What's in a Name? Hip Hop Graffiti and Principles of Authorship

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Abstract:

One way of pulling the carpet from under the simple and elegant edifice of the capital "A" author has been to suggest genres of text which confound or complicate this concept. To whom do we assign the lauded author role in the case of technical manuals, plagiarized papers, hip hop songs, celebrity memoirs, or books written by ghost writers? In these examples our culture believes the author is no one, everyone, or someone but seldom anyone in particular. The romantic notion of the divinely inspired, typically white male who labors solo against the confines of language to express his singular vision fails to apply to a number of types of writing. It is in this spirit that the authors wish to consider as text the illicit and highly competitive genre of hip-hop graffiti (hereafter referred to as HHG). HHG emerged in the late nineteen sixties, contemporary with Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" and Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?", and, this paper will argue, it is native both to the era of the old school "author function" (Foucault 306), which lays total responsibility for a text at one man's feet and to the new era of automatic language and its ransomed reader (Barthes 6). After giving a background of graffiti we will highlight the things about HHG which make this so and draw comparisons between graffiti and online anonymous discourse popular on the internet today. A highly efficient, self-published genre that is uniquely dependent on location and audience for its meaning, HHG will be posited as a type of performative

text, whose writer "says I" constantly and inscribes themselves over commercial and local plans for city spaces (Barthes 3).

I. Introduction

The authors of this paper wanted to find out what hip hop graffiti (HHG) can tell us about composition and authorship. Authorship studies tries to answer the question of whether anything is written by a capital "A" Author anymore and if not, how are texts believed? Composition studies keeps an eye on authorship to be sure not to elide important features of the writing process in pedagogical practices. HHG is a genre of text which is always anonymous, happening when a writer paints their chosen name-- a stylized word or phrase-- on property without the property owner's permission. Graffiti is a genre of text which must be illegal, and the author must use a moniker, usually the same moniker across multiple tags. It would seem that HHG is a sort of adespota: written not by anyone, everyone, or no one, but by "someone," someone with enough authority to be writing but who is always already gone from the scene. In talking about HHG, we are talking about a graffitist who does not possess ownership rights scripturally claiming a space in the context of a city. Commentaries attached to contested spaces are preoccupied with deciding who or what physically fills a space, but graffitists don't fill a space, they change its appearance and its significance with their signature. Authorship studies concerned as it is with who or what writes a text and to what ends they write should turn its attention to how spaces are written into places by marginalized participants (Watzlawik 410). On one hand, graffiti is written differently because it's an underdog text; it is forged in the fire of competing interests and readers. On the other hand, the graffitist almost never owns their work formally and they are in

debt to an infinite number of interpretations based on history, politics, location, time and viewer. Given this mix we ought to ultimately ask, does public reception of the genre of HHG conform to the old idea of the Author or to the new one? First, we must explore how the answer is "both."

First, there is the point that graffiti is motivated by fame and recognition commensurate with risk and self-expression (Young 299; Carrington 422). An author whose name is painted all over town is celebrated in the writing community as being "all city." Acceptance and approval by other writers can make a graffitists' tags worthwhile (Campos 161; Watzlawik 406; Plenty and Sundell 566). Local fame colludes with the internet where HHG culture also thrives. One interpretation, then, is that graffiti writing fits the mold of the traditional author who answers an ancient need to be recognized and admitted in a place or places. Graffitists compromise their own safety and freedom for HHG which fulfills the stereotype of the suffering artist and leads back to another old-school facet of authorship: their treatment by the state. While studies have revealed the general public feels more or less favorably towards graffiti depending on its content, location and aesthetic style, local authorities are not as ambivalent (Brewer 188; Vanderveen and Van Eijk 109). Centuries ago, religious blasphemies were treated as forbidden gestures and punished according to who authored them. Indeed, Foucault points out that before society used authorship to sell books it used authorship to affix blame:

> Speeches and books were assigned real authors, other than mythical or important religious figures, only when the author became subject to punishment and to the extent that his discourse was considered transgression…It was a gesture charged

> with risks long before it became a possession caught in a circuit of property values. (124)

HHG is criminal in the eyes of the law and writers can be fined or sentenced to time in prison. Knowing this, a writer competes with the law to be "up" in as many places as possible in as little time as he can. This version of the graffiti writer has a heroic flare of resistance; like novelists writing under the thumb of a totalitarian state. Graffiti writers vie with local authorities or business owners and with corporate and municipal signage to make their own mark and express their identity, not just in a book or article, but on a cityscape (Vanderveen and Van Eijk 121). This is the writer as vulnerable, overcoming hero, and it tells us that HHG is egocentric. But there are also ways that HHG is created in the mind of the reader.

