

Living Hip Hop:
Defining Authenticity in the Adelaide and Melbourne
Hip Hop Scenes

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Thesis Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the Hip Hop scenes in the Australian cities of Adelaide and Melbourne. Based on fieldwork conducted from September 2006 to January 2008, my research builds on a growing body of scholarship that examines the production and consumption of Hip Hop outside of the United States of America. The central aim of this thesis is to examine how Hip Hoppers define, express, and actively work to sustain, living or authentic Hip Hop culture in Australia. However, it is not my intention to set out a definitive list of good or bad Hip Hop or to suggest that there is one authentic way to be a Hip Hopper in Australia. Instead, I emphasise the contested nature of authenticity and examine how different Hip Hop fans and artists use the concept of authenticity to legitimise their own beliefs and actions. My research illustrates that different Hip Hoppers have varied understandings about the origins, history and traditions that make up Hip Hop culture, and therefore, what living or authentic Hip Hop is. These differences can create tensions as Hip Hop enthusiasts debate how authenticity should be assessed in Australia.

In each chapter of this thesis I examine these deliberations, highlighting the power struggles that occur when people try to fix the meaning of Hip Hop and to disrupt or discount definitions that threaten their own understandings. I demonstrate that authenticity is an evaluative concept that is used to claim status and to formulate and defend cultural boundaries. My findings contribute to contemporary debates about the impacts of globalisation and localisation by examining how people make judgements about what is, or is not, authentic in an increasingly interconnected world. I argue that by studying how authenticity is formulated in a specific cultural setting we gain valuable insight into how people understand their social world and their position in it.

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Chapter 1

Hip Hop Lives:

The year is 2007 and Melbourne MC, Muph, is stalking the stage with a mic in his hand.¹ He's accompanied by Plutonic Lab on Drums and DJ Slap618 on the decks, both pounding out beats.² The performance is one part of a large Hip Hop show taking place in Adelaide, Australia. More than seven thousand people have crammed into the Adelaide Entertainment Centre to see local group the Hilltop Hoods perform with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. In the respite between tracks Muph takes a moment to chat to the crowd. He references the recently released and rather controversially titled album *Hip Hop Is Dead* by American MC Nas. He yells to the audience: "Put your hand up if you think Hip Hop is alive!" People cheer in affirmation and a sea of hands are raised. Muph muses that perhaps someone should send Nas a photo. For this room of people, Hip Hop is certainly not dead. Hip Hop is thriving (Author's Field notes).

The release of Nas's album *Hip Hop Is Dead* (2006) generated a flood of both positive and negative responses from Hip Hoppers around the world. It stirred up a series of debates about how Hip Hop should best be practiced and understood, prompting Hip Hop fans and performers to think about what Hip Hop meant to them. By claiming that Hip Hop was 'dead' Nas had posed a question: what is Hip Hop? Or, more specifically, what should Hip Hop be? These questions are the central concerns of this thesis. In this thesis I explore what it means to say that Hip Hop is alive in Australia. Hip Hop enthusiasts often speak about Hip Hop as though it is a living entity. They describe Hip Hop artists and tracks (songs) as "fresh" or "stale"; denounce certain actions as "unhealthy" for the future viability of Hip Hop; and debate whether or not Hip Hop is "growing" or being "suffocated". When Hip Hop enthusiasts classify Hip Hop as living, dying, or dead, they are making judgments about what is, or is not, authentic Hip Hop. The central aim of this thesis is to examine how Hip Hoppers define, express, and actively work to sustain, living or authentic Hip Hop in Australia. In this thesis I examine the cultural labour that is required to produce or make Hip Hop culture (Bennett 2000; Maxwell 2003; Condry 2006).

While I acknowledge that culture is often experienced as fixed or natural, I reject models that represent culture as a reified form (Skelton and Allen 1999, p. 4). I argue that Hip Hop producers and fans have to work to give life to Hip Hop in Australia; to

¹ Mic is short for microphone.

² Decks is a slang term for turntables.

constitute a culture with a history, traditions and an origin (Alim 2009, p. 7). In this thesis I demonstrate that different Hip Hop fans and artists have very varied understandings about what living or authentic Hip Hop is. These differences can create tensions as Hip Hop enthusiasts debate how authenticity should be expressed and assessed. The steady growth of the Australian Hip Hop scene is exacerbating these debates, prompting Hip Hoppers to reconsider what authentic Hip Hop might be in the Australian context. In each chapter of this thesis I examine these debates, highlighting the power struggles that occur when people try to fix the meaning of Hip Hop and to disrupt or discount definitions that threaten their own understandings.

This thesis contributes to a growing body of scholarship (Peterson 1997; Bendix 1997; Grazian 2004; Solomon 2005; Vannini and Williams 2009) that explores the culturally constructed nature of authenticity and challenges everyday understandings that conceptualise it as an inherent or natural property of some object, person or process (Vannini and Williams 2009, p. 2). Authenticity is not a ‘property *of*, but something we ascribe *to*’ (Rubidge 1996 p. 219 original emphasis) cultural forms, practices and objects. Therefore, it is not my intention to set out a definitive list of good or bad Hip Hop or to suggest that there is one authentic way to be a Hip Hopper in Australia. Instead, I emphasise the contested nature of authenticity, exploring how different Hip Hoppers use the concept of authenticity to legitimise their own beliefs and actions. This thesis is a detailed account of how Hip Hoppers in the Australian cities of Adelaide and Melbourne produce, ascribe and enact authenticity. My findings provide new insight into how Hip Hop is constituted and experienced in Australia and contributes to understandings of globalisation and localisation.

