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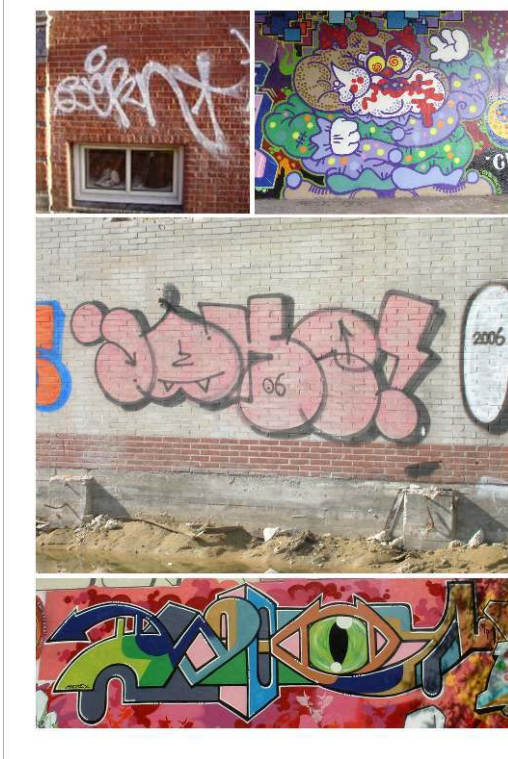
## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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## Introduction

- 1 Name based graffiti, which is – despite the rise of street art – still the visually dominant form of graffiti in many Western cities, is central in this paper. Name based graffiti revolves around the promotion of a certain nickname through the production of legal and illegal tags, throw-ups and pieces (see Figure 1). The producer of this graffiti calls him/herself a (graffiti) writer. In popular media and policy reports these writers are often stereotyped as vandals whose writings could and should be erased (Cresswell, 1992; Kramer, 2010b). However, the academic literature presents a much richer view on the behaviour of graffiti writers, suggesting that they do much more than “just writing a name”.

Figure 1. From top to bottom: a tag by Bern, a character by Oase, a throw-up by Jake, and a piece by Mickey. All located (close to) the centre of Amsterdam.



SOURCES: PICTURES TAKEN BY JANNES VAN LOON

- 2 Graffiti is one of the most spatial forms of artistic expression, graffiti writers take “the city walls themselves as the canvas for new image-making” (Austin, 2010, p.33). It originated in New York and rapidly diffused all over the world, becoming a prominent element in many of today’s urban cultural landscapes (Cooper, 2004; Ferrel & Weide, 2010). Graffiti has also developed in the Netherlands since the 1980s, with the rise of several new styles, graffiti writers, and crews.
- 3 Previous research on graffiti is mostly focused on Australian (e.g. Halsey & Young, 2002, 2006), Anglo-American (e.g. Ferrel, 1993; MacDonald, 2001) and some Southern European cities (Brighenti, 2010; Campos, 2012). Also, it has the tendency to focus on certain elements of the phenomenon, as for example many scholars focus on either legal (e.g. Bowen, 1999; Kramer, 2010a) or illegal graffiti (e.g. Brighenti, 2010; Campos, 2012). Scholars from a wide variety of social science disciplines have studied the phenomenon, all using theoretical angles which are relevant for the understanding of graffiti from the perspective of their sub-discipline. As a result, a wide variety of fragmented insights on the behaviour of graffiti writers exists. However, comprehensive analyses about the complexity of the graffiti phenomenon as a whole – with all its interconnections, its socio-cultural *and* spatial aspects – are lacking. This is sometimes problematic, as, for instance, accounts which solely focus on one fragment, such as legal graffiti, often ignore the fact that most active graffiti writers produce both legal and illegal graffiti.
- 4 Thus, to enrich this literature this paper has three important aims. First, it is often assumed that graffiti writers in different Western cities show similar behaviours. In this paper some elements of this universalist behaviour are presented via comparing the

behaviour of graffiti writers in the urban contexts of Amsterdam with the behaviour described in the international literature. In Amsterdam there is a lively graffiti scene resulting in the presence of many legal and illegal tags, throw-ups, and pieces. The results suggest that findings from Amsterdam could be applicable to other Western cities with active graffiti scenes. Second, the paper argues that different groups of writers develop different frameworks which – to a certain extent – determine the sort of graffiti they produce on a certain place. This framework, which is implicit in more geographical studies on graffiti (Cybriwsky & Ley, 1974; Ferrel & Weide, 2010), could be conceptualized as a "sense of place" (Castree, 2003, p. 168). Mostly determined through geographical factors, such as visibility and surface, writers assess the suitability for a certain kind of graffiti from a surface in order to decide to put a certain type of graffiti on that surface. However, it is argued that collective "senses of place" do exist, and, that it is most fruitful to make this distinction based on the degree to which a writer connects to the unwritten rules of the graffiti subculture, and, the degree of illegality of the graffiti he/she produces. Accordingly, these two interlinked arguments could function as building blocks to develop a better understanding of the complex behaviour of graffiti writers and the spatial outcome of this behaviour: the graffiti they produce. It contributes to a better understanding of the ways in which the surfaces of urban landscapes are produced and how these landscapes influence social practices (e.g. Morin, 2003; Nash, 2005), or, how writers contribute to the "writing and rewriting" of urban oeuvres (Lefebvre, 1996).