In his 1967 "The Death of the Author," critic Roland Barthes urges readers and scholars to move the author away from the center of critical focus when deciphering literature. We rely too heavily on the things we know about Baudelaire or Tchaikovsky's lives to explain their art and unify their oeuvre, he says (Barthes 2). Hip hop graffiti also begins to recruit us to the belief that there are genres of text which can't be decoded by the writer's biography because in HHG, biographical knowledge is always withheld.

Furthermore, we notice that HHG is not an accounting of events or a story in terms of content, but it does say something by merit of its very fact. For example, when one looks at a graffiti tag, one knows only that a writer was in that place long enough to tag it. A tag is evidence of a gap in surveillance; a moment where laws exist but without enforcement. Graffiti is therefore not a descriptive expression but one that asserts the contrived identity of the writer and their persistence of efforts against those who would

stop them. A tag's permanence perpetuates their assertion, unless erased. Like saying "I hereby pronounce you" or "I solemnly swear," an HHG tag is a performative speech act which says, "someone here." Barthes, in his essay, compares modern writing to a king's fiat. Writing is "a rare verbal form (exclusively given to the first person and to the present), in which utterance has no other content than the act by which it is uttered" (4). A graffiti tag states only that the tag happened, it does not elaborate or venture into the realm of who wrote it or why. The writer has made their purpose for the space known and every reading of that purpose is a reiteration of their intent. In this respect, HHG can be viewed as a performative utterance.

Finally, HHG is not written by Taylor Smith as we know them, but by Smith's self-conceived alter-ego who writes themselves into existence. Once invented, their graffiti persona allows Smith to enjoy and maintain a split identity; one which complies and one which transgresses. As told to Ricardo Campos, in his article "Graffiti Writer as Super Hero," writers resent that "in real life and in everyday life, you do a lot of stuff you didn't even want to do…but you are forced to, because you know that if you don't, you won't eat or have a job or something like that. Graffiti is really an expression of freedom" (Campos 165). Hedegaard also points to the "tension between the feeling of freedom through drawing graffiti and the same time being restricted being part of a subculture a 'secret graffiti society'" (392). Graffiti writers wholly contain, nurture and express their alter egos and must never break character. Authorship studies, too, is well acquainted with the distance between the writer and the teller of a tale. When Melville writes, "Call me Ishmael" he does not mean that Ishmael is typing the words, or that Ishmael is personally present for every observation to follow in the pages of *Moby Dick* (1). Foucault and Barthes both note that a multiplicity of egos is responsible for the

narrative in first-person tales, because they are not spoken by the author, the hero of the story, or the man writing. Instead, fictional texts are composed by a 'second self' (Foucault 129). Foucault writes:

> in a novel narrated in the first person, neither the first person pronoun, the present indicative tense, nor, for that matter, its signs of localization refer directly to the writer, either to the time when he wrote, or to the specific act of writing; rather, they stand for a 'second self' whose similarity to the author is never fixed and undergoes considerable alteration within the course of a single book. It would be as false to seek the author in relation to the actual writer as to the fictional narrator. (129)

We can demonstrate the same is true in HHG by citing the language typically used by graffitists to claim their public work. A writer says, "I write Sardine." Instead of, "I am Sardine," or potentially, "I write as Sardine," the speaker uses the transitive verb "I write" as a stand in for, "I am." Writing is the ritual by which they assume a new identity and that identity is comprised of pure text. A tag name is another invention like a username on Reddit or a handle on Instagram and it accumulates its own reputation via repetition of posts.