1.1 The Meaning/s of Hip Hop:

Throughout this thesis I write Hip Hop as per the conventions used by Maxwell (2003) and Arthur (2010); as two separate words, without a hyphen and capitalised. Until very recently scholars tended to use the terms ‘Hip Hop’ and ‘Hip Hop culture’ in an abstract way, assuming that their meaning was self-evident or widely understood (Alim 2009, p. 2). However, the normative use of Hip Hop or Hip Hop culture becomes problematic when ‘one engages in ethnographic studies of Hip Hop cultural practices across wide-ranging and diverse scenes and contexts’ (Alim 2009, p. 3). Alim clearly demonstrates

that we must not take it for granted that we know what Hip Hop is. In this thesis I use the terms Hip Hop and Hip Hop culture interchangeably to refer to what my informants describe as Hip Hop culture. While the term Hip Hop is often used to refer to a specific musical genre, the vast majority of Hip Hop enthusiasts that I interviewed make a crucial delineation between Hip Hop culture and Hip Hop music. As I will argue later in this thesis, classifying Hip Hop as a culture and not simply a musical style is one way that Hip Hop fans and artists define authentic Hip Hop.

The central feature of Hip Hop culture is what Hip Hoppers refer to as the 'Four Elements' of Hip Hop. The Four Elements of Hip Hop are; MCing, sometimes referred to as rapping; DJing; B-Boying/B-Girling, sometimes referred to as Break Dancing; and Graffiti Writing.³ I acknowledge the importance of all four of these practices to Hip Hoppers, however, because of time and space restrictions, the primary focus of this thesis is the Hip Hop music scene or what I refer to as the 'Hip Hop scene' or the Adelaide or Melbourne 'Hip Hop scene'. As such, I do not include a detailed analysis of B-Boying/B-Girling or Graffiti Writing in this thesis. This decision was also influenced by the accessibility of Hip Hop musicians who were often the most willing to be involved in the research and usually had websites or online social networking profiles which made them easy to contact. Hip Hop music events were also the most common types of Hip Hop events held in Adelaide and Melbourne. Some of the events that I attended incorporated both music and one of the other Elements, for example the Adelaide leg of the event Nurcha Fest held at the Viva Function Centre featured the outside wall of the venue being painted by Graffiti Writers and All City 6 at the German Club featured a B-Boy/B-Girl Battle. However, the central attractions at both of these events were musical acts. This focus on music does not mean that this thesis is informed by ethnomusicology or musicology. Although I do refer to Hip Hop song

³ The term B-Boying/B-Girling is somewhat awkward and therefore there are times in this thesis where I use the term 'Break Dancing' instead of B-Boying/B-Girling. However I recognise that some Hip Hoppers reject the use of the term 'Break Dancing', arguing that it is inauthentic because it is a term that they contend was created by the media and not B-Boys/Girls themselves (*The Freshest Kids* 2002). The 'B' in the term B-Boy is widely accepted as standing for 'Break' in reference to the 'Break' in the records that people would dance to. Initially the term 'B-Boy' was solely used to describe such dancers, reflecting the fact that the dance was a predominantly male form. It was only in later years that the term 'B-Girl' originated to describe female Break Dancers, hence the rather awkward neologism: 'B-Boy/B-Girl'. Schloss (2009, p. 15) also discusses the stylistic challenges of using these terms.

lyrics in this thesis, I do not explore the musical structure of Hip Hop songs. This is an area where further research could be conducted.⁴

I define the Hip Hop music scene as one aspect of Hip Hop culture that incorporates the Elements of MCing and DJing but is not restricted to these practices. I draw on the work of Peterson and Bennett (2004) who explore how the term ‘music scene’ has been used to describe the ‘production, performance and reception of popular music’ (Peterson and Bennett 2004, p. 3). Therefore, while I note that a defining characteristic of Hip Hop music is the use of MCing or rapping and/or the use of a DJ, this thesis is not solely an examination of MCing or DJing. This is because not all Hip Hop music incorporates MCs and DJs, but also because the central focus of this thesis is the broader context that informs the music’s production and consumption; the Hip Hop music ‘scene’.⁵ The use of the term ‘music scene’ can be traced back to the work of Straw (1991) although, as Peterson and Bennett (2004, p. 2) discuss, the term has been widely used in journalistic and popular discourse since the 1940s. Other scholars who have used the term ‘scene’ include Shank (1994), Cohen (1991; 1997; 2007), and Kahn Harris (2000; 2006). The term ‘scene’ can be used to describe music communities that are spatially-situated in a particular locale, are in communication with similar scenes in distant locales or are predominantly virtual (Lena and Peterson 2008, p. 703). Bennett and Peterson (2004, pp. 7-11) define these types of scenes as ‘local’, ‘translocal’ and ‘virtual’ respectively.

The Hip Hop scene that is the focus of this study exhibits all three of these traits, and as I will discuss in chapter 2, the definition of the Hip Hop scene as ‘local’ or ‘translocal’ is a contentious issue for some Hip Hop enthusiasts. Bennett and Peterson (2004) note that what they term ‘scenes’ are classified as ‘subcultures’ by some theorists. However, they prefer the term ‘scene’ because of ‘subcultures’ implication that ‘a society has one commonly shared culture from which the subculture is deviant’ (ibid, p. 3).

⁴ In the book *Making Beats: The Art of Sample Based Hip Hop* Schloss (2004) examines how cultural and historical factors influence the production of Hip Hop music in America. In particular, Schloss explores how the creation of Hip Hop music is shaped by the practice of sampling. To date there have been no Australian studies that examine the music-making practices of Australian Hip Hop DJs and producers (e.g. what they sample and why, how they collect records, what kinds of sounds they privilege and so on).

⁵ For example, there are instrumental Hip Hop tracks that do not feature any rapping and there are Hip Hop songs whose production and/or performance does not involve a DJ.