- 5 To make the two arguments presented above, the paper first presents an overview of the fragmented literature on graffiti. The second section briefly presents the methodology used and how this forms the foundation for the two empirical sections. First, illustrating how the universalist aspects of graffiti writer's behaviour are also observable in Amsterdam. Then, presenting a suggestion for the categorization of this behaviour with the use of a typology. In the conclusion other researchers are invited to critically reflect on this typology, and some insights about how the understanding of the typologies could improve policy around graffiti are presented.

## Studying the behaviour of graffiti writers: a rich but fragmented literature.

"Graffiti writers must remain at the same time out of sight and always visible."  
(Ferrel & Weide, 2010, p. 14)

- 6 Almost every (sub)discipline in the social sciences has been involved in graffiti research, ranging from criminological studies (Brewer and Miller, 1992; Halsey & Young, 2002) to anthropological accounts on the deeper motivations of graffiti writers (Campos, 2012; Kramer, 2010a). However, scholars often study a rather small aspect of graffiti using theoretical perspectives which are mostly relevant for their own subdiscipline. What seems to be often lacking, is an approach that is focused on gaining comprehensive insights on the hybrid personalities of graffiti writers and the spatiality of their actions.
- 7 This section tries to put the fragmented literature together by first describing four elements of a global graffiti subculture. Subculture is defined as an "informal or organic small-scale association of people united by a common interest" (Thornton in Campos, 2012, p. 158). These four aspects, which have been observed in many different cities and over different periods in time, are related to some general unwritten rules and shared motivations of graffiti writers. Nevertheless, although most writers understand these

rules they are also contested by (groups of) graffiti writers. Hence, these differing ideas about writing combined with the different types of graffiti that writers produce, has led to the development of some typologies. However, these typologies often fail to take into account the spatiality of graffiti producing. Therefore, the remainder of the section argues that a typology should be based on the observed decision making process of graffiti writers: the way they assess the suitability of a place for a certain type of graffiti. This examination will show that to better understand a writer's development of a sense of place both geographical aspects of a surface and the traces of regulatory regimes on a surface have to be taken into account.

- 8 The first element pointing to a global graffiti subculture is shown in Figure 2 which displays a piece which has remained untouched for decades. The picture illustrates the power of the main informal rule of writers: a writer should not paint over existing graffiti, in particular not over pieces (Chalfant & Cooper, 1984). Hence, graffiti writing is inherently linked to respect and territoriality (Brighenti, 2010). By putting one's name on a surface one seizes some kind of ownership over the surface which is respected among many other writers. When other writers disrespect this ownership, feuds may arise, which are sometimes physical and may endure over decades, see Figure 3 (Halsey & Pederick, 2010). Related to these rules of "not going over" is a wide agreement about not putting graffiti on monuments, religious buildings, private homes, automobiles, and statues (Ferrel & Weide, 2010). These rules are clearly visible in many cities with graffiti where this kind of objects are often left untouched by graffiti writers.

Figure 2. Respecting the unwritten rules of graffiti: a piece and character of the United Street Artists in Amsterdam West which has not been sprayed over for decades.



SOURCE: PICTURE TAKEN BY JANNES VAN LOON



Figure 3. Disrespecting the unwritten rules of graffiti: writer's crossing each other's tags out.