Authorship scholars are aware of how usernames, avatars, and tag names can eventually be healthy enough to stand on their own, representing an idea, not just an

identity in a landscape where they work. In both graffiti and online discourse, a writer may die but their tag or username continue to live on. Although Denver writer, Doher, passed away, a wall exists in Denver to commemorate him and a hashtag #doher has over one thousand posts on Instagram. HHG writers still throw up Doher's name in homage to his memory, evidence that the text has outlived the author and does not rely on him to proliferate (see figure 1).

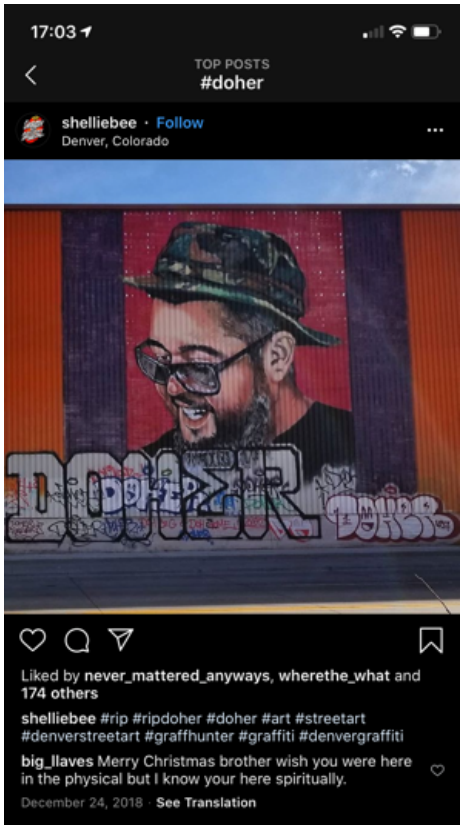

Figure 1

The same phenomenon has occurred online. After Ross Ulbricht, founder and chief operator of the bitcoin drug marketplace known as the Silk Road was arrested and sentenced to two life terms plus forty years in prison, users on the dark web kept the founder alive by using his Silk Road username, Dread Pirate Roberts. Ulbricht's former partners and customers on Silk Road adopted DPR in homage to him as if to say the handle stood for an idea of a savvy and enterprising youth more than it signified just the man who first selected it (*Deep Web*). Similar challenges to a central author have been carried out by the Wu Ming foundation in the form of the Luther Blissett project. As told to Henry Jenkins in his collection of interviews, *Participatory Culture: Interviews*, the figure of Luther Blissett became an omnipresent online folkloric figure whose rise to fame was due to everyone adopting his name and taking equal credit for his speech at the same time the internet was becoming widespread. "In the early/mid 1990s, the 'Luther Blissett' collective identity was created

and adopted by an informal network of people (artists, hackers, and activists) interested in using the power of myths," says a representative of the Wu Ming collective (Jenkins 18). "Every time you used the name 'Luther Blissett,' you were doing more than adhering to a project: you were becoming Luther Blissett, you were Luther Blissett" (19).

We give priority to internet examples of collaborative authorship because we see a fruitful intersection between aspects of HHG authorship and collaborative authorship online. Both types of writing have a low threshold to publication, and both mean something different according to where they're stamped. Unlike a book or newspaper, which are portable, these texts are permanently on their environment, not in their environment. They are also good reasons to agree with Barthes that "the unity of a text is not in its origin; it is in its destination" (Barthes 6) and that the reader of a text can also presume to write that text without altering its authenticity.

Given these functionalities, it would seem that hip hop graffiti fits both models of authorship. The first version speculates that fame, recognition, sacrifice, and hardship can attend the writing of graffiti and make it meaningful. The second version of the story makes the writer's biography seem very remote; rather, the essence of the text reflects in the gaze of all the eyes who have read it.

II. Background and Terms

The rise of urban HHG is relatively recent. It began in New York City in the late 60s and early 70s (Brewer 188, Campos 157). Graffiti is a word or words sprayed or markered on a public or private surface. HHG consists of different forms, usually distinguished by how elaborate the marks are

Figure 2

and how quickly they can be executed. While some graffiti is done in less than a second with stickers, we will limit our discussion to tags, throw-ups and pieces.

