedom:

"A lot of blokes don't like it. I've had a couple of boyfriends and they're just, 'right give it up', and all this stuff. And I've said to geezers, 'look if you don't like it, if you can't accept it, fuck it, because I'm not giving up for no one except myself, if I want to"(Akit).

The female writer stands upon harsh and often hostile terrain, yet she confronts this adversity with a determination to persevere. Aside from enjoyment, an additional motivation perhaps lies in her ability to make a statement (see Figure 23.):

"People have tried to repress me. This is my total statement to all of them that I'm going for it, love it and lick it. . . . I'm doing it as my feminist statement to the world"(Claw).

Figure 23. 'Girlz Just Want to Have Fun' - Claw

Through disregarding her prescribed codes of feminine behaviour and opposing male attempts to put her back in her place, the female writer disrupts the subculture's and society's sexual status quo and rejects her subordinate place

within this. In doing so, she also asks for a new subcultural profile. As this quote illustrates, hers is very much out of date:

> "Girls are present within male subcultures, but are contained within them rather than using them to explore actively forms of female identity. The subculture may be a social focus, something to dress up for and an escape from the restraints of home, school and work, but as yet no distinct forms of femininity, which have broken from tradition,.have evolved"(Brake, 1985:167).

The subcultural female who passively embraces her assigned and traditional feminine role takes her final bow. Her part is now played by a woman who rejects conventional femininity and masculine dominance; a woman who does her own thing. Liberated and independent, however, is not the only thing she becomes through this display.

'IT'S A MAN'S WORLD BUT IT WOULD MEAN NOTHING WITH A WOMAN OR A GIRL' - THE THREAT OF FEMININITY

What the female writer effectively demonstrates through her active subcultural involvement, is her ability to be 'masculine'. What the female writer effectively becomes through this illustration, is a threat:

"I find that men are very, very threatened by me writing because it's very masculine to them. They don't understand at all. It's like, 'oh I don't want my girlfriend running around on the street writing graffiti'. I went out with this guy last year . . . he had written when he was young, but he had a big problem with it and he would call me up and say, 'what are you doing?', 'oh darling, I'm just home knitting and I'm baking a pie and I think I'm going to stay in tonight and wash my hair!'. He had such a problem with me writing . . . so many men are threatened by it"(Claw).

So why is this female display of 'masculinity' threatening? To answer this, we need to look at the relational way in which these gender identities are formulated (Gutterman, 1994; Herek, 1987; Kimmel, 1987, 1994; Messner, 1987). As Herek (1987), citing McGuire (1984), explains:

> "Personal identity (self concept) involves what we are not, at least as much as what we are"(Herek, 1987:76).

Masculinity and femininity are not boundaried and isolated constructs, as the sex role theory implies, they are critically interlinked. One cannot exist or be defined without the other (Kimmel, 1987):

> "Identity requires difference in order to be, and converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty"
>
> (Connolly, 1991:64, as quoted by Gutterman, 1994:221).

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To retain its clarity, masculinity must be other than or different to femininity (Flannigan-Saint-Aubin, 1994; Messner, 1987; Pleck & Thompson, 1987; Segal, 1990). As Segal (1990) explains:

> "It is insufficient for the 'men' to be distinguished from the 'boys'; the men must be distinguished from the 'women'"(Segal, 1990:132).

Being a man, as Kimmel (1994) asserts, means not being like a woman. Women must remain 'women' to allow men to remain 'men'.

Through declaring graffiti 'men's work' and, hence, beyond female capability, male writers activate and try to sustain this gender distinction. Through declaring graffiti 'women's work' as well, the female writer threatens to dilute this distinction:

"Basically, writing for me was to tell these guys for all these years that I've had, 'girls can't do this, oh, you can't come blah, blah, blah, no, no, no, oh no, you have to stay home, oh no, you're fucking bullshit', this is my way to say, 'look, I'm a woman and I can write too'"(Claw).

Emphatic in her desire to eradicate difference and dispel beliefs of female incapacity, Claw strives to extend herself and place her work within contexts which ensure this message is fully relayed and digested:

"I want to do the riskiest, the most outrageous stuff because I'm a woman. So people would say, 'how the fuck did she do that? A nice Jewish girl, nice Jewish girls don't write'. I write and I write for women. I'm doing this to say, 'you and your closed little mind, we can do this, anybody can do it, as long as they have the will and desire to do it'"(Claw).

Coming from a subordinate position, the female writer has little to lose through this assertion of equality. She merely reinforces the fact that she, as Zaki recognises, claims as much right to this 'masculine' ability as her male peers:

"Whether it's right or wrong, it's seen as a masculine thing to go out and risk your life and everything like that. But when you strip it down, everyone is equal to do that, you don't need anything . . . there's no reason why a girl can't go out and do that"(Zaki).

The male writer, however, has everything to lose:

> "If women can do what 'real men' do, the value of the practice for accommodating masculinity is effectively challenged"
>
> (Messerschmidt, 1993:132).

Female capability muffles the sound of his masculine commentary. Female superiority, however, fully silences it. The threat of femininity reaches full force when women do what 'real men' do better than them:

Pink:"*Boys, because of their machoness they can't back out of these things, but females can say, 'no I'm scared, forget it' . . . . They have to admit that they're manly and that's all there is to it, especially when there's a girl watching them. The boys have to do the stupidest things when I'm watching them*"

Nancy:"*So your boys had a harder time?*"

Pink:"*Yea, they couldn't wimp out, they couldn't lose it. Last week some kids walked up on us in the yard, two of the boys that went with us, and one of them is older, they took off running like rabbits. Ah man, they didn't come back for an hour! I felt so bad for him, I know this guy was embarrassed*"*(Pink).*

To wimp out in front of another man constitutes loss of face. But to do so in front of a woman who does not demonstrate this fear, makes this failure doubly significant, lessening their status as men considerably.

Reasons for the female writer's unwelcome subcultural presence can now be fully understood. Through inhabiting this 'masculine' discourse and dissolving her role as the 'other', she disrupts the subculture's constructive conditions and shatters beliefs that this activity awards male writers uncontested 'masculine' status. And this is, in many ways, her objective. She is far more politically informed than previous theorists have given her credit for:

> "Girls may rebel against male supremacy, but even in the aggressive
> subcultures toughness is not aimed against their men, but is a move to be
> accepted by machismo men"(Brake, 1985:176).

Male acceptance and approval is important, but the female writer's priorities lie in stripping men of their self asserted sovereignty:

"*I'm doing this to rebel against men . . . . It's like a fucking repression against women, it's like go fuck yourself, I can do this shit better than you, so what have you got to say about it?*"*(Claw).*

Not a lot perhaps, but there is much they try to do about it.

DEFLECTING THREAT - FEMALE ABSENCE IN SPITE OF HER PRESENCE

Eliade (1958) and Remy (1990) define a 'mannebunde' as a 'men's hut' or male fraternity/paternity grouping. Reflecting its function, women are usually rigidly excluded:

> "This is the place where those males who have earned the right to call
> themselves *men*, or are in process of attaining this emblem of privilege,
> gather"(Remy, 1990:46. Italics in original).

Owing to the female's presence, the subculture fails to fully satisfy this definition - though not through want of trying. While male writers cannot physically prevent female incorporation, they can, through excluding the competitive force they represent, deny them positioning within a male centred subcultural core. Strategies operate to secure her symbolic exclusion or 'absent presence' and thus salvage masculine potency.

THE DENIAL OF FEMALE AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

Claw recognises the threatening nature of female achievement and outlines one strategy male writers use to try and deflect it:

"This guy, 'Deal', he disses [disrespects] me all the time, 'oh who did your piece?', I'm like, 'I did my piece', 'oh yea right, that kid did your piece'. It's because he's real up and he's a dick and he's jealous and I said, 'you want to piece? I'll burn you off the wall, let's go paint', and he never comes through. He knows and I know he's afraid of me"(Claw).

Denying Claw accountable for her own work, or a chance to prove this, supports the belief that she is unable to work unaided and, thus, effectively extinguishes her competitive force. Like Claw, Pink's accountability was also revoked. She explains how she worked to reclaim it:

"At first I didn't get respect because everybody just thought I was somebody's girlfriend and so and so was putting up my name. But, you know, after a while I went piecing deliberately with different groups in different parts of New York so that everyone could see that I could actually paint this stuff and I'm not having some guy do it for me"(Pink).

By painting with a wide variety of writers, Pink asserted her own authority and, thus, right to respect. Claw makes similar claims through refusing male guidance or intervention:

"When people try to help me do my piece, I get really, 'no, no, no, I have to do it, don't, I'm doing it', because I don't want anybody to, you know, say, 'oh, I saw Divo do her piece'. I want to do my piece"(Claw).

Male attempts to help female writers are common. As Pink recalls:

"Whenever I did go with other guys and older guys it always brought out this paternalness half in them . . . . They'd get so silly and stuff, like not letting me climb a big fence or anything like that, they would just reach for me and pass me like a little doll. They'd also put me in the spot most likely so I could get away faster and everyone else in the higher risk spot or something and just do all kinds of chivalrous things that normally they

wouldn't do for a little toy [young inexperienced writer], kind of weird"(Pink).

It is significant that this gallantry was not extended to the male 'toys' present, who, being novices, perhaps required this aid more than Pink herself. This suggests that as males, 'toys' or not, they must prove themselves by their own merits and learn to stand on their own two feet as 'men'. Pink was absolved of this form of masculine test. She could accompany them, but, as a female, she was not expected or, indeed, allowed to prove her worth in these terms. The assistance she received inevitably diffused the masculine impact of her actions. Likewise, her achievements could now be accredited to male intervention. Claw refuses help and refuses male writers this entitlement:

Nancy: *"Do some guys get paternal with you? Do they try and take you under their wing?*

Claw: *"Sometimes, yea sure, but I don't let it get to that level because I'm Claw, I'm not under anybody's wing. I'm wingless, I'm flying on my own two feet here. You know I'm sure some people would like to say I'm under their wing, but I'm not."(Claw).*

Through eradicating the female writer's authority and, thus, competitive force, the male writer is able to preserve his masculine potency. He performs unaided, his actions therefore retain their masculine commentary. He performs against other males alone, his actions therefore retain their masculine legitimacy. He performs, she does not. Without a competitive input, the female writer loses her sense of subcultural occupation. The boys remain the competitors and, thus, only members of this reconstructed fraternity grouping. As we can see, female writers recognise this and act in ways to undercut it.

THE SEXUAL OBJECT

The female writer is allocated an alternative subcultural position, one where her status as a female overrides her status as a writer. With this, she receives an alternative form of appraisal. While male writers are acknowledged for their artistic skills and accomplishments, her worth is based upon the only significant facet of her distinguished status, her physical appearance:

Nancy: *"Would you have a girl in your crew?"*

Steam: *"All depends how nice looking she was"*

Nancy: *"What about Lady Pink? She's good, Would you have her in your crew?"*

Steam: *"No, she hasn't got good enough legs! If I was going to have a girl in my crew, she would have to be nice looking!"(Steam).*

Nancy:"*So if a girl was to be involved, would she be accepted into a crew?"*

Lee:"*Depends how nice looking she is!"*

Kilo:"*That would probably come into it, ha, ha!"(Kilo & Lee).*

On a graffiti related level, girls remain irrelevant. Their recognition is hinged upon their interest value as females alone:

Nancy:"*So what would be the reaction if suddenly there was a girl tagging all over London, more than anybody else? Would there be quite a lot of talk about it?"*

Steam:"*Oh yes, there would. She would be respected, they'd all be thinking, 'I wonder if she's nice looking, I wonder if she's a good!', that's the attitude"*

Nancy:"*But wouldn't she also be respected for doing what the rest of you are good at?"*

Steam:"*A little bit, yea"*

Nancy:"*But more for whether she's fit. So if she got up more than anyone else?"*

Steam:"*I don't know, she might be respected, but people would just see it as, 'I wonder what she's like', it's, like, sexist"*

Nancy:"*So a girl hasn't anything else to offer?"*

Steam:"*In a way, yea. That's how I see it anyway, I don't know about other people"(Steam).*

Other people appear to share this view. Jel declares a girl's common interest in graffiti irrelevant to his reasons for wanting to interact with her:

Nancy:"*What about the girls involved?"*

Jel:"*Female writers, I don't really care much for them. . . . That art show we went to, I was talking to girl writers, but I didn't care about the graffiti part of it, 'how about you and me getting together, go round the block and have a beer?', you know"(Jel).*

In line with this physical focus, a female writer's sexual activities also override her subcultural actions in significance. Freedom illustrates with reference to Pink:

"*You know on the surface everyone was, 'hey Pink, How are you doing Pink? Good to see you Pink', and then the next second it was like, 'yo, you know who Pink is doing? I know she's sleeping with this guy and that guy and blah blah', none of which is really true, but it was just guys being guys"(Freedom).*

In the majority of cases these sexual allegations are unfounded. They remain exaggerated stories or spurious rumours. Nonetheless, they generate difficulties and cause a considerable amount of distress:

"Graffiti writers would just bad mouth me and say I'm just some little slut, I'm probably just doing everybody when I go to the train yard. These rumours have stuck until now, people are still saying stuff, guys are still saying that they did so and so with me, guys I wouldn't touch with a ten foot pole are saying horrible things to me . . . . It's that you're a dyke or a slut, that's it, so I had a lot of problems with that"(Pink).

"There have been times when I've been really, really fucked off with writers full stop in general. Just because all of them, because it's such a little community . . . and because I'm the only girl I get talked about enough and I've heard the maddest stories I'm supposed to have done. I'm supposed to have fucked this writer and that writer I don't even know. I'm supposed to give any writer a blow job, give me a tin of hammerite and I'll do anything and all this kind of stuff, just the maddest things. And at times it's just been like this constant battle where I've got to try and prove myself that I'm not a slag, I'm not out to fuck writers, you know what I mean?"(Akit).

These characterisations are so commonplace that when I raised this matter with Zaki, he was able to predict what I was going to say before I had said it:

Nancy:*"Every single girl I've spoken to has said exactly the same thing, in that the rumours that go around are all the same"*

Zaki:*"'Oh what artist is she fucking?' I'm afraid that's men down to a tee . . . no one would say that about a bloke, would they?"(Zaki).*

Men, as Zaki distinguishes, would not be considered in these terms. This is clearly illustrated in the extract below, where Claw's status as a writer is discussed by a group of male writers:

Nancy:*"So how do writers see Claw as a writer?"*

Sein 5:*"She has a bad rep"*

Nancy:*"Why?"*

Sein 5:*"Because she's a slut or something. I dunno, I dunno because I don't know her. She does have a bad rep though, but that's a rep, that's bullshit"*

Nancy:*"But as a writer is she respected?"*

Key:*"She's a jack [novice]. If you weren't hitting trains, then you missed out"(Key & Sein 5).*

In asking for their views of Claw as a writer, rather than comment, or not, on what they knew about her ability or achievements, these writers chose to evaluate her in

terms of her sexual behaviour. Had I asked the same question about a male writer, I am sure this reference would not have featured in their response. Unlike a female, a male writer's reputation or identity rests upon his graffiti related pursuits, not his sexual conduct, his demonstrations of masculinity, not his passive physicality. Basically his status "rests on his behaviour in spheres other than sexuality"(Hudson, 1988:37).

The female writer is transformed into a sexual object and her emasculating capacity is diminished as a result; achievements which may carry masculine significance are abrogated and the challenge she may represent is deflected. Likewise, the subculture's 'mannebunde' (Eliade, 1958; Remy, 1990) status is also maintained. Girls are refused acknowledgement by the criteria which serve to define boys and are, thus, metaphorically excluded from this male occupied subcultural core.

Male writers work hard to secure the female writer's 'absent presence' and it is not hard to understand why. By "suppressing them, men can stake a claim for their own manhood"(Kimmel, 1994:134). The female writer regains her unthreatening role as the 'other' and the male writer regains the male only retreat he needs to preserve, reassure (Rutherford, 1988) and maintain his masculine potency. Supporting this, Iz implicates the subculture as a masculine safe house; a forum where males can escape the pervasive influence of feminism and its discerned attack upon masculinity:

"Look at how masculinity and the male species is under attack. We always have to make the change, in the workplace, home life. How many years were men raised as the breadwinner? What you say goes now. Alright, we're sensible, so we're more open minded nowadays . . . but possibly because of the constant attack against masculinity, that is where this comes from"(Iz).

A female free subculture evades this feminist critique, its pressures for equality and the potential emasculation that accompanies this. Ultimately, it acts to defend and grant the traditional notions of masculinity that are now taboo, free expression. In this sense, the subculture can be also be understood in historical terms; as a masculine backlash against the changes pioneered by the second wave of the Women's Movement.

This subculture must be acknowledged for what it is. Not just a site for 'youth', but a site for male youth - a confine which works to feed, nourish and, through female exclusion, salvage notions of masculinity (Segal, 1990). Subcultural accounts of

the past failed to fully explore or develop this analytic angle. Miller (1958) alludes to masculinity in his examination of the subculture's 'focal concerns', as does Albert Cohen (1955) when he distinguishes between male and female crime. Yet, in both cases, issues of gender are overshadowed by a prioritised spotlight upon issues of class. Their failure to adequately deal with gender is perhaps understandable. As Heidensohn (1989:55) concedes:

"They lacked a sociology which could supply them with the conceptual tools".

The later generation of subcultural theorists cannot claim such allowances (Heidensohn, 1989). The CCCS group may have given their deviants intentions and motives, but by prioritising 'style', over the masculine and often hazardous nature of subcultural resistance, I would say they gave many of them the wrong ones. There is more to this subculture's resistance than politics. Writers do not place themselves within grave physical and judicial danger for the sole sake of opposing bourgeois impositions/institutions and parading difference (Corrigan & Frith, 1976). A more immediate and personal reward is gained from this - an unambiguous masculine identity. These theorists neglected the subculture's gender constructive potential. In doing so, they also failed to fully problematise the female's peripheral and menial role within it. Here, we see the female writer dismissed to the outer edges of the subculture, not because she tolerates or accepts this position, but because she is actively forced to these corners by the male majority. Her assigned subordination is not passively embraced or abided, as implied by accounts which leave her voice silent (see for e.g., Brake, 1985; McRobbie & Garber, 1976; McRobbie & Garber, 1991), it is actively resisted. Likewise, there are deliberate motives underlying the male writers' sustenance of this sexist regime. They may be reproducing mainstream gender relations (Brake, 1985), but they are also defending the subculture, and the masculine identity it offers, against the emasculating influence of feminism and the female writer.

These findings call for a reassessment of subcultural theory, but they do not necessarily demand its abandonment. What I have found may be pertinent to this subculture alone. Masculine construction, as an analytic focus, works for graffiti, but could the same be said for the 'rave' or dance subculture? This group places little emphasis upon danger, challenge and competition and reflects a largely equal membership of males and females, although girls still maintain a secondary role (McRobbie, 1994). In this sense, an all encompassing subcultural theory, such as that offered by the CCCS, may be too broad a project. Subcultural groups differ - some may be class based, male based, style based, others may be 'race' based, female based or action based. What holds for one theoretically, may not necessarily hold for another. What we need, then, are theories sensitive to

subcultures in all their rich and varied formulations. Subcultural definitions which reflect and cater for these variations are also required. If one theory can't fit all, then how can one definition?

CHAPTER 6

A WORLD OF ITS OWN: THE SUBCULTURE'S SEGREGATION FROM 'WIDER' SOCIETY

Having alluded to the multifaceted nature of subcultures, this may be a suitable point at which to address questions of definition. We have been told that subcultures:

> "Must be focussed around certain activities, values, certain uses of material artefacts, territorial spaces etc. which significantly differentiate them from wider culture"(Clarke et al., 1976:14).

Yet, we have also been told that this holds for the working classes alone:

> "They are all subordinate sub-cultures, in relation to the dominant middle-class or bourgeois culture"(Clarke et al., 1976:13).

This label is, thus, expansive whilst also selective. Groups which stand outside working class boundaries are denied inclusion because they remain the dominant culture against which definition is based. But this view presumes a dominant culture exists. I, alongside other theorists (Evans, 1995; McRobbie, 1994), have trouble in locating this defined and seemingly coherent dominant majority or cultural norm. Society does not appear to boast a group which fits this description. What it yields instead is a series of disparate groups which each express a distinctive set of values, styles and ways of life. In this sense, we lose a fixed and coherent dominant group and gain, in its place, a diverse collection of apparent 'subcultures'. Realising this, Mear sums up the limitations of this class based subcultural model beautifully below:

"I mean there's so many different meanings to subculture. I mean I look at, I don't know how you say it, 'yuppyism' as a big upper class subculture, but no one wants to talk about them"(Mear).

With these class based boundaries shattered, the subcultural floodgates have opened up and a new set of definitional problems have been washed in; the term 'subculture' is now boundless and, in my view, drenched in vacuity. I attended a conference in which Punks to the company 'Benetton' were included within this formerly confined subcultural category ('Theory, Populism and Sub-cultural Dress', 1995); a conference which left a group of academics very confused. Two and a half hours were spent discussing the utility of this, now, measureless concept: Do subcultures, as we know them, exist or are they merely the subparts that make up a culture in totality? Is a meaningful use of this concept still possible or even valid? Perhaps not. But in declaring the subculture dead and buried, where does this leave its affiliated members?

In my view, they are the ones we should be consulting on these matters as the key to this theoretical dilemma lies, potentially, in their hands. Perhaps subcultures are only subcultures if their own members recognise them as such, if they themselves draw subcultural boundaries or define themselves as members of a distinctive, segregated and recognisable group of like-minded others. Theoretical criteria such as these would enable us to salvage the use and utility of this subcultural concept. If individuals, such as those interviewed by Widdicombe & Wooffitt (1995), provide "little sense of groups they joined", do "not invoke a sense of shared identity, nor the benefits of affiliation with like-minded others" or "do not provide a sense of attributes shared by virtue of common category membership"(Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995:216), then we may conclude that these groups do not qualify as 'subcultures'. A shared stylistic connection may not, as these members imply, be enough to form or secure a group in any tangible sense.

Widdicombe & Wooffitt (1995) put this evidence to different use. Rather than consider this, they use this referenced ambiguity to illustrate the importance of members' individuality and uniqueness and to question the 'social reality' of all groups or subcultures. While I agree with the need for a more fluid subcultural model, I resist this slide into solipsism. Widdicombe & Wooffitt's groups may lack this perceived cohesion or connection, but others do not. Unlike their respondents, members of the graffiti subculture articulate a clear sense of shared identity and membership. They also work to emphasise their societal distinction, segregation and seclusion as a group. This defined sense of community may be a social construction, but does this make it fictional? I have trouble in accepting the extreme relativity that often accompanies a constructionist analysis. In my mind, a process of construction implies a resulting product - in writers' eyes, a boundaried and detached subcultural group.

As such, rather than abandon the term 'subculture' maybe we need to rework it. Despite their different guises, concerns and orientations, perhaps subcultures should be literally that, 'sub-cultures'. 'Sub' - not in the sense that different from or beneath 'wider' culture, but rather separate from. Subcultures may be defined as those groups who perceive and strive to portray themselves as standing apart from others as an isolated, segregated and recognisable group. In this sense, groups which affiliate on stylistic terms alone may not qualify unless, of course, this has led them to operate and uphold clearly defined group boundaries. Subcultural definition is, thus, made possible, but it must be elicited from the members themselves.

This chapter will extract this definition through focusing upon the graffiti subculture as part of and apart from the rest of society. Many accounts examine subcultures making little or no reference to the context which accommodates them. Yet, the relationship between a host and subculture can help us to see processes of group construction and definition in play. Accordingly, the first section of this chapter will examine how writers formulate, encourage and use their segregated societal status to enhance a sense of internal solidarity and maintain the social reality or substance of their subcultural group. How this private, yet also public, subcultural parade is manifested and sustained will also be explored.

Their celebration of this detached subcultural stance will be fully revealed in the second section of this chapter. Again, previous accounts have rarely considered how subcultural members actually perceive their societal status - whether their distinction has positive or negative connotations. Stan Cohen (1987) recognises the resulting consequences of their differentiation, as does Clarke (1976b):

"Aspects of dress, style and appearance therefore play a crucial role in group stigmatisation, and thus in the operation and escalation of social reaction"

(Clarke, 1976b:184).

However, they do not go on to explore what these reactions mean to the members involved or, indeed, the part they may play in actually encouraging these. This silence will be countered here. Like style, the subculture's illegality encourages social rejection and condemnation. For illegal writers, this stigma has positive implications. It is, as I shall demonstrate, desired, encouraged and worked for as it effectively immunises the subculture against societal intervention and enables them to maintain their much cherished status as a 'world apart'. On the basis of this, theories which portray individuals or groups as innocent victims of labelling processes are again questioned. As I intend to illustrate:

"Labellees retain some form of negotiating power with labellers, however marked their power differentials may be. Hence if institutions can use delinquency to define individuals as 'insiders' or 'outsiders', so individuals can use delinquency to define their relationship to institutions"

(Emler & Reicher, 1995:7).

CLAIMING SPACE - THE SUBCULTURE'S PUBLICLY PRIVATE PARADE

This subculture is not immune to its outside 'host'. Writers reflect upon the way they are viewed by the general public. Their subcultural knowledge and understanding is generally perceived to be minimal:

"The basic general public haven't got a clue about it, don't really know anything. Some people don't even know it exists"(Mear).

Conversely, those aware of the subculture's existence may be seen to adopt a biased and partial appreciation of its nature and purpose:

"I have found that the politics and rationalisation of graffiti are indiscernible to the outside world. It is viewed, all too many times, solely as vandalism. Those who blanket graffiti with condemnation, block off the light of reason as well"(Teck - 'Urb' Magazine 37, '94).

As criminals and, therefore, 'folk devils', writers gain little opportunity to expose the 'light of reason' and correct what they see to be unfounded critique. Well meaning outsiders may lament their lack of voice, but, interestingly, such sentiments are not expressed by the writers themselves:

"It's quite a wonderful feeling to be part of something that is misunderstood by the rest of society"(Zaki).

Writers have little wish to educate and, thus, close the distance between those who condemn and those who celebrate:

"I'm glad they don't know, that's something that they'll never understand and if they did understand, would you really want them to understand in the first place? . . . I think the fact that people who resent it, people who don't understand it or are against it, that is an added impetus with a lot of people to say, 'well, this is our thing, no one else understands it, so, you know, who cares'. It's the fact that the more people slag it off, the more people will do it"(Zaki).

Writers embrace and, as we shall see, further encourage this public lack of understanding and awareness. In many ways, outsiders' ignorance awards writers a more powerful tool of defence - increased insight. Knowledge is power, but it is also an effective means of securing a sense of superiority, segregation and a greater degree of group definition and solidarity. As Reimer (1994a:68) contends:

'The establishment of fixed groupings is based on access to specific knowledge - knowledge not shared by those outside the group in question".

THE SUPERIOR SOCIETY: THE SEGREGATION OF MENTALITIES

Writers use outsiders' condemnation in productive ways. Rather than perceive it as a difference in opinion and, thus, a valid view, it is taken to reflect an inferior mentality. Like the stereotypes that are used to characterise insiders, outsiders are also homogenised in this manner. Blind and programmed conformity is seen to reflect their inadequacy:

"I don't expect the well programmed to understand that there are other things in life to want to know or understand. This would upset too many of

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their cosy conceptions of life and may force them to question their own meagre existences. . . . You probably go to work, go home, watch TV, go to the pub, go to bed every day and think you're really living. Well let me tell you, you're probably so tuned into this 'normal' existence, so full of spoon-fed bull from all forms of media of the perfect image, that your sight of reality is limited to what you're allowed to think"

('Londonz Burning' Magazine 2).

In this writer's view, those who follow established and prescribed paths are those that remain chained by the conformity they are programmed to embrace. Thus, 'conformists' are no longer superior, but rather tragically ineffectual, unable to recognise and confront the limitations that are imposed upon them in the form of society's behavioural guidelines. Having found the apparent strength to reject and repel these, writers revel in the knowledge that the mundane monotony of life has been overcome:

"When I'm older, these years will be the best years of my life. I know that there's not going to be anything to top it . . . I suppose that's why you do it, because you know you're living your life to the full and enjoying yourself . . . . You think about other people from your class at school and what they're doing now. Like if you all got back together when you're, like, fifty years old, if you were doing the things we were doing now and then they say, 'oh well, I was a bank clerk', big deal!"(Kilo).

The writers are now the superior ones, those 'in the know', those who live their lives to the full, immune to the pressures and influences that encourage the half-hearted existence of many outsiders:

"At least in your lifetime you can say there's all these people just floating in and out of tubes, going home, going to work and you've actually left your mark and that's a good feeling, knowing you're not just one of the lemmings, sort of thing, that you stand out from the crowd"(Zaki).

Writers seize upon outsiders 'conformity' and underplay their own. The rules they follow, the ethics they embrace and the values they share with the rest of society are unreferenced in these accounts. The respectability of 'mainstream' society, often upheld as a comparison or a measure or validation of the subculture's own legitimacy is, in this context, suppressed and converted into a sign of inferiority. This strategy, which Snow & Anderson (1987), as cited by Spencer (1994), term 'distancing' allows writers to isolate themselves from roles and associations inconsistent with their desired self conceptions. Here, they stand apart as free spirits, pioneers who have broken through the boundaries of regulation and restriction. Affiliating themselves with conformist outsiders would, in this case, work against them. Their self portrayals would dissolve and, perhaps most

importantly, external critique would gain some degree of impact. By denying outsiders credibility writers silence their condemnation:

"See I'm not really bothered at the end of the day whether people like it or not because I know ninety nine percent of people don't like it, don't understand it and never will. I'm not going to go out of my way to try and prove myself to them and say, 'look this is what it is, this is why I do it', do you know what I mean? They're just narrow, blinkered and it's just beyond them really"(Akit).

Public condemnation is taken to reflect nothing but the limitations of outsiders' minds. Condescension and superiority, relayed in the tone of those who criticise, is, as Figure 24. illustrates, redirected back to this audience, enabling the ones commonly stigmatised to stand proud and claim a clear sense of ascendancy.

Figure 24. The Superior Society

THE SECRET SOCIETY: THE SEGREGATION OF BOUNDARIES

As outlined above, writers use differences between those who cannot and do not share their subcultural experiences and viewpoints to evoke a feeling of 'us and them'. Grossberg (1997) recognises this as a commonly employed subcultural boundary. One which members use to construct dominant society as the 'other'. They are not so much the 'enemy', but rather the mass group against which the subculture defines and differentiates itself. Their distinction is further amplified by the physically symbolic boundary writers draw between them. The writers below present the subculture as a different 'world', a private system meaningful to writers alone:

Sae 6:"It's a system"

Jel:"*But it's only among us not with the outside world. They will look at us and be like, 'bunch of idiots*"

Sae 6:"*But we wouldn't even care, see they have no say so. It doesn't bother me any response they have to say towards us and they do, you read about it in the press, you know what I mean? You see, all these campaigns have nothing to do with us, because they're not from our world*"

(Jel & Sae 6).

The subculture turns inwards and secludes itself within its own boundaries, operating as a 'world apart', a society distinct from the one which houses it. While this segregation turns criticism into a distant and irrelevant mumble, it also affords writers a rewarding sense of solidarity:

"*It's a clique as well, it's so underground, it's not for normal everyday people, it's for that certain sect of people and they're the only ones who are going to understand*"*(Akit).*

Writers band and bond together as members of a private and elite society. Those beyond their boundaries remain irrelevant. Writers, as Akit maintains, write for writers alone:

"*It's such a little community, there's only a few of us and, like, you're not doing it for other people on the street. You're doing it for yourself and you're doing it for others because no one else can fully appreciate it. Unless you're a writer, at the end of the day, you can't even begin to understand*"*(Akit).*

Few outsiders seem to realise their insignificance, often presuming that writers are trying to talk to the outside world or relay some form of universal message. Those who had reflected upon the inscriptions they had seen would often ask me questions like, 'What does this mean, I saw one that said 'Teach Diet', Is that some comment about obesity, or an ironic dig at our perceptions of the ultimate body image?'. I would have to explain that this is not a comment aimed at the general public, but merely their names. As the interest value of these generally depends upon some degree of subcultural familiarity, the walls tend to speak to writers alone:

"*I mean for the basic public, you're walking down the road and you see a bit of spray paint on the wall and you don't take a second glimpse, you know, you don't bother to read it, you just walk straight past. For a graffiti artist, it's like living in another world, you know what I mean? Every bit of writing on the wall means something to someone and you take notice of it all*"*(Mear).*

Writers see a private billboard of subcultural information and outsiders see a vandalised wall of incomprehensible or obscure scribble. Writers revel in the knowledge that graffiti often lies beyond public comprehension:

"Like one of the biggest moans people go on about, 'oh I like the pieces, the colourful stuff, but I just don't understand that scribbling business'. That's exactly it, you don't understand it. You know, I don't see it as scribble, I see it as names and I know quite a few of them. I'm like, 'oh he's been up', you know"(Stylo).

For the majority of outsiders, these inscribed surfaces remain silent. For some, however, they ring alarm bells. Those unaware of its purpose and meaning often find graffiti sinister and threatening. Awareness of this appears to afford writers a sense of privilege:

"People say, 'oh it's threatening sitting on a train full of graffiti', it makes me feel comfortable. I know that sounds really selfish, it's just that, you know, we like it, we don't want everyone to feel comfortable with graffiti, we'd rather they didn't. It's like everywhere where you don't feel comfortable, like you've got to dress in a certain way and you feel uncomfortable, it's like the ultimate reverse and suddenly you feel comfortable and no one else does"(Stylo).