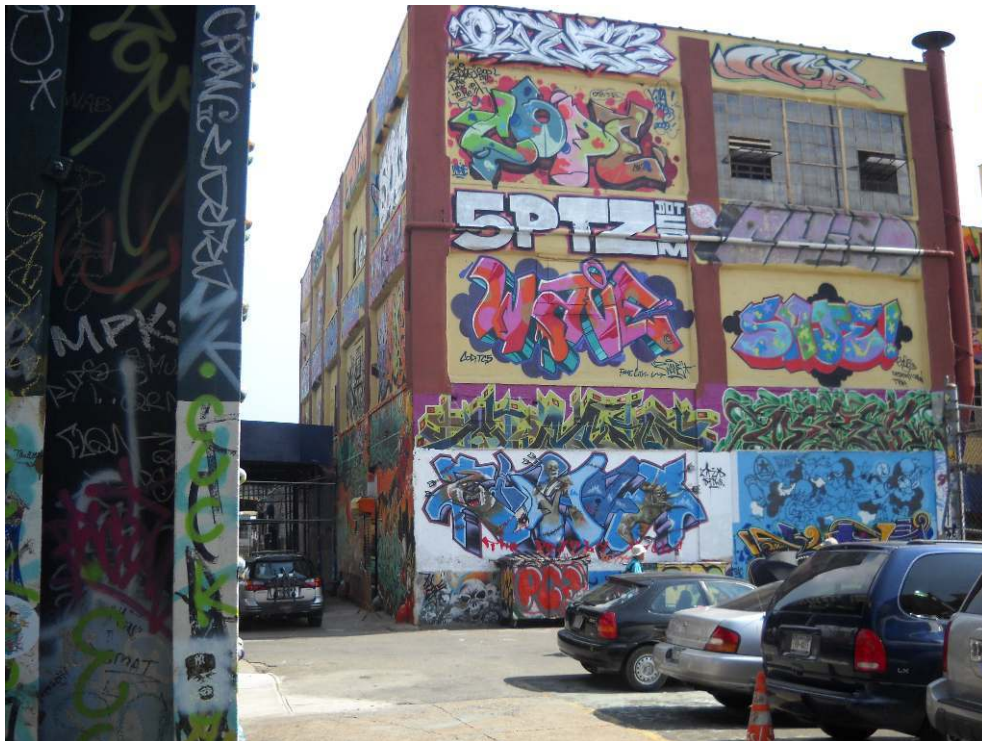


SOURCE: PICTURE TAKEN BY JANNES VAN LOON

- 9 The reason why “not going over” is such an important rule relates to the main motivation of many graffiti writers, namely name recognition. Previous research often emphasized achieving fame (“getting up”) as the sole, main motivation (e.g. Cybriwsky and Ley, 1974; Castleman, 1982), i.e. to spread a certain nickname via quality and or quantity to get recognition from peers. Since the 1990s scholars have delved deeper into the motivations of graffiti writers and refined the understanding of “getting up” as their main motivation. Campos (2012) highlights the feeling of competition amongst writers who want to gain fame and claim the status of “king”. Ferrel (1993) stresses the rush caused via “the intersection of creativity and illegality” (p. 28). Brewer and Miller (1992) also point to other elements such as the power to transform public space and rebellion. Rebellion can be found in “the violent ‘bombing’ [i.e. writing of illegal graffiti] of an organized, aseptic and policed city” (Campos, 2012, p. 166). MacDonald (2002) conceptualizes writer’s main motivation as a way to gain masculinity via the performance of an illegal act, while Othen-Price (2006) relates it to the process of adolescence. Halsey and Young (2006) frame writers’ main motivations as pleasure and desire, which are caused by “increasing skills (...), adrenaline from its illegality (...), something in the act of writing [that] feels ‘right’ ” (Halsey and Young, 2006, p. 283).
- 10 Thus, a wide variety of rich insights about the deeper motivations of graffiti writers exists, often reflecting the interest of specific sub disciplines in the social science. Furthermore, some motivations, such as rebellion and adrenaline rush, are more related to writers who mostly produce illegal graffiti. Nevertheless, as almost every graffiti writer mostly produces graffiti with his/her nickname, or, at least signs most of his/her work with his/her nickname, name recognition can still be seen as a shared motivation for most graffiti writers.

- 11 A third characteristic of global graffiti subculture which comes clearly to the fore in many accounts on graffiti is the exclusiveness of a place. Some authors even consider that "the ability to select appropriate spots for writing graffiti" is "the crucial aspect of graffiti" (Ferrel & Weide, 2010, p. 49). For instance, because graffiti started on New York subways, painting a subway or passenger train is the Holy Grail for many graffiti writers. Spraying trains or subways has become a very risky activity increasing its attractiveness for writers because the ability to produce graffiti on dangerous places is highly rewarded by the graffiti community (Campos, 2012). Cities also have places which have a unique history with graffiti such as places where graffiti is tolerated over longer periods, Hall Of Fames (HOF). Figure 4 displays one of the most famous HOFs, Five Points in New York. Thus, throughout a city there is a wide variety of places suitable for graffiti, but, putting graffiti on some of them is more rewarded by the local graffiti community than on other surfaces. Consequently, for a graffiti writer searching for a spot to place his/her graffiti a city contains a hierarchy of places, a hierarchy which has remained rather stable over time and in different places (Castleman, 1982; Ferrel & Weide, 2010).

**Figure 4. Five Points in New York, one of the most famous places where graffiti is tolerated (Hall Of Fames).**



**SOURCE: PICTURE TAKEN BY JANNES VAN LOON**

- 12 A fourth similarity in graffiti writing in Western cities is a demographic one. Since graffiti originated in New York in the 1970s its practitioners have been in general male, relatively young and almost always start with illegal graffiti activities (Feiner & Klein, 1982; Halsey & Young, 2006).
- 13 To present a comprehensive overview about the behaviour of graffiti writers, both graffiti writers and academics have categorized graffiti writers into different types. For example, Cap – who became a notorious writer in New York in the 1980s because he ignored the rule of "going over" – divided writers into two groups: Artists and graffiti bombers.

"There's two styles of graffiti that are trying to co-exist with each other. But it ain't gonna work like that. Blood wars, buddy. Blood wars" (Cap in Chalfant & Silver, 1983). Academics have made similar distinctions, for instance between taggers – who mostly produce illegal tags – and muralists, who mostly produce legal pieces (Ferrel, 1993; Lachmann, 1988). In New York in the 1980s most writers started as taggers, largely focusing on quantity. Those who gained the skills to produce a piece often became muralists (Lachmann, 1988). MacDonald's (2002) research on the graffiti scenes in London and New York created a more nuanced view of the prevailing career path. A graffiti writer starts via producing a high quantity of illegal work, mostly tags and throw ups. Then (s)he moves on to spray illegal pieces to further develop her/his style while the quantity of tags and throw ups decreases. In the last phase – when responsibilities in life have increased– a writer minimizes or stops illegal activities and instead focuses on legal pieces, characters and/or commercial/art projects.