Furthermore, they propose that the term ‘scene’ allows for a more nuanced understanding of the fluidity of identity in the late-modern context because not all members of a scene are ‘governed by subcultural standards’ (ibid). The fluidity of the ‘scene’ concept has been criticised by authors like Hodkinson (2002, p. 24), who argues that the term is too broad and that this reduces its theoretical value, and Hesmondhalgh (2005), who indicates that its usage has become confusing and therefore, analytically weak.⁶ However, these very criticisms are described by Kahn-Harris (2000) and Bennett and Peterson (2004) as the terms strength. This is because the ‘scene’ concept is argued to be sufficiently malleable to allow its application to a diverse range of practices and contexts. Thus, rather than set out a definitive definition of ‘scene’ Bennett and Peterson (2004) state that ‘each scene is unique’ (Bennett and Peterson 2004, p. 6) and provide a more general overview of the common characteristics of each type of scene described above.

The uniqueness of each ‘scene’ is demonstrated by Kahn-Harris’s exploration of the ‘Extreme Metal’ scene in an edited volume that examines the ‘subculture’ concept (Bennett and Kahn-Harris eds 2004). In this article, Kahn-Harris (2004) critiques the subcultural paradigm of the BCCCS (Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) arguing that the Extreme Metal scene does not ‘fit’ the BCCCS model of spectacular visibility (Kahn-Harris 2004, pp. 107, 117). However, he also notes that the characteristics of the Extreme Metal scene are not consistent with the ‘post-subcultural paradigm’ which emphasises the transient nature of scene affiliation. This is because members of the Extreme Metal scene are ‘deeply committed to the scene’ (Kahn-Harris 2004, p. 117). Thus, while a growing number of studies call attention to the increasingly fragmented nature of youth styles and youth culture (cf. Redhead 1993; Polhemus 1997; Muggleton 2000/2002), Kahn-Harris demonstrates that while some ‘scenes’ can be ‘characterized by fluidity and temporal membership...others...are more invested in stability and continuity’ (Kahn-Harris 2004, p. 118). As I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, Hip Hoppers are critical of people who are not committed to Hip

⁶ Thus, even though Hodkinson (2004) contributes to Bennett and Peterson’s edited volume *Music Scenes* (2004) he notes that his use of the term ‘scene’ in his chapter of this book is not intended ‘to imply any particular support for the notion of “scene” as an interpretive device’ (Hodkinson 2004, p. 146).

Hop culture and whose interest in the form is fleeting or part-time (see chapters 5 and 6).

Like Bennett and Peterson (ibid), my use of the term ‘scene’ is influenced by Bourdieu’s (1984; 1990) concept of ‘field’ and Becker’s (1982) discussion of ‘art worlds’. Bourdieu uses the term ‘field’ to refer to the contexts or social arenas that ‘produce and authorise certain discourses and activities’ (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002, pp. 21-22). He argues that one’s power in a particular field is determined by their social, cultural, and economic capital. Social capital refers to ‘various kinds of valued relations with significant others’ (Jenkins 1992, p. 85) and cultural capital refers to ‘legitimate knowledge of one form or another’ (ibid). Bourdieu states that all three forms of capital are utilised by agents to gain status in their field, although he contends that social capital and cultural capital are ‘more disguised’ (Bourdieu 1986, p. 245) than economic capital. According to Bourdieu, the boundaries of cultural fields and what constitutes cultural and social capital are in constant flux as people debate who or what is authentic in a particular setting. In *Distinction* (1984) Bourdieu examines how these boundaries are determined by analysing ‘the effects of social and political structures on aesthetic taste’ (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002, p. 147).

Similarly, in his text *Art Worlds*, Becker (1982) explores the social organisation of ‘art worlds’, arguing that particular aesthetic values are ‘characteristic phenomenon of collective activity’ (Becker 1982, p 39). Both Bourdieu (1984; 1993) and Becker (1982) demonstrate that judgements about what is, or is not, ‘art’ or ‘high culture’ are not natural or universal. Their work demystifies processes which are often romanticised; the production of ‘art’ and the legitimisation of cultural ‘taste’. Becker states that:

Art worlds typically devote considerable attention to trying to decide what is and isn’t art, what is and isn’t their kind of art, and who is and isn’t an artist; by observing how an art world makes these distinctions rather than trying to make them ourselves we can understand much of what goes on in that world

(Becker 1982, p. 36).

Likewise, the aim of this thesis is not to make judgements about authenticity, but to examine how Hip Hoppers determine what is and is not Hip Hop, who is and is not an

authentic Hip Hopper, and what constitutes the Hip Hop 'scene'. In doing so, I draw specifically on Cohen's (1997) application of the term 'scene' to the analysis of the production of masculinity in the Liverpool rock music 'scene'. In her contribution to the edited volume *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (Whiteley ed. 1997), Cohen sets out to 'outline general characteristics of the scene whilst also raising examples of specific groups and situations' (Cohen 1997, p. 17). She explores the 'everyday activities that comprise the scene' and the 'systems of ideas that inform the scene, including the contested concept of 'scene' itself' (Cohen 1997, pp. 17-18). Cohen emphasises 'the contradictions and complexities of this process, and the way in which it is shaped and constrained by specific relationships and institutions, situations and circumstances' (Cohen 1997, p. 18). This application of the term 'scene' is particularly insightful because it demonstrates that the 'scene' is comprised of numerous agents and institutions that all shape the production and the consumption of music. By acknowledging that the concept of 'scene' can be contested, Cohen allows for the diversity of music-making cultures such as rock or Hip Hop.