Writers use the city as their canvas, aware that outsiders know nothing or little of the markings they see. This public, yet paradoxically private parade of their subculture appears to grant them a rewarding degree of ascendancy and power. The subculture is flaunted in the face of the public, but it remains their own private world, a confine meaningful to them alone. This ties in with Hebdige's (1997) observations. Drawing upon Foucault's analysis of the microrelations of power, Hebdige now sees the subculture's alternative styles and poses as a form of empowerment. Rather than resisting, members use their ability to confound and threaten to assert. They play, as Hebdige (1997) remarks, with "the only power at their disposal - the power to discomfit, the power, that is, to pose . . . to pose a threat"(Hebdige, 1997:402). Presenting themselves and inviting others to see them as the 'unknown alien other' awards them an important sense of potency. Recognising this, writers do not merely rely on public ignorance, they actively seek to secure it through measures which further distance and exclude those beyond their boundaries.

PRIVATISING SUBCULTURAL NETWORKS OF COMMUNICATION

Writers paint differently in accordance with the audience they wish to address:

"We have, what we call, our different styles; simple style, wildstyle, canvas style. Like if you don't want others to read your stuff, it's only for us to

read, then you'll go wildstyle. If you don't care, you want everyone to read it, you'll do simple style, you put Jel, you know. But if you don't want that, you hide it with arrows and colours and all that other stuff"(Jel).

Levels of readability vary, but the subculture does appear to place an emphasis upon stylistic complexity and, thus, illegibility:

"The traditions from what I've grown up with, the more unreadable, the better"(Proud 2).

A writer seeking stylistic acclaim is generally expected to demonstrate skill and technique through the use of 'Wildstyle' (pictured in Figure 25.). Wildstyle is the subculture's most distinctive and complex lettering form, characterised by its angular interlocking letters, distorted letter boundaries, accompanying arrows and extensive use of colour.

Figure 25. 'Wildstyle'

An experienced audience may be able to decipher these obscured letter formations, but comprehension does not usually lend itself to the untrained eye:

"A proper wildstyle is unreadable. You know, if someone doesn't tell you what it says, you won't be able to read it"(Mear).

The exclusivity of subcultural communication is, thus, encouraged and maintained. Graffiti becomes a private language understood by writers alone:

"I think graffiti only spoke to graffiti artists. It was only by and for, it didn't really talk to the public community at all because some of the names were so complicated to read, the styles were so intense that your average everyday man couldn't decipher it anyway"(Futura 2000).

Outsiders are ostracised and this is, in many ways, a calculated gesture. As Vulcan informs us:

"If you could look at one of my letters and see what it is then I'm doing something wrong, you know what I'm saying. My shit is to twist it up"

(Vulcan - 'Vibe' Magazine, Oct. '94).

Legibility is deliberately obscured, reconstituting graffiti into:

"A subversive act, a conscious artistic expression with a revolutionary purpose: using guerrilla tactics to control your own networks of communication"('Vibe' Magazine, Oct. '94).

When you look at it in real terms, outsiders lose little through their exclusion. In the majority of cases, graffiti is used to relay a writer's name; an insignificance to someone who is not subculturally involved. Insiders, however, gain a lot. Graffiti becomes, in their mind:

"A communication that can't be controlled"(Acrid),

"An 'unspoken speak' - a visual language all of its own"

('Vibe' Magazine, Oct. 94),

and, in this sense, an important, if illusory, source of power and control.

The discourse which writers draw upon to describe or label their activities also remains subculturally specific. An alternative vocabulary or argot represents a common feature of adolescent, male, deviant or secret groups (see for e.g., Argyle, 1986; Bloch & Niederhoffer, 1956; Eliade, 1958; Remy, 1990; Williams, 1989). Williams (1989) sees it as:

> "A form of social criticism, with an emphasis on shocking or confusing people
> from the outside"(Williams, 1989:10/11).

This effect, albeit unintentional, is illustrated below. Smith recalls the confusion that followed an outsider's misinterpretation of subcultural terminology:

"The FBI came to my house because they got a letter from some kid saying, 'we're going to bomb all your clean trains', so they came to the top ten writers. We thought they were joking when they pulled out this letter"(Smith).

To an insider, the proposed actions are clear - the writer intended a graffiti blitz. Lack of subcultural insight, however, ensured the FBI interpreted this message using their own frame of reference. Panic, thus, ensued as they received notification of, what they saw to be, a planned explosive attack.

My own limited experience and understanding within the early stages of my research often left me confused when talking to writers about their activities. I remained unable to communicate effectively until I had gained further and deeper

subcultural knowledge and insight. As I became more adept in relating to writers on the basis of their own meaning systems, my distinction as an outsider began to decline. What I gained during these initial struggles was a clear sense of exclusion; an understanding of the subculture's private, segregated and self-contained status and the ways writers enhance and sustain this through the obscurity of their verbal and written communication networks.

THE SILENT SOCIETY: INVISIBLE SOLIDARITY

Distanced and disguised from the wider society housing it, the subculture functions as a secret and symbolically separate world. Those who enter and work within it also gain a sense of this removal. Many writers juggle their identities and lifestyles to ensure that their subcultural personas retain a degree of distinction and mystique:

"It was always something that you did on the side, that you hid from your parents. . . . It was mysterious and it was supposed to be that way"(Freedom).

It is within the context of 'wider' society that this obscurity gains full impact. Outsiders are able to observe writers' completed work, yet, few actually see them practice it. As Henry, a documentary photographer, recalls:

"I was just taking pictures for myself. I did that for years, several years without ever meeting anybody. That was fascinating too because it was mysterious"(Henry Chalfant).

Writers remain elusive. Almost like ghosts they interweave amongst the rest of society without detection:

"It's like a silent society of people. I mean you're just getting into it now, but you could walk down the road and pass four or five graffiti artists and you wouldn't even know"(Mear).

Again, this shrouded existence appears to bestow them a rewarding sense of power and superiority:

"I will admit I live my life feeling rather smug, rather superior, knowing that I know of them and they know nothing of me, gloating in front of a piece at the passers by or passengers who have no clue of my double life. It's kind of like, I know who did that, whilst you're still wondering. The feeling you get when you know a secret others would die to know"

('Londonz Burning' Magazine 2).

Writers' invisibility re-emphasises the subculture's underground, clandestine and secluded status, thus donating them a more defined sense of societal isolation. Their ability to recognise subcultural others further solidifies these boundaries of

distinction. Writers share a symbolic consciousness that outsiders don't and this, as Smith (1990) also observed in his study of auctions, appears to facilitate a unique type of bonding. The poem below articulates the unspoken affinity that generates between writers who realise their secret bond:

"*Steel so bland, monochrome madness.*

Suits content within this blandness.

Mechanical junk on a river of apathy.

I spy another who feels my telepathy.

Checking the lens, the adrenaline flows.

Mimicking the action, the other he knows.

Stagnant steel, the suits wait in the grey.

Then a multi colour bomb shell explodes on their day.

Confused and disgusted, they're stuck to the floor.

The other is snapping, I'm holding the door.

30 seconds of enlightenment, the dream passes by.

A suit turns his head and his eyes ask me why?

I don't have an answer"('*Londonz Burning*' *Magazine 2*).

This sense of affiliation is undoubtedly enhanced by the very subtle cues writers use to make this detection. Identifying signs are, as Acrid illustrates, far from obvious and would be unlikely to register recognition in the eyes of an outsider:

Nancy:"*How can you tell if someone's a writer?*"

Acrid:"*The way they watch the trains. They could be seven foot tall, three foot tall, black, white, green, male, female. You see writers, they don't want to look at trains in the yard because they know it's a give away sign. But sometimes you can tell from the way they dress, like they dress in the hip hop way or they might have a pen in their hands or a camera on the tubes*"(*Acrid*).

Shared status may even be disclosed by a writer's choice of seating upon public transport:

"*Me and a couple of my mates would be out on the buses at night and we'd see, like, two or three other guys get on the bus and they'd come and sit at the back and you'd instantly know they must be graffiti artists as well*"(*Mear*).

With a deepening awareness of these secret signals, I also began to identify potential members, confirming this through asking, 'Do you write?' Writers will always pose this form of question as a means of verifying their connections:

"I meet writers all the time. You get on a train and, I dunno, you see someone with a bit of paint on them and you go, 'Oh, you a writer?'. You know, it's wicked, it's funny"(Akit).

An unquestioned sense of confederation is, as Drax outlines, usually initiated by the introductions that follow:

"It's like the guy could be, sort of, white, black, young, old, it could be a girl, you might not have known who it was and it's like they're instantly a friend of yours, from the second they kind of say who they are. In this kind of world, it's like a password to, sort of, friendship or respect or whatever"(Drax).

Akit relates the intensity of this bond to the distinct, unusual and, perhaps, covert nature of their shared activities:

"All of a sudden you meet a writer and it's bang, you have something in common. It's not just an everyday thing, like train or bird spotting, you know. It's not a normal hobby and you meet that person and you've got something so much in common with them, you're both totally on that tip, it's just weird"(Akit).

This solidarity may appear as a naturally occurring feature of writers' interactions, but it is also, in many ways, a necessity. Without these notions of community, the subculture loses the perceived substance and solidity it needs to support its asserted status as a self contained and segregated scene. With no sense of connection or cohesion, the subculture becomes less a 'world apart' and more a scattering of isolated individuals.

To reiterate then, I would define this group a subculture, but not for the conventional reasons. Cloudy and vague class based criteria or modes of appearance, behaviour and values are, in this case, overshadowed by a much clearer definitional distinction - distance. In all senses, writers express a feeling of existing apart, a being and a belonging to something which resists incorporation within the confines of 'wider' society. They promote their subculture as literally that; a boundaried group which stands distinct from the culture in which it is embedded. This detached stance is, of course, a construction and obscurity is the main tool writers use to build it. Public misunderstanding, denigration and ignorance is celebrated. Writers do not attempt to enlighten or educate as this distinction in insight fortifies their dividing boundaries, awards them a sense of solidarity and allows them to "participate in a simultaneous expression of personal and subcultural power"(Brewer & Miller, 1990:361). Through this 'power of evasion', the subculture becomes a different world, their world, one internally oriented and impervious to its public and external audience.

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And yet, this is, in many ways, exactly what it isn't. The subculture uses the outside world to define its own boundaries. Outsiders' ignorance, condemnation and misunderstanding grants it the perceived detachment it needs to secure its status as a 'world apart'. This subculture may look like a disembodied group floating in a vacuum of its own isolation, but it is, in fact, intrinsically linked to the society which accommodates it. They must be near for the subculture to be far.

THE DEFENCE OF DISTANCE, DISTANCE AS DEFENCE - THE LEGAL VS ILLEGAL DEBATE

As evidenced below, subcultural sentiment is fractured:

Nancy:*"It's like a secret society"*

Proud 2:*"Yea it is and a lot of people want to keep it that way, they don't think it's good talking about it so much. . . . They're very narrow minded, I think, because they want to keep it private. But you're not going to educate people by saying I'm not going to talk to you"(Proud 2).*

Some writers wish to maintain the subculture's seclusion and others, such as the writer above, feel it should be brought out of its shrouded confines and exposed to the rest of society. However, what happens when writers begin to work with another audience in mind? In the eyes of many, the subcultural benefits of self secluded secrecy are sacrificed. This threat has generated raging debate between those who promote an internal group orientation - illegal writers, and those who seek legal work, thus, dislocating the subculture from its disguised positioning into the glare of 'wider' society. The illegal versus legal debate is an active form of subcultural divide and dispute and its central arguments are outlined within this section as a means of illustrating three main points:

1. *Subcultural cleavage:*

The grand divide between high and low or dominant culture and its various subcultures has been an active point of theoretical interest over the years. Yet, as Thornton (1994) quite rightly points out, very little attention has been paid to the divides that operate within subcultural boundaries. This subculture is not, as we shall see, one big happy family united in its views and attitudes. It is a fractured group which offers its members a diversity of positions, standpoints and realities.

2. *The important role of illegality:*

Illegal writers cherish their subculture as a 'world apart' and use their illegality to maintain and defend it as such. They promote their 'controversial' activities to deflect public interest and intervention, invite stigma and rejection and secure their group's segregated and isolated social positioning. Theories which cast subcultural members as 'innocent victims' of negative stigmatisation are, thus, again, misplaced. Outrage, rejection and moral panic is their goal or, as Thornton

(1994) contends, the vehicle of their resistance, not the verdict. From this angle, the subculture's links with the outside world are also exposed. Writers communicate with those beyond their boundaries to ensure they stay beyond their boundaries. And they do so through the voice of illegality.

3. *Reasons for the subculture's defence of distance*:

The notion that subcultures lie, or struggle to lie, outside the corporate world is a resilient (Thornton, 1994) and, for many theorists, outmoded one:

"This romanticism of authenticity was a false and idealised view"

(McRobbie,1994:161).

Supporting her contention, McRobbie (1994) uncovers some of the commercial motives that operated and operate within the punk and rave scene respectively. Such enterprises draw these subcultures into a close and symbiotic relationship with the world they are supposed to resist and repel. Again, however, we are forced to confront the fact that one model cannot always fit all. These subcultures may not be the pure and uncontaminated groupings that reigned within the work of the CCCS group, but the graffiti subculture tries to be. Legal writers are condemned for diffusing illegal stigma, attracting public acceptance and approval and transforming graffiti into a commercially viable product. This, in illegal writers eyes, places the subculture in a very vulnerable position. It now stands within 'mainstream' boundaries and on this terrain it lies open to processes of incorporation (Hebdige, 1979) and writers lose their claim to its ownership and control. The graffiti subculture does, therefore, express this now 'mythical' commercial resistance. The motives fuelling it also go beyond a desire for underground credibility or authenticity (McRobbie, 1994, Thornton 1994). Ownership and control remain their primary concerns.

SETTING THE SCENE

Before exploring this debate, I wish to outline its context and background and clarify its related definitions.

DEFINITIONS

As Drax indicates below, a clear cut means of categorising legal and illegal writers is lacking:

"It's not very often that you're put in one category or the other. If you do a substantial amount of illegal stuff, you're considered an illegal writer, no matter if you were the biggest gallery person going, doing the most exhibitions or whatever, you'd still be considered illegal"(Drax).

Categories incorporate overlap, but illegality remains the deciding factor. A writer who partakes in any illegal work is generally categorised as 'illegal'. Writers who

'move over' to legal work, following an active past of illegal activity, also retain their status as illegal writers:

"The writers that are considered illegal, I think a lot of people would consider it alright for them to do as much legal stuff as they could and still be considered illegal. Whereas, the other way round, the ones who are considered legal writers don't tend to do hardly any illegal work"(Drax).

A writer gains a 'legal' classification if a minimal or non-existent degree of illegal activity has been demonstrated. Thus:

"Very few big time illegals become mainstream legal artists, it's very rare. Like, basically, legal artists may have done a few bits here and there, but they would never be really into doing tubes and trains"(Acrid).

This debate therefore exists between illegal writers and those who have generally maintained a more legally oriented outlook, rarely partaking in any form of illegal activity. Writers who have indulged illegally and then turn to legal work, denigrating and decrying their past and the illegal activities of others, may also be incorporated within this 'legal' category.

Legal work consists of a variety of different types of activity. At a basic level, it can be differentiated from illegal work on the basis of its authorised nature. It does not involve the infraction of law and, thus, threat of apprehension. Wall writers, those who paint solely within legally designated areas such as halls of fame, would, therefore, be considered 'legal'. Although illegal writers also paint here, they have or do complement their activities with illegal pursuits. Legal writers may also partake in paid commission work, such as painting pieces for shopfronts and advertising campaigns, or exhibition work, selling their canvassed paintings within a gallery.

CONTEXT OF DEBATE

The illegal/legal debate is an active one within the British scene. It featured in many British magazines and related issues were raised in a large number of my British interviews. My fieldwork in New York suggested that this divide is not as pronounced in this city. American writers concerns appeared to centre around the effects of commercialisation and societal intervention rather than the actual divide between those employing a legal or illegal context for their work. A possible reason for this difference may lie in the size and history of the New York scene. New Yorkers have lived with graffiti for over twenty years. This appears to have generated a more accepting public attitude. Shopfront commission work has been, and still is, plentiful and many writers use it to complement their illegal activities (see Figure 26.).

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Figure 26. Legal Commission Work in New York

Legal work of this nature has, therefore, become a familiar and accepted aspect of New York's subcultural scene. For this reason, the first section of this debate, which concerns graffiti's appropriate context, subject matter and the divide between writers who deviate in these terms, will centre predominantly upon the reflections of British writers.

BACKGROUND TO THE BRITISH DEBATE

Although this debate has always existed, internal friction and problems during the early 90s, the initial stages of my fieldwork, saw the significance of this British dispute heighten. Two prominent writers, one 'illegal' and the other 'legal', fell out having forged a close friendship. This amplified legal/illegal divisions to destructive proportions and threatened to sever the subculture's tentative and loosely bound thread of unity. Recognising the need to regain cohesion and rebuild the strength of their internally divided and shaken scene, graffiti magazines tried to initiate some form of cease-fire. There was no request for union, their differences make this impossible, merely a call for tolerance and acceptance:

"We ourselves should understand that the scene is solid enough to allow all kinds of different attitudes to work . . . . Those stepping the legal path, bringing the art to spots otherwise impossible, should keep the original flavour and the illegal purists should see the importance of the other side and respect them"(Shock One - 'Graphotism' Magazine 2).

Renewed interaction between the two previously detached groups also helped to diffuse antagonism:

"It's not so bad now though, it has improved quite a bit . . . . A lot of the more legally oriented artists became sort of more connected with the illegal ones and, you know, connections got made"(Drax).

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Although friction between these groups has abated somewhat, the basis of their distinction, namely the ways they practice their art and the directions they advocate as subculturally progressive, remains. The legal/illegal debate continues today as it always has.

THE DEBATE

At a basic level, this debate involves a disagreement over graffiti's appropriate context and content.

CONTEXT

Legal writers oppose illegal writers' contextual stance. In their view:

"The potential for big arse, full colour pieces has never been as great as on a legal wall. Though many might argue that a full colour, top to bottom train is the ultimate achievement, trains are not where new styles tend to develop"(Stylo - 'Graphotism' Magazine 2).

In an attempt to maintain the development of the subculture and its artform, legal writers discourage others from using an illegal context for their work:

"If you continue to concentrate on this aspect you're going to end up with NOTHING. Eventually things in this country will follow on from what's happened in New York - virtually no pieces running . . . . They didn't/couldn't take it any further because they tried to beat the system - and YOU CAN'T BEAT THE SYSTEM. So you've got to work with it, get inside and change it for the better"(Eez - 'Freestyle' Newsletter 5).

The same writer urges illegal writers to rethink their position:

"One of the reasons I've been doing this newsletter is to try and show you what is possible if you choose a certain direction to go in - one of positive attitude and of legal painting as a base to build on. . . . I've got my act together and I truly believe I've chosen the right direction to go in. Can you say the same?"(Eez - 'Freestyle' Newsletter 5).

The superior tone of this comment, which implies the writer has 'seen the light', should indicate reasons for illegal writers' resentment and bitter retort. This form of legal lecturing is rejected:

"They should never try and impress their ideas on someone, it's not down to them. Like who do they think they are? Like, I've never told them to stop what they're doing. I'd never say, 'oh you should do trains to make up the numbers' or whatever"(Acrid).

While illegal writers oppose the imposition of these legal views, they also passionately contest the very basis of this stance itself, declaring:

"Graffiti is most comfortable and appropriate slapped where it shouldn't be"(Prime - 'Graphotism' Magazine 3).

Illegal purists reverse the argument that art does not belong on illegal walls or trains by asserting this is exactly where it does belong:

"I don't really believe in like putting paint on canvas or stuff like that . . . it's not the same at all. It works, but I don't think it quite rocks really. . . . It just gives it a different perspective, people start looking at it differently and, I dunno, it just becomes something totally different. It is art blatantly, but it's not meant to be there. I reckon it's meant to be on a wall or some surface or another, but not canvas"(Akit).

In response to the legal position, and severely weakening it, illegal writers draw upon tradition as a strong tool of defence. Graffiti, as Akit maintains, is not meant to be on canvas, it is meant to be where it was originally born and developed; on the street:

"As style developed on the street, for the street, by the street, graffiti, in my opinion, loses its essence and whole point in an enclosed space"

(Skore - 'The Real State' Magazine 6).

Illegal graffiti claims its title as the grass roots of the artform. It represents:

"The original way to do graffiti"(Zaki),

and consequently remains:

"The pinnacle of it, everything else after that is a step down"(Zaki).

Legal work comes a very poor second on this hierarchy of stylistic credibility. As in high culture, tradition and history retain a revered influence and play an important role in legitimising an artist's work. Legal canvas work disregards these conventions and loses its right to authenticity as a result:

"The graffiti canvases were never really the real thing. They were just like a watered down version. It's like getting a famous painting by Degas and converting it onto a little postcard or Y-fronts or something, it just doesn't work. I mean it will probably sell quite a lot, but that's not the way it was meant to be"(Zaki).

Wrapped up in issues of tradition come the subculturally salient values of commitment, dedication and fidelity. Prime urges legal writers to remember and embrace their roots:

"I'm not saying that I don't think legal pieces, gallery work, canvases and all that are graffiti, but you can't lose the spirit of what graffiti started from, how you started, from seeing bombed trains, lil' neighbour Joe Bloggs going all city, pieced trains etc."(Prime - 'Graphotism' Magazine 3).

Writers who respect and sustain the subculture's illegal traditions are seen to be subculturally committed and loyal. This is an important value and, as such, it offers illegal writers a powerful ethical resource. Any form of legal contention can be rebuffed through referencing their infidelity:

"See certain people, they get a bit of success and now they're like, 'this is the thing, all you lot are in the wrong', whereas they started from that"(Prime).

In the quote above, Prime upholds illegality as a writer's inspirational starting point. This accommodates further claims of subcultural sustenance:

"The illegal scene built graffiti in this country, got it noticed to people. Let's face it, people are going to start graffiti by seeing it on the street or on trains. They're not going to do it by seeing it in galleries because you don't get to see it in galleries unless the scene's already developed anyway"

(Drax).

Illegality begins to represent more than mere tradition, it becomes the subculture's life-force, the medium maintaining its existence:

"Without it, the artform would not exist and would have fizzled out"

(Skore - 'Graphotism' Magazine 2).

Because of this, it stands as the subculture's most authentic form of art:

"The real life and spirit of it is public graffiti, not in a gallery where you might get paid for an opening night, only certain people sipping wine . . . because that's from the raw, that's how it started and that's what gives it the life"(Prime).

CONTENT

The subculture's conventions extend to include graffiti's style as well as context. Traditionally:

"The lettering is the key to graffiti. I mean characters are like a side issue"(Zaki).

Lettering remains the basis of the artform and it is maintained as a core and central feature of an illegal writer's work. The legal writer is not, as Proud 2 illustrates, as stylistically conformist as his/her illegal counterpart:

Nancy:*"There's more use of characters on the legal side isn't there?"*

Proud 2:*"You can demonstrate more sort of virtuosity, you know . . . . With letters you can get away with a lot. You know these letters look good, but, in a real sense, they're not really that well thought out"(Proud 2).*

Legal writers adopt a more expansive approach to their work and suffer because of this:

"A lot of these legal writers haven't developed, what I would call, lettering styles and skills and, therefore, their style, although it's very good, it's considered arty farty or whatever, so a lot of people won't give them credit for it. Whereas, if they were good at letters and they chose to do these other things as well, people would respect what they're doing"(Drax).

Pictorial, abstract or 'arty farty' legal work (see Figure 27.) is denigrated for sacrificing the essence of traditional graffiti and denied credit and authenticity on the basis of this. As in areas of contextuality, it fails to gain its classification as 'real' graffiti:

"I mean graffiti was always based around the idea of writing your name . . . the characters and all the rest of it, it's artistic, but it loses the point of what, exactly, I think graffiti is. A lot of people have tended to say, 'oh it's not graffiti'"(Drax).

Figure 27. Pictorial Legal Work

In many ways, this entire debate reduces to become a simple contest of authenticity. Illegal work, in all its guises, is promoted as the 'real', 'true' and, thus, legitimate representation of graffiti:

"Illegal stuff, that's really always where the real scene is"(Prime).

"To me, the only true graffiti is illegal graffiti"(Zaki).

Tradition, and loyalty to this, plays the most predominant part in this process of legitimisation. Illegal graffiti is 'true' to its roots in both context and content and this conformity remains responsible for authenticating its status and, indeed, that of its practitioners:

"Any true graffiti artist gets the biggest buzz from doing illegal stuff"(Zaki).

Those who remain 'true' to this traditional and authentic art gain a personal sense of legitimacy from their allegiance. Those who do not are, as the writers below outline, denied this authentic award:

"We got a lot of flak from a lot of guys that we weren't interested in the illegal aspects of it . . . they were saying that we were fakes"(Proud 2).

"When 'The Chrome Angels' were around we had a few exhibitions and things like that and there was a lot of people saying we weren't really graffiti artists, you know, this wasn't what it was meant to be"(Zaki).

The legally oriented artist must deal with the illegal writers' power to impose definition. As they remain committed to the traditional roots of the artform, they are able to decree or define what is and isn't graffiti, who is or isn't a writer and what these individuals can and cannot, should or shouldn't do. In response to these narrowly defined illegal standards, legal writers assert their distinctions and agree to differ:

"You spend a lot of time hearing different viewpoints. You know there's some people that say it's like this and it should be and there's other people that will say it shouldn't be like that. For every person, like Drax, who says, 'it's all about your traditions and the act of doing graffiti', there's someone like me who will say, 'no, to me it's not about that, it's about if you and me were to go to a wall and produce an image, who would do the better image and that's what, at the end of the day, matters'"(Proud 2).

Legal writers operate a different set of objectives. They work to develop and advance their artistic skills and these illegally enforced rules and regulations harbour their desired progressions:

"Suddenly there's all these rules and regulations . . . in terms of what is permissible to paint, like letters or characters or there's this whole silly abstract thing, you know, 'oh, that's not graffiti, that's not graffiti', and, like basically, no it's not, but it's still using a spray can . . . . I've got no problems with anyone who does graffiti on that level, but it's when people start to say what you can and cannot do. I mean, for me it's now at the stage where I want to develop the artform so we can become distinct from other people"(Stylo).

Illegal purists provide their legal counterparts little room for manoeuvre. They regulate these concerns diligently and, in doing so, become, in many ways, a contradiction in their own terms. Stylo articulates the inherent paradox of their position:

"The most hardcore supposedly illegal writers have got, like, a whole book of rules about how to be illegal or how to be a graffiti writer and it just kills

me because, to me, it's all about doing what you, what people are telling you not to do or it's just doing what you want to do really"(Stylo).

While they encourage nonconformity, passionately opposing the social rules and guidelines imposed upon them, ironically the illegal writer represents the subculture's staunch conformist. As such, roles are reversed. It is the illegal writer who attempts to uphold internal standards of conventionality and it is the legal writer who disregards these and becomes the subcultural deviant. Given this ambiguity, we must ask why illegal writers work so hard to enforce and police their conditions? Why is this legal orientation denied credibility and, thus, discouraged? Can tradition really be that important? If so, Why?

SOCIETAL IMMUNITY THROUGH ILLEGAL INSULARITY

Authenticity emerges here as an important form of 'subcultural capital' (Thornton, 1994). Writers operate definitions and criteria which work to grant individuals and their work a powerful degree of legitimacy and acceptability. This corresponds with the observations of other researchers. Thornton (1994) illustrates how the dance or rave culture orientates itself in similar terms. 'Underground' activities are celebrated. They refuse to occupy categories defined as 'mass' or 'mainstream' and earn from this gesture a rewarding sense of credibility or 'hipness'. Yet, these rewards are depicted as ends in themselves; the subcultural adherents' ultimate concern is being 'hip', authentic and 'in the know' (Thornton, 1994). Few studies delve deeper to explore the possible motives underlying the construction and operation of these revered subcultural categories. Within the graffiti context, illegal authenticity appears to serve an additional purpose. It grants a writer credibility, but it also helps to encourage, sustain and defend the subculture's segregated or secluded social positioning.

SEGREGATION THROUGH REJECTION

Drax provides a lucid illustration of illegality's defensive role:

"Bombing, tags or even racking [stealing paint] . . . all these things and others have no financial potential and are, in fact, an obstacle between us and the powers that be"(Drax - 'Graphotism' Magazine 3).

Illegal work functions as the subculture's armour and shield. By capitalising on its ability to shock, confuse, exclude and alienate subcultural outsiders, it resists commercial viability and immunises the subculture against 'mainstream' assimilation or 'the powers that be'. As Martha Cooper remarks:

"A lot of it's indecipherable, you know. I think that has always been why people don't like it, they can't read it"(Martha Cooper).

Aware of this, Sae 6 presents stylistic obscurity as a subcultural weapon, an effective means of securing their self contained isolation:

"By somebody like that being able to come into my area and read what I'm doing or even know about it, then it's selling out. Now you're breaking up the whole thing, you know what I'm trying to say? It's like organised crime, once you have all these other people involved, it's no longer organised crime"(Sae 6).

The public nature of illegal graffiti also helps the subculture in its quest for rejection and seclusion. Unlike canvas work, art in these locations cannot, as Zaki recognises, be packaged, bought or contained:

"I'd rather have a graffiti canvas than a painting because that's what I like, but it's not the same as having it on a train go by. You can't buy things like that and you can't buy walls either"(Zaki).

Illegal graffiti is inaccessible. It stands beyond the reach of outsiders and, thus, resists their manipulation and precludes their interest.

Illegal work's strongest tool of defence, however, undoubtedly remains its unauthorised status:

"There's nothing more controversial than illegal graffiti . . . whereas people see legal stuff and they say, 'oh it's quite legal', and you get a far better reaction. It's when you take graffiti to the tube trains, that's when you start getting all your bad press, like the public won't tolerate it"(Proud 2).

Graffiti's illegal context alienates outsiders who demonstrate a more positive attitude to work presented on a legal medium. Jel and Sae explain the benefits of this negative reaction:

Jel: *"It's a turn off to them"*

Nancy: *"And that's good?"*

Sae 6: *"Yea, because they can't get in on it, they can't get in on it"*

(Jel & Sae 6).

What they don't like, they don't touch and what they don't touch remains isolated, segregated or, as Sae 6 terms it, 'underground':

"I don't want nobody in no three piece suit to like my stuff. You see, I'm an underground person, that's the thing about graffiti, it's a whole underground culture, you're writing for the writers . . . . That's why we just don't cater for these people, you see, I just don't give a fuck, you know what I mean?"(Sae 6).

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SEGREGATION THROUGH FIDELITY

The emphasis placed upon subcultural fidelity lends a powerful hand in this endeavour. This is an influential subcultural value which is confirmed through a writer's embrace and commitment to illegally derived traditions. Writers who uphold these maintain a rewarding sense of integrity. By developing his style, while sustaining his use of lettering, Sae 6 displays such allegiance and honour below:

"I'm trying to expand, trying to bring it out, but I'm still not going to be selling out . . . . I still maintain the rules, you know the lettering form. I change it around and play with the arrows . . . but I'm still using the letter form, so I'm still showing respect for graffiti because that's how I started out. I'm not going to sell out"(Sae 6).

Fidelity demands an insular focus, one which locates a writer's orientation, audience and, thus, loyalty within subcultural domains. Sae 6 satisfies this demand. He refuses to distort graffiti's lettering traditions and, thus, presents work which essentially speaks to writers alone.

A similar gesture was made during the initial stages of our interview. Although I was unfamiliar with some of their terminology, Sae 6 refused to compromise his subcultural orientation and integrity by modifying his speech to suit my needs:

Sae 6:*"It gives you more props"*

Jel:*"Meaning popularity"*

Sae 6:*"Props. Jel, you got to use the correct form. You can't, you're not selling out Jel, you know"*

Nancy:*"No, you use, it's alright I can keep up, you'll just have to translate some of them"*

Sae 6:*"Yea I'll translate, but I don't want to give you it"(Sae 6 & Jel).*

By maintaining the subculturally specific character of his visual and verbal vocabulary, Sae 6 resists 'selling out'. The term 'sell out' is used to describe a writer who relocates his/her concerns beyond subcultural boundaries; a writer who surrenders the exclusive or controversial facets of the subculture to accommodate or target an external audience with a more delicate palate. Drax comments passionately on such individuals, the nature of their work and their underlying incentives:

"The neatly packaged, we're from the street, we don't do trains, we're nice legal guys, look we're so full of expression spelt S-H-I-T gang. That's where the hard work of thousands since 84/85 is going - into the back pockets of bullshitters who sell ours and even their own artistic souls for as much as even a sniff of what they perceive to be fame. . . . They deprive

the public of seeing real street level graffiti, only producing watered down crap with no soul, no style, no feeling . . . light weight rubbish which they think will catch the eyes of the public and ascend them to the status of 'the artists from the street'"(Drax - 'Londonz Burning' Magazine 2).

In this quote, legal writers are accused of 'packaging' themselves for public consumption. This expression implicates them as fakes. It portrays them as individuals who have denied, disguised and sacrificed their 'true' subcultural personas for a reconstructed image which lacks subcultural association and attracts, rather than repels, a public audience. Essentially, then, these are writers who have 'sold out' their roots and turned their backs upon the subculture.

As the phrase 'selling out' suggests, their motives are seen to be financial. This form of material reward, as Zaki reminds us, goes against subcultural principles:

"One of the most amazing distinctions is there's no pay involved . . . with graffiti, it's just for the love of it"(Zaki).