- 14 More recently, some scholars started to focus their research on solely one of these subcategories of legally or illegally active writers. Kramer (2010a) demonstrates how a group of graffiti writers in New York has created a new category because they seem to only produce legal forms of graffiti and live a conventional lifestyle. As they have to obtain permission to produce legal graffiti on walls their relation with wider society is based on cooperation instead of conflict. As a result, legally active writers show a certain willingness to participate in society and often support strong measurements against illegal forms of graffiti. Research which only focuses on illegally active writers, on the contrary, demonstrates how they are proud to stand up against dominant social norms and related authorities (Campos, 2012). This battle creates "infottamento" (in slang, an uncontrollable burn)" (Brighenti, 2010, p. 320), a strong adrenaline rush (Ferrel, 1993), and these writers have a shared language and visual capacity to evaluate the urban graffiti landscape. Through adopting a specific language code, the illegal graffiti scene differentiates itself from other parts of society, making it easier to cross societal boundaries such as legal rules (Brighenti, 2010).
- 15 Thus, the degree of illegality of the graffiti produced has been a leading principle in categorizing graffiti writers' behaviour, and, as a tool to select graffiti writer's behaviour in depth. However, in this paper it is argued that this continuum presents an overly narrow reduction of complex social reality. First, because many writers do produce both legal and illegal graffiti this continuum fails to take into account ambiguous behaviour. Second, this continuum does not take into account how a writer engages with the urban landscape to produce graffiti. Put differently, it does not take into account the ways in which urban landscapes are produced and how these landscapes influence social practices (e.g. Morin, 2003; Nash, 2005). Third, as the discussion above shows, there are writers who deliberately disconnect themselves – to a certain extent – from the unwritten rules of the graffiti subculture. Thus, to better understand the spatial behaviour of graffiti writers, the remainder of this section argues that it is essential to, also, take into account two aspects of the urban landscape, its geography and regulatory regimes, which together shape a writers' sense of place. Subsequently, this specific sense of place is used by writers to judge the urban landscape and find places/surfaces suitable for a certain sort of graffiti.
- 16 As discussed above on an urban level, most graffiti writers prefer to leave their mark on more prestigious places, such as subways, famous hall of fames, and rooftops. Also, certain surfaces are seen by many writers as undesirable for graffiti, i.e. existing pieces



and characters, monuments, private homes and automobiles. However, when selecting a specific place or surface other geographical factors are important as well. Of major importance for many writers is the location of graffiti. As graffiti is about name recognition visibility in daytime is crucial: "the more visible, the better" (MacDonald, 2001, p. 76). In addition, the number of passers-by during the evening or at night is one of the most important elements related to risk estimation (Ferrel & Weide, 2010). The material of the surface can also create barriers for the production of graffiti (Ferrel, 1993). A flat, sizeable already painted wall can be more suitable for colourful pieces, while a small, unpainted surface can be more suitable for tags.

- 17 A graffiti writer's sense of place is also formed by a second spatial element, regulatory regimes, which can be conceptualized as consultations of public and private actors who enable and constrain the activities which can take place in public space (Ruppert, 2006), or on public walls (Young, 2010). In the literature on graffiti there is much attention on how these regimes also shape the behaviour of property-owners who own surfaces suitable for graffiti (e.g. Dickinson, 2008; Moreau & Alderman, 2011). In Amsterdam, for instance, there are many examples of owners who gave permission for legal graffiti but were overruled by the municipality (Parool, 2010). In general, regimes related to the production of graffiti are often focused on erasing all forms of graffiti, creating a negative image around it, and punishing writers (e.g. Halsey & Young, 2002, 2006; Kramer, 2010b). Nevertheless, these policies often have contradictory effects. Aggressive anti-graffiti regimes – for instance observable by frequently cleaned walls and high fines for graffiti offences – might stimulate tagging and make creating pieces less attractive (e.g. Ferrel, 1993; Halsey & Pederick, 2010). A "graffiti-free" environment indeed seems impossible because graffiti writers have a deep desire to produce graffiti, a desire which cannot be taken away by (severe) punishments, and once established, the phenomenon almost always attracts new practitioners (Halsey & Young, 2002, 2006). Therefore, graffiti continues to criticize the social order by "asserting that the common sense aesthetic is not an adequate reflection of our collective everyday lives" (Austin, 2010, p. 43). Hence, at its core, graffiti is about the question of who has the right to (co)design the urban landscape. Graffiti can be conceptualized as an important contribution to the oeuvre of postmodern cities: to "an urban reality whereby use ... still wins over lucre and profit" (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 102).
- 18 In this study the concept of a regulatory regime is approached in a more practical way. Namely, via the ways in which a regulatory regime is observable on a surface and henceforth influences a writer's sense of place. When a surface displays frequent cleaning, some writers might choose to use fewer paint because "a spot that won't last long doesn't merit serious artistic investment" (Ferrel & Weide, 2010, p. 54). The sort of ownership is also often readable from the property, as for instance, private property is more respected by writers than state buildings. Furthermore, a surface that already has writings on it might indicate a lax regime and could be considered to be more inviting. Or, in the case of a Hall Of Fame, clearly indicate that graffiti is tolerated on that place. Finally, writers might have to cope with cameras pointed on the surface, fences and barbed wires reflecting a severe anti-graffiti regime (Iveson, 2010).
- 19 The study acknowledges that regulatory regimes are themselves complex configurations of socio-spatial relations (Ruppert, 2006). However, for the purpose of this paper, adopting the perspective of the writer who will decide where and what to paint, the regulatory regime is here considered as a spatial element, i.e. as part of the way a writer

reads the suitability of a surface for graffiti. Together with the geographical elements described above it creates his/her sense of place, his/her framework to decide where and what to paint. In the remainder of this paper empirical data from Amsterdam is used to better understand this sense of place, but, first the methodology used to gather this data is briefly described in the next section.