A tag looks like a scribble. Tags can be done quickly and are usually in one color (figure 2). A throw-up is a more detailed rendering of the writer's name, uses multiple colors, and takes more time. The most complex type of hip-hop graffiti is referred to as a "piece" or "masterpiece." A piece is a three-dimensional tag with three or more colors, and often has letters blending into each other and overlapping one another (figure 3). There are multiple other forms of tags as well, but for the purposes of this essay, we will focus on these three styles. A tag, a throw up, and a piece all refer back to the same writer whose name they bear. "Writer" is the preferred name for people who create graffiti. Sometimes "graffitist" is used as well.

Figure 3

A writer conceives of a chosen name (different from their legal name) and that name stays the same throughout most/all of his or her tags in an area or city. A graffitist may say, "I write [insert tag name]" and mean their tags, throw-ups, or pieces in any given location. A writer's name serves multiple functions. It serves as a pseudonym to separate and confuse any efforts at identifying the writer. Another function of tag a name is to create space for a new interpretation of language or a completely new word or phrase. A highly efficient minimalist text, a tag name shows the imagination, humor, sarcasm and particular relation to the subculture or community of the writer behind it.

Polemics or phrases like “f-ck Trump” or “f-ck toys” are not considered to be HHG by the writer community or by the authors of this paper. To be HHG, a tag must consist of the writer’s graffiti name. The act of writing graffiti can be called “getting up” or “hitting” a wall or a train car. “Bombing” is known as writing prolifically or hitting as many walls as possible in a short amount of time (Lombard 187). When a writer’s tag and pieces can be found throughout a major metropolitan area, that writer is said to be “all city.”

Figure 4

For our research, commissioned murals, street art, or safe walls are not considered HHG. Murals are defined as walls reserved and dedicated to street art which are sanctioned, legal and sometimes paid. These murals are legal and are conceived of to discourage graffiti (Vanderveen & Eijk 109). Murals can include artist names as signatures and often do (figure 4, far right). In many cases, the artist uses an online username to tie their work back to the mainstream culture of social media. While murals and street art have aesthetic value, we are more interested in their ability to coerce and control HHG writers. We were suspicious and exclusive of street art/murals from the start. This is because we were conscious of the profound differences between murals and HHG graffiti in legal, economic, and cultural terms.

III. Competition

"Graffiti painting is a bit like computer games, except that it is for real"

This research began with an in-class exercise. The class brainstormed a list of different texts –blogs, car titles, literary novels, tattoos, graffiti, and more. We were asked to choose a text from the list and determine its chief characteristics. We chose graffiti. Then we were asked to decide whether the chief features we had chosen were derived from the author's name or whether the text's essence was actually derived from something outside the author themselves.

We were not the first to try to tie a text's value to its internal or external qualities. A related question is asked by Amy E. Robillard and Ron Fortune in their 2007 article, "Toward a New Content for Writing Courses: Literary Forgery, Plagiarism, and the Production of Belief," where they demonstrate with a case of forged Shakespeare documents that writers rely on outside buy-in to sell their text. They write that "production of belief, or trust and confidence in a text springs not only from the composition abilities of the writer, but from readers, critics, publishers, and all sorts of people who produce belief outside the text (187). This group is a dynamic and fluctuating jury within which ranks are shifting constantly and once subject to their evaluation, the writer has little agency. According to Robillard and Fortune, putting out a new text is to enter it into a contest of legitimation outside the control of its author. They describe how a text might fare in this exquisitely tense, rowdy, and competitive arena which itself is in disagreement over who can bless a text:

> In any field, legitimation is key, and legitimation depends to a great extent on the production of belief. The structure of the field is such that all agents and

> institutions battle within a "space of possibles" for those position-takings that will grant one the power to consecrate works and people as legitimate. In each field, there are positions designated as having the requisite amounts of symbolic capital to legitimate the work of others. When newcomers enter a field, struggle ensues over who has the right to legitimate whom. (189)