Writers who dedicate themselves to unpaid illegal work do so 'for the love of it'. Their incentives are deemed 'pure', 'true' and legitimate because stem from nothing but an untainted and unquestioned loyalty and love for the subculture:

"I didn't start graffiti to make money, only to get up and I will continue getting up"(Keen One - 'Londonz Burning' Magazine 2).

Material reward contaminates these incentives. A legal writer's love is not seen to be the subculture, but the money he/she can squeeze from it. Jel and Sae 6 reject such a writer for exploiting the subculture as a vehicle of profit potential:

Sae 6:"*He's not a name, he never painted a train, he's excluded . . . . He's like a person who used graffiti to sell. He made a profit off it, he's a sell out*"

Jel:"*To us, he's like the arm that we never had"(Jel & Sae 6).*

From an illegal perspective, the legal gesture is one of betrayal. The illegal sphere and its traditions constitute subcultural roots and purists believe that these should be nurtured:

"Peace and respect to all those writers who know their roots. Peace, no sell out"(Keen One - 'Londonz Burning' Magazine 2).

Nurturing these means obscuring aspects of the subculture which may enhance public interest or access. Nurturing these, therefore, means sustaining the subculture's segregated or 'underground' status. In detaching themselves from these traditions to market themselves for 'mainstream' consumption, legal writers disarm the subculture of this illegally maintained distance and defence:

"People that make money off this artform, no matter how you look at it, they destroy the cause"(Iz).

SECURING SECLUSION - SECURING CONTROL

So why is the subculture's segregated social position so important? Why do illegal writers work so hard to preclude the attraction of an external audience? What threat accompanies 'mainstream' acceptance, assimilation and involvement? Drax enlightens us:

"What if we do gain acceptance from these 'powers', from the 'man in the street', then what will happen? They will turn it, like everything else good, into a sick charade of Sun Newspaper like headlines: 'Graffiti is in', 'This week we talk to the artists from the street who have made good', 'Win a trip to New York' and of course the art will have no depth, soul or meaning. Then as Mr Byrite or Marks and Spencer's sell off their last stocks of Wildstyle slippers or aerosol art knickers and decide not to restock, the powers that be will be back with: 'Graffiti is out', 'Boy died after inhaling paint', 'Stop this craze now', 'Graffiti promotes drugs and violence', etc., etc., etc. and then it will be good-bye to this whole scene, good-bye to any respect from anyone anywhere, good-bye to our discredited history and good-bye to all those that encouraged the sell out as they'll be living it up on a yacht somewhere laughing and then what will we have left? Nothing. . . . Now I'm not saying there isn't a place for commercial success within our scene, of course there is, for those who deserve it. But it can only really be (to me anyway) a part of it, not where the scene is heading. This isn't the stock market and the time will never be right to 'sell out' because without roots this tree will die"(Drax - 'Graphotism' Magazine 3).

Acceptance is quite clearly subculturally dangerous. As Iz explains:

"Someone invents something and that really hits off and everybody's like, 'wow, I want it, I want it, I want it'. The guy's making a bundle, he sells the secret ingredient, now you don't have it the same, you know what I mean?"(Iz).

In selling (selling out) the secret ingredient (illegality) the subculture loses its societal immunity and its self sustained form. Repositioned within 'mainstream' confines, its destiny is now placed in the hands of those with the power to manipulate and decree its future. This remains dependant upon its commercial viability. The subculture is sustained for as long as it can offer financial reward and this potential rests upon the jurisdiction of external others.

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The arguments and assertions of the illegal side in this debate may now be fully understood. Acceptance, and the intervention this invites, engages writers in a struggle for symbolic ownership and control of their subculture:

"This is our community, this is our nation, our contribution to the world, it's our job to preserve it, insure it and nurture it - not someone else's"

(Phase 2 - 'Vibe' Magazine, Oct. '94).

Writers are possessive of their subculture and illegally advocated traditions may be interpreted as their attempts to reserve their rights to its control. By disguising graffiti's accessible, appealing or potentially marketable features, the subculture retains its social stigma and its immunity against societal intervention, manipulation and control:

"If they can't understand it, claim it or market it, they don't give a fuck about it"('Vibe' Magazine, Oct. '94).

In renouncing their world, the subculture stays their world.

In this chapter I have examined how the graffiti subculture actively struggles to define, negotiate, secure and defend its optimum position within societal boundaries. For illegal writers, this is a secluded and segregated niche. This group assert themselves as a subculture (in the literal sense of the word) and they work hard to stay that way. On this level, these observations provide support for the contentions of the CCCS group. Here, space is illustrated as an important subcultural commodity and resistance features heavily in members' interactions with the outside world. Subtle and important differences emerge, however, when one considers the purpose of their resistance, the nature of this space and, indeed, the reasons why it is won.

Subcultures take on a political guise within a Marxist framework. By resisting and opposing dominant culture's hegemonic values and meanings through their nonconformist styles, activities and rituals, subcultures crusade to 'win space' for the co-existence of their own values and forms of life. But are these resistant gestures their own values and ways of life? Do they seek accommodation? Or do they serve another purpose? In my view, the CCCS failed to fully problematise the role of these oppositional and often 'antisocial' subcultural displays. There is more to this subculture's opposition than a wanton abandon of societal codes of conformity, a flagrant refusal to 'fit' or a half-hearted rebellion against the impositions of the 'powerful'. Writers use their deviations and disguises, as we have seen, in insightfully beneficial ways; to secure public rejection and maintain their isolated and detached status as a 'world apart'. As such, their resistance

wins them 'space', but a very different type of space to that proposed by the CCCS theorists. This is not a symbolic expanse where their own distinctive forms and expressions can be accommodated out of hegemony's shadow. It is a much more 'real' space which allows them to stand apart as isolated outcasts and folk devils rather than cultural innovators and political crusaders.

Nowhere do these Marxist theorists consider the fact that the subculture's members may actually strive for and celebrate their social stigmatisation and rejection. Too often this is seen to be the consequence of their resistance rather than its goal (Thornton, 1994). As illustrated below, a negative as opposed to positive effect of their subcultural pursuits:

> "Exploitation of subcultural style, by the dominant culture, has itself two
> opposed aspects; on the positive side a heavy commercial investment in the
> youth world of fashion and trends, and on the negative side a persistent use of
> style-characterisations as convenient stereotypes to identify and, hopefully,
> isolate groups dominantly regarded as 'antisocial'"(Clarke, 1976b:185).

The CCCS's research is marred by the absence of the subcultural voice and this quote further emphasises the desperate need for its presence. A commercial investment is, for this subculture, anything but positive and its isolation is anything but negative. In this case, the subculture's aims and intentions have been overlooked or grossly misinterpreted, read in accordance with the theorists' own terms and meanings, not the ones of the groups they study.

The CCCS's political agenda just does not translate here. As opposed to countering hegemony or challenging the legitimacy of society's 'dominant' meanings, the subculture supports them. It hides itself from the public glare and reveals only its negative or inaccessible side, the side which continues to ensure its confinement and subordination. While hegemony may be used to explain their celebration of this, in the words of Willis (1990):

> "It seems too general and malleable a concept to be of much use in the
> analysis of concrete living social practices. . . . Hegemonic perspectives seem
> to be deeply uninterested in these actual practices and recoup 'popular
> cultural' contents too quickly into the politics of people/power block
> relations"(Willis, 1990:156/157).

Hegemonic analyses ignore the fact that these practices produce cherished cultural products and, with these, shared notions of power, control and ownership:

> "Psychologically at least, the informal symbolic workers of common cultures
> feel they really 'own' and can therefore manipulate their resources as materials
> and tools - unlike the books at school which are 'owned' by the teachers,

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unlike fine art paintings which are 'owned' by the curator"

(Willis, 1990:136/137).

For a young individual with no other claims of possession, power and control, this is a significant reward. An attempt to understand subcultural motives and concerns must account for this and realise that:

"Certain kinds of symbolic creativity in the expressive and communicative activity of 'disadvantaged' groups exercise their uses and economies in precisely eluding and evading formal recognition, publicity and the possible control by others of their own visceral meanings"(Willis, 1990:3).

What is hidden from and then discarded by the outside world becomes a societal loss and a subcultural gain. The subculture remains their world - meaningful, accessible and available to them alone.

CHAPTER 7

<u>NEW WORLD, NEW OPENINGS: THE PERSONAL</u>
<u>BENEFITS OF A SUBCULTURAL EXISTENCE</u>

Whether subcultures function in terms of individual or personal needs and interests appears to be a contentious issue. For the CCCS group such concerns were insignificant. Subcultural space was not used for personal gain, rather it allowed members to work out or through, at an imaginary level, class related problems or contradictions (Clarke et al., 1976). Political rewards were emphasised at the expense of personal ones and members' youthfulness and the age related issues that may be addressed through the group were relegated to secondary concerns.

Although Brake (1985) works within a Marxist framework, he redresses the balance between the subculture's personal and political functions by focusing on members' individual needs and the ways in which the subculture works to satisfy these. In brief, the subculture's proposed rewards are said to include the offer of an achieved as opposed to ascribed and possibly limiting school, work or class based identity and an alternative reality or moratorium space which allows adolescent members to explore who they are and test out questions about their world (Brake, 1985). Other theorists join Brake in their promotion of such concerns. Willis (1990) highlights the symbolic creativity of the young as an aid to exploring 'who' and 'what I am and could become'. Likewise, with no cohesive or 'whole' culture to adhere to and, thus, no 'ready values' or 'models of duty and meaning' to help structure an individual's passage into adulthood, youth groups are also seen to be an important source of guidance (Willis, 1990). These accounts concur with youth theories which also emphasise the importance of the adolescent peer or youth group and the individual's investment in it (see for e.g. Ausubel et al., 1977; Beloff & Cockram, 1978; Coleman, J.C., 1980; Eisenstadt, 1956; Hendry et al., 1993; Hurrelmann, 1989a; Ganetz, 1994; Marsland, 1980; Poole, 1989; Rogers. 1977; Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1985).

They do not, however, go unchallenged. These academic and commonly cited lay explanations of subcultural affiliation implicate the importance of the group and conformity to it, but they do not, as Widdicombe & Wooffitt (1995) contend, consider or problematise the loss of individuality and autonomy that occurs as a result of this affiliation. Given the social value that is placed upon uniqueness, this theoretical omission is, in their mind, somewhat paradoxical. Using a discourse analytic approach, Widdicombe & Wooffitt (1995) illustrate how the tension between social identity and individuality, ignored within theoretical explanation, remains a live issue for those subculturally involved. As they show:

"Being seen to conform to the criterial features of a subcultural group is taken
to be a sign of inauthenticity"(Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995:226).

As a means of salvaging their individuality, members were seen to underplay the
importance of the group, its codes of conformity and its associated rewards:

"Respondents design their talk to resist attempts to assess affiliations in terms
of what is thereby gained"(Widdicombe & Wooffitt 1995:182).

In doing so, they are able to revoke conformist depictions and instrumental
motivations and portray membership to be a matter of one's 'true' calling.

Widdicombe & Wooffitt use these findings to dismiss individualised or 'traditional'
accounts of group affiliation and reward. In my view, however, they have not yet
fully inoculated their thesis against these theoretical implications. My concerns lie
primarily in the ambiguity of the questions they used to elicit this apparently
revealing evidence - 'Is being a punk (or otherwise) important to you? 'What do
you get out of it?, What advantages are there? These questions do not, in my
opinion, invite consideration of the rewards of 'group' membership. Rather, they
ask respondents to comment on the implications of their stylistic appearance,
more specifically its benefits. Given the social stigma that accompanies such a
'style', the immediate rewards are probably few. In confirming this, respondents
do not necessarily dismiss the benefits they might gain from other facets of their
subcultural involvements. Likewise, failing to mention the advantages of one's
appearance and membership could also be construed as an attempt to further
support one's claims to subcultural commitment and fidelity; 'I suffer the negative
consequences of my chosen style because I remain a dedicated and loyal
subcultural member'. In this sense, the importance of the group is, in fact,
implicitly expressed.

Alternatively, one could accept these findings as valid, but limited in their
relevance. As I have argued elsewhere, subcultural groups differ and
Widdicombe & Wooffitt's contentions may merely comment on the nature of the
particular groups they studied. These may not be as defined or cohesive as the
graffiti subculture, for example, offering their members less to conform to and less
to gain from this adherence. Additionally, graffiti writers display their conformity
and commitment through attitude and action. For Widdicombe & Wooffitt's
groups, conformity is expressed primarily through one's dress, style and external
appearance. As a more overt demonstration of commitment, threats to
individuality may be greater. Lastly, the graffiti subculture dedicates itself to
granting writers distinction. They may conform to its conditions and standards,
but they write to be known, to be famous, to stand out from the crowd. The nature

of their work, thus, affords them a counterbalancing force that stylistic groups perhaps lack.

Subcultural distinctions make the universality of Widdicombe & Wooffitt's theoretical commentary hard to sustain. Reflecting this, this chapter offers a different view of subcultural participation. Unlike their respondents and the silenced members of the CCCS's groups, graffiti writers reference a variety of individual affordances and declare these to be a highly pertinent reason for their subcultural engagements:

"The wonderful thing about graffiti, you'll get people from all walks of life and all ages that are involved . . . because you get out of graffiti anything you want. . . . You know there's so many different things you can get out of it"(Zaki).

As we shall see, many of these rewards derive from the subculture's status as a 'world apart'. Writers work hard to support their perceptions of distinction and the personal implications of this 'separate' existence help us to understand why. Aside from the collective benefits of subcultural control, writers also gain a liminal space; a symbolically removed confine which offers those who enter it an escape from the influences, restrictions and setbacks which may be experienced within the fabric of the 'real world'.

The first section of this chapter explores themes of independence and self control and examines how the subculture's detachment works to satisfy these. Its structured and rule bound nature is also outlined as a transitional aid; an important source of guidance during an adolescent's quest for autonomy.

The remaining sections of this chapter focus upon issues of identity. Subcultural accounts of the past have rarely considered the link between subcultural practices and the construction of identity. Theorists now understand its importance. As McRobbie (1994) maintains:

> "Identity could be seen as dragging cultural studies into the 1990s by acting
> as a kind of guide to how people see themselves, not as class subjects, not as
> psychoanalytical subjects, not as subjects of ideology, not as textual subjects,
> but as active agents whose sense of self is projected on to and expressed in
> an expansive range of cultural practices"(McRobbie, 1994:58).

Ethnography remains an important tool in helping us to see how individuals formulate their identities in and through the cultural practices of everyday life (McRobbie, 1994). This chapter will illustrate these processes. Alongside a masculine identity, writers also gain an alternative persona. This, as we shall see, frees them from the ascribed ties and constructive restraints of their 'real life'

identities, allowing them to achieve the kind of persona that may be unobtainable elsewhere.

NEW WORLD, NEW LIFE: ESCAPING EXTERNALLY IMPOSED DIRECTION AND COMMAND

Theories of adolescent development are diverse (Roberts, 1983). Classical psychological and sociological accounts present adolescence as a stage or phase of transitional development which occurs in response to the innate physical and emotional changes or social role problems and confusions which arise during these teenage years (see for e.g. Blos, 1962; Erikson, 1968; Josselson, 1980; Kroger, 1988; Marsland, 1980, 1993). These developmental perspectives generally perceive adolescence to be a troublesome period of upheaval, confusion and rebellion.

Other theorists, such as Offer & Offer (1975) and Dittmann-Kohli (1986), dispute the traumatic nature of this transition, finding little evidence of this conflict or 'storm and stress' within their own empirical studies. Likewise, functionalist theorists, most notably Eisenstadt (1956, 1962), Coleman, J.S. (1961) and Parsons (1942), accept adolescence as a 'real' life stage, but they prefer to view it as a phase of continuous socialisation as opposed to a period of inner turmoil and crisis.

Others move away from the whole concept of adolescence as a stage. Davis (1990) views adolescence as a manufactured social phenomenon; a period of life which has been created by the disjuncture between Western definitions of childhood and adulthood. Accordingly, traditional 'stage' theories are criticised here for stressing a universality which fails to account for sexual, cultural and historical variations in tasks, values and pressures (Allen, 1968; Allerbeck & Hoag, 1986; Griffin, 1993; O'Donnell, 1985; Silbereisen & Eyferth, 1986).

Perspectives which ask us to recognise youth as a social construction or a differentiated group of individuals with differing experiences do not necessarily lead us to a position where 'adolescence' loses its categorical pertinence. McRobbie (1994) argues that:

> "Without presenting youth as an essentialist category, there are none the less
> a sufficient number of shared age-specific experiences among young people
> which still allow us to talk meaningfully about youth"(McRobbie 1994:178).

The most notable of these has to be a commonly felt desire for independence and self direction. Youth stand at the brink of adulthood and at this point in life issues of autonomy start to gain full impact. Whether one sees this as an influence of internal drives and impulses, externally changing roles and responsibilities, limited social rights and opportunities or a combination of all these factors, depends upon

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the theoretical standpoint one occupies. However, it is an issue which enjoys currency within almost any account which tackles the subject of youth or adolescence (see for e.g. Argyle, 1986; Bloch & Niederhoffer, 1958; Bremner, 1974; Byng-Hall & Miller, 1975; Coleman, J.C., 1980; Coleman, J.S., 1961; Damon, 1983; Eisenstadt, 1956; Erikson, 1968; Fiener & Klein, 1982; Ganetz, 1994; Hendry, 1989, 1993; Josselson, 1980; Marsland, 1993; Matza, 1964; McRobbie, 1994; Miller, 1975; Roberts, 1983; Rogers, 1977; Trommsdorff, 1986; Virgil, 1988; Willis, 1977, 1990).

Given this, subcultural themes of control and direction (outlined within the previous chapter) perhaps realise their greatest importance within personal domains. Adolescent graffiti writers are not only granted control of their subculture, but, more importantly, themselves. They confirm the value of this affordance in this section, illustrating why it was important to them and in what ways the subculture served to facilitate its gain. As such, a personalised view of these age related changes is offered from the point of view of those involved. Such an approach has been criticised in the past for perpetuating respondent naivety. Yes, their views may be interesting, but are they informed? Perhaps not. But then it is not my intention to uncover, identify or support a definitive theoretical take on the source or reasons for these adolescent developments. The scope of my research limits me in this respect. Such a commentary would resemble, like many of these theoretical arguments, a statement of faith rather than a proven 'truth' (Davis, 1990). My interests lie in the writers' own interpretations of their needs and desires and the way in which they use the subculture to satisfy these. In short, their own agentic moves towards adulthood. Perceiving the adolescent as a goal oriented and acting subject is now increasingly common in youth research (Hurrelmann, 1989b), as are naturalistic methods which take into account this agentic individual's own views, expectations and goals (Hurrelmann, 1989b). If individuals are acting (albeit within constraints) rather than acted upon, what could be more valuable than a subjective insight into the concerns that motivate them (Dittmann-Kohli, 1986; Emler & Reicher, 1995; Hurrelmann, 1989b)?

BREAKING AWAY - THE SEARCH FOR SPACE, SELF CONTROL AND SELF SIGNIFICANCE

The commentaries below exemplify themes of separation, distinction and independence:

"You're at the age where you don't really want to have to be told what to do. Like once you get into the high school level, you begin to feel a little grown

up and everything . . . . That's why graffiti begins here, at that same age group, that thirteen to fifteen age group, where you're just at the brink, where you're ready to go either way"(Futura 2000).

"I suppose I was pissed off with just being told what to do all the time, you know, it was nice to do something a little bit different"(Stylo).

Both writers relay their wishes to stand apart from others and enjoy some sense of the autonomy that this stance represents. Utilised as a gesture of independence, the subculture works to satisfy this desire. As Series maintains:

"It's a clear cut means of breaking away, doing your own thing"(Series).

The writer gains a private space positioned beyond the realm of family and adult ties, associations and influences; a domain which effectively communicates assertions of individuality and distinction.

This adolescent search for 'space' is a well recognised one (see for e.g. Bloch & Niederhoffer, 1958; Bremner, 1974; Byng-Hall & Miller, 1975; Damon, 1983; Ganetz, 1994; Hendry et al., 1993; Marsland, 1993; McRobbie, 1994; Miller, 1975; Roberts, 1983; Trommsdorff, 1986; Virgil, 1988; Willis, 1977). Ganetz (1994) outlines its incentive:

> "Liberation from parents is central to adolescents (Fitger, 1991). This involves
> the construction of identity, a goal conscious project of finding oneself, of
> becoming a separate individual"(Ganetz, 1994:90).

Supporting this, Drax recalls his desire for some sense of self significance:

"I think you feel the desire basically to do something and achieve something for yourself"(Drax).

The self command, direction and control that accompanies this subcultural space represents an important gain in this respect. For perhaps the first time, writers' actions stem from their own decisions alone:

Nancy: *"So would you say it represents a break from adult influence?"*

Ego: *"Yea, I suppose it does. You've got to fend for yourself, do what you want to do with regards to being able to carry yourself in that respect"(Ego).*

Unlike home or school, writers volunteer their own progressions and, thus, work solely for themselves. As Claw maintains:

"You can control your own destiny here, it's totally self propelled"(Claw).

External supervision is absent, as is the tuition or aid which may accompany such guided development. Writers are, as Sae 6 and Zaki outline, left to direct themselves through a totally independent and private learning process:

"The one thing about graffiti is the fact that you couldn't go and buy a book about it, see what I mean, there was no guidance to it"(Sae 6).

"When you're really into something madly, you learn every facet of it, don't you? Because a lot of it's self taught, you can work out things for yourself or experiment by making mistakes"(Zaki).

Pink articulates one of the more extreme implications of this self gained responsibility and direction:

"It follows an adolescent pattern, you know, you start to feel your own independence. Now you're responsible for your own life completely. Like, if you make one false move, your life is in your hands and you could get killed, so you're showing that sort of independence"(Pink).

Writers are not only provided a metaphoric control of life, but also a literal one. Graffiti is dangerous and interaction with such risk donates them the ultimate testing ground; a setting which allows "them to try out their personal physical power . . . and thus test their personal possibilities and limitations of behaviour" (Hurrelmann, 1989a:23).

This might explain why writers invest such an enormous degree of effort and work into the development of their careers. Through this self directed progression, they gain full authorship of their own achievements, a clear recognition of their own capacities and an active sense of "the powers of the self and how they might be applied to the cultural world"(Willis, 1990:12).

Ostensibly, then, the subculture serves to elucidate and exemplify self significance. Notions of independence gain full expression and individuals are provided the space to 'come into their own'. Henry identifies the factor that works to make this possible:

"There's no bureaucracy to deal with, which might make any transitional event for you meaningless. If you do it through the institution, it becomes meaningless, they are so little to do with you. . . . No one intervenes, you get on with it for yourself"(Henry Chalfant).

The subculture's societal isolation may grant its members some sense of group control and ownership, but it also clearly works to feed their age related concerns. These may be related to the restrictions experienced beyond subcultural boundaries:

"Society is run by a system of appointed power, some of us are granted it, some are not. . . . Fuk the police, bollocks to law and order, I love doing what I'm told I can't"('Londonz Burning' Magazine 2).

With little social standing or potency, young people are subject to the conditions and demands imposed upon them by those with a relatively greater degree of power. While they can oppose these, they cannot ultimately change them. Self control and direction remains denied:

"To be a young girl or boy is to be powerless, to see one's own life controlled
by other forces than one's own. It is not only one's parents who have power,
but also institutions such as school and leisure organisations. The market
and the state also intervene in young peoples' lives"(Ganetz, 1994:87).

Here, then, the subculture steps in to redress the balance. As Iz and Pink
explain:

*"There's an outlet there that you feel you can have control of because
society sort of makes you feel like you're controlled"(Pink).*

*"I still think to this day it's about freedom, that's the assessment I would
make"(Iz).*

The individual escapes 'real' life and the hierarchy of power that operates within it
and enters a domain where figures of authority are notably absent (Brake, 1985).
Recognising this, McRobbie (1994) locates the sub or youth culture's attraction "in
the modes of empowerment they offer"(McRobbie, 1994:174). Ganetz (1994)
elaborates on this point:

"One of the distinguishing features of youth culture is just this search for
places where one can be in control; a place to be alone and with friends; a
place free from parental and other adult interferences. These free spaces are
absolutely essential if the individual, together with others in similar situations,
is to be able to seek, experiment and shape his or her own identity and
subjectivity"(Ganetz, 1994:87).

These rewards are nicely summarised in the extract below:

Ego:*"All it offers you is a kind of format, it's something to be into and that
is the medium of using spray paint to actually create your art. So,
therefore, you're giving yourself your own guidance, you're not being
tutored, you're not being told this is what you have to do, you must go to
college, you must be a lawyer, you must be a doctor"*

Nancy:*"You're your own boss basically"*

Ego:*"Yea, yea, you've found something that is your own"(Ego).*

The functional nature of this subcultural response provides us with a radically
different image of adolescence to that put forward by classical theorists. They see
rebellion and nonconformity as a problem, a reflection of confusion and instability
during an inherently stressful and traumatic stage of life. Subculturally, however,
this 'rebellion' takes on a much more coherent role. In light of writers' own
commentaries, it is not so much a culmination of internal drives and impulses,
external stresses and strains, but more a conscious and active search for a
context which feeds their age related desires for control, independence and
autonomy. As Silbereisen & Eyferth (1986) contend:

"Adolescents . . . produce their own task environments to actively shape their development"(Silbereisen & Eyferth,1986:14).

Deviance is seen to be a valid option in this quest (Dittmann-Kohli, 1986; Jessor, 1986). If one expects young people to secure their step into adulthood, but denies them the tools to build this bridge, they will find their own route with the only resources left open to them, in this case, crime. In this sense, the problem is not an individual one, but a contextual one. As opposed to lashing out in response to uncontrollable urges and conflicts, writers appear to be compensating for a simple lack of legitimate transitional opportunities. Fiener & Klein (1982) put forward a similar argument. They view subway graffiti as a 'self generated rite of passage', an attempt by a group of urban adolescents to find ways of attaining adulthood within a social environment which does not meet their needs or concerns. From this angle, then, themes of adolescent adaptation are much more relevant than classical narratives of confusion, trauma and rebellion.

The comments within this section also offer us a slightly different version of the relationship Emler & Reicher (1995) articulate between delinquency and adolescence. Building on Hirschi's (1969) social control thesis, they present adolescent crime to be, among other things, the result of loosened or absent parental, family or social commitments and controls. On the basis of writers' accounts, I reverse this argument. Yes, external attachments, commitments and controls are important, but because they are present, not absent. Adolescent writers crave some sense of autonomy and independence, so they move away from the sphere of the family and school to satisfy these demands. As such, rather than facilitate delinquency, these weakening attachments are actually fractured by it. While this leaves writers with a greater degree of fr eedom and control, it does not, as we shall see, leave them devoid of order or constraint.

STABILISED FREEDOM

Writers may reject the structured and ordered framework of 'conventional' society, but, ironically, they enter the subculture to embrace a new and, as Martha observes, similar one:

"It sort of imitates mainstream, but it's their own"(Martha Cooper).

Writers gain their own space, but this is regulated using the organisational principles of 'mainstream' or 'adult' society. This observation corresponds with those of other researchers. Ausubel et al. (1977) highlight similarities in adolescent and adult group standards, values, rules, roles and hierarchical distinctions and they interpret and present these as transitional aids; moving from the security of adult control, the structured peer group offers the adolescent

anchorage and a new and alternative source of stability and support (Ausabel et al., 1977; Hurrelmann, 1989a; Kandel, 1986; Marsland, 1980; Newman & Newman, 1976, as cited by Hendry et al., 1993; Rogers, 1977). This section makes similar claims. While the subculture affords adolescent writers self control and independence, it also eases their move towards autonomy through providing them a reassuring degree of structure, clarity and order.

'THE RULES OF DISORDER' - STABILITY THROUGH DIRECTION

Although writers disregard societal rules and regulations by engaging in this activity, they do not divorce themselves from the discipline these represent. An internally governed system of direction replaces this external guidance:

"We created a self governed subculture and we were fine with that"(Dondi).

An accessible set of unwritten subcultural rules and conventions make up the structure of this governance:

"The rules are clear. There are these aspects and marks that you live by as a graffiti writer and you learn as you go"(Claw).

These behavioural guidelines are an important feature of adolescent groups. They provide young individuals seeking autonomy a repertoire of accepted moves, a clear set of steps towards goals, a guide to handling new situations and thus, as Futura 2000 endorses below, an important sense of direction and confidence (Argyle, 1986):

"I remember so vividly being like a toy (novice) and not knowing anything about the rules and just pretty much keeping my mouth shut and listening and wanting to learn, you know, having some education before I just jumped into the thing blindly"(Futura 2000).

So what makes these rules different to those questioned or rejected within home, school or wider society? Lee explains:

"They identify much better with the rules of the community because they're self made rules and they fluctuate and they're sort of appropriate for the field you're in"(Lee).

Unlike these other rules, subcultural codes of conduct are self generated and, thus, relevant and meaningful. Because of this, they are voluntarily embraced rather than imposed:

"Our society has its own rules that are not inflicted upon us by appointed figures, but a voluntary set of rules lived by through belief, rather like the customs of a religion"('Londonz Burning' Magazine 2).

This has allowed the subculture to retain its sense of order. As Marsland (1980) distinguishes:

"Control in peer groups tends to be tight, precisely because of their voluntarism and informalism. The norms that are generated are powerfully maintained. However, the basis of this control is fundamentally different, since it is voluntary, temporary and mutually adjustable, than control in other types of collectivities"(Marsland, 1980:31).

To enforce these rules through a single system of power would threaten an adolescent's newly gained freedom and ultimately ensure their rejection (Werthman, 1982). Through diplomatic generation, such threat is eradicated. The subculture removes the authority and, in the majority of cases, maintains the discipline. It is this balance which defines it as an ideal forum for adolescent transition. An individual gains space and freedom and a lucid set of directive guidelines to replace the clarity and support of external supervision.

'THE YOUTH OF TODAY' - STABILITY THROUGH DIFFERENTIATION

Although age is, in one way, an unimportant subcultural factor - any individual of any age can work hard and move up the subculture's hierarchy - divisions in experience and status inevitably reflect some degree of age based differentiation. Like the identity classifications that operate within other deviant or adolescent groups (see for e.g. Bing, 1991; Bloch & Niederhoffer, 1958; Katz, 1988; Marsh et al., 1978; Parker, 1974; Virgil, 1988; Williams, 1989), writers recognise these differences by dividing themselves into two broadly based categories:

Nancy:*"So if you're going to divide them, roughly there are two divisions?"* Kilo:*"Yea, basically old school and new school . . . like your new school will be all the people that are out bombing at the moment, like new names, like I don't even know half of them"(Kilo).*

The subculture adopts generational divides and, it appears, the attitudes that characteristically accompany these. As in 'mainstream' society, we see older generations of writers condemn 'the youth of today' for their unruly and immoral behaviour:

"Back then people had more morals and the kids of today have grown at a much faster pace, so the kids of today are more wild than when I was younger, they're just really crazy"(Jel).

As Ego complains:

"It's what kids are like now though, it's getting worse and worse"(Ego).

Ironically, the tone of this condemnation differs little from the way in which society comments upon the subculture as a whole! Thus, rather than escape their stigmatised societal position, young writers find themselves swiftly reinserted into similar categories. This graffiti magazine article conveys the menial status they occupy within these:

"(1) You suck until further notice

(2) It's going to take a long time before we even acknowledge your existence, even longer before we can bear to look at that foul scribble you call your name"(Mark Surface - 'On The Go' Magazine, Dec. '93).

Novice writers carry their subordination through bearing the designated label, 'toy'. As the literal meaning of this word suggests, they represent playthings, uncredible figures that merely generate mild amusement or entertainment for others. Indeed, to call an older or accomplished writer a 'toy' or imply childlike connotations, as below, constitutes a great insult:

"He's down with the crayola posse"(Az).

So how might this role framework assist a young writer during his/her quest for independence? Firstly, by offering clarity and, thus, security (Argyle, 1986; Rogers, 1977). Young writers enter the subculture and gain a rapid appreciation of where they stand and what is expected of them. Secondly, it offers familiarity. Rather than enter a world devoid of 'real life' significance, they enter one that is reassuringly similar - although significantly less restrictive. Here the subculture differs to wider society. Although 'toy' status is unrewarding, it is not fixed or enduring. Through hard work and dedication these writers can soon attain the prestige and importance that older, established or prominent writers enjoy. As Freedom recalls:

"I was a toy, nothing but a toy, but just due to longevity, I gained a lot of respect . . . just because of my age, because I had been there at an earlier age"(Freedom).

In many cases, older or prominent figures take on celebrity status. Reflecting this, demands for their autographs are not uncommon!:

"Drax says he gets kids coming up to him and asking for his autograph, you know, thirteen year olds. Because to have a tag by Drax in your book, its like getting someone's autograph or something"(Proud 2).

I witnessed a similar form of reaction while conducting research in New York. Having offered his name, an older writer I was talking to became engulfed by an excitable group of young writers. They questioned him at length about the 'old days' and asked him to tag in all of their 'black books'. He finally managed to extract himself from the scene and his car pulled away leaving a star struck group of fans animatedly discussing his inscriptions within their books. This event allowed me to fully appreciate the third, and perhaps most important, benefit of status differentiation. The individual I was talking to ceased to be merely an 'American writer', he became an accessible celebrity, a subcultural icon and, thus,

a figure who could be adulated and emulated. At this point in life, as Proud 2 explains:

"You change your role models. I mean I adopted people, prominent people in the scene . . . I suppose it's like a popstar, they're your role models. For the last part of my teens, it was a few prominent guys in graffiti"(Proud 2).