## Data collection

- 20 The empirical data for this article exists of ten semi-structured interviews with active graffiti writers from Amsterdam, complemented with the personal experience of the author for being a graffiti writer for over ten years. As I was an active graffiti writer myself during the research project, the problem academics often face to get access to the subculture of graffiti was minimized. In addition, shared experiences and the use of a common language made it possible to establish a level of trust between me and the interviewees. This trust was further established by guaranteeing complete anonymity, therefore, the quotes below will not refer to graffiti names but to respondent numbers. Consequently, almost all of the interviewees were completely open about their illegal activities and deeper motivations to write graffiti. This openness I could check, for instance, I know their graffiti names and henceforth I could see where they had produced which graffiti. Moreover, as I was familiar with the local graffiti scene under study, I could link questions to some of my own personal experiences (see van Loon, 2008 for an extensive description for my relation with graffiti at the time of the research project). My ties with the topic under study now have disappeared, as about three years I have stopped graffiti writing completely, and I don't feel any hesitation to write critically about graffiti. Neither have I any commercial ties with graffiti anymore.
- 21 The research was focused on Amsterdam and first graffiti on randomly selected walls in the city centre was measured and mapped. This measurement showed that there were 90 active graffiti writers in the area from which five were known by the researcher and willing to be interviewed. These interviewees connected the researcher with four other graffiti writers. The last interviewee was met when he was putting a piece on a wall in the city centre. The youngest interviewee was 19 years old, the oldest 38, and on average they were 26 years old. They all started with graffiti when they were between their 11 and 18 year old and on average they were 12 year active with graffiti. As discussed below, only (very) experienced graffiti writers were interviewed. The interviewees said that they spend a lot of time on graffiti: on average eight hours a week actually spraying graffiti and 25 hours a week conducting activities related to graffiti such as searching for spots, talking with graffiti friends, drawing and reading (online) magazines.
- 22 As is still literary readable from the walls, Amsterdam shows a high activity of both illegal as legal graffiti writing. Furthermore, the regulatory regimes observable on surfaces throughout the city are varied, representing for instance highly regulated regimes on subway yards, and lax regimes on Hall of Fames. Hence, it is assumed that because Amsterdam represented a wide variety of surfaces and regulatory regimes the city could also contain a wide variety of graffiti writers with various senses of places making it a perfect location to test the ideas presented above.
- 23 The following section presents the main findings from the interviews in two subsections. The first part shows how graffiti seems to be part of a global urban subculture. The second part presents a typology based on the actions of graffiti writers from Amsterdam.

As the following sections will demonstrate, the two main findings – universalist behaviour, and four categories of “senses of places” – are strongly embedded in the international literature.

## A global graffiti subculture

- 24 What is remarkable is not only how stable the main elements of the graffiti subculture are, but also how international its main rules and characteristics are. In line with most other studies on graffiti, the interviewees started with graffiti when they were teenagers. Furthermore, while the interviewed writers had different socio-economic backgrounds, all respondents were male. Almost every interviewee reported to experience, or had experienced, periods of high illegal activity during which a passion for or addiction to graffiti emerged. For most respondents graffiti remained an important part of their life. Or, in the words of Respondent C: “I love graffiti. I love this experience ... just the joy of painting”, and Respondent B “it is a sort of addiction but more healthy than drugs”.
- 25 This addiction to or love for graffiti seems to originate from two factors in particular. The dominant motivation is – in line with the international literature – the drive to achieve fame, i.e. name recognition. Fame is achieved through writing “your [nick]name as frequently and beautifully as possible” (Respondent A). Consequently, there is fierce competition to become the most respected, i.e. to become the (local) king. Secondly, there is joy generated by many aspects of graffiti. For example, many writers like the illegality of graffiti. As Respondent B argues: “The more dangerous, the better. I like to show that I dare to spray graffiti in dangerous places”. In addition, for many writers writing graffiti is a very social activity and many of their friendships arise from activities related to graffiti. Joy is also experienced through the ability to leave behind traces of their work around the globe that may stay there forever: “...when you come to a city where you have not been for over four years or so, and that your piece still stands there in the middle of town, that’s just joy” (Respondent F).
- 26 The interviewees share specific rules about the appropriateness to put graffiti on certain places, and these rules are also generally in line with the international literature discussed above. Remarkably, the rules of going over as described in the second section, are still put in practice in Amsterdam in similar fashion to New York’s graffiti scene in the 1980s. Furthermore, there is still a preference for public properties. When, during the interviews, a picture was shown of a wall owned by a housing association, every interviewee considered writing illegal graffiti on it. Contrastingly, privately owned objects were not considered as suitable for graffiti, neither are, monuments, cemeteries, and religious objects.
- 27 The presence of a hierarchy in the suitability of places for graffiti was not central in the conducted interviews. However, from my own experience, I know that there are many highly appreciated places such as Hall of Fames with a long history throughout the Netherlands. Moreover, in all Dutch graffiti magazines the most prominent pages are always for pictures of subways and trains, illustrating the high appreciation of writers for those places. Thus, this examination shows that some main elements of graffiti subculture as described in international accounts – namely name recognition, not going over, unique places and writers demographics – are clearly observable in Amsterdam. Nevertheless, the next section will demonstrate that existing typologies – such as tagger

versus muralist – to research this global graffiti subculture could not be applied on the writers in this research.