We emphasize this theory of authorship to affirm that HHG also springs from and is legitimated by the fraternal, legal, economic and linguistic systems within which and against which it competes. We position HHG as a text which dynamically reacts to factors outside of it. The cycle of production, legitimation, reaction, and production is key especially in an underground artform with no formal underwriting process. In HHG, no publishing houses vet tags as fit for consumption or dictate quality control. Rather, the needs and abilities of a graffiti writer to write is their own unique and individual threshold to "publication." Put another way, graffiti writers are their own agents and publishers. The very fact of a piece of graffiti adds a layer of self-expression to their project. In a culture where visibility and brand recognition equals currency, being "up" among the Geico ads and bus schedule posters is an act of political resistance. As John Berger writes in *Ways of Seeing*, "publicity turns consumption into a substitute for democracy. The choice of what one eats (or wears or drives) takes the place of significant political choice. Publicity helps to mask and compensate for all that is undemocratic within society" (149). In the teeming marketplace of images wanting our attention, graffiti constitutes a self-published, non-corporate, illicit, expression of self. As real as any product ad but not for sale. Writers write for and impose on more real and theoretical fields. The pressure of each refining and defining the form.

The first of these fields is fellow writers. Writers compete with each other for recognition in the areas of style, risk, and volume of work (Rowe and Hutton 80). The graffiti ethos puts forth acceptable styles and surfaces (*ibid.* 80). This do-it-yourself (DIY) culture reads, recognizes, and initiates fellow writers who are new on the scene. Acclaim is a chief motivator (Young 298; Rowe and Hutton 82). Conformity and competition of HHG writers within their own subculture keeps HHG culture distinct from corporate copy-cats and local authorities who would re-direct their efforts to murals or "safe walls."

A second contest exists between writers and the legal system. Writers either confront or elude state and local authorities who feel little ambivalence about HHG. To these "readers," graffiti is vandalism which signals danger and cultivates fear to passers-by (Vanderveen and Van Eijk 108). Based on the dated "broken window" policy approach, some criminologists have proposed that graffiti encourages or is a precursor to crime (Plenty and Sundell 566). This policy proposed that a broken window or any sign of neglect correlates with a higher likelihood of more property crime and social disorder in the area around it. It was met with mixed success in Giuliani- era New York City of the late eighties. Police have fined, given chase to, arrested, or brutalized graffiti writers and in some cases, they can conduct body and property searches without a warrant if they suspect a person to be doing graffiti (Young 303). These pressures fuel how and why HHG is done. Legal prohibition encourages the text's author to write outside of the light of day and under a pseudonym. It makes the act of painting graffiti look a certain way. Surveillance also makes graffiti feel a certain way, delivering a measure of "sneaky thrills" (Ross and Wright 178). An element of risk excites and entices some writers, some of whom describe experiencing a game-like gratification,

heightened sensory episodes, and a pleasurable release (Campos 163). The legal system which surveils, fines, and imprisons graffiti writers gives the form its edge, its pleasure and heavily influences graffiti's attitude towards the mainstream. In a study of how courts react to graffiti writers in Australia, Alison Young found that legal systems feel a negative affect towards what she calls, "the unsanctioned image" and that courts often sentence one convicted writer especially harshly in an effort to make an example out of him. Young finds this is due to different visions of public space and how the boundaries of those spaces operate:

> In conceptualizing the criminal law's encounter with the illicit artist as an affective one, such spatial illegitimacy can be seen to derive from differences in the way space is imagined, since the affective spasm that seeks to exclude the illicit writer and erase the uncommissioned artwork focuses upon their affront to private property values and to the norms of image production in city spaces…The illicit artist recasts these intensely regulated city spaces as "smooth" by marking them with unauthorized words and images in a performative demonstration that it is impossible to contain signification within strictly delimited boundaries. (310)

Victoria Carrington echoes this theory when she writes about "imagined geographies…that all geographies are imagined rather than 'real' and as a consequence, intimately linked with relations of power" (418). HHG casts radical scribbles over these imagined borders and suggests new borders and texture to a place.

Corporate messaging and our economic system of capitalism offers a third competing theory of private property which HHG uniformly violates. Graffiti is an

affront to privatization of property. It hijacks public surfaces for its own use and its own messaging. HHG competes with principles of public and private ownership and the privileges ownership entails, thus offending individualist values of Western culture. Graffiti is free -- it positions itself against material priorities and towards artistic ones (Campos 166). It sells nothing. Awareness of this rule can then righteously inform boundaries drawn between authentic writers and sell-outs, further narrowing the scope of what counts as legit HHG.