Peers do not have to replace the leverage of parents or significant others, as Coleman, J.S. (1961) has suggested, they may merely begin to exert a greater degree of influence in areas such as one's current lifestyle (Kandel, 1986; Noller & Callen, 1991). In relation to this, they provide opportunities for role taking, modelling and imitation (Hendry et al., 1993; Kandel, 1986):

"See, everybody has a certain mentor in graffiti . . . someone that you grow up watching and you admire his work and stuff. You just watch him as a kid and say, 'wow, I really dig this guy's stuff"(Az).

Superiority positions older writers upon a kind of platform, one facilitating a learning relationship. Although less prevalent today, more formal or personal mentor-apprentice partnerships were also common. In exchange for paint or support within the train yards, older writers would act as subcultural trainers or teachers:

"You could watch people develop . . . take over the style that their teachers had taught them and improve on it and actually become more famous than the teachers who had taught them"(Henry Chalfant).

The mentor-apprentice relationship is a developmentally important one (Levinson, 1978). Moving towards a position of independence, the mentor provides the adolescent with a supportive transitional figure (Levinson, 1978); an unrelated role model who initiates and smoothes their journey into the social world outside of the family unit (Hamilton & Darling, 1989; Levinson 1978). Subcultural involvement does not, then, leave writers suspended in a vacuum of isolated autonomy. They relinquish the full impact of their external influences and find within these boundaries the stability and support of new and alternative references and guides.

I wish to conclude this section by, again, calling attention to the conformity that pervades the fabric of this supposedly lawless subculture. This is revealed in the way it adopts varying aspects of conventional society. Firstly, rules, expectations and codes of conduct play a central role in maintaining subcultural order and discipline. Likewise, generational divides and their attached meanings are also embraced. Toys are 'seen and not heard' and older writers are 'elder and better'. Ironically, they are extended the respect that elders within 'wider' society are now increasingly denied. This serves to challenge two theoretical assumptions concerning youth and their subcultures:

1. Adolescents create their own distinct societies which operate norms and values in opposition to those of the adult world (Coleman, J.S., 1961; Havinghurst, 1987).

My ethnographic material supports the existence of a symbolically distinct society, but, in terms of its organisation, I am inclined to agree with Coleman, J.C. (1980) who states:

"In most situations peer group values appear to be consistent with those of important adults, rather than in conflict with them"(Coleman, J.C., 1980:178).

There is little evidence here to support the adolescent's apparent rejection of conformist sentiments or the generation gap that supposedly exists between the attitudes of society's 'young and old'.

2. Following from this, the CCCS's contention that subcultural space is used to assert socially alternative attitudes and modes of behaviour is also questioned. The subculture may have retreated to a secluded corner to embrace its status as a world apart, but it has clearly carried selected aspects of 'mainstream' society with it.

The theorists above present their observations as a matter of all or nothing - the subculture or the peer group reject or replace **all** adult or 'mainstream' values and attitudes. This is problematic because they leave little room for exceptions or areas where this may not be so. I have argued that the subculture embraces many features of 'mainstream' society, most notably those which appear to stabilise or ease processes of adolescent transition. There are, however, other aspects which it does leave behind. The next section details these and the reasons why they have been discarded.

NEW WORLD, NEW LIFE, NEW PERSONA - ESCAPING EXTERNALLY IMPOSED DEFINITIONS OF SELF

The subculture's segregated nature affords those who enter it a sense of detachment. They symbolically disengage from their immediate situations to start a parallel life within a new world. I say parallel because this is not the only life they lead. In straddling membership between both 'mainstream' and subcultural forums, writers live out a dual existence. Mear describes this 'superman syndrome', as I term it, as lived experience:

"It's like two totally different lifestyles. Probably people at work don't know what the hell he's doing in his spare time. You know, it's just something totally different. It's like having a split personality. It's like me, at one stage my parents, my mum, didn't know where I was going at night. I'd be back before morning, you know, I'd just have a normal day"(Mear).

In distinguishing between these different identities and lifestyles, Mear fills a theoretical gap that many theorists leave vacant:

"Theorists display an over-committed image of subcultural affiliation. That is, it is implied that being a punk is all you are"(Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995:27).

Too often the subcultural member is presented as that alone (Davis, 1990; McRobbie, 1980; Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). Scant attention is paid to the other life spheres he/she occupies (McRobbie, 1980, 1994; Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995), the different identities he/she juggles and how. Writers remain in tune with these issues. A writer may be a writer, but he or she is also, as Mear appreciates, someone's son, brother, daughter, father or employee. Mear describes this multiple co-existence as akin to having a split personality. In doing so, he clearly recognises himself as a postmodern subject, one whose:

"Self is conceptualised as more fragmented and incomplete, composed of multiple 'selves' or identities in relation to the different social worlds we inhabit"(Hall, 1989:120, as quoted by Reimer, 1994b:129).

Some theorists see this rupture in unity and wholeness as stressful (Weedon, 1987), as producing:

"Anxiety states resulting from distress at such contradiction, and the consequent desire for wholeness, unitariness - a coherent identity"

(Henriques et al., 1984:225).

But confusion and instability need not be inevitable. Writers evade disorientation by avoiding any sense of contradiction. A distinction between 'real' and 'subcultural' life is drawn and the self is neatly fractured to accommodate this. Rather than one person housing two identities, they become, like Superman, two different people. A new name is chosen and a new self is gained. They both remain distinct and, thus, coherent:

"You develop this whole other identity that doesn't really apply to the real world"(Dondi).

'THE SUPERMAN SYNDROME' - NEW PERSONA, NEW POSSIBILITIES

This splitting of the self serves an important and immediate function. Aside from gaining coherence, writers are also:

"Kind of escaping real life"(Dondi).

Rather like rebirth, they choose a new name and establish a new persona. Unlike their inherited 'real life' identities', this one is created and developed by the writer alone. As such, it enjoys an important degree of stability - it cannot be disputed or destablised. Futura 2000 explains why this certainty was so important to him:

"At some point around fifteen, nineteen seventy, I was told by my parents that I was adopted and I guess the shock of hearing that put me in a

situation where I didn't, at that point, know who I was, kind of thing. And there was this happening outside on the streets where I could suddenly become an anonymous person and create a new identity for myself, which is pretty much what I used graffiti for, to create an identity of which I was certain of. Nobody would be able to come and say, 'well you're not that person or whatever', there was really no question. I could hide behind the anonymity or I could be quite public about it. However, I wanted to deal with it, so that's what really got me into it, that I needed to, I was looking for my self identity"(Futura 2000).

Futura used the subculture to reinvent himself. He entered a new world as a new and anonymous person and, in doing so, escaped the ambiguities and insecurities which surrounded his 'real life' self.

For an adolescent, this reinvention of self is significant:

> "Graffiti writers use their new names to celebrate the transition from the
> narrowly defined role in the family to a more widely experienced world"
>
> (Fiener & Klein, 1982:49).

Name changes have always represented changes in status and role (Bloch & Niederhoffer, 1958; Eliade, 1958; Fiener & Klein, 1982; Harré, 1993; Young, 1965). As an important feature of initiation rites and rituals, they "indicate that the novice has attained to another mode of existence"(Eliade, 1958:xiii) and, thus, stand as a symbolic landmark in his/her quest for autonomy (Bloch & Niederhoffer, 1958), individuality and distinction:

"You went out and you kind of wanted to make an identity for yourself . . . . There was a whole movement of kids who wanted to be identified"(Dondi).

With a new name, writers stand alone as their own person, self-contained and free from the external ascriptions and connections that determine their significance and work to define them. For perhaps the first time, as Henry explains, writers gain the power and freedom to define themselves:

"You're kind of transforming, you're no longer a child, you hold your own destiny and identity in your hands. And I think graffiti is like that, it's the first step of having your identity in your hands, you're responsible for it, you display it, you're responsible for the persona that you're going to present to the world as an adult"(Henry Chalfant).

The beauty of a subcultural identity is the developments you can make to it. The persona the writer now holds in their hands is flexible and recognises few of the limitations of the 'real' world. It does not just evade 'real life' connections and

associations, but also the impediments and frustrations that may be found here. As Steam explains:

"If you haven't got fame and respect from anybody else or you're not well known, you're nobody, you've got to get those things"(Steam).

The subcultural identity dedicates itself to this provision. In this sense, it makes a significant contribution to a writer's self esteem and respect. Emler & Reicher (1995) find claims linking delinquency and self esteem puzzling:

> "It is not entirely clear . . . why vandalism, fighting or theft should have such beneficial effects for self-respect"(Emler & Reicher, 1995:132).

The writers' comments below should help to clarify this point. As they explain:

"In the graffiti world, you can be the same as bloody Calvin Klein or whoever else"(Mear).

"You can be an underground celebrity within your own community, your own setting"(Sae 6).

Essentially, a subcultural identity represents the persona that is yearned for, but, as these writers specify, unattainable within other spheres:

"You know, it's because you can never be famous in the higher life, you know, you're nobody, you're being looked down at, you know. So we had to find a way to become movie stars in our own way"(Jel).

"I just think a lot of people see it as a way they're going to get some sort of recognition within their own group . . . . A lot of people see that they're not going to get noticed, they'll just be another statistic, but the guys that do graffiti are there"(Proud 2).

"I mean, as an adolescent you've got to just wait until you grow up for people to take notice of what you're doing. So with graffiti, you can start at any age and people will look up to you. However small you are, people will look up to you with some respect"(Mear).

Using a subcultural identity, the writer becomes who he/she wants or needs to be:

"Your own sort of superhero . . . I dunno, it's a kind of sense of being someone"(Ego).

The new name and persona a writer adopts therefore plays a personally significant role. For some, it is used to dismiss the definitions which frame their 'real life' identities, allowing them to assert a sense of distinction, individuality and influence. For others, such as Futura 2000, this importance may not lie so much in discarding applied definition, but rather constructing it. In either case, the writer *is afforded* a sense of escape; using one identity, 'real life' gains full impact, using the other, it is further distanced.

SUSTAINING A SEPARATE WORLD - SUSTAINING A SEPARATE SELF

The subculture works to support this sense of escape by operating perimeters which ensure these worlds and lives remain separate and distinct. This section will explore these boundaries, how they are encouraged and enforced and the ways they operate in terms of writers' needs and interests.

'FOOLISH FIDELITY' - KEEPING LIFE WITHIN SUBCULTURAL BOUNDARIES

One measure of maintaining difference can be found within the definitions and boundaries writers use to construct what it means to be a writer. These use subcultural values of commitment and dedication as their building blocks. As we have seen, writers must prove themselves and 'pay their dues' within an illegal sphere. However, what point must writers work to? When are their dues seen to be paid? Answers to these questions may be found in the category writers use to define individuals who ignore personal limits and apparently go beyond the call of illegal duty. These are:

"Guys who've got to keep carrying on and on and on and really pushing it, obsessive"(Ego).

This form of writer is generally termed 'fanatic' or 'hardcore'. The fact that writers have devised a specific label for these individuals illustrates them as somewhat distinctive or unusual. Drax outlines why they differ using Rate, a renowned 'hardcore' illegal writer, as an example:

"You've got to talk to Rate. Rate is like, 'I've been in prison and I'm a total psychopath, I don't stop'. He's out there to destroy trains and you just think, 'What the fuck is this guy on?', and you just think, 'yea, I've heard it all before', but when you realise his age and the fact that he's been to prison and that, you just think, 'he really means it'''(Drax).

Fanatics are writers that continue the scale and pace of their illegal work after apprehension or imprisonment. Despite the commendable degree of commitment and dedication they display, they are viewed ambivalently:

Nancy:*"People that carry on in the face of massive charges, people like Rate, is he highly respected?*

Kilo:*"People either respect him or think he's stupid. I respect him"*

Lee:*"Yea, he's just dedicated"*

Kilo:*"I mean to be knocked back, as he's been, and still come out, you know"(Kilo & Lee).*

Fanatics may be honoured for their subcultural efforts, but, as Kilo observes, many view the lengths they go to as reckless, irresponsible or stupid. There are, it seems, limits to the dedication expected and fanatics go beyond these:

"True respect goes to fanatics who go all out with complete openness to follow their heart . . . . To be blatant, however, gives them advantage and means your freedom will rarely be yours"('Londonz Burning' Magazine 2).

Paying your dues involves discomfort, possible apprehension and the problems associated with this, but jeopardising your freedom is seen to be excessive. When dedication starts to interfere with 'real' life, life beyond these boundaries, writers have, as Drax articulates, gone foolishly beyond the call of duty:

Nancy:*"Did Acrid get a certain amount of respect for doing what he did?"*

Drax:*"Yea, definitely, even now, to an extent, people say he did a lot of stuff. But I think if you're just a total idiot who didn't care or think about getting arrested, then anyone can go out and do that amount of stuff easily. It's like to do it and get away with it earns you more respect than to do it continually and just fuck yourself up over it, you know. I mean 'Kast', for example, is probably the most respected London train writer ever, yea, just for style. He served time for graffiti and then he had a court case coming up, where he was looking at getting something close on two years for graffiti. And he went on the run from the police and he's been on the run ever since. . . . It's like graffiti has completely and utterly screwed up his life and people, I'd say quite unanimously, respect him as one of the best London train writers ever, but, at the same time, I don't think people respect what he has allowed graffiti to do to his life. . . . Although people will say it's unfortunate, a lot of other people, even reckless writers, would say, you know, he should have been more sensible. Like Acrid is someone who falls into that bracket, he got arrested and he didn't learn, he just carried on being stupid"(Drax).*

A writer should be dedicated then, but not too dedicated. Fanatics overplay their fidelity by carrying this to the point where 'subcultural life' meets 'real life'. This makes the 'fanatic' a less valued construction of writer. These life worlds should be parallel, not merged. An ideal writer is one who sustains this divide, one who acts with caution and, citing Drax, does it and gets away with it. The subculture is no escape if one is sitting in prison because of it.

'THE LIMINAL WORLD' - ERASING 'REAL LIFE' MEANING

The occupation of two identities may allow writers to evade background influences, associations or insecurities, but what about the features of 'real life' which cannot be so easily disguised or escaped? Harré (1993) describes these as 'stigmata':

"Stigmata are fateful attributes of individuals, which they can do nothing to remove and which they cannot help but acquire. . . . someone born into a despised ethnic group cannot by their own actions slough off that

ethnicity"(Harré, 1993:208).

The subculture manages stigmata such as one's class, 'race' and physical appearance by paralysing their influence. Aside from sex it seems:

"Graffiti lifestyles hold no prejudices. Whether black, white, rich, poor, smelly, clean, intelligent, thick, gay, sheep shagger etc., there is room to earn respect in our culture"('Londonz Burning' Magazine 2).

The fact that these affordances are not available to all (i.e. women), may lead some theorists to interpret these accounts as 'tales of the field' (Van Maanen, 1988); fictional or idealistic fantasies which keep the subculture alive. But do exclusions have to make this depicted life world illusory? Female writers may not get the opportunity to enjoy these merits, as we have already seen, but this does not mean that male writers don't. This is not a fantasy world, it is a world described by and meaningful to its central inhabitants, males. In this sense, it can still be used as real evidence of the real gains females fail to enjoy.

The subculture undermines these stigmata by reconstituting itself into a liminal sphere:

> "A transitional place in which normal expectations of behaviour are suspended, allowing participants to take on new roles"(Murray, 1989:186).

It sustains its status as such by bringing its second measure of differentiation into play. Commenting upon subcultural dispute and friction, Drax illustrates how boundaries between 'personal' and 'subcultural' life are internally enforced and upheld:

"With graffiti, you've got an alterego, which is your tag. And, you know, it can be 'Rough' is crossing out 'Skip', 'Rough' is saying this about 'Skip', it's all graffiti chit chat which blows between people, you know. But once you overstep the boundaries of personal behaviour, graffiti behaviour and people actually start knocking on your door and punching you in the mouth and stuff with no interest in regard to, like, graffiti or tags or anything okay, then you've overstepped the boundaries of what you can afford to get away with. I mean, I can sit here and go like, 'so and so', using their tag name, 'isn't any good, so and so is this, so and so is that', but I wouldn't just add to it, 'yea and, like, his sister's ugly anyway', or something. Do you see what I'm saying? You can't overstep that kind of like boundary"(Drax).

A very clear line is drawn between this life and 'real life' and writers are not expected to cross this in their behaviour. Subcultural interaction should, as Drax indicates, centre around writers' alteregos and issues of subcultural concern alone. Like the mud that is wiped before entering the threshold of a clean house,

traces of 'real life' are left upon the subculture's doorstep. Writers enter carrying nothing but their subcultural name and persona:

"You're only based on that, you're based on what your actions are under that name"(Stylo).

Within these boundaries, you are not black, white, rich or poor. Unless you are female:

"You are what you write"(Sash).

Writers relate to each other on the basis of their subcultural identities alone. In doing so, they exclude the influences that might preclude or limit their interaction within other spheres. As Prime, a black writer, explained to me:

"I mean, I've met people that I would have never met, people like skinheads who are blatantly racist or whatever. I can see it in them and they know we know, but when you're dealing on a graffiti level, everything's cool, everything's real cool and I go yard with them, they'd come round my house, I'd give them dinner or something"(Prime).

The subculture stands apart as a free space, a confine suspended in a vacuum of its own relevance. On this liminal terrain:

"Kids from the richest families can hang out with kids from the poorest broken families. There was all sorts; black, white, Spanish, Chinese. You know, this was the first universal culture, they felt very unified"(Lee).

As Coco 144 maintains:

"It broke a lot of barriers, I'm talking about racial barriers, people from different neighbourhoods, different boroughs, it wasn't a colour thing, it was more like a family"(Coco 144 - 'Vibe' Magazine, Oct. '94).

Entering the world of the subculture means entering a domain devoid of 'real life' meaning and relevance. It does not, however, mean losing notions of distinction. Its members may be unified, but they are not necessarily equal. Like 'wider' society, the subculture is a hierarchical confine. Unlike 'wider' society, however, it operates a democratic process of reward, one which conforms to the belief that:

"Respect should be earnt. No one should expect respect. Why should I respect someone just because of their position in life?"

('Londonz Burning' Magazine 2).

The inherited props of 'real life' are eradicated and writers must now achieve their status and standing through their subcultural actions and achievements alone. As Prime informed me:

"It's all about wisdom, knowledge, working hard to develop your talent and getting respect because of that, not getting respect because you're in a certain position or you're affiliated to anybody or whatever"(Prime).

This system of earned status represents a common feature of adolescent and subcultural groups (Ausabel et al., 1977; Coleman, J.S., 1961; Eisenstadt, 1956; Rogers, 1977) and itself has two important and related functions. Firstly, it works to enhance self significance; writers achieve by their own merits, not other people's. Secondly, it ensures that success lies within the grasp of any individual who works to attain it. Even for those with little or no artistic talent:

"There is room to earn respect in our culture. Artistically, there is really no barriers to a degree. Man who paints drippy, out of proportion, ugly pieces everynight gets more respect than man with wicked outlines, but to paint would upset his social calendar. Respect is mainly based on effort"

('Londonz Burning' Magazine 1).

'All' (males) are donated the right to promote their identities beyond the boundaries and restrictions of 'real life' because immutable criteria, which may discriminate or limit this development elsewhere, are dismissed.

Upholding graffiti as the only issue of concern allows writers to enjoy the positive acknowledgement that may, on the basis of alternative means of judgement, be withheld:

"Writers earned respect from their achievements. You could be four foot tall with four eyes, buck teeth and a lump, but if you rocked lines and produced fresh cars, you were a king"(Prime - 'Graphotism' Magazine 3).

As the quote above elucidates, writers are granted an immunity against factors which lie beyond their influence and control; factors which might, given relevance, threaten a positive perception of self. Rate and Akit further illustrate this affordance:

"Once you get good at it, and it's not as if it's hard to get good at, people will think you're alright, when actually, at the end of the day, you could be a complete idiot"(Akit).

"He's a bit of a weirdo, but he's alright, he gets up and that . . . . That's why I respect him, because I see him up all around"(Rate).

In a sense, writers become 'more' than themselves because they escape the need to represent themselves. Their art or achievements now perform this role:

"You know what backs you up, show her the book. You know, when you meet a writer and they talk to you, all you have to do is whip something like this out. That's your credentials right there, that speaks for you, that says what you are and what you've done"(Jel).

What we begin to gain here is a sense of removal. If,

"They compare each other through their artwork"(Lee),

as Lee confirms, then the significance of a writer's personal or physical self is effectively dissolved. This further emphasises the female writer's subcultural exclusion, since her physicality and sexuality is generally commented upon. However, it also says something interesting about youthful vulnerabilities and the possible insecurities associated with one's personal and physical self. The next section of this chapter will examine this in more depth. A writer's written name will be presented as a form of 'metaphysical identity', a 'virtual' persona which overrides the physical or personal constraints that may prevent a positive and desired realisation of self.

THE NAME IS THE FAME OF THE GAME: SUBCULTURAL REMOVAL OF THE PHYSICAL SELF

The name represents the basis or 'faith of graffiti' (Mailer et al., 1974). It is a fundamentally important aspect of a writer's work:

Iz:"No matter how abstract a canvas of mine might get, the name remains, the name remains"

Cavs:"That's important"(Iz & Cavs).

In its simplest form, then, graffiti concerns a celebration, promotion and exposure of self:

"You can sum it up in two words, 'I am'. That's basically what it is, 'look at me', it doesn't matter if you look at me in a negative or a positive way, but, 'look at me'"(Proud 2).

The subculture encourages writers to proclaim their existence and effectively rewards them for doing so. The greater the self promotion, the greater the fame and respect:

"You did your name a thousand times, that was your respect"(Dondi).

In this sense, writers are literally honoured for nothing more than being, for existing and illustrating and securing this existence in the minds of others. A process writers term as:

"Making a name for yourself"(Cavs).

This saying is fitting because it connotes a sense of physical absence. People may make a name for themselves in any area of life - i.e., she has a name as a trouble maker, he is very tough on new students, he has a name for that. It is not a direct confirmation of you, it is a reputation. Similarly, the writer is also 'making a name' in the sense that he/she is becoming known for something. It is not the physical self, but the inscribed name that declares a writer's existence. Writers

'make a name' for themselves, the written name, as Claw demonstrates below, is literally, 'made for the self':

"I mean, look at graffiti, it's a celebration of self. It's, like, this is me, Claw, this is my name, this is my art, this is me, me, me. It's a me thing and it's my identity, this is who I am and it's a total representation of me"(Claw).

THE 'VIRTUAL' SELF

The name is used to embody and represent the individual who writes it. The writer below makes this affinity between inscription and self explicit:

"It's a kind of familiarity. Like, if you paint somewhere and you go back there, you feel like you belong . . . there's a bit of you there"(Stylo).

Stylo's work incorporates and emanates an essence of himself. As he states, 'there's a bit of you there'. Zaki explains how this association is, perhaps, amplified by the intimate nature of spray can usage:

"With a spray can it's a different way of applying things, it's, sort of like, intimate with yourself . . . . A pencil and all those tools are extensions of yourself. But, for some reason, if you've got this thing coming out with air and colour at the same time, it sounds kind of corny, but it is coming from you, sort of thing, as opposed to dip in the paint brush and apply colour. With spray it's so immediate, it seems to be coming from you sometimes"

(Zaki).

This intensive communication between a writer and his/her creative production appears to secure a sense of fusion between the two. As Iz confirms, boundaries become impalpable:

"Whenever I paint, it's just a physical extension of myself"(Iz).

A writer's work becomes an extension of self and, thus, a plausible substitute for self. Prime explains how his name evokes a symbolic sense of his presence despite his physical absence:

"You like seeing your name, you like knowing that, yea, you've left your mark. It's like you being there and other people seeing it"(Prime).

The subcultural self is, thus, further fractured. Alongside a 'different identity', dislocated from the parameters of 'real life', writers also occupy a 'virtual' or 'symbolic' identity, dislocated from the parameters of 'physical life'. Writers appear to recognise this duality. They comment below on the anonymous acquaintance they share with others through their silent exchange of names:

"When you're first known, someone knows who you are and they don't, they don't know you, you know, who you are and they're talking about you"(Stylo).

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"There's hundreds of people all over the city who don't even know what you look like, where you come from or nothing, but they know you. It's weird"(Akit).

"It's a great thrill to do something then come back the next day and know that people are seeing that, but, at the same time, they don't know who you are. You never get, like, personal fame, you know, your name's famous, but you're never really famous"(Zaki).

A theme permeating all these commentaries is the known/unknown status of the writer's self; 'people don't know you, but they know you. You are famous, yet unknown'. Writers seem to use this acknowledged tension or contradiction to distinguish between the distinct identities they possess; one physical, the other ethereal, the written name, the identity that assumes subcultural relevance. Again, depictions of chaotic and confused subjectivity are also dissipated. Fragmentation takes on a guise of consistency here. Each segment of this splintered self is recognised, self-contained and, thus, coherent.

VIRTUAL CONSTRUCTION - REINVENTING THE SELF

The adoption of a virtual identity shrouds a writer's 'real life' or physical persona in a cloak of mystique:

"In a way, it's a mystery. You know, the last time I did a piece I wrote, 'twinkle twinkle little Claw how I wonder who you are', because people don't know"(Claw).

Even one's sex, the most prominent feature of an individual's self, is obscured:

"It's just like a name, whatever, but I'd meet people and they'd heard of Akit, but they didn't know that Akit was a girl and stuff like that and they'd be like, 'oh, you're a girl'"(Akit).

Writers embrace this afforded disguise and the phantom like status they gain from it. Notice the way Jel refers to a picture of his name as 'his picture':

"You know what's even better, you know, you're hanging out with all these kids and they open up a book and your picture's in there and they don't know it's you though"(Jel).

"I kind of like the fact that people don't know who I am, they know Claw. My friends were telling me that they heard this rumour that Claw is like a big black kid with one arm and then somebody also told me that Claw is this Puerto Rican fifteen year old and then Claw is this other person. I always hear these rumours about who is Claw and I kind of like it"(Claw).

Perhaps the pleasure of this obscurity lies in the power writers now have to transcend the boundaries of their 'real life' or physical selves:

Nancy:*"So you choose a new name, it's like a new identity"*

Stylo: *"Yea, it's a secret one and you become more than yourself because people don't know you"(Stylo).*

A symbolic identity relieves writers of their personal and physical characteristics and promotes a process of self reinvention. This ties in with recent work on internet users. Theorists have observed how the anonymity of machine interaction allows users to construct a 'virtual identity', one which transcends their sex, appearance and other features of their physical selves (Bassett, 1997; Spender, 1995). Graffiti, however, facilitates this without the help of technology:

"What youths thought about themselves, their environment and, maybe most importantly, what they wanted to be, was reflected in their tags, throwups, pieces, messages etc. They created identities for themselves"

(Prime - 'Graphotism' Magazine 3).

Let us now look at some of the tools writers use to construct their virtual selves.

'IT'S ALL IN THE NAME' - DEPICTING THE SELF THROUGH THE USE OF A NAME

A writer's choice of name is important. The recognition that he/she strives to secure can, as Drax and Dondi explain, be enhanced by a name that captures the attention of others:

"There's a lot of names like Sim, Sin, Sem, Cap, Kip, Cop, Ken, Cess, which are just quite irrelevant really, you have to work really hard to get those names noticed"(Drax).

"You just had to have a good name, good names usually made it. A lot of guys had bad names, it just didn't click. Like, Butch is a good name, wow Butch!"(Dondi).

The names Drax references as irrelevant appear to lack a sense of meaning. Conversely, the name Dondi cites exudes an evocative quality, offering impact in its associated connotations. The name therefore works when it serves to conjure up some form of image. The nature of this image also appears to be important:

"An example of a good name is 'ARGUE'. It looks fly [good] when written, sounds cool when spoken and conveys a combative attitude. On the other hand, 'ENEMA' (actual name) looks, sounds and conveys a shitty attitude"

(Mark Surface - 'On The Go' Magazine, Dec. '93).

If the meaning or feeling of the name works to convey an attitude, then this word can be seen to contribute to a writer's virtual construction of self. As Fiener & Klein (1982) maintain:

> 'The selection of a nickname can also be seen as a communication to the world about how one is feeling about oneself and what it is about oneself one would like to advertise to the world"(Fiener & Klein, 1982:49).

Additionally, in the absence of "any form of visual representation, a name constitutes a first appearance"(Bassett, 1997:544). Writers must, therefore, consider the image they wish to portray. Acrid illustrates his elective intentions:

Nancy: *"So why did you choose your name?"*

Acrid: *"Do you know what Acrid means?*

Nancy: *"Acrid, it's bitter"*

Acrid: *"Yea, that's me"*

Nancy: *"How did you get that name?"*

Acrid: *"I liked the letters and I liked the meaning . . . I just thought what word would suit me"(Acrid).*

Acrid chose his name for what it evokes, as he contends, an essence of himself. Drax confirms the constructive role of the name below and illustrates the self image he endeavoured to formulate through his own personal choice:

Nancy: *"So the tag name's important, you choose that with care?"*

Drax: *"Yea it is important, but it depends on the individual. Again, for some people it's important, but there's other people who change their name every week because of problems with the police or they don't like the letters or they can't seem to find the right identity with it or whatever, but it is important. . . . With mine, I was thinking, yea, yea, this graffiti, I like it, I must get a tag and I wanted something that sounded quite dynamic, you know, not one of those smooth names, Romeo or something, right. I suppose an X has got an element of that in it, one of those harsh sounding names. And then there's this Bond film, 'Moonraker', and there's a guy in it whose name's 'Drax', 'Drax Industries'. It just had this, kind of, taking over the world kind of feel about it, this mad guy that was trying to take over everything"(Drax).*

Writers clearly use their written or spoken names to build up their virtual identities. Their chosen self projections and the names they select to construct these are revealing (Ley & Cybriwsky, 1974). Desired characterisations appear to communicate masculine notions of strength, power and control; Butch is macho, strong, forceful, Acrid also denotes this strength through its associations with a bitter taste, the opposite to sweet, a shocking or disturbing experience. Likewise, Argue, as the writer explained, imparts these connotations through its combative or oppositional overtones. Finally, Drax in itself has little meaning, yet its visual letters, the X specifically, the actual sound of the spoken word and its original reference again imputes a sense of power and dominance, as he states, a 'taking over the world kind of feel'.

Not all writers use their names to inspire these characteristically masculine overtones. An alternative image of self is perhaps preferred; Claw - lacerating incisiveness:

"It really fits my personality . . . it was just a natural tag"(Claw).

Futura 2000 - a visionary pioneer:

"Futura 2000, it just had that kind of ring to it that seemed to apply . . . and it was always done at that kind of angle, going up to the right, so it was kind of like kicking off, going to the future"(Futura 2000).

Figure 28. 'Futura 2000'

Alternatively, writers may choose not to define themselves in the eyes of others at all, adopting a seemingly meaningless word that holds personal or private significance or is beneficial for its letters alone.

'IT'S NOT JUST WHAT YOU SAY, IT'S HOW YOU SAY IT' - STYLE AS A STATEMENT

Given the irrelevance of the physical self, fashion or one's dressed appearance holds minimal significance within this subculture. Style, however, is not an absent concern. Rather than outfit themselves writers use their writing styles to clothe their names, their virtual selves:

"You built up a style, it's like your signature, a part of you, it's you saying something about yourself and putting it somewhere and other people see it and recognise it and click"(Prime).

So what does a writer's style work to say or convey? In the main, something assertive. Many of the subculture's lettering styles are dynamic, angular and powerful in appearance, granting much work an aggressive quality:

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"I don't believe it's possible for the aggressive vibes of graffiti not to show in any piece of art work produced by a writer"

(Shock One - 'Graphotism' Magazine 2).

The core writing style, 'Wildstyle', is perhaps the most provocative. This imagery wraps the writer's name in a flurry of sharp peaks created through the use of angular and generally indecipherable interlocking letters. From these letters arrows project rather like guns or weapons that stand to protect the name. The overall constellation takes on the appearance of an armoured tank or a powerful machine, inducing, through this, a sense of unrestrained motion and an aggressive tone of confrontation and angular violence (see Figure 29)

Figure 29. The Angular Violence of Wildstyle

Represented through this visual guise, the virtual self assumes its connotations As Skore demonstrates:

"Although I am a positive thinking person and anti violence, my pieces give the impression I'm a raving psychopath . . . . The generally 'tooled up' nature of my work reflects this I guess"

(Skore - 'The Real State' Magazine 6).

Skore dissociates himself from the intimations of his artwork (see Figure 30.), indicating his awareness of its definitional powers:

"I feel my graffiti has a very sharp steel feel to it, although I'm not a violent person at all"(Skore - 'The Real State' Magazine 6).