## Towards a renewed typology of graffiti writers

"We must not imagine that reality exhibits a sharp line of distinction; what confronts us is a continuum." (Richardson, 1972, p.887)

- 28 As discussed above, by focusing on specific subgroups of graffiti writers and using theoretical angles mostly relevant for their subdisciplines scholars have created a rich, but fragmented view on the behaviour of graffiti writers. In this paper I try to present a more comprehensive view by analysing how writers develop a sense of place which they use to "read a surface" – via its geographical aspects and the traces of a regulatory regime – to conceive *the appropriateness of a place for graffiti*. From the interview data I have, in an inductive way and in continuous dialogue with the literature, developed a typology which makes it possible to categorize shared "senses of place". This typology is presented in this section.
- 29 In both the interviews and the literature, it is clear that the production of illegal and legal graffiti are two rather different ball games. Therefore, it is important to take into account that *the degree of illegality of the graffiti a writer produces* is essential to understand his/her spatial behaviour. Using this continuum for constructing a typology overcomes a stark, clear and purely juridical distinction between legal and illegal graffiti as used in many other studies on graffiti. It acknowledges that most writers have at least some experience in both legal and illegal graffiti and that the subculture produces alternative criteria of appropriateness. This allows to make sensible distinctions between, for instance, a tag in a toilet and a piece on a train, both illegal graffiti. Or, between painting flowers in a children's bedroom, or painting a character in a Hall Of Fame in New York, both legal graffiti.
- 30 As shown above, the general unwritten rules of graffiti are sometimes disrespected, giving rise to feuds. However, these are often extreme cases, as the walls of many cities illustrate the wide majority of writers does follow the general set of rules. However, the interviewees differed considerably in the way they talked about graffiti. Many interviewees expressed great knowledge on graffiti, its practitioners and many of its technical aspects. Other interviewees talked in a more factual way about graffiti and did not expand on the details of this subculture. They were also much less engaged with other graffiti writers, and merely described their own actions. This difference can be understood as the degree of reflexivity towards graffiti as a subculture and social activity that shapes their production of graffiti (Burgess, 2005). Interviewees with a lower degree of reflexivity often felt much less urge to abide the rules of the game, to search for fame, to develop their skills and style and to connect with other graffiti writers. Therefore, it seems to be that a graffiti writer's *connection to the graffiti subculture* could influence his spatial behaviour: his sense of place.

Table 1. Typology of graffiti writers: Amateurs, artists, bombers, and outsiders.

		Connection to the graffiti subculture	
		<i>Weak</i>	<i>Strong</i>



Degree of illegality of the graffiti he/she produces	Low	<b>Amateur</b>	<b>Artist</b> Respondent C, D, G, K
	High	<b>Outsider</b> Respondent 6, E	<b>Bomber</b> Respondent F, S, B, A

- 31 As table 1 demonstrates the use of these two dimensions creates four possible types of graffiti writers who could have a shared sense of place. Still, these dimensions should be conceptualized as continuums, many writers act ambiguous as many Outsiders and Bombers also produce legal graffiti and many Artists and Amateurs produce illegal graffiti as well. As table 1 also illustrates, one possible type of graffiti writer, the Amateur, was not interviewed. Nevertheless, many writers seem to start in a similar way. Namely, by first drawing a lot with a certain nickname, first on paper, then with markers on places where the chance to be caught is very low, like school tables, toilets, inside ones bedroom, and under viaducts. Their knowledge of and connection with the graffiti scene is still limited. In addition, many writers that quit being a Bomber, Outsider or Artist can become an Amateur (again) if they still like to draw and paint occasionally a wall. They do not connect to the graffiti subculture as they once did, they have become risk averse, and they are not maintaining or developing their skills.
- 32 The Artist focuses mainly on the production of legal pieces and characters and confirms deliberately to habits that are characteristic to the graffiti subculture in general. The respondents confirm that the search for fame within the subculture is an important drive, but other motivations are diverse. The word artist refers here to the fact that legal graffiti is more often regarded as art by the public and not to the artistic quality of the work produced by these writers. However, it is true that Artists are more likely to focus explicitly on the development of skills, styles and compositions. Improvements in their work give them a feeling of satisfaction. The possibility to take a nice picture to show their work to others digitally is important. Hence, on site visibility is less important for them compared to the Bomber, but this does not mean that quantity of drawings or the exclusiveness of place are irrelevant. Regarding the characteristics of the wall, the surface should be flat and sizeable so the artist can create a big and detailed piece or character. Artists also interact with the surface: "Different things you can do on different forms" (Respondent C). Preferable, there are also amenities – such as barbeques – which enable social activities. In the Netherlands these writers experience a scarcity of legal places for graffiti, and the scarce existing legal places are often located peripherally. Artists also participate at events or jams because it is a "joy" way to maintain social relations with other writers. Their social network has evolved and is still evolving around graffiti and they experience the production of graffiti as a way to take time for themselves and their friends: "It enables me to forget about my work, my situation at home and the rest of the world for a while" (Respondent G).
- 33 Some of the Artists earn their income with their graffiti designs and related art forms and they adjust their style to satisfy or attract customers. Occasionally an Artist still makes an illegal tag, throw-up or piece on a place which is not cleaned frequently, and where the risks of being caught are as low as possible. The group of Artists consists of writers of

different ages, with different experiences, and different focuses on illegal graffiti than others. More than the other types this group includes also older writers with a job and children that belonged to another type earlier in their graffiti careers. As a result of their deep love for graffiti they are still very active: "It became a part of my life. That is what it really is, you started with it and you experienced joy and misery with it and still you crave for it" (Respondent G).