The term 'Hip Hop scene' used in this thesis refers to the institutions, organisations, individuals and groups who collectively constituted the specific geographical sites where I conducted fieldwork. As the title of this thesis suggests, my two field sites or Hip Hop 'scenes' were the Australian capital cities of Adelaide, South Australia and Melbourne, Victoria. I was in the field for approximately sixteen months from September 2006 to January 2008. During this period I conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty-seven Hip Hop fans, twenty-four males and three females. The majority of these interviews were recorded and transcribed, however some people requested that I did not record their interviews. In these cases I took detailed notes. In order to protect my participants' identities I use pseudonyms throughout this thesis. Twenty of my informants lived in Adelaide, six lived in Melbourne, and one lived in Geelong, Victoria.

In addition to more formal interviews, this thesis is informed by everyday discussions and interactions that I had with Hip Hoppers in Adelaide and Melbourne. I also attended numerous Hip Hop events in Adelaide and seven events in Melbourne where I conducted participant observation (see Figure 1, p. 8).



Figure 1: The crowd engaging with the Adelaide Hip Hop group The Funkoars during their performance at Adelaide nightclub HQ on the 24th of August 2007 (Author's Photo, 2007).

The nature of these events (lack of lighting, large crowds, limited seating) made it difficult to take notes so I would often retreat to the women's bathroom to record key words and short notes. These notes and my memory informed the production of field notes which were written up at the first opportunity after an event. Given that many Hip Hop events run late into the evening the first opportunity was often the following morning. In addition to the above sources, in this thesis I also use quotes from various media sources including magazines and newspapers (both online and offline) and from websites such as the Australian Hip Hop site, ozhiphop.com (see chapter 6). It should be noted that throughout this thesis I reproduce quotes as they were found in the original source, in particular Internet forums, without altering grammar or spelling errors. To improve readability, I do not use the phrase 'sic' to denote that such errors are from the original source. Where I use song lyrics, I have transcribed these from recordings.

The collection of these forms of data and the use of ethnographic methods was designed to enable me to gain a detailed and rich understanding of the Adelaide and Melbourne Hip Hop scenes. In particular, my aim was to explore how different Australian Hip Hoppers understood their own practices, values and beliefs. In his anthropological text *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Bronislaw Malinowski wrote that the goal of an ethnographer is to ‘grasp the native’s point of view...to realise *his* vision of *his* world’ (Malinowski 1922/1972, p. 25 original emphasis). Despite the biases in Malinowski’s phrasing and the fact that he has been criticised for his own methodological and personal weaknesses, I take up Geertz’s call for the continued relevance of an approach that aims ‘to see things from the native’s point of view’ (Geertz 1974, p. 27).

In chapter 2, I begin this task by exploring debates about the ‘origins’ and ‘traditions’ that constitute Hip Hop culture in Australia. In this chapter I demonstrate that Hip Hoppers have diverse understandings of the connection between the contemporary Australian Hip Hop scene and the importance of Hip Hop’s American past. Thus, while some Hip Hoppers make an ideological break between American Hip Hop and Australian Hip Hop, suggesting that the Australian Hip Hop scene is no longer connected to the American Hip Hop scene, other fans maintain that the authenticity of the Australian Hip Hop scene is predicated on its relationship to American Hip Hop. I argue that accounts of globalisation that solely emphasise how cultural forms and practices are localised when they are appropriated cross-culturally may overlook the similarities and shared values that can connect geographically distant musical scenes or cultural forms. My findings suggest that researchers analysing the effects of globalisation need to be attentive to the diverse ways that cross-cultural appropriation is understood by the appropriators themselves.

In this chapter I also introduce a common theme that unites each of the chapters in this thesis; that Hip Hop is about ‘being true to yourself’. I illustrate that Anglo-Australian Hip Hoppers use this discourse to reject the argument that Whites cannot authentically appropriate Hip Hop (see also section 1.2 of this introduction). In chapter 3 I examine the discourse of ‘being true to yourself’ in more detail through a discussion of what is known as the ‘accent debate’ in Australian Hip Hop circles. This debate centres on whether or not Australian Hip Hop artists should rap in their ‘native’ or ‘Australian’ accent or assume an American accent when performing their rhymes. My analysis of

the accent debate further reveals the complex ways that ideas about authenticity are negotiated and transformed as Hip Hop culture is appropriated outside of the U.S.A. In this chapter I further examine how the discourse of ‘being true to yourself’ or ‘keeping it real’ is drawn upon by a range of Australian Hip Hoppers to authenticate their own practices and beliefs. I examine how these discourses operate in practice by exploring how Hip Hop enthusiasts define, ascribe, and perform, ‘realness’ or ‘truthfulness’ through their language use. I conclude that rapping in your ‘native’ accent is very much privileged in the Australian Hip Hop scene because it is defined as an act of ‘realness’.

In chapter 4 I build on debates about the ‘realness’ or ‘truthfulness’ of Hip Hop lyrics by switching my attention from the accents that Hip Hop lyrics are performed in to the content of the lyrics themselves. In this chapter I contend that Hip Hoppers understand Hip Hop as a more intensely ‘personal’ or ‘local’ musical form than other genres of music. I demonstrate that Australian Hip Hoppers privilege lyrics that they define as being culturally relevant or part of their own lived experience. Yet, despite the emphasis that Hip Hoppers place on the autobiographical ‘truth’ of Hip Hop lyrics, we must be careful not to oversimplify or essentialise the relationship between personal experience and authenticity. Hip Hoppers do not simply represent their own realities word for word in their lyrics. They do not write solely about their own lives, or reference only situations that they have experienced first hand. To do so would severely limit the thematic scope of their songs, the subject matter of their lyrics and the dynamism of their performances. This suggests that when Hip Hoppers assess the ‘truth’ of an artist’s lyrics they are not solely concerned with autobiographical veracity.