His comments also illustrate how writers can use their art to portray an alternative or oppositional image of self. Zaki makes use of this potential:

"Maybe you like things that aren't like yourself because I've always wanted to do big, bold, blockbuster letters, maybe that's why"(Zaki).
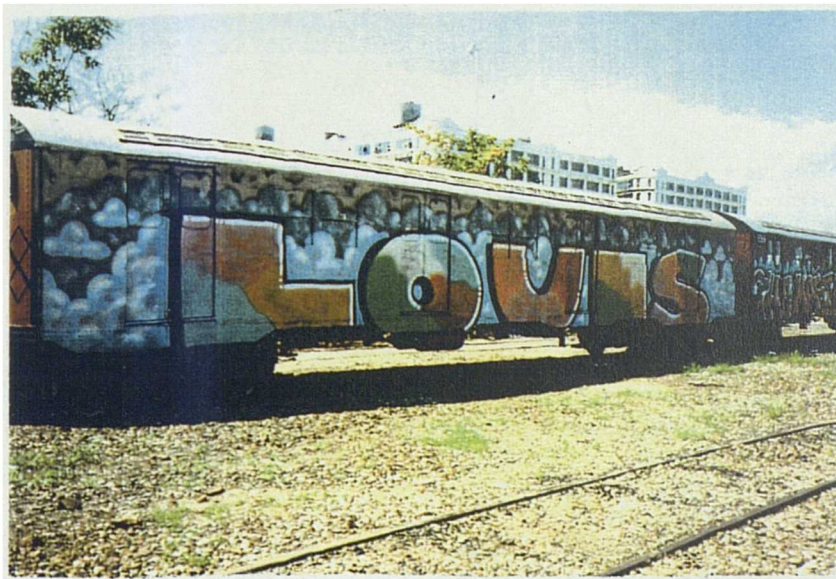
Figure 30. 'Skore'

Figure 31. Blockbuster Letters

Graffiti, thus, allows writers to construct or relay some statement of themselves. However, this commentary can be taken one step further. A written name can suggest a writer's disposition or personality, but it can also be used to imply his/her physical size:

"The way someone writes their tag is very important, you can tell a lot about their character, their build and height and everything. Like big people, physically, will tend to do their tags bigger and fatter people tend to do fatter writing and tall, slim people do tall, slim writing. So you can tell from their tag"(Acrid).

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As physical status is connoted through the relational size of the name, there is nothing to prevent a writer from intimating a different physical image. As Prime elucidates, visual cues do not always offer an accurate portrait:

"There's pictures you've built up of people. Every time you meet someone it's, 'oh, I thought you were a big guy', ha, ha, ha"(Prime).

As such, writers enjoy a great deal of constructive freedom. An image of machismo can be visually suggested, for example, alongside a physical status that works to support it.

A QUESTION OF LOCATION

In examining the ways in which the virtual self is constructed, the contextual location of the name must also be considered. At a time in life when issues of power, autonomy and control are immediate, this constructive tool has much to offer.

These writers, among many, express the enjoyment and satisfaction they gain from seeing their externally inscribed names:

"I see my name about, I feel, sort of like, cool, good about it"(Rate).

"It was a good feeling to wake up the next day, walk along the street and see your name there"(Steam).

This pleasure is, perhaps, derived from seeing the name as a symbolic representation of self; a self that is, as Zaki intimates, exposed, isolated and, thus, irrepressibly independent:

Nancy:*"So what is it about that, seeing it again, just that it's there, it's permanent?"*

Zaki:*"Well, no, because you know that it might not last. It's like, if you do a drawing, you go away and you come back and it's there on a bit of paper, your drawing. But if you do graffiti, it's on a wall or a train or something, it's in a different element, it's on a medium that you've never seen before and it's out there in the world, sort of thing. I know it might sound stupid, but if you've done something inside, you've got on the light, it's inside in a familiar surrounding so it helps, but if it's outside, it's not natural . . . it just stands out"(Zaki).*

A name on a piece of paper is sheltered by the shielded environment it exists within. However, an external context, such as a train, offers this name little protection:

"It can be destroyed within hours and you're doing something that moves as well . . . it moves around and then it gets killed"(Zaki).

Like a hunted animal, the name or symbolic self stands alone to brave the rigours and hazards that it may encounter. An exposed setting, thus, awards it a sense

of fortitude and, it seems, an additional guise of supremacy. As Fiener & Klein (1982) contend:

> "Names help to tame the powerful. Giving something a name or label offers the illusion of controlling or limiting it. The subway's powerful machines are tamed by placing one's name on them; the name celebrates victory and possession, like one's brand on a wild steer"(Fiener & Klein, 1982:49)

The name/self imposes itself upon the unsuspecting environment and does so in a way that acts to convey presence and a sense of domination:

"Like you usually see letters on little things and to se_ something t rt f ' moving along or even stationary on a wall, it's not wh't /ou d no mally . it's out of it's normal surroundings, it's blown up . . . . As soon as yo ' - the colour or the outpouring of graffiti, it suddenly bec rre., it st, ^'s o amongst all that"(Zaki).

In relation to their backdrop, the names in Figure 32 are lar_e and dvn¬n ic standing out and proud upon their conquered context.

Figure 32. 'Revs' & 'Cost'

The speed and motion of a train may be seen to magnify this imparted potency. Lee articulates the command of these travelling inscriptions:

"That was the beautiful thing about it, that these things moved out of your sight and you couldn't arrest it, it arrested you for the few seconds that it was in the train station, for when it went by you, then it was gone"(Lee).

The name is granted the same power as the robust machine it rides upon It cannot be stopped, it lies beyond the control of those who see it passing. Against the intense force of the machine, they remain impotent. They can only watch as it thunders past to its next destination.

"Its a good feeling to see your name run"(Cavs).

Like the train, the name or virtual self is going places.

Figure 33. 'Cavs' Going Places

'PHYSICAL GRAFFITI' - VIRTUAL INTERACTION AND THE VIRTUAL SELF

Writers can construct themselves beyond the boundaries of the physical self, but they can also, as Drax indicates below, conduct themselves on this symbolic level:

"Even without the physical contact of networking with people, interaction is constantly being made, like between writers that don't even know each other"(Drax).

Using nothing but their inscribed names or virtual selves and a semiotic analysis of the positional interaction that may occur between them, writers have devised a symbolic interchange or silent language:

"There's conversations between people who haven't met, through writing"

(Prime).

This exchange can be understood metonymically (Marsh et al., 1978), as a substitute for face to face interaction and communication. Indeed, Zaki and Series support its metonymic role by referencing their symbolic actions in these terms:

"I see tagging as 'talking' to other graffiti artists"(Zaki).

"Basically it's just 'shouting' all over a wall. It doesn't mean anything, it's just that, it's 'shouting' all over a wall"(Series).

I would disagree with Series here. Shouting all over a wall or replicating bodily interaction on a symbolic level is not meaningless, it serves a very important function. Namely, it allows writers to animate or put the virtual persona they have

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chosen to evoke into play. As such, it offers them another resource with which to construct their identities.

SHOUTING ON THE WALL

"Graffiti attracts graffiti"(Acrid).

A piece of graffiti on the wall rarely remains solitary, generally it is accompanied or joined by a group of other names and markings. Ego explains the purpose of this congregation:

"What it is, it's that you're communicating with others. You'll find that you do a tag and someone else will tag next to it"(Ego).

So what exactly do writers communicate or say to each other through this affiliation? In its simplest sense, hello:

"You're letting them know you've seen them there, like instead of walking past the wall, I know you've been here"(Acrid).

Just as an individual would approach another and greet him/her physically, writers position their names, their symbolic selves, next to others to relay this greeting in visual symbol (see Figure 34.).

Figure 34. A Virtual Greeting

As Drax explains below, this gesture of salute can also act as a sign of respect:

"Let's say a specific person, maybe someone I've never met before, you know, say 'Joe' for example, happens to have placed a tag everywhere that I've done and, depending on the way in which it is done, I could take that as a sign of respect. Like he's saying, 'I've seen your name, I'm, kind of like, following your spots as well'"(Drax).

By acknowledging another's name with his/her own, the writer indicates he/she is worthy of attention and, thus, effectively grants the other some importance. However, as Drax points out, this does depend 'on the way in which it is done':

Nancy:*"And depending on how it's placed, you can read it differently?"*

Drax:*"Yea, you can read different things"(Drax).*

The meanings that can be conveyed through this visual interchange are variable. Manipulating the position, quantity and size of one's name represents a potent means of changing these.

Relational positioning, quantity and size

Drax explains how space can be used to signify or support a writer's importance:

"If you get a huge big wall, nothing on it, say, for example, I go and place a tag on the wall, generally speaking another accomplished writer or known writer will come along and place his tag somewhere indiscriminately on the wall away from mine. . . . Even though he's obviously seen your tag, a more accomplished one will tend to be more like of the attitude, 'I saw the wall, I wrote my name there, I don't even remember seeing your name there', that kind of mentality. Whereas a younger writer might, sort of like, give you the acknowledgement and not really worry about that kind of thing, actually deliberately putting it near your name just to, sort of like, say, 'yea respect, I've written here too'"(Drax).

By placing his/her tag within a clear distance, an accomplished or well known writer denies the other writer's name recognition and, thus, effectively asserts his/her own importance (see Figure 35.). In accordance with his/her status, an obvious acknowledgement and donation of respect may be seen as unfitting.

Figure 35. A Virtual Assertion of Status

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For a younger writer of lessened status and importance, however, such refrain may be detrimental. Jel and Sae 6 explain why:

Jel:*"Put it this way, we'll have a hundred tags on the wall, we know which ones to look at"*

Sae 6:*"It's just when you look at it real quick, you know which ones to pick up . . . . That kid 'Near', you say you saw everywhere, I would see that tag and I wouldn't even read it because it doesn't matter"(Jel & Sae 6).*

As a writer's motivation lies in gaining recognition and fame, ensuring one's name is noticed by others becomes centrally important. Given that:

"Writers will always look at their tags when they go past again, their own ones"(Drax),

the proximity of a young writer's name will ensure he/she gains the recognition that may, as Jel and Sae 6 outlined, otherwise be revoked.

Where one puts this name, however, remains important. A name directly above as opposed to beside another's (see Figure 36.) can easily turn a conveyance of respect into an assertion of supremacy or an insulting denial of potency:

"If I'm walking along somewhere and I'm doing tags, whether there's a few on the wall or whatever, if I come back and there's a tag deliberately placed above mine, sometimes it could be taken as like a friendly little challenge, but a lot of the time it is a deliberate, sort of like, attempt to make you look irrelevant, you know, especially if there was loads of other space on the wall"(Drax).

Figure 36. A Virtual Assertion of Supremacy

This gesture is a plain and simple way of saying I'm above or better than you. Upon finding such a message, Prime responded in kind:

"I did my crew tag, 'Famous 5', and one of them put 'London Giants' on top, not touching it, just above it and then I came and put mine on top again. . . . When I did my tag and they put it above, I knew that was saying, 'The London Giants are better than us', and he knew that I was saying, 'no you're not', by doing a tag on top, 'no you're not'"(Prime).

Similarly, increasing the number of accompanying names can, as Steam illustrates, reconstitute the acknowledgement that is donated by one name, into a challenge:

Nancy:*"Say Drax is king, how would someone try and challenge him?"*
Steam:*"They'd just do tags maybe next to him, like four tags next to the side of his one, something like that. They'd just put it everywhere just so people would see it as well"(Steam).*
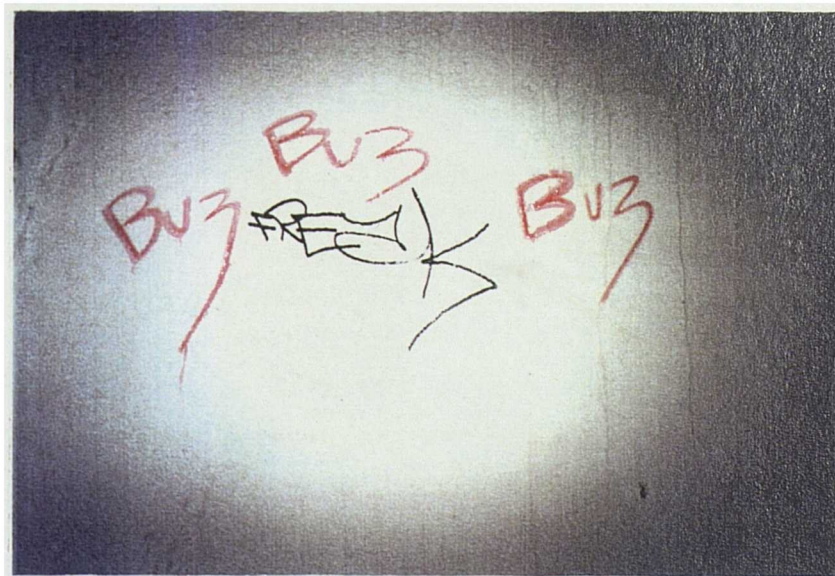

Figure 37. A Virtual Challenge

Drax translates the implications of this gesture:

"If someone sort of said, 'oh went to so and so the other day and I saw your tag and it had like four different tags by so and so placed all around it', and, depending on who that person was, they'd instantly go, 'oh cheeky git, he's showing off', or, 'who's he trying to make look silly'"(Drax).

Crowding another's name with four of your own literally declares 'I'm more than you'. The surrounded writer's importance or superiority is questioned because the space or uncluttered platform that signifies or supports this status has been reclaimed by the other writer.

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A larger name can work to relay a similar statement (see Figure 38.).

Figure 38. A Virtual Denial of Potency

Drax explains why the need for name affiliation and, thus, acknowledgement declines as the size of a writer's tag increases:

Nancy:*"Size is important then?"*

Drax:*"Well, yea . . . I mean, if you had a huge can of paint, you'd just hit the wall because there's no way someone's going to go past and miss it. You wouldn't need to sort of try and put it next to them, in that it could even be taken as offensive, you know. And, of course, there's the possibility that you might accidentally clip over the edge of their name"(Drax).*

Through enlarging the name, the recognition invited or the respect that is donated through placing one's name next to another is easily revised to impart a form of challenge, ridicule or boast of superiority. However, as Drax stipulates, the greatest danger of this placement lies in the writer's possible contact with the other's name.

Virtual imposition

The immunity of a writer's written name is a centrally important code of writing practice; a universally accepted rule, recognised and expressed by any writer:

"I think everyone knows from day one that if you go over the top of someone that is a serious crime, sort of thing"(Zaki).

Futura and Claw testify to the severity of this violation by declaring their adherence to this rule:

"I never had guys going, 'Futura, I'm going to fucking kill you, you wrote over me', because I'm still like from the old school of respecting each

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other's tags and if there's no space available I'll just find some other area"(Futura 2000).

"I don't go over people unless I have a reason to. I'm very respectful. If there's no room on a door for me to write my tag, I don't write on that door. I will not go over people"(Claw).

If cramping a writer's space indicates his/her insignificance, then encroaching on this to the point of touching or covering his/her name (see Figure 39.) is an even more direct way of denying his/her importance and worth. A writer does not touch another writer's name:

"Unless you want to show a deliberate lack of respect for them. It's like you're trying, you're showing, 'well I don't care about you, I'm just going to write the name on you'"(Drax).

A metonymic translation of this action might see the individual pushed aside or ignored.

Figure 39. A Virtual Imposition

There is, in this case however, room for poetic license. Acrid illustrates how size can affect the impact of this derogatory gesture:

"You can put a dub over a tag and you can put a piece over a dub. Then you can put a window down or whole car over a piece, as long as it's bigger and better. . . . I've done plenty of pieces over peoples' tags. It wasn't a sign of disrespect and it wasn't taken as a disrespect. Say I put a tag over someone's piece, that's a sign of disrespect. But if it was the other way around, it would be no big deal"(Acrid).

Imposition represents an insult unless the writer uses something bigger and better. Offence is then eradicated. In Figure 40. Elk insults Dreph by placing a

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dub, a relatively simplistic graffiti form, over his piece. The impact of this gesture can be ascertained from the message Dreph has left asking Elk to explain himself.

Figure 40. A Dub Placed Over a Piece

This exchange can be understood metonymically. As in any situation, an insult is somehow greater if it comes from someone smaller or less important than oneself. This is a more overt threat to honour because one's physical or social dominance has been blatantly dismissed as inconsequential. When the scenario is reversed, however, the insult loses some of its sting. A smaller or inferior individual may merely present a safe and accessible target. If anything, the insult lies at the feet of the bully or coward who hasn't the courage to pick on someone of his/her own size and standing.

Virtual assault

While a name over a name can be read in different ways, a line through this offers no such ambiguity. As Figure 41. illustrates, the gesture is emphatic. It ignores all the rules which work to protect the name and, as Akit elucidates, imparts the most extreme mark of disrespect:

Akit:*"When I was young and was writing 'Best', I got lined out . . . . I was just like, 'oh my God, fuck, oh no!', it's like the end of the world, you know"*
Nancy:*"If someone lines you out, what are they saying?*
Akit:*"You're shit"(Akit).*

I was able to appreciate the severity of this violation when a writer showing me around his crew's hall of fame noticed that some of the pieces had been defaced by someone's tag. He was clearly annoyed, but the unknown name suggested that the offender was a young or new writer who may not have known better.

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However, when he noticed a line through his own tag in the same coloured spray he became visibly upset. A line is taken to be a more personal and striking insult because, unlike a tag, it appears to represent the equivalent of a physical attack. Drax supports this correlation by presenting a physical blow or a line through the name as optional responses to misdemeanour:

"He'd find out by way of getting his name crossed out or a slap in the head from someone that he'd done the wrong thing"(Drax).

Figure 41. A Virtual Assault

Virtual combat

Writers have at their disposal a symbolic representation of self, an inscriptive means of insult and assault and, thus, all the symbols that enable them to enact the provocation and interaction of a physical fight on an emblematic level. Steam describes this symbolic process:

Nancy: *"How would you insult another person?"*

Steam: *"Someone would go over or write over your piece saying wak, toy, lame, something like that, just a little insult or whatever"*

Nancy: *"What would happen if you went over someone's piece like that?"*

Steam: *"They would find out, then they'd go over your piece and then it would get out of hand and they'd cross your whole work out"(Steam).*

The exact same stages of a physical fight are metonymically enacted; a writer is insulted, assaulted or challenged by a line or tag over his/her name and he/she retaliates to defend his/her threatened honour (Matza, 1964; Polk, 1994). Notice how Col and Rate refer to their work as themselves:

"I don't like it when I get dissed [disrespected], I don't like that. People go over me, diss my pieces, any of that, when someone disses me, I'll diss them back"(Col).

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"If someone dogs [lines] me out I just dog them out myself . . . see their tag, dog them out as well. Some people don't, some people just leave it"(Rate).

The fight starts on the wall and it stays there:

"They'll battle it out on the wall in paint"(Col),

using words and symbols rather than fists and weapons.

Virtual warfare

A fight that continues or escalates is generally recognised as a war:

"Graffiti wars were when guys were crossing each other out"(Freedom).

Writers use their city walls as a billboard of subcultural information, so a large 'cross out war' usually becomes a focus of interest. By reading these surfaces, writers can follow the development of the fight:

"You've got these walls that say, Drax, and cross over say, RCS, and then cross over again with a fatter one, a fat cap on a silver, again and again, bup, bup, bup, bup, bup"(Ego).

What Ego refers to above is a notorious cross out war that occurred in London in the early 90s, a period of extreme internal unrest. A young writer, 'Cred', in the crew, 'RCS', started to 'line out' Drax, a very respected older writer who is head of the crew 'PFB' (see Figure 42.).

Figure 42. 'Drax' Lined Out

The war started, predictably, with a throw away insult:

"Something about Drax cussing [insulting] RCS, saying they were all toys and that"(Rate).

Acrid, the leader of 'RCS', offers his reasons for Drax's aspersions:

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"I think a lot of it was because RCS, the people that started it, were from his area and were, like, younger toy writers. In time we overtook him and he got a bit upset . . . he couldn't outdo us"(Acrid).

Drax volunteers an alternative account:

"In my opinion, it's because a lot of the RCS people came from this area, and I've always done a lot of stuff in this area, got more exposure. . . . To use a phrase, I suppose a couple of them got out of their prams really. It's like they got jealous and rather than sort of have respect they started to just show total disrespect really, just going over my stuff, sort of like saying, 'well we're from round here as well', sort of thing. And then I suppose I, kind of like, crossed out their stuff and it, kind of like, develoj o f from there. . . . It just got more and more malicious really"(Drax).

Using either version of this story, the contest was clearly incited by compctiion and fuelled by attributions of disrespect.

Figure 43. 'Cred' Lined Out

The resulting unrest made its mark upon the entire London scene as the fervour and scale of this war intensified and others began to take sides and get involved:

"It went on so far that other writers that don't even know either of us in person were actually making the effort to go round crossing Cred out, just because he was discrediting an accomplished writer for no reason, which is quite unheard of to an extent"(Drax).

Likewise, others stepped in on Cred's behalf and extended the boundaries of the war by attacking those with no direct connection or involvement. Kilo found himself caught in the middle of this cross-fire:

"Cred and Serch and all that lot, they all had a go, but Fest just seemed to come in on RCS and just tried to carry it a bit further by crossing out me

and a load of people that were innocent . . . people that weren't even involved in it the RCS, PFB business. Really, because of that, he just made so many enemies in one go"(Kilo).

Figure 44. 'It's War RCS VS PFB!'

Following a year and a half of tumult, a cease-fire was declared and calm was finally restored. Kilo explains how:

"That Cred guy must have obviously had enough because I saw a piece last year that he did in Hoxton, like Drax's area, and on the dedications it had PFB and all crews that he'd messed with. So, I dunno, maybe he just thought is it worth it"(Kilo).

Writers often dedicate their pieces to other writers and crews as a sign of respect (see the bottom right corner of Figure 45.).
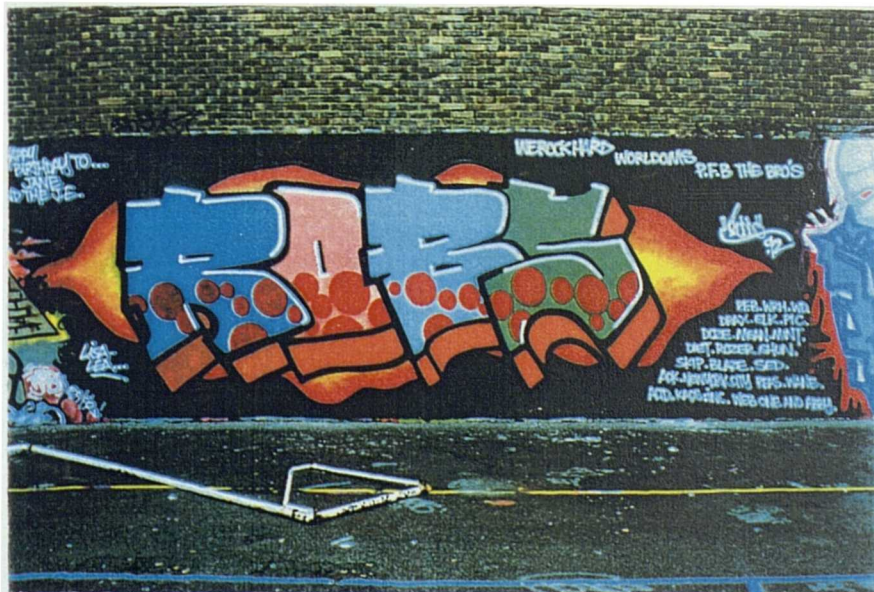
Figure 45. A Writer's Dedications

Like a handshake, then, Cred used this gesture to signal his submission and effect a truce. Unbeknownst to the rest of society, the silent war that had raged within their city and fractured an entire subcultural community had just been terminated.

'STIGMATISED STARDOM' - VIRTUAL CONDUCT/CONSTRUCTION

Although Cred diffused his dispute with Drax, he walked away from this confrontation with a very high profile:

"He got his bit of fame out of it. People know him because he's the one that crossed Drax out or whatever (Drax).

Cred's prominence based itself upon his infractions. He broke the rules and made this significant by insulting or disrespecting a famous or accomplished writer. Accordingly, he earned, what writers term, 'cheap fame' or a blemished form of recognition:

"I mean, he's got his fame, but it's a bad bit of fame"(Mear).

Cred became infamous as opposed to famous because he built his name through scandal and notoriety. As Ego sees it:

"It's like being a serial killer, do you know what I mean? Same way, isn't it?"(Ego).

While Ego's comments convey the negative associations of this fame, his analogy is a pertinent one. If we interpret Cred's actions metonymically, the connotations are very similar. His actions were symbolically violent. In effect, he attempted to obliterate Drax and those that stood by him. Henry supports this translation below, referencing an American writer who earned a legendary profile for similar actions:

"'Cap' had a profound effect . . . . He destroyed a whole generation of writers . . . that was 'Cap's' legacy and he got famous for what he did"

(Henry Chalfant).

By crossing out these names, Cap did not destroy a generation of work, but, rather, a generation of writers. Henry supports the significance of the symbolic self and reinforces, through this, the physical implications of Cap's activities. He conducted a symbolic massacre and, in doing so, gained a notoriety that recognised him as the subculture's serial killer, their infamous villain:

"I guess there's got to be a bad guy. I mean, we're all bad, but he's a really bad boy . . . he's the famous villain"(Futura 2000).

The concordance between Cred's and Cap's actions are recognised:

"He thinks he's Cap in New York"(Lee),

as are the similarities in their stigmatised reputations. Both used symbolically violent and destructive behaviour to formulate disreputable, yet, highly prominent

identities. Both, therefore, provide us with a lucid illustration of self construction within the symbolic realm.

THE VIRTUAL SELF: REACHING THE PARTS OTHER SELVES CAN'T REACH

Notions of identity construction find unambiguous support within subcultural confines. Writers use their graffiti to 'make a name' and, thus literally, 'make themselves'. A symbolic self is adopted and various constructive resources are used to provide it shape, meaning and form.

So what does this self work to reflect? Depictions may vary, but predominant features appear to suggest a sense of masculine significance. Writers often use 'macho' names, inscribing and embellishing these with visually aggressive angles and details. These are then placed in locations which support narratives of resilience and dominance. Finally, interaction with others' names enables writers to openly communicate expressions of supremacy, antagonism and aggression. Although writers are granted constructive choice, masculine narratives of power, strength and control prevail. The symbolic realm is clearly used as a gender creative resource and a very powerful one at that. In the absence of external props, i.e., material wealth or employment, individuals may opt to use physical activities, such as sport (Messner, 1987, 1991; Westwood, 1990; Willis 1990), fighting (Polk, 1994), bodybuilding (Mishkind et al., 1987) or posturing (Brake, 1985), to illustrate and validate their masculine identities. These options reduce constructive restraints because masculinity is expressed through the use of the body, a resource which any individual has access to:

> "One of the only remaining ways men can express and preserve traditional
> masculine male characteristics may be by literally embodying them"
>
> (Mishkind et al., 1987:47).

Graffiti, however, takes this masculine accessibility one step further. As a physical act, it limits the need for bodily force and skill (see chapter 2). As a symbolic act, it completely eradicates it.

PHOTOS NOT BRUISES

By containing their aggressive gestures to the wall, writers escape the need for physical engagement. This consequence is recognised and apparently maintained. As Willis (1990) and Marsh et al. (1978) also observed in their studies, the goal is not to fight as often as possible, but as little as possible:

Nancy: *"So how do you diss [disrespect] someone?"*

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Col:"Well, usually, you just go over what they did. It's very odd that a writer will go up to a writer they don't like and say it to his face because then there'll be a regular fight"(Col).

Physical provocation invites a physical response. Symbolic provocation invites a symbolic or, perhaps, even a creative response. Rather than realise a fight in its physical or, indeed, virtual form, writers may transmute this aggression into artistic depiction. Illustrating this:

"'Hex' did this great big Freddy Kruger with him, like, holding 'Slick' in one hand"(Steam).

The image Hex uses (pictured in Figure 46.) clearly inputs a physical edge.

Figure 46. Creative Destruction

Similarly, in Figure 47. the artists use a larger, more aggressive and artistically competent image of the same fish character to convey a relationally greater degree of strength and command.

Figure 47. A Creative Display of Strength and Dominance

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This scene mirrors an episode of physical confrontation as the larger character intimidates and belittles the other through a menacing parade of physical dominance. As one of the artists declares:

"We put up this great big bull shark and we kept this one to make him look a bit silly"(Proud 2).

In this sense, graffiti acts as a physical buffer. As Prime intimates, it offers writers a valid alternative or substitute for physical violence:

"It gets rid of energy better than fighting or beating up someone . . . and I've got a photo to show for it instead of bruises"(Prime).

In turn, this holds huge implications for their construction of self. Writers pick up their cans rather than their fists and, in doing so, override the physical constraints which might, as Willis (1990) outlines, otherwise limit or tarnish their masculine depictions:

> "The worst . . . is to be somebody who acts hard but is really not hard 'inside'.
> Such a person creates an external persona that is unmatched by bodily force
> and skill"(Willis, 1990:104).

By conducting themselves symbolically, any individual of any size and disposition can taunt, provoke, challenge and fight and, thus, construct themselves symbolically, realising, through this, their masculine status as aggressors, assailants, rivals and enemies.

DRESSED TO KILL

In the same way as clothing, the embellishment of the written name enables writers to project an alternative image or identity (Carter, 1967, as cited by Brake, 1985; Ganetz, 1994). However, unlike clothing, it also supports this self portrayal by freeing writers from the need to endorse or verify this in person. A Skinhead may attempt to communicate an image of machismo and tough brutality through the symbolic potency of his clothing. Yet:

> "If they sport heavy, macho clothing (for example Hell's Angels or Skinheads),
> they are a walking challenge and have to be hard enough to live up to their
> image. They have to indicate that they 'deserve' the uniform"

> (Brake, 1985:178).

The Skinhead's self depiction is very much diffused if his physical or personal demeanour actually projects an opposite impression. As recent theorists have shown, the links between masculinity and physicality are strong (Morgan, 1994):

> "A man's most basic sense of self necessarily stems from or at least must
> necessarily include a conception and image of the body as male"

> (Flannigan-Saint-Aubin, 1994:241).

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Young (1989:152) maintains:

"The body is the locus of the self, indistinguishable from it and expressive of it".

Not necessarily it seems. Unlike the Skinhead or Hell's Angel, the writer escapes the influence of his physical self and the limitations which may accompany it. Self connotations are not carried physically, they are reflected in the writer's art:

"Being bad, bold and bodacious came through in your painting - not your fucked up attitude towards another writer"

(Phase 2 - 'Vibe' Magazine, Oct. '94).

Even when the physical self is presented, focus still remains upon the writer's name or virtual persona. As Drax demonstrates, this constitutes the basis of one's subcultural self, the only facet of a writer's identity that others attend to:

"I remember one time I was down Covent Garden a few years ago and a load of ragga kids turned up. There was about seven or eight of us standing in a line . . . and they walked along the line very subtley, like, intimidating people and going through people's pockets. . . . Then they came along to me and said, 'What do you write?', and I said, 'Drax', and they went, 'respect', and although I'm big and I wasn't going to take people going through my pockets, when I said who I was, they were, like, respect, sort of thing"(Drax).

Drax did not have to speak for himself, defend himself or prevent theft by demonstrating his worth in any other way than providing his name. This, rather than his physical assets, declared his significance and commanded their respect.

In all situations, then, writers are able to carry the ramifications of their chosen identities. The subculture replaces physical status with the status of the name, which means:

"Your name has to mean power"(Jel),

your physical self does not. This, and the virtual identity itself, provides writers with a formidable source of constructive freedom. Almost as if using an actor to play themselves, they gain an additional persona; one that reaches the parts other personas can't reach:

Nancy:*"Is it like an outlet then, a way of getting things out?"*

Zaki:*"Yea, from being shy and, sort of, reclusive in my younger years, without having to stand on a pedestal and say, 'look at me', sort of thing. . . . I think it's no coincidence that graffiti is just a piece of art and that's what you get your respect for. . . . I've never been someone who wants to draw attention to themselves, I've never been that confident, but, at the same*

time, I was doing something that did put myself in the spotlight, sort of thing. But with graffiti, it's your artwork that's on show, not yourself"(Zaki).

Zaki was able to project himself freely because he did not have to complement or support this symbolic presentation using his physical or personal self. For those lacking the confidence or ability to fulfil desired notions of self physically or personally, this is a significant reward:

"There's a prominent group of young guys who are very unsure of themselves, insecure about themselves . . . and graffiti is very much like their alterego, like, how they would really like to express themselves. It's a very outgoing expression, how they would really like to be"(Prime).

Regardless of the chosen depiction, writers are free to transcend the limits of 'real life' and create, occupy and project a new or completely alternative image of self:

"Well, some people do graffiti to, like, show their other side. Some people could be really, really, quiet, you don't know who they are and, like, there's a way for us to express how we feel on a wall, on a train, doing a piece"

(Col).

Their name speaks for them and they are free to stand back and watch the performance:

"Even though what you're doing is yourself, it's being able to open up yourself without actually changing yourself. . . . The thing that sums up graffiti, it was a way for me, and probably a lot of other people, to express themselves and feel confident and feel they are part of the world, but, yet, still be me"(Zaki).

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SUBCULTURAL IDENTITY

I wish to conclude this chapter by re-examining the patterning of a writer's subcultural career. An outline of this has already been provided (see chapter 4), however, in light of the insights we have gained since then, a more detailed exploration of these changes will be made. Many subcultural accounts assign stages of group entry and exit minimal attention. We gain a static picture of involvement alone. Yet, such career junctures are, as Brake (1985) argues, important:

> "One needs to know how other non-subcultural elements of an actors life are
> dealt with. Important variables, therefore, are entrance into, and exit from, the
> subculture, participation in and commitment to it"(Brake, 1985:20).

These variables do not just grant us a greater understanding of the subculture's perceived rewards and why, at the point of decline, these lose their pertinance. They also enable us to see shifts in members' identity occupations. Writers accommodate, as we have seen, two self contained personas; one 'mainstream',

the other subcultural. Questions emerge: How does the self negotiate this duality? Do the positions that these identities occupy always carry equal weight and significance? Apparently not. Supporting Hearn & Collinson's (1987) observations, their different identities appear to be prioritised at different times:

> "In a divided society it is very difficult, and probably impossible, to hold onto numerous composite identities equally at all times; some will be prioritized over others and their meanings may change over time"
>
> (Hearn & Collinson, 1994:111/112).