- 34 An Outsider seems not to think about graffiti, he just meets with friends, drinks some (or a lot of) alcohol and goes out to produce illegal drawings mostly with spray cans and markers. In contrast with Artists and Bombers he is not in love with or addicted to graffiti, graffiti is secondary in his life: "it is a secondary thing, something extra, more like a hobby" (Respondent 6). Outsiders do not connect with the graffiti world, they produce a lot of illegal graffiti's but do so with existing friends, they do not want to make new friends via graffiti. Nor do they want to develop their styles and techniques. Moreover, because an Outsider does not feel the need to become respected by other writers (s)he does feel less obliged to follow the rules of this subculture. Probably related to the disconnection with graffiti subculture, this category of writers is well known for starting feuds (beefs) with other writers, often by going over work which is considered by insiders as of higher quality. Although outsiders consider graffiti as a hobby and not as a lifestyle they are very active and cannot be stopped by the police. They are not hindered by camera surveillance, and fines of up to 6.000 euros do not decrease the amount of illegal graffiti they produce (Respondent 6). Moreover, an Outsider likes to produce illegal graffiti on risky places. This means that for tags and throw-ups the city centre - which is also relatively crowded during the night - is the perfect area. When their graffiti is cleaned Outsiders are motivated to come back as soon as possible to produce new graffiti: "If they clean my graffiti I come back to put more, and more aggressive forms of graffiti on that surface" (Respondent 6). Furthermore, they are, just as Bombers, attracted by the risky environment related to spraying on trains and subways. However, while the Bomber is also motivated by the higher rewards risky places offer in the form of admiration by other writers, the Outsider is already satisfied by just the high risks. Put differently, the act of producing graffiti itself is enough to satisfy the needs of the Outsider, he does not need the recognition of other writers.
- 35 A Bomber is a graffiti writer who strongly identifies him/herself as such and mainly produces illegal graffiti. It is remarkable that all interviewees in this category described their connection with graffiti as an addiction. A Bomber is continuously searching for new spots, draws new sketches, searches for new styles, talks with other writers and observes yards to see when it is safe to spray on trains. A cocktail of factors probably causes this addiction. The production of illegal graffiti in more complex forms creates an addicting adrenaline rush which is intertwined with the search for fame through spreading his/her name and/or improving his/her style and skills. The Bombers' drive shows characteristics similar to an Artist: the search for fame, spreading your name, visibility and reputation, the development of style and skills, and elements of joy and sociability. His actions are more calculated and reflexive towards graffiti subculture when it comes to the choice of locations and the drawings, compared to the Outsider or the Amateur. The choice for mainly illegal graffiti offers different circumstances of graffiti production and it demands a different mind-set - sometimes described as guerrilla tactics (Iveson, 2010) or bomb the system (Labonté, 2003) - which sets him/her apart from the Artist.

- 36 Every now and then, a Bomber might write graffiti on legal walls but illegal spots mostly attract him/her. Some Bombers use legal opportunities to develop skills and make contacts while others are categorically averse to the phenomenon of legal graffiti. (S)he is not afraid to pay fines when (s)he gets caught and is attracted to put graffiti on dangerous places to achieve fame more rapidly: "The more dangerous, the better: I like to show others that I dare to take a lot of risk to write my name" (Respondent B). This introduces a paradox: regimes based on severe punishment aim to minimize – or even destroy – illegal graffiti; however, because Outsiders and Bombers are attracted by risks the establishment of stringent regulatory regimes may increase attractiveness for graffiti writers who produce illegal graffiti. In some cases this action-reaction becomes a cat and mouse game in which the writer decides to return over and over again with less paint consuming and more "vandal like", harder to clear types of graffiti: "When they clean it fast I just put a tag" (Respondent B); "Yeah with black tar, that's great ... it is very difficult for them to clean it up" (Respondent S)". The Bomber likes visible locations, and when he goes out to produce tags and throw-ups he does not plan much. However, spraying illegal pieces is planned very carefully, in particular when it concerns risky places like train yards. Then, Bombers carefully study the regulating regime related to train yard, for instance by observing the working hours of cleaning teams and time slots of security rounds.
- 37 Thus, the typologies reveal important similarities in the spatial behaviour of groups of graffiti writers. Moreover, as the conclusion below will illustrate, these typologies allow to couple different contributions on graffiti to each other.

## Conclusion

- 38 In this paper the graffiti phenomenon was explored via the study of the behaviour of writers in Amsterdam. First, it was demonstrated how graffiti seems to be a truly global phenomenon. The practices of graffiti writers in Amsterdam are very comparable to the practices observed in many other Western cities. The main elements of this global graffiti subculture are that its practitioners are mostly male, and started as teenagers with illegal graffiti. Their goal is to achieve fame by the promotion of a nickname, and, in general, writers do not go over existing graffiti. In addition, a general hierarchy of places suitable for graffiti is shared among writers, whereby subways are (still) the most desired place for many.
- 39 Second, the paper demonstrated how writers have developed their own way of reading the urban landscape. They continuously evaluate surfaces, to judge if they are suitable for a certain type of graffiti. For doing so, writers take into account all kinds of aspects related to the characteristics of a place and its regulatory regime. Although every individual writer develops his/her unique sense of place, there are shared, collective perspectives. The three different types of writers (Outsiders, Bombers and Artists) interviewed show remarkable within-group similarities in the way they analyse the suitability of surfaces for their graffiti. Using this typology allows to develop a more comprehensive insight on the behaviour of graffiti writers, it connects work which has been disconnected because it only focused one side of the continuum, namely legal or illegal active writers. Therefore, contributions which critically engage with this typology to analyze if it is applicable on local graffiti subcultures in other Western cities are

welcomed. Moreover, as Amateurs were not interviewed that group needs extra attention.