Finally, the graffiti form amounts to a cultural controversy by spelling and shaping words and letters differently from the norm. It subverts educational norms and schoolbook learning. We are all taught in school to put our names on our work, hip hop graffiti pours the work and invention into the name itself and leaves the compulsory work behind. Graffiti culture and content is shaped by opposing forces. The importance of pressure exerted by external hierarchies cannot be overstated in how this text is read and consequently in how it is written.

IV. Neoliberalism, HHG and Repressed Discourse

"Homeland is a Watermelon"

In a fifth season episode of the US TV show, *Homeland*, producers needed to portray a Syrian refugee camp which they wanted to include shots of graffitied walls. They hired three graffiti artists from Germany, where the show was filmed, to paint Arabic graffiti for them. Producers gave Heba Amin, Caram Kapp, and Don Karl instructions to paint things like, "Mohamed is the Greatest" on the walls of the camp

past which the camera would pan. The artists, conscious of the show's controversial portrayal of Muslims instead painted attacks on the show and negative appraisals of its representation of Arab culture on the walls of the set; phrases like "Homeland is Racist," "Homeland is a Watermelon," and "Black Lives Matter," all in Arabic on the set (26). The prank went unnoticed during filming and the episode was aired on October 11, 2015. As Anna Strowe writes in her article about the event, the writers revealed the top layer of graffiti. It is crucial to acknowledge that, for most, the casual, passing glance at graffiti can upstage its content, signifying more about the fabric of the place than the text or writer themselves, *unless* a viewer is schooled in what the script actually means. Aside from pointing to the underground language tags traffic in, this example from network television of cultural commissioning gone wrong illustrates what can happen when authorities try to appropriate culture and end up creating space for activist commentary on the figures who solicited their help in the first place. Graffiti cannot be turned against itself; it will break apart before it will serve a commercial master.

What else happens when authorities try to crackdown or appropriate HHG? In an article for the Society of Applied Anthropology, scholar Devon D. Brewer asks whether graffiti writers (pay attention to the laws which constrain them. He asks, "are writers aware of the various strategies to fight illegal HHG, and do writers have alternative strategies in mind?" (189). Taking a polling approach, Brewer asks writers to consider two methods, one more stringent than the other, used to control HHG. The two methods were harsh punishments such as fines or prison time or more lenient responses such as safe walls or commissioned murals -- measures that provide an alternative creative outlet (Brewer 190).

Figure 5

The crackdown method has been studied at length. Kara-Jane Lombard has studied the evolution of different means of anti-graffiti campaigns. Lombard points out, "policies which make it harder and more risky to write graffiti lead to the growth of those forms of graffiti which are able to be rapidly executed and applied (etchings, tags, stickers, etc.) at the expense of those forms of graffiti which take longer to complete" (Lombard 263). Lombard explains that the attempts of law enforcement and transit authorities to limit graffiti paradoxically resulted in an explosion of instances of graffiti by way of smaller and more frequent acts of vandalism via smaller tags, throw ups, and stickers (see figure 5). The prohibition of graffiti can be seen to have the opposite effect. Crackdowns actually *add* to volume in that they create a defiant energy making smaller forms of tags multiply. This proliferation is because larger and more meticulous pieces are riskier to throw up. At the same time the prestige attached to a larger piece might grow because of the newly heightened risk attached to its execution. These are ways illegal graffiti flourishes under harsh restrictions.

Prohibition in the form of appropriation adds to the value of graffiti because efforts to enforce it paradoxically contribute to more and more painting but in different manifestations, namely painting on safe walls in the form of street art. Neoliberal governments, especially on the west coast, have attempted to commodify and sanction HHG in this way. There, government programs seek to transform graffiti writers into legal aerosol artists by "differentiating graffiti vandalism from graffiti art" (Lombard