Changes in the meaning and prominance of writers' personas seem to relate to the relevance of the particular rewards they offer. An examination of their career paths and the corresponding rise and fall of their subcultural and 'mainstream' identities will help us to see this more clearly.

THE RISE - SUSTAINING THE SUBCULTURAL SELF

Graffiti grants a writer fame, respect, importance and masculine significance, and the benefits of these affordances are obviously felt:

"Some people have problems or confusion within their lives that they need to clear out, yea, and something like graffiti may give them a direction, which can either make them forget their problems, okay, or can actually make them feel better about their lives and what they're achieving in life. . . . It's something that, you know when I was younger, made me forget my worries and, you know, it was something that gave me confidence and it gave me a bit of identity within the male world"(Drax).

Writers gain from graffiti what they may not be able to obtain elsewhere - a potent source of personal confirmation. Understandably, then, many are reluctant to relinquish its influence. It bathes their self in success and, thus, remains a centrally important part of their life:

"When I think to myself at night, 'What have I achieved?', I always feel that graffiti has been one of the most positive things and that's probably why I cling to graffiti so much, that's why I don't want to leave it because I don't want to get rid of that"(Zaki).

For some, it remains the only important part. Drax's subcultural persona replaces his 'mainstream' persona in significance and importance. It is promoted in all settings as his primary or core identity:

"It's, kind of, so strong that people know me as Drax that don't even know about graffiti, do you see what I mean? It's like the name has completely taken over to an extent"(Drax).

Prime details the difficulties Sham 59 experienced when he involuntarily lost the subcultural identity he also embraced in this way:

"Sham 59, I don't know what year it was, eighty six, eighty seven, he went into prison . . . . I see him soon after he come out and it was like he was off key, he was in a daze, he didn't really know what he was doing. The number of times he'd say, 'I don't know, I've lost my identity, I don't really know what I am doing, I don't really know where to go or whatever'. After a while he started bombing and now he's like hardcore. And you can see it's settled him out. Possibly, it's the thing of that's where he left off when he went inside so he's going back to that, but it's a bit more than that I think, it's more that's the identity he built up for himself"(Prime).

This account corresponds with Messner's (1987) observations. Similar to the sportsmen he studied, Sham 59's subcultural identity represented his 'master status' (Davis, 1990). Its loss, thus, left him confused and disorientated. In effect, he lost himself. His return to the subculture helped him to rebuild this self definition and regain the affirmation that promoted it in the first place.

For many, then, a subcultural persona becomes much more than a complementary or sideline identity - it represents who they are. Likewise, their unrelenting subcultural activities go much deeper than mere recreation. They constitute, as Drax indicates below, a way of nourishing and maintaining this adopted persona:

"It's hard for people to let go because they've got a whole new persona and they don't want to let that die"(Drax).

THE FALL - RELINQUISHING THE SUBCULTURAL SELF

Delinquency appears to run in phases. Following a peak in adolescence, involvement characteristically declines (Dittmann-Kohli, 1986; Emler & Reicher, 1995; Gibbons, 1968; Gold & Petronio, 1980; Jessor, 1986; Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1985; Silbereisen & Eyferth, 1986; Werthman, 1982). Writers' subcultural career patterns confirm this apparent trend. Initial stages may be frenetic, but most writers do eventually 'let go', as Drax terms it, lessening their illegal involvements and diffusing the salience of their subcultural personas. An expression of this identity demotion is outlined below:

"For me, my writing is developing like this; from saying, 'I'm here alive'; to saying, 'I'm here alive and creating something beautiful'; then hopefully saying, 'I'm here alive and creating something beautiful that will make you think'"(Prime - 'Graphotism' Magazine 3).

With time, Prime's incentives began to change. Other concerns started to gain relevance and the focus that was placed exclusively upon the promotion of his

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subcultural self gradually declined. By deviating from the presentation of their written names, the writers below evoke a similar commentary:

"When I made my real statement was nineteen eighty. I did a train where I didn't even put my name, it was like the name had been removed from the imagery. It was no longer about names or letters or any of the stereotypical work, it was going to be about just colour and form. It had nothing to do with, 'yo, here I am, this is who I am', it was more to do with, 'What's that!?'"(Futura 2000).

"For a very long time my name has not been so prominent . . . . I've stopped really, you know, 'my name is Prime, it's Prime, it's Prime', it's been more other things . . . things that are going on in your life rather than just your name"(Prime).

"You start to say, 'well, I'm a grown up, my subject matter's changed, it's not about my tag anymore', it's about painting and interacting with a whole broad audience through your art"(Lee).

These changes implicate a decline in the continued construction of this subcultural identity. As Drax reviews:

Nancy: *"Why is it that the illegal lot do more lettering?*

Drax: *"Because your name's more important, the identity is much more important. You can't create an identity by doing portraits . . . it's all to do with lettering and writing your name"(Drax).*

Without a name, writers lack the resource which enables them to formulate and project their chosen depictions of self. In addition to this, no name invites no fame, suggesting a diminished interest in the external recognition that solidifies or donates this persona its significance. Stylo confirms this apparent shift in concern:

"It's only when you get really older I think that you start to develop style for its own sake as opposed to just, like, 'oh, I must give you respect' . . . . I think now, people, especially if they're older, they paint more for themselves maybe, you know"(Stylo).

Priorities change. Personal gratification becomes more important than audience appreciation, which means "the risks are no longer incurred exclusively for what can be demonstrated about the self for taking them"(Werthman, 1982:295). In time, these risks may not be incurred at all as a developed interest in art, rather than the respect that can be earned from it, lessens a writer's need for the more public and hazardous illegal forum:

"When I first started, I had less interest in art work, I wasn't really interested in art at all, I was just interested in putting my name out. . . . and

then, I suppose with the interest in art, the illegality gets less because you can be happy to do a legal wall"(Drax).

A writer's active illegal career reaches its closing stages and the subcultural identity that was nourished through it begins to lose its predominance. At this point, a change in self definition appears to take place. Teck and Futura articulate this:

"The changes came as I grew. With years, I became less interested in fame and more tuned to my art, more embarrassed at being caught and less likely to rack [steal] paint. In other words, I was assimilating into the same society I pillaged in previous years"(Teck - 'Urb' Magazine 37, '94).

"What eventually happens, whether you realise it or not, you become the establishment. After a time, unless you're totally an outlaw, you know, if you want to change, if you want to become part of society and be someone positive, then you have to become part of it"(Futura 2000).

For Teck and Futura, the subculture and its illegal identity became increasingly less important. Reflecting this, they began to define themselves using a conformist identity that had 'mainstream' significance. Some theorists explain these identity shifts in terms of age related duties and responsibilities (Clarke, 1976*b*; Levinson, 1978):

> "When work or family demands come to assume greater significance, the style of collective leisure, . . . dissolves as a continuing part of the biography"

> (Clarke, 1976*b*:191).

These influences naturally play a part, however, alone, they leave little room for the choices or desires we see evidenced in the accounts above. Teck and Futura's moves towards 'mainstream' assimilation appear to be desired rather than obliged, effectively suggesting a lessened need for the rewards of the subculture and its accompanying identity.

LESSENED INCENTIVES AND THE OPPORTUNITIES OF AGE

Focusing on the subculture's male majority - involvement in both the symbolic and physical realm of illegal activity offers writers autonomy, independence and a strong sense of masculine significance. The older writer's diminished interest in illegality, the name and the recognition and respect that this invites, therefore, relates the value of this masculine presentation to the age or developmental phase of the actor. One reason for the younger writer's more frenetic involvement within these physical and oppositional illegal confines could lie in the self image this awards. According to Hart (1992), a male adolescent's 'ideal self' is generally

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defined in terms of physical action and activity. The media have undoubtedly influenced this ideal:

> "Media celebrations of 'diehard' masculinity confer widespread acceptance on the perceived need for masculine 'hardness'. Young men are bombarded with images which attest to the glamour and potential rewards of conforming to 'traditional' masculine virtues"(McCaughey, 1993:37).

However, media gloss and glamour alone does not explain why this 'diehard' masculinity is generally embraced by younger rather than older men. To understand this, we must look at adolescence as a juncture in the masculine career structure.

FROM TOYS TO MEN - AN AGE RELATED MASCULINE CAREER

During their teenage years, young men are probably first consciously working to construct and confirm some signification of masculinity. The extreme implications of traditional masculine discourses are, perhaps, more appealing for this reason:

> "Youth stand at the threshold of manhood, and consequently they are more obsessed by the postures and poses that symbolise and confirm it. . . . He wishes to demonstrate that he is a man. He is not, and thus he is driven to extravagant and incredible bravado"(Matza, 1964:156/157).

Masculine insecurity is a common feature of male adolescence (Levinson, 1978). Illustrating this, Thomas's (1990) data from a sample of age graded men found her teenage respondents most unsure about their gender identities. This was manifested in their close adherence to a very traditional or conventional style of masculine presentation. In Levinson's (1978) view, this serves to compensate for their underlying uncertainty. This reasoning can be applied to a writer's subcultural career changes. The younger writer occupies the subculture's illegal discourse and presents himself as a warrior or superhero, casting little doubt upon his masculine status. The overt nature of this display will also ensure he gains the external recognition that works to validate this identity. With a confirmed and, thus, more secure masculine identity, the older writer's need for this discourse correspondingly lessens. Claw's comments support this contention:

Nancy:*"Would you say for the older lot the illegality isn't so important?"*

Claw:*"Well, yea, because they've reached a certain level where they don't need to prove themselves anymore"(Claw).*

Having gained the respect, potency and hierarchical status that validates masculine significance and ultimately fuels this display, the need to seek further verification appears to decrease. As Marsh et al. (1978), Parker (1974), Schwendinger & Schwendinger (1985) and Werthman (1982) explain it, a

reputation has been developed and the individual can now calm down and live off it.

However, masculinity is never a completed project. A curtailed illegal involvement will not represent the end of masculine construction but, rather, the terminated use of this particular constructive resource. As the individual ages, other, previously inaccessible, resources affording masculine status and some degree of standing and importance perhaps make themselves available. Teck articulates this in so many words:

"The value of a young person was measured in their conformity to the system, their silence and co-operation. Anger at the 'real world' served as my fuel as well. We were assed out of the game as young people first, long before we became graffiti artists. An aggressive rampage through the city was my skid mark on society's smooth tarmac. I was an artist so fuk the rules. I eventually made more stringent guidelines for myself (steering me away from getting up), but only after starting a business, buying a car and sharing in the adult experience. . . . As people around me began hearing me, I needed to yell less. I suppose it's the natural progression of things, we grow up and fit in"(Teck - 'Urb' Magazine 37, '94).

Teck expresses his experience as a young person to be one of alienation and impotence. The regulations and guidelines of society offered him little reward and, thus, little incentive to conform to them. Here, then, the subculture came into play. Lacking the resources which other discursive positions may demand, an adolescent can occupy the subculture's oppositional discourse and realise autonomy, respect, recognition and masculine status; benefits that are denied elsewhere. With an increase in masculine security, responsibility, societal status and resources, an older writer may elect to replace this discourse and its identity with one which displays a greater degree of social acceptability. As Matza (1964) notes:

> "Boys are less driven to prove manhood unconventionally through deeds or
> misdeeds when with the passing of time they may effortlessly exhibit the
> conventional posts of manhood - physical appearance, the completion of
> school, a job, marriage, and perhaps even children. Adulthood may not in all
> social circles definitely prove manhood, but it is always good *prima facie*
> evidence"(Matza, 1964:55. Italics in original).

Although Matza (1964) offers us a problematic and limited definition of manhood by ignoring those who are single, gay, unemployed or childless, Teck's experiences support the general gist of his argument. Granted a degree of societal presence and potency and, thus, a share in 'the adult experience', his

subcultural involvement and identity began to dissolve. Like the young drug dealers, athletes and gang members which Williams (1989), Messner (1987, 1991) and Yablonsky (1962) studied respectively, Teck gained some reason for societal assimilation, namely, newly available resources which enabled him to confirm masculinity and claim subcultural affordances, such as respect and standing, in more relevant ways. He obtained, what Prime might call, some degree of direction in life:

Nancy:_"Would you say the illegality of it gets less important to you as you get older?"_

Prime:_"Yea, yea, I'd agree with that, yea. Because you get to be more settled in your thoughts about life in general. I suppose when you're adolescent, you're looking around, you're hanging round with kids and you haven't got so much direction, but you start to get more direction in other things in your life"(Prime)._

Similar to Teck, other areas of Prime's life gained clarity, lessening his need for illegality and the identity created through this. The solutions he previously found in this subcultural resource were, perhaps, now afforded elsewhere.

We see through this career process, then, a change in masculine expression. Writers appear to transfer from a 'retributive' (Rutherford, 1988) or 'traditional' (Pleck & Thompson, 1987) masculine discourse, characterised by its emphasis on toughness, respect and status (Pleck & Thompson, 1987) to a more modern or conventional style of masculine presentation. Connell (1989) observed similar changes in his study of masculine construction within a school environment. Discursive themes of pride and aggression were, for many boys, gradually replaced by a discourse which exemplified rationality and responsibility. These shifts in, what could be defined, a masculine career structure serve to highlight one of the sex role theory's most central deficiencies:

> "Gender socialisation theories conveyed the strong message that while gender
> may be 'achieved', by about age five it was certainly fixed, unvarying and
> static - much like sex"(West & Zimmerman, 1987:126).

As this study shows, masculinity takes on different guises and these are far from enduring. The sex role theory's tunnel of gender becomes more of a maze as writers twist and turn into different masculine orientations. The different directions they take elucidate masculinity's dynamic nature, but they also reveal a critical, yet highly neglected, link between masculine style and age (Bjerrum Nielsen & Rudberg, 1993).

Theorists rarely address the role age plays in shaping masculine presentation, focusing instead upon the mediating influence of one's race' and class (see for e.g. Dugger, 1991; Edley & Wetherell, 1995). Yet, this factor appears to be important. Writers age and their masculine expressions modify accordingly. Bjerrum Nielsen & Rudberg (1993) recognise these adjustments and use Erikson's (1968) concept of the adolescent 'moratorium' to explain them. They view adolescence as a time of freedom, creation and adaptation, a phase where parental influence is dissolved and different cultural possibilities can be played out (Bjerrum Nielsen & Rudberg, 1993). This enables adolescents to relate to their gender identities in an experimental and reflexive way. They have both the space and the freedom to ask, 'Is this me?' and change if it isn't (Bjerrum Nielsen & Rudberg, 1993). Bjerrrum Nielsen & Rudberg (1993) must be applauded for remaining sensitive to these age related issues. But they must also be condemned for critically neglecting other important concerns. Their work paints us an overly idealistic picture of untainted freedom, adolescents as happy shoppers buying into the discourses which might just 'tickle their fancy'. Yet, as Connell (1989) quite rightly asserts:

> "To picture this as a marketplace, a free choice of gender-styles, would be
> misleading. These 'choices' are strongly structured by relations of power. . . .
> masculinity is organised - on the macro scale - around social power"
>
> (Connell, 1989:295).

Bjerrum Nielsen & Rudberg (1993) uphold adolescence as a phase of liberation, but they totally ignore its additional constraints. Adolescents are, like many other social groups, limited in their access to certain sources of social power (Messerschmidt, 1993, 1994). Until this increases, their discursive options remain somewhat restricted in range:

> "Individuals are invited to make choices - i.e., whether to embrace them or not.
> However, since particular constructs may be highly elusive, whether because
> they are fraught with contradictory edicts for the individual or whether regime-
> specific or other forces make it difficult for the individual to respond (e.g. the
> cool masculine style of the computer executive may not be as accessible to
> some as to others), then the restricting impact on character may leave it
> predisposed towards other forms of behaviour by default, as it were"
>
> (Liddle, 1993:90).

Connell (1989) embellishes this contention. Failure to claim power and, thus, gain access to certain discursive positions will, as he maintains, result in a "claim to other sources of power, even other definitions of masculinity. Sporting prowess, physical aggression, sexual conquest"(Connell, 1989:295), or even crime may do:

> "Crime is a resource that may be summoned when men lack access to other

resources to accomplish gender"(Messerschmidt, 1993:85).

Agency is, thus, counterbalanced here by constraint. Yes, individuals may act with intent and purpose, but their actions must be seen as 'structured' (Messerschmidt, 1993), that is, shaped by social forces that lie beyond their control.

But are they not also structured and shaped by individual desires and interests? To see gender construction in terms of access to power or resources alone is also misleading because it infuses a sense of frustration into this endeavour which may not be felt. Those unable to buy into middle class gender definitions are depicted as discontented window shoppers, discursive paupers who are forced into fashioning a 'last resort' identity out of whatever resources they may have left. But do all social groups really want this middle class or power based masculine ideal? A young writer may not have the resources to embrace the 'cool masculine style of the computer executive' (Liddle, 1993), but the traditional masculine discourse he does occupy appears to represent far more than a dull compromise. This approach fails to look at discourse choice in terms other than resource availability. In doing so, it fails to convey the engaging or appealing qualities of these alternative discourses and the reasons why they may actually be preferenced rather than claimed in compensation. Hollway (1984) makes such considerations central to her analysis. As she argues:

> "Any analysis which focuses on subjective positioning in discourses requires
> an account of the investment that a person has in taking up one position
> rather than another in a different discourse"(Hollway, 1984:238).

For the younger writer, as we have seen, this 'traditional' (Pleck & Thompson, 1994) or 'retributive' (Rutherford, 1988) discourse offers a number of important rewards. Its overt nature lessens masculine ambiguity and its central narratives celebrate notions of power, control, independence and freedom, meanings which interface with cultural definitions of youthful masculinity and maturity. In this sense, writers are commenting on more than limited social opportunities through their use of this discourse, they are also indulging and responding to their needs, concerns and interests as young males.

Here, then, I stand alongside other postmodern theorists who view the identities we occupy to be the result of our constituted positions within certain social frameworks. We inherit, through these placements, a definitional guideline or an outline of 'being'. But does working with a prewritten script have to preclude the presence of agency as some postmodernists, such as Henriques et al. (1984) and Sampson (1989), have suggested? In my mind, no. Illegal writers may be

situated within a relevant discursive position, but a sense of intent pervades the constructive processes they activate within this. They remain responsible for bringing this text and identity to life; the name is selected to convey desired notions of self and its embellishment, locational placement and the interaction it performs with other names continues to furnish this chosen projection. These identities are not uniform donations of this discourse, they are actively created and carved by their authors into desired and personally rewarding formations. It is here that their agency is, perhaps, most directly expressed. Writers may not be unified, autonomous individuals exercising free will, but they are agentic enough to recognise and avoid the potential constraints of the discourse they occupy:

> "Cultural texts furnish their 'inhabitants' with the resources for the formation of selves; they lay out an array of enabling potentials while simultaneously establishing a set of constraining boundaries beyond which selves cannot be easily made"(Shotter & Gergen, 1989:ix).

Writers traverse these constraining boundaries by erecting their own ones. These deaden the influence of 'real life' and reconstitute their subculture into a liminal sphere. Here, they adopt a new name and a new identity and, thus, effectively remove themselves from the ties, ascriptions and potential limits of the 'real world'. Intensifying this sense of escape, they even evade physical confinement. What writers gain from this is an opportunity to reconstruct themselves. They may not have written a brand new script, but they have modified it enough to tell a different story - little Jo Bloggs becomes a 'king', a legend, an icon, a warrior, a villain, respected, or at least recognised, by thousands of other writers all over the world.

What I propose, then, is a re-evaluation of the robotic portrayals evoked by some of these postmodern commentaries. To say that the subject is constituted, is not to say that the subject is determined. Far from it:

> "The constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency"
>
> (Butler, 1992:12, as quoted by Gutterman, 1994:224).

Writers do not blindly inhabit this 'traditional' masculine discourse. They tailor and reinterpret it to their own gain and occupy it for the affordances it now offers them. While these are needed or wanted, its identity maintains a pivotal self positioning, as we have seen. This is not to say these rewards lessen in importance, however, with age, opportunities to realise them in other ways may increase. At this point, we begin to see a characteristic decline in illegal subcultural involvement and the identity fostered through this. What societal assimilation may now offer the writer is that which this rebellious discourse cannot; a non oppositional identity and rewards that may be more pertinent to an older individual. What this rebellious subcultural discourse and its identity can offer an adolescent or individual without

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these social affordances, however, is that which society or a 'mainstream' identity cannot; independence, personal confirmation, potency and an amplified sense of masculine status.

Writers are also conscious of this. The personal benefits of a subcultural discourse and identity are not just enjoyed. They are, like the restraints of other discourses and identities, also recognised. This might explain why this area of interest was so poorly represented within the CCCS's 'Resistance Through Rituals' thesis (1976) and, indeed, in Widdicombe & Wooffitt's (1995) more recent subcultural account. In both cases, subcultural members were effectively silenced. The CCCS did not even ask them for their views or opinions. They had, after all, a class based agenda to fulfil which might not have benefited from these inappropriate insights. And although Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) inquired, this was little more than a token gesture. Their questions regarding the personal merits of subcultural membership were ambiguous and predetermined and the responses they obtained were correspondingly scanty. In my view, a more direct and flexible approach would have invited a fleshier commentary and a greater understanding of these rewards.

Perhaps, then, it is time to confront and challenge the beliefs that justify this detached methodological stance and the partial theoretical portrayal it engenders. If we continue to believe people lack insight and awareness, we will continue to build these ideas into our research methods and nurture this presumption. By silencing our respondents and assessing their motives and actions ourselves, we support the view that they are unable to comment and foster the potentially misguided or overimposed analytical portrayals that lie undisturbed by it.

CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I have examined various aspects of the urban graffiti subculture. Through this, I have tried to highlight its purpose and rationale and the formative role it plays in the lives of its members. I would summarise the main thrust of my argument as follows: in order to understand this subculture, it is necessary to move beyond hegemonic subcultural accounts and popular media depictions of this group. The former paint a political portrait of working class rebellion and resistance; one which does not, in my view, capture or explain the graffiti subculture's functions, goals or, indeed, its mixed class membership. The latter offer us a superficial and often negatively biased view of a phenomenon which, I believe, deserves a greater degree of understanding and positive appreciation.

Early in the thesis I outlined a writer's subcultural career and the rewards that are earnt through this, i.e., fame, respect, status and recognition. These, and the self esteem and confidence they grant a writer, have been related to adolescence, a time in life when one's personal identity is in formation and often insecure. I have argued that, first and foremost, subcultural involvement helps writers to solidify and strengthen their concepts of self - more specifically, for the male majority, their <u>masculine</u> concepts of self.

The graffiti subculture is, like many others, a male dominated domain. The bulk of its activities are also illegal, dangerous and, in relation to the deterrent authorities, oppositional. It has been argued that these two factors are related in ways which point to the subculture as a site of masculine construction. By highlighting the risky, challenging and militaristic aspects of illegal graffiti, I have positioned its male practitioners within a masculine discourse and a related process of masculine identity formation. As such, I have re-interpreted the CCCS group's analysis of the subculture's role and the part opposition plays within it. Rather than a seed bed of political rebellion or a weapon of political resistance, the subculture and its illegal orientation has been presented as a tool of masculine construction; a resource which allows male writers to compete with and challenge the police and each other, not capitalist hegemony.

Problematising the masculine component of this subculture has also helped to highlight and explain the previously neglected absence of the subcultural female. I have argued that girls do not participate to the same extent as boys because their identity construction does not benefit in the same way from this subcultural display of resilience and daring. However, it has also been suggested that girls may have less access to these subcultural risks and rigours. Outlining the

treatment that female writers receive within this subculture has been useful because it has illustrated how male writers actively work to enforce their exclusion. Previous theorists have read the peripheral position girls occupy within subcultures as a male reproduction of societal sexism (see for e.g. Brake, 1985; McRobbie & Garber, 1991). I have found it useful to go one step further and interpret it as a male expression of the female member's emasculating threat. It is in his interests to discourage her from participating because, as I have argued, her involvement works to diffuse the masculine significance of his activities and the identity he develops through these.

I have also contextualised this subculture by examining its relationship to 'wider' society. This has been valuable because it has enabled us to see how the writers themselves construct and interpret their societal position. As we have seen, they work hard to create and maintain division between those inside and those outside their subcultural boundaries. Writers reinforce the notion that these two groups are oppositional categories by constructing outsiders as ignorant programmed conformists who have, unlike them, failed to break through their social chains of confinement. Examining these constructed divisions has also allowed us to see some of the fractures which cleavage the subculture itself. This group is not a homogenous mass, it is one divided along lines of gender, experience, area of residence and, most significantly, orientation, i.e., how and where writers practice their art. The fracture and friction between those advocating an illegal or legal context for their work is the most pronounced, certainly within the British subculture. The reasons underlying it take us back to the subculture's status as a 'world apart'. Illegal writers oppose and condemn the work of their legal counterparts for dissolving the distance they have created between the subculture and the rest of society. In their view, legal work is dangerous because it promotes outsider acceptance, encourages their intervention and, thus, moves the subculture into 'mainstream' boundaries where it is no longer controlled and owned, albeit symbolically, by the writers themselves. The illegal writer's agenda moves us away from the passive victim model of the subculture put forward by the CCCS group. Negative media coverage and public rejection is not the consequence of their resistance, it is their goal (Thornton, 1994). Outsider condemnation is actively encouraged and celebrated. Not just because it authenticates the subculture by positioning it outside categories defined as 'mass' or 'mainstream'. But, more importantly, because it works to sustain one of its chief rewards; a sense of group ownership, control and power. On the basis of this, I have argued that the subculture does, as the CCCS group contended, actively resist forms of commercialism and attempt to win space. However, this is a very

different form of space; one which allows its members to stand apart as societal outcasts, not cultural innovators and through this, subcultural owners, not political activists. Writers interests lie in the subculture, not beyond it. Consequently, they work for it, not through it.

I concluded my analysis of this subculture by highlighting some of the personal or individual rewards it offers its members. Many of these stem from its socially segregated stance, i.e., its status as a 'sub' or separate culture. Although the CCCS group acknowledged the importance of subcultural space, they chose to explore its implications in political rather than personal terms, i.e., as an escape from hegemony. I have argued that the theoretical gap they left must now be filled. It is very difficult to explain the physical and judicial risks subcultural members take by making reference to some vague and apparently unconscious class related crusade. The graffiti subculture's space is more concrete and, as I have hopefully illustrated, the benefits it affords are too. Firstly, it can be seen to make an important contribution to the processes of maturation which acquire some significance during adolescence. Figures of authority are absent, so the subculture's largely adolescent members are granted great scope for independent action and autonomous decision making. Their passage into adulthood is also eased by the reassuring degree of structure and support the subculture provides. Its rule bound nature offers novice writers an important source of guidance and its generational divides present them with visible and relevant mentors and role models.

Writers' identities are also invigorated by this insularity. The subculture represents a 'different world' and a separate name and identity is adopted in accordance with this. Most writers know and interact with each other on the basis of their subcultural names and identities alone. In this world, as one writer put it, you are what you write. This suspends writers in a liminal sphere; a confine where immutable features of one's 'real life' self, such as one's class, 'race', background and even physical appearance, are broken down. This, I have argued, grants writers an enormous degree of constructive freedom. Without the structural, personal and physical restraints of 'real life', there is nothing, except perhaps an exposed feminine identity, to prevent them from building a positive and desired sense of self.

Although the subculture offers its members a diverse range of rewards, these are, in many ways, closely interconnected. Writers gain freedom, independence, autonomy, a sense of ownership, control and power and an identity which affords them status, respect and, for the male majority, an important degree of masculine

security. Put together, these rewards articulate a process of change and development. This progression can be used to define the subculture as a rite of passage; a transitional vehicle which, like the army (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978; Coote, 1993; Morgan, 1994; Rutherford, 1988; Segal, 1990), the Boy Scouts (Hantover, 1978) or the sportsworld (Messner, 1987, 1991) helps its mainly male members journey from one status to another (Eliade, 1958; Glaser & Strauss, 1971). They enter as a boy, an adolescent and a nobody and, having successfully completed its illegal tasks of endurance, they emerge as a man, an adult and a somebody. The status foundations they gain through this passage can open doors to a whole new set of societal opportunities. This helps to explain why the subculture often declines in importance after adolescence. As an adult and a man, the writer can relinquish the subculture and its identity and, perhaps, continue his self development and construction using society's conventional, and now accessible and relevant, resources. As such, the subculture offers the adolescent male a, now somewhat elusive, transitional opportunity. As Raphael (1988), as cited by Segal (1990), notes, the traditional and, for many young men with no other resources, necessary pursuit of manhood via displays of resilience and physical prowess seems to be increasingly obsolete in modern industrial society. As a result, many men without access to this power are seeking:

"Proof of manhood individually and competitively . . . by other selected but isolated attainments, which often do not receive widespread public acclaim"

(Raphael, 1988, as cited by Segal, 1990:131).

The graffiti subculture offers us a prime example of this.

By viewing the subculture in these terms, rather than those of class, I have tried to take its analysis down to a more personal, human and agentic level. Its members are not just dots on a class landscape, as the CCCS group would have us believe. They are people, more specifically male adolescent people, with individual concerns, desires, hopes and insecurities. This subculture is their way of tackling, meeting and satisfying these demands and interests. It is, as I have hopefully emphasised, a constructive and agentic response. The CCCS group made similar claims about the agency of their subcultural members. Paradoxically, however, these were revoked by the very theory they used to make them. False consciousness lies at the heart of their hegemonic analysis. In effect, this portrays their members as somehow blind, working to remedy a situation which they do not even realise exists. Similarly, working class pressures and contradictions depict their subcultural response as inevitable, activating structuralist notions of over-determination. These social agents, as Willis (1990) concludes:

"May not be seen as passive bearers, but they have still not become much

more than brightly coloured cardboard cut-outs pushed around the
hegemonic boardgame"(Willis, 1990:157).

While hegemony is a theoretically important notion, alone, it leaves little room for
the conscious and dynamic processes we see in operation here. These writers do
not just actively and consciously create and sustain their subculture, they also
actively and consciously create and sustain the identities they occupy and the
rewards they enjoy within it. Using the fervour and purpose of their creativity, I join
Willis (1990) in his call for a more dynamic model of cultural practice:

"Rather than see humans as lumps of 'labour power', meaningful only in work
or altogether 'redundant', we will then need to see them as full creative
citizens, full of their own sensuous symbolic capacities and activities and
taking a hand in the construction of their own identities"

(Willis, 1990:145. Italics in original).

This shift in vision would move us beyond both the structurally fixed landscape of
the Marxist world and the flat and meaningless landscape of the postmodern
world. In many cases, the latter would have us believe that individuals are merely
inscribed positions in provided texts or artefacts. I have argued fervently against
this view. We are human beings, not automatons, and, as such, we come
endowed with the creative powers to construct, adapt or reformulate our textual
positions to our own gain. Being human, as Willis (1990) contends:

"Means to be creative in the sense of remaking the world for ourselves as we
make and find our own place and identity"(Willis, 1990:11).

Postmodernism, in its full blown form, strips us of this agency and consigns us to
an existence which, while plausible on paper, does not often correspond with the
one we live out in our everyday 'real world' lives. Although it has pushed us in
undoubtedly positive and enlightening theoretical and epistemological directions,
in some cases it pushes too hard and asks us to accept its own metaphors for
reality (Willis, 1990).

The methodological stance I adopted made some attempt to counteract the
problems cited above. It is my belief that ethnography can deliver 'rich' empirical
material which remains in tune with the meanings and concerns of those it
studies. For this reason, it constituted the backbone of my subcultural study.
Without it, I would have been unable to access and utilise the writers' voices and
without these, I would have been unable to present their world as they see and
experience it.

The CCCS group offered us some very sophisticated theoretical arguments
concerning subcultures and their related functions. However, rarely did we hear

the members themselves contribute to this thesis. Their silence continues to bewilder me. How is possible to translate, document or interpret a cultural slice of life without referencing the views and meanings of those who create, sustain and exist within it? Reading 'Resistance Through Rituals' (1976) was, in many ways, like going to see a play with no actors. The scene was set, but it was not animated or brought to life. I tried to remedy this here by casting these often unemployed subcultural actors in a central role. Through their input we have gained a vivid and radically different interpretation of the CCCS group's subcultural script; one which makes themes of masculinity and adolescence, rather than class, central to its plot. As an ethnographic researcher, I played a directorial as opposed to leading role. I made these analytic lines prominent and knitted them together to narrate a compelling story. However, it was the actors who initially delivered them. By making the actor/insider's voice and habitat its first port of call, ethnography records and fleshes out the fine-grained complexities of social life that other methods can often neglect or miss.

While ethnography reaches the parts other methods can't, it cannot always reach all of these. I conducted, what I take to be, a holistic study of the graffiti subculture as it stands in London and New York. However, there were areas which remained beyond the scope of my research. I did not, for instance, examine any of the subculture's rural or suburban scenes or, indeed, those in other countries and cities around the world. These might have introduced further variation. We may have found that these other writers use graffiti in different ways and for different reasons than those in New York and London.

Nor did I look at how this subculture is changing in line with society's technological developments. Difficulties in painting trains and ensuring these 'run' has led many writers to explore alternative ways of exposing their work, for example, through the use of magazines, videos and the internet. These communications media have extended their potential audience, but they have also enhanced writers' abilities to network and interact with other writers in other 'scenes' and countries elsewhere.

It might be interesting to look at how these advances are affecting or strengthening this subculture's sense of 'worldwide' unity.

Finally, I did not fully explore life as it exists beyond subcultural boundaries. Like most subcultural studies, I spotlighted the public sphere, life on the subcultural streets, as it were. A more detailed focus on a writer's life at home, school or work could serve to enhance four areas of our subcultural understanding;

1. It could clarify the nature, impact and influence of the 'real life' restraints that the subculture supposedly counterbalances, whilst also emphasising the significance of its claimed rewards.