Therefore, I argue that Hip Hoppers make nuanced distinctions between fictional narratives that are deemed to be creative acts and fictional narratives that are viewed as calculating attempts to make money. They are critical of artists who elaborate or fabricate their life history in order to create a particular image and it is argued, to sell more records. Hip Hoppers are viewed as inauthentic when they are thought to be solely motivated by the ambition to make money. Distinctions between Hip Hoppers who are argued to be motivated by money and those whose actions are based on a “love” for Hip Hop form the basis of chapter 5. In this chapter I analyse the concept of ‘selling out’ through the examination of the case study of arguably the most successful Australian Hip Hop group to date, the Hilltop Hoods. I use the example of the Hilltop

Hoods to demonstrate that Hip Hop fans and artists are critical of people and organisations, such as major record labels, who they argue do not “love” Hip Hop and whose participation in Hip Hop is solely economic. Artists like the Hilltop Hoods who are very commercially successful have to work to demonstrate their commitment to Hip Hop and, therefore, their authenticity.

In chapter 6 I analyse a marketing campaign run by the Jays Jays brand to further examine how people who attempt to engender a connection between themselves and Hip Hop culture can be criticised by Hip Hop enthusiasts if they are considered to be ‘outsiders’ not committed to the future prosperity of the Hip Hop scene. I demonstrate that Hip Hoppers condemn individuals and organisations who do not ‘support’ the Hip Hop scene. Yet, as I will discuss, the issue of ‘support’ is a contentious one because some Hip Hoppers argue that when ‘support’ for Australian Hip Hop is not moderated it becomes destructive. I conclude the chapter by introducing debates about the value of a logo which I refer to as the ‘Support Australian Hip Hop Logo’. This logo, created by Australian record label Obese Records, instigated a number of discussions about how and indeed, if, Australians should ‘support’ Australian Hip Hop.

In the final chapter of this thesis, chapter 7, I contribute to the growing number of studies that explore the marginalisation of women in Hip Hop, both in Australia and internationally. I demonstrate that it is women that are most frequently evaluated as lacking commitment to Hip Hop culture and that these judgements are often based on assumptions about the ‘nature’ of women. In this thesis I illustrate that all Hip Hop enthusiasts have to work to imbue themselves with authenticity and to constitute themselves as Hip Hop insiders. In chapter 7 I contend that this task is especially difficult for women because Hip Hop, and in particular DJing, MCing, B-Boying/B-Girling and Graffiti Writing, are normalised as ‘male’ activities. I draw on interviews with three female Hip Hop enthusiasts to examine how women ‘experience and carve space within this male-dominated and often misogynistic environment’ (Macdonald 2002, p. 97). This chapter is an important critique of the common assertion that Hip Hop culture is egalitarian and that anyone who is interested in Hip Hop can participate equally.

In each chapter of this thesis I attempt to centre quotes from my participants in my analysis and to objectively represent their opinions. By engaging with how Hip Hop enthusiasts understand and define their own practices, I attempt to avoid the methodological deficiencies of some Hip Hop studies that privilege theory at the expense of field based research (Templeton 2003). In sections 1.5 and 1.6 of this thesis I explore the complexities of my methodological choices in more detail, reflecting on the strengths and weakness of ethnographic research and the limitations of ethnographic texts. I am mindful of the fact that written words are no substitution for lived experience and anthropological accounts of human life cannot be transparent windows onto the world (Machin 2002, p. 87). I hope that my account of the Adelaide and Melbourne Hip Hop scenes will be of particular relevance to people with a specific interest in Hip Hop. However, the central aim of this thesis is to address broader anthropological issues and provide insight into how culture is produced, re-produced and given meaning in an increasingly interconnected world.

1.2 The Global Spread of Hip Hop

As the referencing of an American Hip Hop CD (*Hip Hop Is Dead* 2006) by an Australian MC (Muph) demonstrates, Hip Hop is a mobile cultural form. Both academics and non-academics widely agree that Hip Hop originated in the South Bronx, U.S.A. in the early 1970s (Bennett 2000, p. 134).⁷ Since that time Hip Hop has spread far beyond its initial American foundations. Local Hip Hop scenes have developed in numerous countries around the world including; France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Greenland, South Korea, New Zealand, South Africa, the U.K, and, the focus of this study, Australia.⁸ These geographically dispersed Hip Hop communities are connected by transnational flows of information, products and people (Spady, Alim and Meghelli 2006, p. 11). Australian Hip Hoppers do not exist in cultural isolation; they compete in international Hip Hop competitions like Scribble Jam (a large Hip Hop event held annually in Cincinnati which ran from 1996 until 2008), they react when Australian releases receive reviews on websites like www.rapreviews.com and the majority of them consume Hip Hop music and other Hip Hop products from all around the world.

⁷ Debates about the origins of Hip Hop will be introduced and explored more critically in chapter 2 of this thesis.

⁸ This is not intended to be an all inclusive list.

Australian DJs, MCs, B-Boys/B-Girls and Graffiti Writers travel to different countries to meet with and work with other Hip Hoppers and they engage with Hip Hop fans and artists that visit Australia. For example, the aforementioned Hilltop Hoods and Adelaide Symphony Orchestra Show (HTH/ASO Show) featured not one but two international artists; British MC Mystro and American MC Okwerdz who have both rapped on Hilltop Hoods albums.⁹ The advent of technologies like the Internet means that these kinds of collaborations are no longer reliant on face to face interaction. It is therefore unsurprising that many Hip Hoppers in Australia identify as being part of a global collective of Hip Hop enthusiasts. They feel connected to what they colloquially refer to as the ‘Hip Hop Nation’, an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983) of Hip Hoppers that crosses geographical boundaries. However, Australian Hip Hoppers are also aware that their appropriation of Hip Hop is condemned by some Americans and, in particular, African-American scholars and Hip Hoppers.