261). In most instances, this means providing writers with safe and profitable opportunities to practice spray-painting such as commissioning legal murals, and providing legal walls, while at the same time, sentencing harsh punishments towards "unsanctioned" hip hop graffiti (261). The MTA transit authorities who, in the 1970s aimed to "break the spirits" of graffiti artists by quickly removing or at least smearing and fading new pieces soon after they were painted are not so different from the west coast authorities who sought to appropriate graffiti by making it legal and commissioned in certain spaces (Lombard 259). Both efforts actually result in more graffiti around a city, albeit in different forms. Attempts to reform graffiti writers by use of neoliberal means, however, does not prevent HHG, as much as it reinforces the divide between "legal" and "non-legal" aerosol painting. We found evidence of this in our interview with Angus, a Denver graffiti writer, who asked that we withhold his real name. While discussing the appropriation of the graffiti aesthetic in gentrified neighborhoods like the RiNo district in Denver, Angus suggested that "sanctioned" and "commercial" aerosol art only functions as a way to increase the profit margins of local businesses, and thereby restricts most writers from being involved with writing legal graffiti. In Angus's words, whereas "The only people getting these legal permission murals are trust fund kids, and well-established artists," illegal vandalism is different in that it remains accessible to most writers.

V. Conclusion

We have shown that graffiti is an exceptional text because it exemplifies features of Authorship which were thought to have been dead or discredited by now and yet also

displays features which are celebrated as the new guard. Importantly, HHG can tell us that the old school image of the suffering singular author is more easily applied when the text is censored or illegal. No one treats the author to text relationship as more one to one than the justice system in a state where graffiti is considered vandalism. HHG can also tell us that when such systems are set up to oppose it, they can refine and change how a text is wrought. Scholars have commented on how the prohibition of graffiti means it is written mainly at night and that tag letters are even painted more fluidly for the sake of speed and efficiency in high pressure environments (Watzlawik 406). We have seen how neo-liberal efforts to contain or re-direct graffiti expression also shape the cityscape but that promoting street art mainly reifies a divide between artists who engage socially against those who skirt recruitment. Published without permission, erased without permission, and having a low threshold to involvement, HHG seems to multiply under pressure to contain it and in a sense, can never be erased or contained as long as there is evidence of efforts to fight it[1]. These three details remind us of a form of sanctioned discourse that is also largely anonymous: internet forums and social media sites.

Internet discourse between casual users on sites like Reddit, Snapchat, Instagram or Twitter is often called participatory or prosumer because users both create and consume the site's content by posting, reading, reacting and posting. Participatory culture stands opposed to consumer culture and shares commonalities with graffiti culture in both of their adherence to Henry Jenkins' eight rules for how participatory

[1] Slabs of heavy paint may cover unwanted graffiti in many urban settings, but these erasures only make evident the vibrant contest between writers and community clean-up crews, drawing attention to unwanted text and concerted efforts to contain it. Murals could be interpreted similarly as they are commissioned to deal with graffiti in a more cost-effective way than removing it. Murals are simply a cheaper way to deal with property ownership in a graffiti-prone setting (Craw, et. all 432).

culture is defined. Victoria Carrington summarizes his criteria in her essay, "I Write, therefore I Am: Texts in the City," noting that graffiti also has "relatively low entry barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, a culture of valuing and sharing the outcomes of artistic expression, patterns of informal mentorship and a sense of social connection…an example of contemporary participatory culture that operates outside the mainstream" (421). Carrington also considers graffiti to be autobiographical and confessional, much like posts on social media sites today (410). A graffiti tag and a Reddit post also both have millions of passive viewers and are location-contingent for their range of reach. While the internet is similarly cordoned off into spaces dedicated to different purposes (Reddit hosts threads divided into different topics with conduct strictly enforced by moderators), a troll or sh-t poster can draw ire for trespassing on a certain thread just as a graffitist faces consequences for jumping a fence in a railyard. There can be no doubt that both mediums satisfy personal expression, and both address a need for young people to feel engaged and heard in a community.

It is not the purpose of this paper to outline all the ways internet discourse is an heir to graffiti culture, just to point to online forums as another interesting place to apply the questions of authorship and to suggest that anonymous authorship is a fruitful ground for exploring authorship theories as they've evolved over the decades. Further research could explore the thrilling and addictive experiences of anonymous authorship or the ways anonymous discourse can alienate readers while nourishing new identities. Finally, students of authorship as resistance could do well to incorporate research into HHG as it is a medium which is motivated in part by its prohibition and misinterpretation. All of these areas stand to benefit from considering how hip-hop graffiti and concepts of authorship interact.

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