2. It could help us to appreciate the complex interplay between writers' multiple identities. A subcultural identity is not all embracing. In some contexts, such as home or work, it is played down or even concealed. A look at this 'private' sphere of existence would allow us to see how this identity exchange is negotiated and why.

3. It could also, as McRobbie (1980) argues, enable us to understand some of the ways in which these different worlds cross and merge:

> "The family is the obverse face of hard, working-class culture, the softer sphere in which the fathers, sons and boyfriends expect to be, and are, emotionally serviced. It is this link between the lads' hard outer image and their private experiences - relations with parents, siblings and girlfriends - that still needs to be explored. Willis's emphasis on the cohesion of the tight-knit groups tends to blind us to the ways that the lads' immersion in and expression of working-class culture also takes place outside the public sphere. It happens as much around the breakfast table and in the bedroom as in the school and the workplace"(McRobbie, 1980:41).

McRobbie (1980) asks us to attend to the ways working class masculine culture manifests itself in domestic or 'private' contexts. Delete working class and, in regard to the graffiti subculture, this would be an important and interesting future research direction.

4. Lastly, a trek across this non subcultural terrain might enable future theorists to answer some of the questions I have left untackled. Namely, if all adolescent males are striving for a masculine identity and some sense of autonomy, why is it that only some young men involve themselves in this subculture? What, apart from opportunity and inclination, is present or absent in their lives that is/is not in the lives of other young men? Class, ethnicity and area of residence are irrelevant factors, as we have seen, so this could point to something concerning life at home perhaps.

This last extension in research focus lay beyond the scope of my study and its objectives. Although it represents a potentially fruitful future endeavour, it may also be one that remains a thought rather than a deed. There are boundaries and thresholds we cannot always cross as researchers and relative strangers and expecting to gain access to a writer's life at home could be deemed an over ambitious project. One's home is a relatively private confine, as McRobbie (1980) recognises. But, in this case, it may also be occupied by individuals who are unaware of their sons', daughters' or perhaps even husbands' subcultural involvements. Issues such as these will continue to ensure certain doors remain closed to us. And closed doors such as these will continue to emphasise the

value and importance of the insider's voice. If we cannot observe or experience these facets of existence for ourselves, then we must take our visions from the words of those who can.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

THE HISTORY, BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT OF SUBCULTURAL GRAFFITI

This outline will grant the reader a basic appreciation of when, where and how the graffiti subculture originated and developed. These are, as Jel confirms, subculturally important concerns:

"The important thing about graffiti is knowing your history"(Jel).

The subculture's history may be relatively brief, but, in writers' eyes, much has occurred over the twenty odd years of its existence. In the view of one writer I spoke to, one must reference the past in order to understand the present. He sent me a list of articles that he felt were important in explaining the subculture's background. I quote from a note he included with these:

"As I said, the New York City art is critically linked with UK art, but its history is all twisted, so learning the background is important"(Juice).

Following his advice, this outline will move the reader through the various phases of the subculture's evolution - from its point of initiation in New York to its export overseas. I have constructed this overview from documentary sources, but much of it is also based upon writers' own commentaries. They pride themselves on their knowledge of past events and the writers who took part in them. As Futura explains:

"Even though it's all been documented in books or whatever, it's also documented in kids' minds as to who was where and when"(Futura 2000).

Thus aside from serving an informational purpose, this outline is also presented as evidence of writers' own body of historical folklore and its importance within the subculture.

THE BIRTH OF SUBCULTURAL GRAFFITI

Subcultural graffiti originated in New York during the late sixties. Prior to this point in time the only existing graffiti was that used by gang members to claim territorial turf. A young teenager from Washington Heights, inspired by the impact of this medium, adopted a nickname or 'tag' and began writing his name on the trains and the walls of New York. His real name, Dimitrius, was shorted to 'Taki' and his street number, '183', was affixed to the end of this name as a means of indicating his place within the city. His work as a message boy took him to many different areas of New York and afforded his name a great deal of exposure and recognition.

Taki's impact was enormous. Upon seeing his written name, others were inspired to do likewise:

"It was seeing their tags around and beginning to understand that something was happening, you know, that there was a movement beginning and I didn't know what it was really, but I understood that people were communicating"(Futura 2000).

As more and more individuals began adding their names to the surfaces of the city, members grew and an element of competition emerged. Now the aim was not merely to put your name 'up', but to ensure this was 'up' in greater quantities than your contemporaries. Writers also began to innovate and modify these forms to create larger, more elaborate and stylised representations of their names. New developments in technique gave rise to a new form of graffiti, the 'masterpiece' or, as it is now known, the 'piece'. This form of graffiti allowed writers to experiment with the use of lettering and formulate new embellishing effects. At this point, one's writing 'style' came into play. Early innovators remain legendary:

"I would say that the first inventor of lettering would have to be Phase 2. He started like taking the bubble letters and making it twist around with arrows coming out"(Az).

Another 'veteren' writer is acclaimed for his progressive style:

Cavs:"Blade, I look up to his stuff a lot, look at that character!"

Az:"I'd have to say he was different to any other writer with his characters and lettering"

Cavs:"He was a very original, creative writer. See, he experimented, see, he's not afraid to experiment . . . look at what Blade was doing, look how creative he is. Like, if you look at the Blades, there's so many different types"(Cavs & Az).

Invented styles were quickly adopted by other writers, experiencing a period of popularity before another style emerged to take its place. Writers familiar with their history can, thus, look back and place a piece within its historical context according to its style of lettering:

"So you see how it works in generations, how graffiti goes through stages in lettering style and everything"(Az).

As style advanced, scale also increased and writers began to compete using size as an additional aspect of their skill. Pieces painted on the sides of trains enlarged and by 1975 a new challenge emerged. Pieces, formerly confined to the space between the windows and the bottom of the car (window downs), now covered its entire surface (top to bottom whole cars). Again, pioneers are recognised:

Cavs:"Dead Leg, he was one of the first people to do a top to bottom"

Az:"That's how the legend went, Dead Leg did the first top to bottom"

(Cavs & Az).

There are, of course, many other landmark events, achievements and writers I have not mentioned here, precisely because there is such a detailed body of graffiti folklore. Taki, however, remains the most prominent and revered of these legendary figures. As Futura 2000, a writer from the early 70s in New York, explained to me:

"Well, you know the undisputed father is this guy Taki 183. I mean, he was out before I was and, you know, this guy's tagging at the point where there hadn't really developed any spray painting techniques on the outsides of trains yet"(Futura 2000).

Taki sowed the seed that was to become a world wide movement and his name remains etched in writers' minds because of this. In effect, his is the:

"Grandson on the knee tale of graffiti, like the proper story you would tell your grandchildren about graffiti history"(Zaki).

I finish this section, not with a reason why individuals embraced this activity, but an insight into why their environment or culture was ripe for this subcultural explosion. In the words of an older writer, Lee, who I think explains it best:

"The painting just came out of the phenomenon of the way New York is, the way people are here. The concrete jungle here just suppresses, it distils people to be creative. It can feel very oppressive for the very, well, absent minded and the weak at heart. You know, people are strong here and they have a strong drive to create and to tantalise each other and I think that was the beauty and the magic behind the whole graffiti phenomenon in the early seventies. It wasn't just about tagging, it was about the competition to really uphold a sort of starism"(Lee).

SOCIETAL OPPOSITION - NEW YORK'S WAR AGAINST GRAFFITI

The progression of the graffiti movement was not without its problems. The enthusiasm and pride writers felt for their flourishing art form was not shared by all. In 1972 war was declared on the writers by those unimpressed by their efforts to decorate the city:

"On May 21 city council president Sanford Garelik told reporters, 'Graffiti pollutes the eye and mind and may be one of the worst forms of pollution we have to combat'. He called upon the citizens of New York to band together and wage an 'all-out war on graffiti'"(Castleman, 1982:136).

Headed by Mayor Lindsay, supporters were quickly recruited to the ranks of those fighting this 'urban decay'. As he pleaded:

"For heaven's sake New Yorkers come to the aid of your great city - defend it, support it and protect it!"('New York Times', Aug. 25, '72).

Varying deterrent measures were introduced over the years, but to no avail. Writers counteracted any attempts to eradicate graffiti and their subculture continued to flourish.

In 1988, sixteen years later, the city finally won their war after a massive input of capital was made available through federal funds. This bought the Transit Authority a surplus of subway cars, enough to enable them to remove any train daubed with graffiti from the system. These were sent, instead, to the buffer; a solvent system specially designed to strip graffiti from its surfaces. The Transit Authority were now able to remove graffiti faster than the writers could paint it. Writers have accepted the authorities' undisputed victory:

Jel:"*Finally, New York won the war against graffiti*"

Sae 6:"*Yea, they beat us*"*(Jel & Sae 6).*

Their defeat represents the end of an era and, as Freedom demonstrates, an important marker in their subculture's history:

"*I think it's two different written texts. I mean the first text was nineteen seventy to eighty eight, when they took the last train out of service. To me, subway graffiti has always been that first phase . . . . That was a very definite movement that you can chronicle and everything else around it is something else*"*(Freedom).*

Futura 2000 also recognises this as an important historical division. For him, however, it is positive as it firmly establishes his position and input within the scene:

"*I tell you something, I kind of like the subways the way they are now. I also like the fact that it's not around because it more clearly defines what we did and when we did it. If it was still out of control and happening, it would all kind of blend into one big thing*"*(Futura 2000).*

To this day the New York subway remains free of graffiti. Although writers still paint its trains, their pieces never 'run'. Any train marked with graffiti is immediately removed from service and cleaned. The subculture has survived, however, by adapting to its new conditions. The authorities' deterrent measures have merely moved graffiti from the subway system to New York's walls, trucks (see Figure 48.) and freight trains instead (see Figure 49.). Although freights do not occupy the status of the subway, they are a valid alternative under the

circumstances. They also extend a writer's audience and fame by carrying his/her name across the country to other states and other subcultural scenes elsewhere.

Figure 48. Graffiti on a Truck

Figure 49. Graffiti on a Freight Train

UNDERGROUND TO OVERGROUND AND EXPORT OVERSEAS

It was during these years of conflict with the authorities and society as a whole that a remarkable shift in attitude occurred and the subculture took on a new facet. A group of approximately twelve writers were literally plucked from the underground to continue their activities above ground in the city's art galleries. This was an enormous transition, not only for the writers, but also the galleries receiving them. Four of these artists comment on the impact of their transitions:

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"That transition was quite difficult at first. I felt I was very young, I was nineteen, I was giving for such a long time and now I felt I was taking. You know, I sold out my first show and it was like, 'God, shit, I'm nineteen years old', and I had ten thousand dollars in my pocket, I was like, 'shit!'. Like, I hadn't even had my first girlfriend by then. It was a nice feeling, but, I mean, I felt honestly that I wasn't ready for it at the time"(Lee).

"Initially, it wasn't that easy to make the transition for any of us because it was a new pressure too. Suddenly, here we were, really famous in our own society, but now we were in the big art world and we were nobodies. So we went from being generals to privates, kind of thing, having no juice really"(Futura 2000).

"We were the youngest artists in history to be making that kind of money and to be recognised . . . no other group of artists had ever made it that early on. Every artist that made it into museums were well into their thirties. I mean, we broke ground there and it hurts and it helps. It helped us in experience, but it hurt us to be so young and make so much money so soon"(Dondi).

"Yea, it was weird because we were thrust into the public eye almost immediately. I was only sixteen and I was doing TV and all that kind of stuff, it was kind of weird"(Lady Pink).

Previous writers had flirted with these mainstream possibilities. In 1976 the Razor Gallery in Soho, New York, hosted an exhibition of graffiti art. But the impact of this move went somewhat unnoticed. What, then, precipitated this radical shift in the early eighties? Possibly, graffiti's status as a socially condemned art form. Ironically, Mayor Lindsay's campaign appeared to give graffiti a perversely appealing and, in the eyes of the art world, financially potent profile. Graffiti was embraced as the new outlaw art movement. Its selling point was undoubtedly its illegality. As Mel Neulander, an art dealer, confirms:

"That, in a fashion, makes the art easier to market. As long as it has this bandito image, we're going to sell paintings"

(Mel Neulander - 'New York Times', Feb. 6, '82).

Lee and Futura are well aware of the factors which made their work commercially viable:

"They liked the fact that guys were reproducing what they did on the subways because, in a commercial kind of way, that was a selling point. Like you can actually have real graffiti in your living room"(Futura 2000).

As Lee recognises:

"The MTA [Metropolitan Transportation Authority] thought we were vandals, the galleries wanted us to be vandals"

(Lee - 'New Yorker', Feb. 26, '90).

The inherent contradictions of this situation could not be avoided:

"Some of them had works hanging in the offices of Park Avenue doctors,

several had been arrested for doing the same kind of work on subway trains. .

. . On Thursday Mayor Koch announced a new programme to discourage

graffiti and they had a show opening this Tuesday. It was all very confusing"

('New York Times', Feb. 6, '82).

Graffiti, thus, completed the first step of its important journey. It had surfaced from its underground position and exposed itself within legitimate 'mainstream' circles. Here, it gained widespread popularity:

"Well, it wasn't until the artists first started exhibiting their work, it was a secret society 'til we came up above ground literally. And then what happened was the initial badge of the movement caught popularity here"(Futura 2000).

The New York art world embraced this packaged version of the subculture and the exhibiting writers embarked upon a hectic period of activity. Their work was shown in huge number of galleries and, as time went on, their shows became more and more exclusive. This represented the brink of another substantial step in the passage of the art form. Graffiti saturated New York and then started to make it's appearance across America and overseas. As Futura recalls:

"It lasted up until about eighty five, eighty six becomes the sort of death of it when it had reached to over exposure and people just were tired of it. And what wound up happening was, although it was kicking kind of good eighty one, eighty two, we began to exhibit in Amsterdam, Belgium, Germany, Italy, in Paris, France, Copenhagen, Australia. Things began to open up on the world level"(Futura 2000).

Having established itself within these foreign galleries, graffiti's next move introduced it to the young people of these cities. This was accomplished through the mass export of New York's 'hip hop' culture. The term 'hip hop' encompasses many different elements of the New York street scene. Not only were the writers forging ahead in the creation and development of their new art form, but dancers and singers were also inventing their own stylised contributions in the form of breakdancing and rap (Banes, 1986; George, 1986). In effect, 'hip hop' describes a culture of performance, a group of different activities and individuals driven by a competitive spirit and a common goal - to be the best. Just as a writer competes

to execute the supreme 'masterpiece' and earn the respect of his/her peers, a rapper or breakdancer also performs in an attempt to surpass his/her opponents using the ultimate rhyme or dance move. Merging these mediums under this single banner served to ease their exportation. As Futura 2000 explains:

"The combination of graffiti art as an element of the hip hop culture enabled us to travel, not just for exhibitions we did in different countries, but also for these kind of shows we used to put on . . . . For the sake of exporting, we realised that we could package it as something, because, at that time, nobody was exposed to it abroad, not on that scale"(Futura 2000).

An important trip for Futura came in 1981 when he embarked on a tour with 'The Clash' as their backdrop artist and rapper. This took him to London where, as the story goes, he painted the first ever British piece:

"That initial piece that I did in London there, I mean maybe there had been somebody, but really my impressions of London that first time I went was that the only graffiti that was there was a lot of band graffiti, IRA political kind of graffiti. There wasn't any graffiti in the sense of individual guys doing it, certainly no pieces yet. . . . It was a big deal for the time"

(Futura 2000).

Futura's gesture was important. In effect, it represented the germination of the British scene:

"In London, however, graffiti arrived in the shape of Brooklyn born Lenny McGurr, aka Futura 2000, who, while on tour with The Clash, painted his name at the Westway, Ladbroke Grove, in silver letters with the epitaph 'Futura rocks London'. And this is basically what he did, for the youth of London were well and truly rocked. From this moment, graffiti was upon us and here to stay"('Londonz Burning' Magazine 2).

This event remains in British writers' minds as a vital point in their subcultural history. The location of Futura's piece also established Ladbroke Grove as the heart of the London graffiti scene.

In 1982 a large travelling show incorporating all aspects of the New York hip hop culture made its way to London and Europe. Futura 2000, who took part in this, explains:

"We basically had, like, all aspects of the hip hop culture and we did, like, a travelling show. We'd have rappers and DJ's on stage, breakdancers and graffiti artists at the back spray painting. This was a whole New York extravaganza thing"(Futura 2000).

In this form, the New York street scene was literally brought in person to the streets of Europe and the rest of the world. The films and books that emerged at this time also gave graffiti an international audience. 1982 saw the release of the film 'Wildstyle'. For those who had not seen the shows, this film would have been their first subcultural encounter. As Zaki recalls:

"I went to see that film and I just came out of that film just totally inspired. . . . As soon as I saw the trains in that, I knew that was exactly what I wanted to do and I think, as far as I can remember, that was the thing that turned me onto graffiti, that film 'Wildstyle'"(Zaki).

Music videos also featured graffiti art and artists. Malcolm McClaren aspected the writer Bill Blast and his work in his video 'Buffalo Girls'. Around this time, the documentary film, 'Style Wars', was also released. Without doubt, however, graffiti's greatest exposure came from the book 'Subway Art' (1984). Once this book was published:

"And there was some real kind of documentation of things that were no longer around, that's when the movement was given to the rest of the world. That's when the international communities in all these satellite cities that have a system, subway or train system or some sort of urban setting . . . discovered that they could also do this. So that's when movements began popping up in all other cities of the world"(Futura 2000).

A British writer, Proud 2, recounts the effect this book had on him:

"I saw this book and I was just like, you know, this imagery is so free, these guys are drawing Mickey Mouses and there's really nice letters and that and I was purely into it for artistic things, I just thought, yea. . . . The whole book packaged it as some kind of romantic sort of tradition. It was, sort of, like any sort of outlawed art form. Even though it's illegal, there's got to be some good in it"(Proud 2).

The majority of writers I spoke to referenced this book as their graffiti bible; a vital incentive and guide. Its success perhaps lay in the fact that interested outsiders could not only acquaint themselves with New York's key artists and their work, but also the dynamics of the subculture itself. Its history, terminology, rules, values and objectives were all documented, presenting these budding subcultures with the framework they needed to establish some form of structure within their own scenes:

"There's rules and regulations, I mean that was in 'Subway Art', so you could read that and think, 'oh, let's not do that'. . . . People adopted all that, like the word 'toy' and 'bubble letter' and all that, but, yea, that's gone round the world"(Stylo).

Writers credit these vehicles for their involvement in this international subculture. They also use them as a common bond or link with others. As Stylo explains:

"Like, I meet a Berlin writer whose got all the same references, like, knows lines out of 'Wildstyle' off by heart, you know. Like, every writer I know, knows every line out of 'Wildstyle' and 'Style Wars' and can quote it to someone they've never met and they laugh because this is one of the cool things about it. Writers, now, who haven't done that, you think, 'well sort it out because that is our history, which you need to know', like mad little phrases and even the way they say it. I mean, that's nice"(Stylo).

Graffiti, thus, completed the last step of its developmental journey out of New York. In its entirety, its history as a subculture has been relatively brief. It spans just over twenty five years, from the initial few taggers in New York, to its movement overground into galleries and its final passage overseas where it established itself as a thriving international subculture. For the initial pioneers, these progressions were unforeseen:

"Here it is twenty two years later and I'm being told that people all over the world do this. We started something without the slightest notion that it would get to this point. We didn't realise the baby we bore"

(Lee 163 - 'Vibe' Magazine, Oct. '94).

New York may now be one of many scenes that exist around the world, but is still recognised and respected as the subculture's birthplace and heartland. To this day it is esteemed for its powers of inspiration and the crucial role it played in creating this vibrant international subculture:

"New York is where it came from and the rules and everything has basically been done in New York. Style, rules, everything was kind of developed out of the subculture. I mean, it would be like, sort of, being Catholic and looking to the Vatican or something, you know. Any little problem that you come upon, you might be tempted to see how things are done in Rome and with graffiti it's, kind of, the same. You tend to come across problems that you haven't encountered before. Because the things you're doing tend to be copied from New York anyway, you know, the solutions tend to be the same"(Drax).

New subcultural scenes may have formulated themselves in the image of New York, but they have maintained a sense of their own individuality. As cities, they differ. Their scenes have incorporated this imprint of diversity:

"Yea, everywhere in the world, it's been pretty modified. I mean, there's Europe, England, Australia, and all other parts of the States have got different scenes in relation to their environment; how easy it is to do graffiti

or what kind of people tend to be drawn into it, what their economy is like, what paint accessibility they've got, it's changed a lot"(Drax).

As time progresses, members continue to mould their scenes and carve their own respective positions within the subculture as a whole. Celebrating their distinctions, they construct their identities to fall alongside, rather than underneath, New York's imposing shadow. As Drax describes the scene he is part of:

"The true London scene, a scene totally self contained and self influenced, initially inspired by New York of course, but now isolated in its own identity"(Drax - 'Graphotism' Magazine 3).

APPENDIX B

VOYAGE THROUGH THE FIELD - A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

This section will outline, at a very personal and detailed level, the journey I made through the stages of my research within the field. In reality, I began this before the actual start of my PhD, during preparatory stages where thoughts were formulated and proposals written and rewritten. I'm sure more researchers must experience initial doubts as to the feasibility of their studies. I was certainly no exception. This was an area which fascinated me, however, it was also one which worried me. Graffiti is illegal and its practitioners are, therefore, elusive. I had never actually seen anyone writing graffiti, nor did I know of anyone that did it. So firstly, How was I going to find these people? Secondly, If I did find them, would they wish to talk to a complete stranger about their illegal activities? Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the media had placed this group in a more than ominous light. What was I letting myself in for?

I kept these worries very firmly at the back of my mind where I could not dwell on them and set about finding a university place which would allow me to carry out my study. I remained optimistic while I concentrated on ensuring my more realistic interview panels that access would be possible. As I kept telling them and, more importantly, myself, other people had done it, so why couldn't I?

A TREK THROUGH BRITISH TERRAIN - FIELDWORK IN LONDON

Having been accepted at Brunel, I set about trying to familiarise myself with the workings of the subculture I planned to study. A diversity of secondary sources were used at this point; newspapers articles, videos, films and books. I also began to establish some initial contacts. I had my first meeting with David Holloway, a youth worker who had been involved in staging an exhibition and seminar on graffiti art. I had traced his name and number through a related newspaper article. Although not a writer himself, Holloway was a very good initial step into the subculture. Like me, he was in many ways an outsider. His vision as such submerged me gently into the fabric of the subculture. I suspect an interview with a writer would have immersed me to levels of a reality I was not, at this stage, prepared for or able to appreciate. My first shifts in conception were made during this meeting. Holloway informed me of the existence of a legal subcultural sphere, an area of the subculture I was unaware of. I had only read about and seen evidence of illegal graffiti and presumed this was the only dimension of writers' involvements. He talked me through the legally based writer's activities; commission work, work within galleries and legal wall sites. This

was an important revelation as this group distinction now represents a central aspect of my theoretical framework. Holloway also provided me with some important reading material; proposals for future projects and letters and accounts relating to a very large dispute which had taken place within the scene during the early stages of my research. These enhanced my understanding of group dynamics and also introduced me to some of the subculture's key figures. Phone numbers of writers I could contact were also supplied. These included Drax, an important figure within the illegal sphere; Juice, a figurehead for legal writers in Birmingham; and Steam, a member of the London scene, albeit at a peripheral level.

I contacted Juice by phone. Although I never actually met him, he helped me to familiarise myself with the history of the movement. He had, as he explained, helped a great many people doing projects or articles on the subculture and, in his view, background knowledge is essential. Drax, having made cautionary enquiries about the actual purpose of my study, agreed to meet me for an interview. He emphasised that, because of his illegal involvements, he would not discuss or disclose any details of his past or future activities. Understanding his inevitable caution, I assured him that my interests lay in a more wide angled understanding of the group as a whole. As it transpired, I did not meet Drax until a year later. Indeed, with the exception of Steam, most of my interviews with writers took place within the second year of my research. I felt I still needed to generate an understanding of the subculture which would enable me to make the best use of their very detailed and advanced levels of insight. This decision was prudent. The quality of material I obtained from Drax, and many other writers, was undoubtedly influenced by my confidence and ability to manage, perhaps, deeper levels of commentary. I had also begun to formulate theoretical propositions at this stage and my meetings allowed me to discuss these with the writers themselves. Drax proved to be an invaluable aid in this capacity. As an older writer, he was able to comment on his reasons for involvement and the varying stages of this. He was both intelligent and reflective and, on the two separate occasions I interviewed him, I was able to access some new and very valuable areas of concern.

Steam, a writer turned photographer of the art form, proved to be an accommodating contact for slightly different reasons. As a less active subcultural member, he did not provide me with the rich and detailed material I obtained from Drax. However, his level of commentary suited my experience at this stage. He also provided me with helpful secondary source material and the names and numbers of other writers to contact. Most importantly, however, his outgoing

personality and desire to help allowed me to become involved in an observer or participant capacity. I accompanied Steam and another writer, Mear, on my first painting trip as a participant observer During this, I was able to watch these writers paint and observe the various methods and techniques they used to do this (see Figure 50.).

Figure 50 The First Stage of Piece Design

Another opportunity arose and I joined these writers for a second time as they painted a legal commission wall in Mitchum. I maintained regular contact with Steam and a few months later met up with him, Mear, Mess and a group of other writers planning to paint a disused reservoir site near Ascot. I did not stay long enough to watch them paint, but this gathering did allow me to observe writers' interactional behaviour and the connected nature of the subculture as a whole Writers from a variety of areas who all knew, or knew of each other, arrived to discuss recent news and events and exchange information and gossip. My presence was notable. I was the only girl and the only person who wasn't a writer. With little to contribute in the form of information, combined with slight feelings of inhibition, I maintained a low profile and stayed pretty much in the background of things. Possibly sensing my feelings of unease, Mear tried to involve me by talking me through some of the photos that were being passed around. His efforts were much appreciated at the time. I did feel like a conspicuous outsider and Mear's gesture eased and reduced my sense of exclusion.

At this stage, I began to feel more confident about my abilities as a researcher and my understanding as a subcultural outsider. I decided it was time to talk to someone from the other side of the camp and made contact with the head of

transport security, Richard Carrol, and Inspector Chris Connell, head of the London Graffiti Squad. They appeared more than happy to help and supplied me with revealing data and material concerning the writers they had apprehended. This included offenders' age ranges, sexes, occupations and their re-offence rates. Inspector Connell also discussed his theories and thoughts regarding writers' subcultural motivations. These ranged from the possibility of a criminal gene to Maslow's theory of self actualisation. I began to realise how little they really understood about the subculture they were dealing with. Even though I was still a relative amateur, I could see there was much they didn't know or would need to know if they had any hope of controlling or abating writers' activities. I did not impart any of my knowledge, however, towards the end of our meeting there emerged a gentle hint of I've scratched your back, now you scratch mine. Inspector Connell told me he also had to complete a report, although somewhat smaller than mine, and asked if he could use my ideas as a guide. Although he had been very helpful and generous with his time, I had to weigh up my ethical priorities. At this stage of my research I could not afford to jeopardise the trust of my other informants. I depended on them for subcultural access and information and my dealings with the Graffiti Squad would have undoubtedly lessened their co-operation. I told Inspector Connell I would try and keep in touch, but my commitment to the writers prevented me from doing this.

I continued to follow up the leads Steam had given me and arranged to meet and interview his friend, Mear; Proud 2, a legal writer from Essex studying graphic design at college; Kilo, a semi legal/illegal wall writer who also produces 'Video Graphics', a compilation of videoed events, interviews and graffiti work; and Stylo, a prominent legal writer and editor of the graffiti magazine 'Graphotism'. Through Stylo, I also met up with Prime, an older and highly respected illegal writer. I also began to contact writers through other means. A friend introduced me to Ego, a retired illegal writer who now produces graffiti design clothing. He invited me, on a separate occasion, to attend a gallery show where he was exhibiting his canvas work. I tracked down Acrid, a notorious and highly active illegal writer, through one of the many newspaper articles detailing his recent court case. This particular one mentioned the name of the pub he worked in. I wasted no time and rang him to request an interview. Due to his recent legal difficulties, I expected a less than enthusiastic response. I was wrong. Acrid was happy to talk to me and delighted in recounting and detailing every dangerous and fateful facet of his exploits - a true fanatic! He also put me in touch with his friend Series.

By this time I was well into the second year of my research. I had begun to recognise the subculture's various groupings and my contact requirements became more selective. Having interviewed a number of older and more legally oriented writers, I decided to try and access the younger or more illegally active cleavage of the subculture. One individual notorious for his undeterred devotion to illegal graffiti was Rate. His dedication had already resulted in an eighteen month custodial sentence and various difficulties with the police and authorities. I knew that he could impart a fascinating angle on things, but writers I spoke to seemed unwilling to put me in touch with him. They appeared to adopt a gate keeping role, which, I presume, served to protect Rate from the possible threat I represented as a subcultural outsider. By incredible coincidence, I stumbled across him without their help. Passing the pub I live next door to, I noticed a menu stuck to the window. It caught my eye because it was written in the distinctive style of a graffiti writer. I went in and enquired and my suspicions were confirmed. A man told me his son had written it and, yes, he was a graffiti artist. I asked his name and the gentlemen told me, with a certain degree of pride in his voice, that he was a very well known writer that goes by the name of Rate. I left my number and Rate contacted me and agreed to be interviewed. We arranged a time and location, but he did not keep this appointment. I was later told by his father that the Transport Police had raided their flat that very day and arrested Rate for the paint, photographs and other incriminating evidence they had found. This was inconvenient, but it also generated some very serious worries concerning my involvement in the scene. Following Rate's arrest, my interview progression declined somewhat. Two writers I had contacted through a friend, failed to commit to an interview. Their original agreement turned, in my eyes, into excuses and avoidance. With no other avenues to explore, I pursued these leads until it was clear that there was absolutely no hope of a meeting. A couple of writers I met by chance at a graffiti site in Fulham also appeared to be unnerved by my presence and interest in their involvement and declined my requests for an interview. I had exhausted all my previous leads and was failing miserably at generating any others. I began to wonder whether my arrangement to meet Rate upon the day of his arrest had any bearing on this. Perhaps I was now being associated with the British Transport Police. My worries grew as this quiet period continued. Relief finally came when Rate contacted me upon his release. Although this assuaged my doubts somewhat, this event and its possible connection did unbalance me a little. These concerns remained in the forefront of my mind for the rest of my fieldwork.

During the closing stages of my fieldwork I was advised by a friend to contact Zaki; an older, retired writer of considerable standing within the British scene. I knew of him, but had not made any attempts to contact him earlier as his legendary status had led me to expect an attitude of indifference. I could not have been more wrong. He showed immediate interest in my project and said he would be happy to meet and talk to me about it. We concluded one interview, which in truth I don't think I had adequately prepared for. I failed to fully utilise his knowledge and insight as an older and highly reflective member of this subculture. I sensed he also felt this way and, upon his offer to help at any time, suggested a second interview. This meeting proved to be invaluable. I gained some fascinating material concerning the merits of writers' virtual identities. In turn, this helped me to formulate and clarify some of my theoretical insights.

I maintained my contact with Zaki and met with him subsequently at 'Unity', a yearly graffiti event he offered to take me to. 'Unity' is an important inclusion in any writer's diary. Organised by Drax, among others, it brings writers of all persuasions together to partake or watch others paint the walls of a legal painting site in Fulham (see Figures 51. & 52.).

Figure 51. Stylo & Mear Painting at 'Unity' '95

We arrived and a large group of writers, friends, spectators and enthusiasts began to gather. Magazines, photos, news and gossip were exchanged and writers engaged in animated graffiti related debates. Like Ascot, this event allows writers to meet each other and generally 'talk shop'. Zaki's presence was widely acknowledged and his approachable manner led many to bend his ear about the 'good old days'. I was also able to identify the familiar faces of those I had met

and interviewed. This allowed me to observe, but also interact with both those I knew and didn't know so well. My two year involvement within the scene had, it seemed, reduced the feelings of inhibition I had sometimes felt as a researcher with an essentially shy disposition!
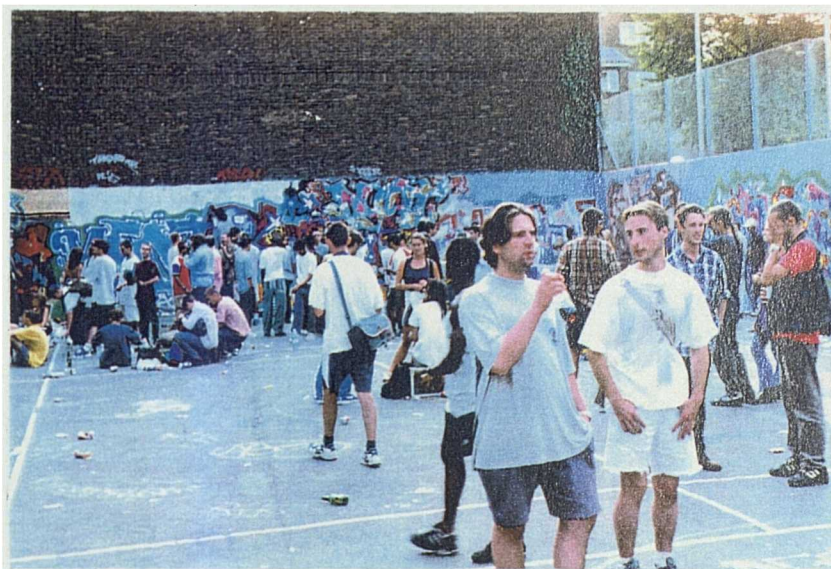

Figure 52. 'Unity' '95

I learnt a lot from this event. Most importantly, however, I met Akit, my final British contact. As the only female writer in London, I had heard a lot about her, but had been unable to track her down. I noticed her painting during the later stages of the afternoon and, having been informed who she was, asked her if she would be willing to talk to me. She agreed, apparently pleased to be given the opportunity to relate her story. We met a few days later and I was able to draw upon her unique experiences as a female member of a very male dominated world; a fascinating conclusion to my fieldwork within the British subculture.