For example, in the article ‘It’s a Black Thing: Hearing how Whites Can’t’, Allinson (1994) argues that ‘hip-hop lives and breathes as a Black thing in ways simply not open to white experience, white thought...the *world* of hip-hop is not and cannot be *our* domain’ (Allinson 1994, p. 438, original emphasis). When Allinson uses the phrase ‘our’ domain he is arguing that Hip Hop has meanings that a ‘non-Black, non-ghettoized listener’ cannot ‘hear’ (Allinson 1994, p. 453). While I do not suggest that all Australian Hip Hoppers have read works by authors such as Allinson (1994), they are acutely aware of these kinds of arguments. They are, after all, ‘the people who – through non-African heritage – were always bagged out for being into something that derived from black urban culture in the States’ (Pollard 2004, p. 8). As such, I argue that Australian Hip Hoppers have to work to imbue their appropriation of Hip Hop with authenticity. In this thesis I demonstrate that Anglo-Australian Hip Hoppers challenge the notion that Hip Hop cannot be their domain and discuss their attempts to figure out how Australian Hip Hop can fit into the ‘world of hip-hop’ (Allinson 1994, p. 438, emphasis removed) that Allinson describes.

⁹ Mystro and Okwerdz have both collaborated with Australian Hip Hop artists. Okwerdz is featured on the Hilltop Hoods album *The Hard Road: Restrung* (2007), which they recorded with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. He also does a guest verse on Hykoo’s album *The Crooked Unseen* (2006). Mystro released an album titled *Diggi Down Unda* (2006) which he produced while travelling around Australia. He has been featured on several Australian albums such as The Hilltop Hoods - *The Hard Road* (2006); Bliss N Eso - *Day of the Dog* (2006); and; Phrase - *Talk With Force* (2005).

Therefore, this thesis addresses several key questions concerning how Hip Hop should be constituted in Australia; Is Hip Hop in Australia different to Hip Hop elsewhere? Should Hip Hop culture be moulded to suit particular local circumstances? And if so, which aspects should be changed or retained? What happens when culture is ‘created, shaped, reworked and contested within and across national borders’ (Inglis 2005, p. 116)? These kinds of questions are illustrative of ongoing debates about the impacts of globalisation. In the following section I define globalisation and outline the now widely criticised view that globalisation is ‘swamping authentic cultures’ (Barber and Waterman 1995, p. 240). While early accounts of globalisation tended to view globalisation as a form of Cultural Imperialism, more recent studies have stressed the agency and the creativity involved in the global spread of cultural forms like Hip Hop.¹⁰ In the next section of this introduction I explore how the shift from the global homogenisation paradigm to the localisation paradigm has changed the study of Hip Hop.

1.3 Globalisation, Localisation and Authenticity:

The global diffusion of Hip Hop is a fitting example of globalisation, a term that refers to the ‘intensification of global interconnectedness’ (Inda and Rosaldo 2002, p. 2). Cultural channels that were previously closed by geography, ecology or active resistance are being pried open and transformed by the extension of social, economic and political relations across the globe (Appadurai 1996, p. 27). There can be no denying that globalisation is a real phenomenon, the extension of social, economic and political relations across the globe is occurring (Mann 2001, p. 1). However, globalisation is problematic to many because it is seen as an inherently uneven process, whereby goods and ideologies from the West and in particular, America, are beginning to replace local products and practices. From this perspective, globalisation is understood as a one-way cultural flow that is eroding cultural differences and making the world more uniform. This position, described by Howes (1996) as the paradigm of global homogenisation and by Hannerz (1989, p. 70) as ‘alarmism’, has been critiqued

¹⁰ However, Tomlinson indicates that to define the writings on Cultural Imperialism as a ‘thesis’ gives an artificial coherence to the body of literature which does not exist (Tomlinson 1991, p. 8). He states that the impression of a unified and coherent set of ideas invoked by the concept of a ‘Cultural Imperialism Thesis’ is a misnomer (ibid).

by theorists who contend that it oversimplifies the intricacies of globalisation (Howes 1996; Inglis 2005).

Hannerz (1989) contends that underlying this view of globalisation are '[e]stablished assumptions about cultural purity and authenticity' (Hannerz 1989, p. 71) that tend to view culture as something that can be lost and not gained. This viewpoint is highly prevalent in Australia where the appropriation of Hip Hop is often denigrated as a crude imitation of American Hip Hop or a form of cultural contamination (Maxwell 1994, p. 119). The production and consumption of Hip Hop in Australia is often represented in the mainstream media in terms of a moral panic about Americanisation (Maxwell 2003, p. 71). While these kinds of fears are abating, the view that Hip Hop is destroying 'local culture' still carries some weight in popular opinion. In academic circles, accounts of globalisation are increasingly demonstrating that it is flawed to reduce a whole series of diverse and potentially contradictory processes to a singular force (Inglis 2005, p. 111; Mann 2001). In order to avoid this kind of reduction, scholars like Inglis have problematised categories like 'Western culture' arguing for accounts of globalisation that recognise the heterogeneity of the West and the selectivity involved in cross-cultural consumption.