- 40 Third, Belgian research on graffiti subculture (VanderMoere, 2002) suggests, in line with Lachmann (1988) and MacDonald (2001), that graffiti writers could move between the different types. Put differently, the typology seems to be – over time – fluid rather than fixed. The most logical pathway would be starting as an Amateur, then becoming a Bomber or an Outsider. Subsequently it is hypothesized that Outsiders quit relatively early due to their weak connection with the subculture while most Bombers develop into Artists. However, this is a hypothesis, a larger more quantitative research could deliver more fruitful insight on these career paths. Still, the idea of a career path could be fruitful for policy makers, as, for the general public, Amateurs, Outsiders and to a lesser extent Bombers produce the most undesirable forms of graffiti in the form of many illegal tags, throw-ups and to a lesser extent pieces. Therefore, policies could be developed which try to stimulate writers to become Artists, for instance, through the creation of more legal or tolerated places, but, also, by punishing undesirable forms of graffiti (such as tags) more than more desirable forms of graffiti (such as pieces). In Amsterdam the policy is currently the other way around.
- 41 Furthermore, as the claim of urban surfaces by graffiti writers can also be conceptualized as a claim to the right of the city (cf. Lefebvre, 1996), future research could focus on issues and frictions relating to the battle for public space. For example, by critically engaging with urban politicians who stimulate advertising but marginalize graffiti (e.g. Haijer & Reijndorp, 2001). Or, using the words of Respondent D: “when you have enough money you are allowed to place ads everywhere, but there should be more room for art, and I see graffiti as art”. Researchers could then also further engage with the discussion opened by Iverson (2010), who presents graffiti as a counter power in times in which security measurements have hijacked many essential freedoms in the public space of democratic cities. In sum, it is essential to study the ways in which urban landscapes are produced and how these landscapes influence social practices (e.g. Morin, 2003; Nash, 2005), to study who “writes and rewrites” the city (Lefebvre, 1996).

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## ABSTRACTS

The phenomenon of graffiti has received much attention from many sub-disciplines in social science. Scholars often engage with a small fragment of graffiti writing using ideas popular in their own-subdiscipline. This practice has given birth to a rich, but fragmented literature. This paper tries to connect the fragments by focusing on the spatial behaviour of practitioners of graffiti (i.e. (graffiti) writers) in Amsterdam. Interviews with them provide a basis for demonstrating that graffiti is part of a global phenomenon associated with recurrent social features such as the achievement of fame. Moreover, the triggers for graffiti writers to produce graffiti on a certain surface seem to be interconnected with 1) geographical factors such as the visibility of a location and 2) a certain regulatory regime which characteristics writers can observe on a surface. The complex mixture of such factors on a certain place influences the behaviour of individual graffiti writers, it creates a specific sense of place. Nevertheless, there seem to be groups of graffiti writers whose actions are rather similar. In order to understand their spatial behaviour better this paper argues to use a typology with the dimensions "degree of illegality of the graffiti produced" and "connection to graffiti subculture". Consequently, four types of writers are distinguished: amateurs, outsiders, bombers, and artists, making it possible to research graffiti in a much less fragmented way.

Onderzoek naar graffiti is binnen de sociale wetenschappen door talrijke sub-disciplines uitgevoerd. Het onderzoek beperkt zich vaak tot een element van graffiti en maakt gebruik van

ideeën en theorieën uit sub-disciplines. Hierdoor is een rijke, maar gefragmenteerde literatuur over het fenomeen graffiti ontstaan. In deze paper is gepoogd om verschillende inzichten bij elkaar te brengen door het ruimtelijk gedrag van Amsterdamse (graffiti)schrijvers te bestuderen. Uit interviews wordt duidelijk dat het gedrag van Amsterdamse graffitischrijvers sterk lijkt op gedrag zoals beschreven in internationale literatuur. Zo is het krijgen van naamsbekendheid (“fame”) ook in Amsterdam een sterke motivatie om graffiti te zetten. De behoefte van graffitischrijvers om op een bepaalde plaats graffiti aan te brengen lijkt sterk te worden beïnvloedt door geografische factoren – zoals zichtbaarheid – en de aanwezigheid van een bepaald “regulerend regiem”. De complexe mix van deze elementen op een bepaalde plaats beïnvloedt het ruimtelijk gedrag van graffiti schrijvers. De schrijver creëert zo een eigen “sense of place”. Er lijken ook gedeelde “senses of place” te bestaan. Om deze gedeelde senses of place beter te begrijpen wordt in deze paper voorgesteld om een typologie te gebruiken gebaseerd op twee assen. De ene as betreft de mate van illegaliteit van de geproduceerde graffiti, de andere as de connectie van de schrijver tot de graffiti subcultuur. De hieruit voortvloeiende “typen” graffitischrijvers zijn amateurs, outsiders, bombers, en kunstenaars. Ze maken het mogelijk om op een minder gefragmenteerde manier onderzoek te doen naar het (ruimtelijk) gedrag van graffitischrijvers.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** graffiti, urban landscapes, public space, sense of place, urban art  
**motsclesnl** stedelijke landschappen, openbare ruimte, plaatsgevoel, stedelijke kunst

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