THE URBAN JUNGLE - FIELDWORK IN NEW YORK

In March 1994, I was invited by some friends living in New York to come and visit. I had completed three quarters of my fieldwork in London and, feeling I still had a substantial amount to do, declined their offer. However, this invitation did lead me to consider the various merits of visiting New York for the purpose of my research. It was, after all, the birthplace of the movement and the possibility of talking to writers who worked within it could be beneficial to me. I did not, at this point, allow myself to get carried away with these largely idealistic notions. How, in reality, was I ever going to find willing informants without prior leads and within a limited space of time? The temptation did not, however, abate and I began to half-heartedly consider ways of initiating some contacts to justify the purpose of this trip.

I decided that Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant, the authors of 'Subway Art' (1984), would be my most productive and accessible leads. Their subcultural involvement could provide me with important research material and the interview avenues I needed. The possibility of this trip began to take form. I rang their publisher and explained my intentions. Having alleviated his initial reservations, he gave me their numbers and they agreed to meet me should I come over.

During this time my British fieldwork activity had declined substantially. Following Rate's arrest, I was finding it very difficult to maintain a healthy interviewing schedule. This state of affairs and Martha and Henry's agreement helped me to make my decision. I could now go to New York as a researcher in search of new fieldwork experiences.

Before leaving I decided to try and establish some prior interview leads and called Drax for his help. He explained that, although he knew writers in New York, it might be difficult to tie them down because they preferred to do graffiti rather than talk about it. He did, however, mention one writer who might agree to talk to me. He told me he would check with him first and let me know. Unfortunately, this lead never materialised. It was possible Drax merely forgot to call me. On the other hand, however, he might not have wanted me to pursue this New York avenue. London writers feel an intense pride for their scene, but, as the birthplace of the movement, New York has always received more attention and exposure. Without realising it, I may have reduced their enjoyment of my recognition and interest. This is just a speculation which might prove to be entirely incorrect. I could hardly present my suspicions to Drax as this would have implied jealousy on his part. In addition to this, I would have sounded like a school teacher asking him to explain himself. I had no choice but to speculate or alienate and I chose the former as the safest option. I put my doubts aside and left for New York.

Sadly, Martha Cooper was away during the two weeks of my visit. However, I contacted Henry Chalfant and we arranged a meeting at his studio. As my main reason for visiting New York, this was a disappointment. Henry was very busy and I felt uncomfortable imposing on his time. We talked for a short while and his views and opinions were very helpful. Somehow, though, I had hoped for more, at least the names of some writers I could contact. Henry did not volunteer these and I did not feel comfortable asking for them. I left his studio feeling a little deflated and made my way back to the subway station. The route I took ensured I did not return home with a mere forty five minutes of interview material. By complete chance, I stumbled across 'Soho Down and Under', a shop selling

graffiti magazines, clothing and related paraphernalia; a graffiti magnet which draws writers from all over the city (see Figure 53.).

Figure 53. 'Soho Down and Under' - New York

My problems of access were now over. My next task involved finding a way of asking writers for an interview without generating suspicion. The wary reactions of writers I had met by chance in London had taught me an important lesson. I did not want to repeat my mistakes and estrange potential informants through cold questioning. Accordingly, I devised a less intrusive method of introduction. Rather than initiate the first step myself, I got the writers to do this. By asking about the availability of a British based magazine I could provoke their interest. I was not male or American and my uncharacteristic persona usually led to queries concerning my status as a writer. Their questions allowed me to explain myself and request an interview without inducing alarm. I used this approach and met two writers, Jel and his friend Sae 6. I also met Sar, an older writer, through this shop. As it turned out, Sar knew Stylo and Steam, having been in London two years previously to exhibit his work with another writer Iz the Wiz. With this immediate connection Sar was happy to be interviewed. Upon leaving the shop, Sar asked a group of young writers outside if they would also like to talk to me. They seemed ecstatic at the prospect and made me promise to call them. A welcome change to the difficulties I had been experiencing in London!

My interviews during this trip were all very different. Col, one of the younger writers I had met outside the shop, was able to present his experiences as a relative newcomer to the movement. His age (16 years) did not prevent him from contributing some very mature and insightful views and opinions. Although Sar

was unable to attend, he organised the interview to include Iz and a younger member of his crew, Cavs. This meeting provided me with a comparative angle on things. Iz, at 38 years old, represented the views of a writer involved from the very start of the movement. Cavs's experiences differed quite considerably by comparison. Jel and Sae 6, the other two writers I met, offered me some very animated and opinionated commentary. As pictured in Figure 54., they also took me to see the edge of the subway tunnels where they used to paint. Their memories were prompted by this visit and they recounted many stories of their past exploits.
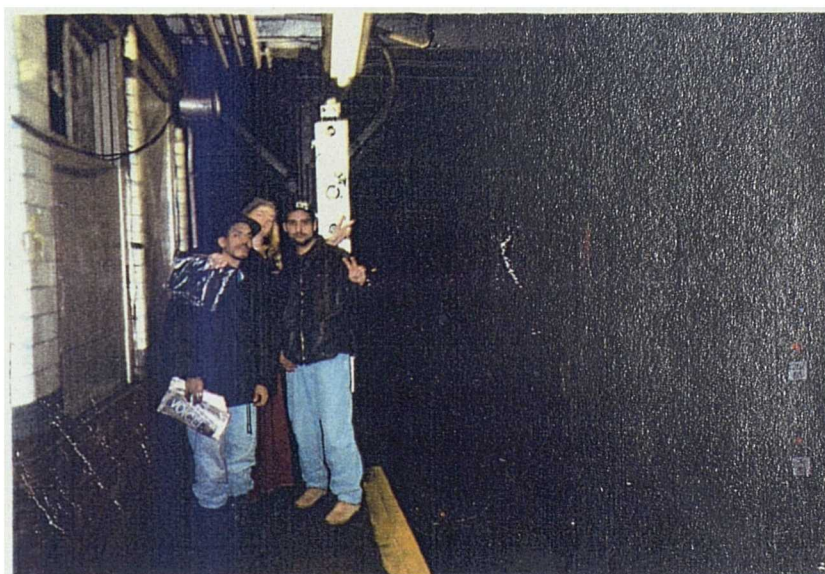

Figure 54. Sae 6, Jel & I at the Edge of the Subway Tunnels

During all of these interviews I expressed a desire to actually visit a train yard itself. This was something I was anxious to do before finishing my fieldwork as I felt it would enhance my ability to portray writers' own experiences. I had been unable to fulfil this ambition in London as writers were reluctant to risk their own safety, let alone mine. Sadly, time limits in New York also prevented me from realising this goal.

I left New York completely uplifted by my experiences. I had amassed some very valuable research material and means of obtaining this proved to be easier than London. The shop had been an invaluable aid as it had freed me from relying on other writers for my leads. The writers I had met also seemed more approachable and open to my propositions. This had a substantial effect upon my state of mind. I felt more relaxed and secure in my role as an interested outsider and returned home considerably less frustrated.

Steam contacted me upon my return, interested to hear about my American activities. He told me that I should have called him prior to leaving as he could have passed on Dondi's, Futura 2000's and Lady Pink's numbers. These, one could say, legendary writers could have provided me with some invaluable interview material. All were involved at the early stages of the movement and all had made a transition into the 'mainstream' through their feature in related books, films, videos and gallery shows. The productivity of my last visit and the offer of these leads resulted in a return trip.

Before my departure, I gained another hint of British writers' sensitivity to my expanding fieldwork focus. During my second interview with Zaki, I told him of my plans to return to New York. These were met with a tinge of annoyance. In his view, the London scene represents an important focus in itself. He seemed to question my need to look elsewhere. Zaki's reaction did worry me, as I did not want to disaffect those who had done a lot to help me. However, I did need to progress my research and New York did offer me this opportunity. I tried to assuage his doubts by justifying my reasons for including New York and emphasising the importance of my fieldwork in London. I can only hope I succeeded.

I arrived back and immediately organised my long awaited interview with Martha Cooper. She was friendly, open and very enthusiastic. We talked at length and she allowed me to draw upon her experiences as a reference and guide. I left with recommended reading material and Patricia Crevits's number, a friend of hers who was currently producing a documentary film about graffiti in New York. As relative newcomers to the scene, Patricia and I found immediate common ground. We discussed our thoughts and ideas and exchanged informant numbers. Through Patricia, I was able to add Lee and Freedom to my growing list of writers to talk to.

I called Freedom and asked if Patricia and I could accompany him to see his artwork and the unusual location housing it. He agreed and I embarked upon a totally fascinating experience. Freedom had renounced his work upon trains several years ago and moved to concentrate his efforts further underground in the tunnels running under the city (see Figure 55.). These are now inhabited by many of New York's homeless community or 'mole people' as they are sometimes known. Although Freedom does not live amongst these groups, he is known by them and allowed to go about his business. He paints the main bulk of his work in the tunnel dwelling of his friend Bernard. We met on a quiet street in uptown New York and Freedom called to Bernard through a grating in the pavement. He

appeared at an entrance down the road, let us in and led us down some steps into the belly of his home. The tunnel was partially lit from the sunlight that filtered through the grates in its ceiling. It was also noisy as this particular tunnel houses an Amtrak express train which runs through every twenty minutes or so. As Bernard remarked, he must be one of the only people in the world with a train running through his front room! Freedom talked us slowly through each of his paintings and, accompanied by Bernard, we moved further down the tunnel. We eventually arrived at Bernard's dwelling. Freedom pointed out his most recent work, a Goya scene painted on the back wall, and we drank coffee made upon an open fire.

Figure 55. Freedom's Work in the Tunnels of New York

Three weeks into my second trip I made contact with Dondi, Futura 2000, Lady Pink, her husband, Smith, and Lee. As high profile subcultural figures, they more than justified my second visit to this city. They talked me through the transitions they had made to 'mainstream' prominence and how these events had shaped their lives in general. Their maturity also enabled them to reflect upon some of the reasons for their involvements. Pink imparted some fascinating and novel insights as a female writer, as did her female associate, junior and friend, Claw. Together, these interviews helped to shed some light on the common experiences of female writers in general.

Despite my status as a researcher and, thus, outsider, these meetings were really very exciting. I knew of these writers through the groundwork I had done in the early stages of my research, but by this stage I now saw them, as many did, as legends or icons. I had exceeded all my expectations and referenced the views of some of the subculture's esteemed pioneers.

Upon arriving back in New York I had also contacted Cavs, the writer I had interviewed on my last trip. He was happy to hear from me and surprised by my swift return. I explained why I was back and also asked him about the possibility of accompanying him on his next trip to a train yard. As it happened, he was planning to paint freights that weekend with some friends and he agreed to take me. I could now finally fulfil my ambition and expose myself to an experience I consider to be central to any researcher's participation within the subculture.

I met Cavs, Az and Sein 5 at a subway station at the very top of the Bronx. From here we walked for about fifteen minutes to an entrance leading to the train t ack we were to follow. Difficulties in gaining entrance held us up, but they did not deter. We made it through and proceeded down the track. My guides were relaxed, but diligent. Any sight or sound of an approaching train on our track or any other meant we had to scramble into the undergrowth to ensure we were not detected and reported. We arrived at the lay up where the freight trains were kept and moods intensified. There was no one else there which meant they had two very large trains at their disposal. They painted and I observed, using this opportunity to talk to them about graffiti related matters.

Figure 56. Watching Cavs Paint a Freight Train

Writers are closely dependant on each other during these trips. They are dangerous and the eyes and ears of their friends help to ensure their own personal safety. A successful endeavour, thus, acts to enhance trust and strengthen their affiliating bonds. Being part of this seemed to move me to a more personal level of interaction. I became closer to these writers. It appeared that

our shared experience brought me in as a friend or an ally rather than a detached and removed observer. This shift in status was reflected in the subsequent invitation I received to join Cavs and six of his friends for a pizza and video evening at his home. Although this was a sociable gathering, I did learn from it. Whilst eating, talking and watching videos, the conversation never strayed far from the topic of graffiti. It was not just a pastime, as one might have thought from meeting writers in interview or participating encounters alone, their lives literally revolved around it. The unstructured and easy nature of this evening also highlighted some new areas of interest which had not been made apparent during my conducted interviews.

I concluded, at this point, a very productive five weeks of fieldwork. I had learnt much through my experiences and, again, these seemed easier to access than in London. As a researcher in New York I was literally spoilt for choice. I had a vast array of access avenues and an almost guaranteed chance of finding an accommodating informant at the end of them. Like my last trip, writers I met were all receptive, open and willing to talk. There were several possible reasons for this. Firstly, there was the novelty of my status as an English female. Related to this, an interested foreigner is less likely to arouse the suspicion and distrust that a member of one's own society and culture might induce. On the other hand, these writers might have accommodated anyone who happened to show an *interest*. New York has a long history of graffiti and writers are well acquainted with the interests of outsiders. For this reason, my attention may not have been regarded as unusual or threatening. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, one must consider the size of the New York scene. This is very much larger than London and competition for fame and recognition is much more fierce as a result. It is possible that I represented a very effective means of extending and increasing these writers' profiles.

Adapting to my role as a researcher involved a process of finding my feet. My first few slow and unsteady steps upon this unfamiliar terrain gradually gained stability and momentum as I adapted to my new environment, developed some sort of niche within it and began to recognise the results of my progressions. There were obstacles to confront and anxieties to deal with, but there were also some highly rewarding and exhilarating experiences to be had. I hope I have granted the reader some sense of these. Research is a very human experience. We take with us the baggage we carry in everyday life. This includes our individual insecurities, strengths, capabilities and weaknesses. We may be learning much about the

culture we are studying, but we are also learning much about ourselves. Together, these insights make our fieldwork encounters unique and, in my experience, hugely vitalising.

APPENDIX C

TALKING BACK: WRITERS' REACTIONS TO MY COMPLETED THESIS

Following its completion, I set about handing copies of my thesis back the British writers who had been involved in my research. I felt this was an important gesture of thanks, but also courtesy. As the subjects of my study, I believed they had a right to read what I had written about them and comment on this. Ethical issues aside, this move required a certain amount of courage. Writers are highly critical when it comes to outsiders commenting on their subculture. In their eyes, to have a voice one must have first earnt it through dedicated and committed subcultural involvement. This way, as Stylo's comments convey, insight and accuracy is assured:

Nancy:*"So there's a strong belief that if something's going to be done, it's going to be done by those involved, rather than someone from the outside?"*

Stylo:*"Its like anything, if you're not controlling it there's always a chance that you're going to get subverted . . . . The only way to represent is represent yourself. Its like anything, you're always going to have someone saying how it is when it's not you"(Stylo).*

Given this attitude, and the fact that much of my material on masculinity could be perceived as sensitive or even threatening, I expected to be given a very hard time. Suprisingly though, their reactions were generally very positive. The writers I managed to contact were complimentary about my work and, indeed, my research approach. Their comments are detailed below:

"In this writing I'm going to give my comment, analysis and criticisms of the thesis "The Art of Destruction: An Ethnographic Study of the urban Graffiti Subculture. Before I start I feel I need to flash my credentials. This is in no way a boast or boost of myself, but as far as I and a lot of people are concerned, if a man can't ground his talk or opinion with experience and recognition of that experience then his view doesn't mean shit and isn't respected.

I took my doodles in my school books to the walls in 1985, at the age of 14, I'm 26 now. As the graffiti virus multiplied in my veins I went bombing every night and got up strong between 1986 and 1988. Having a eye and talent for sketching I quickly made a name as a piecer, starting on walls, running with the top crews in London, then going on to the Underground, producing, with others, some of the most respected painting ever to run on

the network. Due to the power of the word and the introduction of magazines I am known and respected in different parts of the world. I have held a number of group and solo exhibitions, I'm also editor of one of the best graffiti magazines in the world 'Graphotism International'. Having a connection with different groupings and schools of thought in the writing culture and being able to place myself and others in an accurate historical context gives my opinion some value I hope.

On meeting Nancy, through Stylo, my first thoughts were 'oh shit not another one'. Someone trying to be 'alternative' by doing their academic work about graf. I wasn't new to the idea and found it unoriginal. Most observers don't come across as having the inclination to get the deeper facts or tell the story as it is. But I love talking about what I do. When I finally saw the finished product, I knew I'd have to eat my words, even if only on effort. From my point of view, the subject warranted a substantial piece to be written about it and Nancy defininately came through on that. Reading through the chapters that form her theoretical foundation (1-3) it soon became clear that this would be the most comprehensive work I would have read on the subject to date, with the best analysis from an 'outsider' I would have encountered in my years of writing. For me, the foundation of any action is its integrity or its reasoning; a writer can be classed as shit, but as long as he's not full of shit, he's cool. Reason and rationale count for a lot and Nancy clearly laid out hers, fighting against the arrogant and stiff 'old grey men' and bringing a real, interactive perspective to the way one conducts research. People always write bullshit about how we're supposed to tick, but we watch as much as they watch us, and like the ink blot test, their theories reveal their state of mind more clearly than ours. Nancy tries fucking hard not to fall into that trap and quickly identified the all crucial parallel role the subculture holds next to mainstream society, addressing the subject in a wider context. Her efforts to "let the key issues emerge"(P.5) helped to keep her feet on the ground by not allowing her initial fascination with the subject cloud her judgement too much. Her admission that everyone has a preset agenda or viewpoint also nicely fucks with the detached, super-human, super-objective doctor myth. Destroying this myth empowers the subject and lets them take centre stage in the research, lessening the chance that issues and notions are suggested to the subject rather than coaxed out.

On P.5 Nancy states that she carried with her the proposition of the CCCS group, that subcultures are a symbolic solution to class related problems. It is clear that this proposition does not stay with her throughout. Writing

is about taking power, but primarily within the subculture itself or at most the wider youth culture. A lot of people carry on writing because they've looked at the class thing and said 'fuck it all'. Joining mainstream society is usually just a means to a financial or some other end.

Nancy touches on crime and criminality but doesn't really explore the concept of 'criminalisation' of the writer by authority or how the crime is viewed in different localities. Driving over 30mph in some areas is a crime, dodging the train fare is a crime, tax evasion is a crime, using a mobile phone while driving can be a crime. Some of these crimes are committed by most of us everyday, so what is a criminal? The point is, for shit to run smooth, it's important that some people are criminalised, that in the public mind their act loses its context and becomes 'as bad as' robbery with violence or rape or burglary.

I also ask questions about the way gender is approached in Nancy's work. Writing definately is a construction of masculine identity, but whether this is constructed on the backs of women that want to write is questionable. Writers fall into different kinds and the kind that represents the majority (which can be different at any given time) will give their view on what is the norm of the culture. I wouldn't try to categorise all the different types of writers Nancy interviewed, but I do know, on the issue of gender, she interviewed at least one wanker who wanted to be hard in front of her. My experience in London, amongst the thinkers, the 'old school', is the eveyone comes through on their dedication and ability. So women are seen to add to the culture, but they must play by the same rules as the men. Hard competition is what made writing flourish and anyone that falls short of that ain't respected, male or female. Women entering the scene as 'someone's girl' doesn't help their status.

(p.33) Most writers I know don't really give a shit about 'misrepresentation' in the media. No one expects anything different or really cares about how we're seen. In fact most writers I know love the 'spotlight' of a mention in the press, whether it's favourable or not. Like shrewd advertisers, we know there's no such thing as 'bad press', especially when we know our thing is seen as 'bad' anyway. This 'group' of disgruntled writers is usually the fringe, right on, 'of course it's art' type, who most people don't respect anyway. The 'silent voice' thing isn't really relevant either because the writers who are confident about what they're doing know that the 'voice' of a bombed train speaks the loudest - we take control. I disagree that the validity of accounts is not important (p.36), as it obvious that the more opinionated groups within the subculture see it as essential to any true

portrayal of events and the culture as a whole. Referring back to misrepresentation in the media, writers are less able to tolerate bullshit from another writer who should know better than from an outsider, furthermore accounts being 'valid in their own right' makes the whole exercise of 'finding out' and building a 'framework' futile.

Finally, I need to make myself very clear. Whatever shit I have written about Nancy's work involves no serious criticisms, simply observations about a few points, many of which Nancy elaborates on further on in the piece. As a body of research and academic authority on what writers do, why and how they see themselves, 'The Art of Destruction' is flawless, I repeat, Flawless! Nancy's research is sharp, penetrating and almost scary in the way it sheds light on the workings of the culture. She has expounded on the subject like a veteren writer. I'm sure if her work were made accessible to a wider audience it would be powerful enough to actually educate new writers who are ignorant of the depth and history behind the culture. Most importantly, Nancy not only approached the subject with the discipline needed to research any subject thoroughly, but also the prerequisite of an open mind, not simply taking things on face value. For me, a man who could talk about the culture for days, on all levels, 'The Art of Destruction' is the deepest and most informative work I have ever read on the subject" (Prime - written communication).

"Dear Nancy, sorry it's taken 10 years mate! I don't know if my waffling is of any use to you, what I read of your work was safe, nuf props, nuf respect. Your analysis and portrayal of us mad folk was spot on, but it would be fair to say that your picture was a little bit rosy - one of graf as a harmonious underground existence bound together by an unspoken solidarity of us against the rest of the world - pursuing our love of art. I know 2/3 years ago I would have been totally on this tip, but due to different personal circumstances and the tumultuous world of graf, my perceptions have altered and not necessarily for the better. Tradition got played out and the mentality has soured recently. I'm not in any way against graf, on the contrary, I'm even more elitist in my stance. What others think of graf I'm even less bothered by. The more mainstream it becomes, the more incensed I get. It really isn't for others, that's my main point, because a writer has little or no respect. A general disregard is almost necessary, it goes hand in hand. But this general disregard and 'fuck everyone else' attitude will and does have debilitating effects on most young men (and women!). I'm not saying they all go that way, but I've been

part of and an observer of London graf for over five years and the levels of self destruction and fuckedupness some people sink to is unfounded. As I write, there is a division in London I never dreamed possible. A militancy has emerged due to (I think) shere boredom combined with the attitude you start of with e.g., anyone who doesn't or won't understand graf is an enemy, let alone worthless. An inability to deal with anything other than graf is obviously unhealthy, and once you've fallen into the trap that graf is all you have and know and when faced with a.) everyday life and b.) having to find an alternative (which is inevitable for most) other than selling out, the attitude held by hardcore graf can become a hindrance - to the point of being a ball and chain. This all sounds very moody and I don't mean we're all doomed, but you talk about self direction in a positive way and I haven't seen much evidence of it recently. That air of disregard is what keeps us going. Writers cringe at the thought of public acceptance. You could put all the bows and ribbons on a writer or their graf, but underneath what it boils down to is 'fuck you'! It's all or nothing. I just felt that the picture could be clearer with an admittance of the downside. But this is just my view and it's wholey dictated by what's happening here now in London. I'm talking 100% personally and not of graf's behalf, even London graf. I don't expect anyone else you interviewed to make the same assessment of the situation or of your work. Just right now, this overshadows everything. Come ask me again in six months and everything may be sweet. But regardless of that I maintain that we're not all lovely and great, not by a long stretch. In fact we can be quite a nasty bunch! Ha! You must be as mad as us to love it so much.

Regarding being female, things never got any better - in general!! I still meet writers and I know what they think or have heard and to make life easier on myself and show I'm not bitter, I'll often proclaim that 'I've had every writer going and if I haven't had them yet, then I will. So then they can't really say anything worse than that!! I couldn't win, but I wasn't bothered. I suppose if you can't beat them, join them and all that shit. But it wasn't ever that, I just gave up giving a shit about what they thought about me. It all became quite amusing and I'd relish hearing stories of my sexual escapades with writers, often making a few up myself just to keep the fire burning! Being famous is nice, but being infamous also has a certain ring to it! Only through developing <u>friendships</u> with writers, most could see I was genuine and not a genuine slag. I can't remember who says in your dissertation that it's easier for a girl to get away with less. Yes, the rules are bent and a female writer will never be on a par with her

male equivalent. Blatantly, I know that a piece I had done would be worth ten pieces simply because it was executed by a girl. The same with tags even, again because it was a girl who put them there. I suppose for the same reasons, I'd be scrutinized ten-fold. But I know I did alright. Like I say, they can think what they like. I know what's what and that's all that matters.

But again, nuf respect girl. Well done. I liked what you did a lot and you should be chuffed! It's wicked. Everything you addressed was appropriate and your analysis was realistic and correct (you could have had a bit more about the joys of racking [stealing paint] personally). But believe it's all good. It was a pleasure to take part and assist. Thanks for including me. Take care, see you soon mate, Akit"(Akit - written communication).

"This is the first time I have read something on the subject from an outsider which actually hits the nail on the head. I was expecting the old social deprivation argument, but you go beyond that. It is the most detailed study of the subculture ever done. My only criticism would be that I don't think writers discriminate as much on gender as you portray. Some of them are a bit like Bernard Manning - any excuse to single people out will do"(Stylo - written communication).

"Since 1986, when I first became involved in the London aerosol art scene, I have seen many an article and thesis written with regard to our movement. Initially, I read these with enthusiasm, wondering how the outside world viewed us. Unfourtunately, it seemed that most just didn't understand the essence of our artform. The authors just dived into a crescendo of clichés and stereotypes, which, when backed up with inaccurate facts and misrepresentation, resulted in the piece being somewhere between a joke and an insult. Consequently, my enthusiasm for reading such works died. I did, however, continue to help people who wished to write on the subject, as it something I love and am more than glad to talk about. Thus, when I was approached by Nancy I was happy to let her interview/question me, though I cynically thought, 'like most people', she would hear only what she wanted to hear and write accordingly, depicting the stereotyped funky - pseudo - graffiti writer - cum - breakdancing - broken home - rebel without a cause that is usually featured in articles on graffiti. Alas, I was wrong!

On reading Nancy's work, I was shocked/delighted to be reading something I could relate to and, indeed, enjoy. The writing was devoid of the usual

'they're so coolisms' and didn't take us on a journey through the dark, dingy and still vaguely romantic world that is the London graffiti underworld. It allowed the writers (through quotes) to speak for themselves and consequently the factual information and opinions stated were either correct or relevant. Reading this thesis, I found myself engrossed in the subject matter - reading it from start to finish in one sitting! Admittedly, some of the academic jargon had me lost, but with a graffiti drenched brain like mine it is almost impossible for me to read something on the subject and find it interesting, let alone enthralling. 'The Art of Destruction' <u>was</u> enthralling and for once I was glad I had assisted somebody. The inclination to go of on tangents, whilst debating our scene, is one we graffiti writers are all guilty of, and it was rewarding to see that Nancy had indulged us that luxury and not pushed for the stereotypical 'we're just misunderstood' or 'we're out to destroy the system' quote. All this has been heard a thousand times and merely serves to cloud any possible introspective look into a subculture which is deeper, more intricate and deserving of better. It was refreshing to read about our scene from a more analytical or documentary angle. The cardinal sin of most authors is to allow self opinion and personal viewpoint to dominate. The work then becomes inaccurate and eventually boring. By allowing the artists to speak for themselves, Nancy creates a piece which relays an open minded outlook of a scene which is all too often written about from a self promoting or demeaning viewpoint.

I would glad for this thesis to be read by somebody who wished to understand the essence and depth of our movement, encountering it on more than a superficial or judgemental basis. 'The Art of Destruction' was an excellent read and, though I am more than familiar with the subject matter, I enjoyed the way it gave an accurate account of what is a much deeper and involved subculture than most people would give it credit for. This thesis wasn't the usual misinformed rubbish. It was unbiased and, unlike most fraudulant accounts I encounter, truly and uncompromisingly real" (Drax - written communication).

"This is the first paper, to my knowledge, that has gone into such depth into the study of a very visible, yet at times, clandestine subculture. I was amazed at the volume of information presented, as in recent years writers have been reluctant (with good reason) to part with information even to other writers. This research was delivered with obvious enjoyment of the subject which, unlike some dry academic excersises, made it interesting to

read. I also like the way Nancy does not try to seal this subculture into a capsule, but shows its many facets with further possibilities for studying it. I'm sure this study would make a valuable contribution to creating more studies on this artform"(Junk - written communication).

There are some writers I have not heard back from yet. Likewise, there are others, I have not actually met or spoken to, who have apparently borrowed my thesis from their friends. As Elk told me:

"You've become a bit of a celebrity. Everyone's talking about this women who has written a book on graffiti"(Elk - verbal communication).

My gender appears to have been quite significant in all of this. Elk mentioned that many writers were surprised I was a woman. Another writer I spoke to made a similar comment, suggesting, fairly tentatively, that it is usually men who think this deeply and work this hard on things - like female writers, women lack the dedication and commitment! Hopefully, then, I have challenged some of chauvanistic sentiments that prevail within this subculture.

All in all this exchange was a very positive experience, both for me and the writers. It was also an interesting one, as it commented a little more on the nature of the subculture. Since handing back my thesis, the writers' attitudes towards me have changed somewhat. I now have a lot more contact with many of them and I am regularly invited to their events and meetings. Additionally, I have also been asked to contribute to their magazine 'Graphotism'. In a sense, the subcultural doors have opened a little more. I seem to have been allocated a place within its boundaries. I am no longer just an outsider with a fleeting interest or a college report to submit, but an individual, as I am told, with something to say.

My next step takes me to New York, where I will give my thesis back to my American informants. I can only hope their reactions are as positive and fulfilling as the ones I encountered here.

GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Active - A writer who currently paints.

All city - A writer whose work can be found in many different areas or locations.

Bad, def, dope, mad, wicked - Terms used to describe a great or fantastic piece of graffiti.

Bite - To copy another writer's work.

Black book - A sketchbook containing writers' graffiti designs.

Bomb, cane, destroy, kill - To prolifically mark the surface of a train or wall.

Bombed, caned, destroyed, distressed, killed - A surface that has been covered by graffiti.

Buff - To chemically clean or remove graffiti from the surface of a train.

Bumpkin - A writer who does not live in London

Burn - To piece the side of a train or paint a very good piece

Burner - A well executed piece.

Cap, fat or skinny - Spray can nozzles which make the width of the spray wide or narrow.

Catch tags - To tag one's name here and there.

Cheap fame - A profile that has not been earnt through hard work.

Crew - A group of affiliated writers.

Cross out, dog out, line out - To put a line through another writer or crew's name.

Cross out war - A dispute between two writers or crews who are lining out each others names.

Diss, cuss - To disrespect or insult another writer.

Down - A writer who is part of a group or highly respected.

Drop - To paint a piece

Dry, lame, wak - Terms used to describe a poor or substandard piece of work.

Dub - A quick outline of a writer's name with a silver or gold painted interior.

End to end - A piece which covers the entire length of a train carriage.

Fanatic, hardcore - A highly active or reckless writer.

Fill in - The interior shade of a piece, throwup or dub.

Freights, BR's - Overland trains which travel across the country.

Give props - To give a writer credit.

Go all city - To paint in many different areas or locations.

Go over - To write over another writer's name with your own.

Grass - A writer who informs the police of another writer's activities.

Hall of fame - A legal or semi legal walled painting site.

Hot - A term used to describe a name, yard or area which is being monitored by the police.

Inactive - A writer who has temporarily stopped painting.

Jock - A sycophant.

King - The most accomplished or active writer.

Line - An underground or subway line.

Line battle - Two writers or crews who compete to outnumber each others tags or throwups on a designated train line.

Mission - An illegal painting trip.

New jack - A member of a new or recent generation of writers.

New school - A new generation of writers.

Old school - An old generation of writers

On tour - A trip abroad to do graffiti and/or steal paint.

Outline - The line which silhouettes a piece, throwup or dub.

Pay one's dues - To display commitment and dedication through a full and active service of illegal work.

Piece - A painting, short for masterpiece. To paint a word or image with more than two colours.

Piece or wall battle - Two writers or crews who compete to execute the best piece.

Props - A writer's credits.

Rack - To Steal.

Rads - The Police.

Rep - A writer's reputation.

Retire - To give up painting graffiti on a regular basis.

Safe - A word used to describe an area or yard that is not being monitored by the police.   '

Scar - Graffiti that is still faintly visible after having been chemically removed.

Sell out - A writer who renounces illegal work and works commercially for money.

Tag - A writer's name or signature.

Tagging, hitting, getting up - Writing one's name or signature.

Third rail - The electified rail on a train track.

Three stroke - A throwup with the first letter of a writer's name

Throw down - To put a writer in a crew.

Throwup - A quick outline of a writer's name with a black or white painted interior.

Tin - Spray can.

Top to bottom - A piece which covers the top of a train carriage to the bottom, including the windows.

Toy - A young, inexperienced or artistically incompetent writer. Often used as an insult.

Train jam - An organised graffiti attack on the underground system by a large group of writers.

Up - A writer who tags prolifically.

Whole car - A piece which covers the entire surface of a train carriage including the windows.

Whole train, worm - A piece or series of pieces which extend the entire length of a train.

Wildstyle - A complex writing style characterised by its angular interlocking letters.

Window down - A piece painted below the windows of a train carriage.

Writer - An individual who does graffiti. A member of the subculture.

Yard, depot, lay up - A place where trains are housed.

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