These developments have also been reflected in the study of Hip Hop. While the ubiquity of Hip Hop was once seen as evidence supporting the global homogenisation paradigm, many scholars have now rejected this model in favour of theories that emphasise how Hip Hop is 'glocalised' (Robertson 1995), 'hybridised', 'localised' or 'indigenised' when it is adopted by different groups of people in diverse contexts around the world. While each of these terms has a slightly different meaning, they are all designed to emphasise the 'active element' involved in the 'transfer of culture from one setting to another' (Brown 2006, p. 138). This emphasis reflects a shift from the global homogenisation paradigm to the creolisation paradigm (Howes 1996), a concept used to highlight how goods and practices can be transformed when they are utilised by people in different local contexts (ibid 1996, p. 5). Howes uses the term creolisation to describe this process but he also notes that it has been called 'localisation' (See Friedman 1990; Appadurai 1990 in Howes 1996) and 'domestication' (See Tobin 1992 in Howes 1996). In this thesis I use the term 'localisation' because it is often used in

studies of Hip Hop, and because I support Eriksen's (2007, p. 155) argument that a more restricted definition of the term creolisation is analytically helpful.

Many recent studies of Hip Hop outside of the U.S. have focused on the process of localisation, exploring how Hip Hop is imbued with new meaning or 'made and re-made' (Condry 2006, p. 2) when it is incorporated into new cultural settings. This area of research, described by Alim (2009, p. 3) as 'global Hip Hop studies' was codified in large part by the publication of Mitchell's 2001 edited volume *Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop Outside the USA*. As Mitchell (2001a) discusses in the text's introduction, *Global Noise* aimed to fill a void in the academic literature on Hip Hop, which at the time had rarely acknowledged the 'other roots hip-hop has developed outside the USA' (Mitchell 2001a, p. 2). This thesis builds on this growing body of work by examining how Hip Hop is given meaning in Australia, or as Maxwell (2001) eloquently phrases it; how '*that* thing' becomes '*our* thing' (Maxwell 2001, p. 260, original emphasis). My findings support the contention that Hip Hop has been localised by Australians. Australian Hip Hop is not the same as American Hip Hop, it has 'differentiated itself from the parent culture [American Hip Hop] and developed into its own distinct entity' (Arthur 2010, p. 82).

However, I argue that Hip Hoppers are divided about what these differentiations should entail. In his study of Hip Hop in Frankfurt, Germany and Newcastle, England, Bennett (2000) found that the localisation of Hip Hop was accompanied by 'fractious 'in-scene' debates' (Bennett 2000, p. 138). His research demonstrates that the process of localisation can cause conflicts as people debate when, why, how, and even if local factors should affect the formulation of authenticity. My research supports Bennett's argument that a number of distinctive variations in Hip Hop authenticity can exist within the same city or region (Bennett 2000, p. 150). In Australia, these variations centre on the extent to which Hip Hop should be localised and the implications that this has on the relationship between Hip Hop in Australia and Hip Hop globally. As the Hip Hop scene in Australia continues to expand, some Hip Hoppers have begun to listen exclusively to Australian Hip Hop music and to reject the importance of Hip Hop that is produced elsewhere.

For these enthusiasts, Hip Hop has become so localised, so distinctly Australian, that both the American origins of Hip Hop and the current practices of Hip Hop fans in other countries, including America, are no longer significant. This perspective angers other Hip Hoppers who argue that it is too insular:

I think that some Hip Hop fans have made it [Hip Hop] all too much about being Australian. It's almost too local if you know what I mean, I think it is very narrow-minded

(Rex, Author's Interview).

Rex clearly suggests that when Hip Hop becomes "too local" that it becomes inauthentic. This sentiment defies common depictions of localisation that posit it as the process by which foreign cultural forms become authentic. In many respects, localisation has become synonymous with authenticity; where to be local is to be genuine or real. This is what James Carrier, in a personal communication to Wilk, called the "'It's All Right, They've Appropriated It" school of thought' (Wilk 1995, p. 115). While scholars are now critical of the global homogenisation paradigm, there remains an underlying bias that equates authenticity with locality. These kinds of assumptions can collapse the highly nuanced ways that people make distinctions between what is local, global or foreign and how these categories are imbued with authenticity. As the above quote from Rex illustrates, in the Australian Hip Hop scene, locality does not necessarily denote authenticity, just as globality does not always imply inauthenticity. Accounts of localisation need to take into consideration that people can have different opinions about what localisation should involve and that they may view some aspects of localisation negatively. We cannot assume that there is a correlation between authenticity and locality. Authenticity must be judged 'according to local consequences not local origins' (Miller 1999, p.181).

1.4 Changing Times: The Development of Hip Hop in Australia:

The HTH/ASO Show that I described at the beginning of this thesis is representative of the growing popularity of Hip Hop in Australia. To date this show is the largest local Hip Hop show that has ever been held in Australia and the first and only time that an Australian Hip Hop group has collaborated with a symphony orchestra. Seven thousand two hundred tickets were sold which completely filled the venue. This is significant because Hip Hop groups in Australia rarely play 'stand alone' shows at

venues with such large audience capacity, let alone sell them out. By stand alone I mean shows that are not part of a broader musical festival or mixed genre event with several head lining acts. While the large number of people at the HTH/ASO Show is by no means a common occurrence, over the course of my research I did observe a marked rise in attendance numbers at Hip Hop shows. I conducted my fieldwork at a time of change for Hip Hop fans and artists in Australia.

During this time local Hip Hop artists were reaching new levels of commercial success and the number of people both consuming and producing Hip Hop dramatically increased. The growth in the size of the Australian Hip Hop scene during this period has also been noted by Arthur (2010, p. 95) in his study of Adelaide Hip Hop. While Hip Hop emerged in Australia in the early 1980s, it is only in recent years that locally produced Hip Hop music has ‘established a solid foothold in the mainstream Australian music market’ (Iveson 2006, p. 109). In 2010 local Hip Hop group Bliss and Eso’s album *Running On Air* (2010) debuted at the top of the Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA) Top 50 Album Charts, replacing Eminem’s album *Recovery* (2010).¹¹ Perhaps more importantly, this fact was deemed newsworthy and received coverage in a number of online media sources, one being an article published on the ABC website titled ‘Oz hip-hop knocks Eminem off charts’ (‘Oz hip-hop knocks Eminem off charts’ 2010, n.p.).¹² In the article MC Bliss argued that this milestone was significant because: “It’s been such a battle over the years to get home-grown hip-hop recognised by the industry at large, so it’s great it has finally come to fruition” (ibid.).

Milestones like the above success of Bliss and Eso are representative of the increasing public profile of Hip Hop that has led to growth in a number of areas, including but not limited to, an increase in the number of local Hip Hop performances and national tours, a rise in the number of international Hip Hop artists (predominantly American) touring Australia, and, higher attendance numbers at both local and international Hip Hop shows. These developments mean that Australian Hip Hop enthusiasts are now able to access a vast amount of locally-produced Hip Hop music. In the past, the low quantity

¹¹ It is also worth mentioning that Bliss and Eso’s album went to number one on the ‘Top 50 Albums chart’ which is a chart for all music genres not just the ‘Top 40 Urban Albums Charts’ category which includes Hip Hop music. Eminem is an extremely successful American Hip Hop artist.

¹² See also Purdie (2010) and Newton (2010).

of Australian releases and the lack of inter-state distribution and touring opportunities had meant chances to engage with Australian Hip Hop music were limited. As Mark, manager of an Adelaide Hip Hop group recalls, before these developments obtaining music from other states was a difficult process:

At the time if I wanted to hear a Trem twelve inch I needed to call Obese [Melbourne], if I wanted Koolism I needed to call Next Level [Sydney], if I wanted to hear Lazy Grey I needed to call Rocking Horse [Brisbane] for the tape.¹³ Music wasn't getting from state to state

(Mark, Author's Interview).

This problem spurred Mark and a fellow Hip Hop enthusiast to form a distribution company. While this company is no longer in operation, numerous new distribution companies have filled the void and Australian Hip Hop can now be found in many, if not all, entertainment stores and other generalist stores with music sections. Products that were formerly only available in specialty shops in each state, predominantly independent record stores or Hip Hop stores, can now be purchased almost anywhere. For example, the large entertainment retailer JB Hi-Fi has an Australian Hip Hop section in their Rundle Mall (City) and Westfield Marion (Oaklands Park) stores. While the convenience of accessing Hip Hop goods in-store is reflective of growing local demand, technological advances like the Internet are also playing a key role in making both information and Hip Hop merchandise (magazines, DVDs, books, clothing and music) much more readily accessible.

These developments are bringing new sets of challenges as Hip Hop reaches more and more people. While Hip Hoppers are happy that Hip Hop is finally getting what they see as its due respect, they are also fearful about what this growing success might mean. In his study of the American Hip Hop scene, McLeod (1999) found that the importance of authenticity intensified as Hip Hop's increasing popularity placed fans and artists in the contradictory situation of being 'inside a mainstream culture they had, in part, defined themselves as being against' (McLeod 1999, p. 136). This has also been the case in Australia where the mainstream acceptance of Hip Hop is viewed with mixed emotions: "It's a catch twenty two I guess, we all want it to grow but at the same time

¹³ A twelve inch is a vinyl record. Obese, Next Level and Rocking Horse are the names of retail stores that specialise in music. Trem, Koolism and Lazy Grey are Australian Hip Hop artists.

when it grows it can go further and further away from its roots” (Fred, Author’s Interview). Many Hip Hoppers are concerned that the meaning of Hip Hop culture is being changed by newer Hip Hoppers who, they argue, have an inadequate understanding of Hip Hop culture. These changes are viewed as negative misunderstandings that contradict their own definition of Hip Hop culture.

Furthermore, they are concerned that the increasing commercial appeal of Hip Hop music, and other cultural practices associated with Hip Hop such as B-Boying/B-Girling, will weaken the artistic integrity of the form. They point to recent campaigns by brands such as Jay Jays and Stay Fresh as examples of outsiders exploiting Hip Hop culture in order to make monetary gains. My research supports McLeod’s (1999) contention that discourses of authenticity are heightened when what is understood to be a culture is faced with assimilation. The growing popularity of Hip Hop is viewed by Hip Hop fans as a potential challenge to the authenticity of Australian Hip Hop and a threat to the future vitality of the Australian Hip Hop scene. As forces threaten to move Hip Hop “further and further away from its roots” (Fred, Author’s Interview), Hip Hoppers invoke the concept of authenticity in order to ‘draw clearly demarcated boundaries around their culture’ (McLeod 1999, p. 136). By focusing on authenticity Hip Hop fans and artists are able to play a role in regulating how Hip Hop should be defined and who can lay claim to the culture. Hip Hoppers use the concept of authenticity to make crucial delineations between insiders and outsiders or us and them.

These distinctions (alive/dead, authentic/inauthentic, insider/outsider) are not just assertions of equal difference, they are important claims to authority (Thornton 1996, p. 6). Given that the appropriation of Hip Hop by Anglo-Australians is often decried as inauthentic (see section 1.2) these claims are particularly salient. Stokes (1994) states that; ‘where political issues are at stake, questions of definition assume great importance’ (Stokes 1994, p. 9). In this context, the show of hands at the HTH/ASO Show can be understood as a powerful act of authentication. When Muph rallied the crowd at this show he was doing more than entertaining the crowd. He was making a statement about the vitality of Hip Hop culture in Australia. Nas argued that Hip Hop had “forgot where it started” (*Hip Hop Is Dead* 2006), that it had become inauthentic or dead. However, in doing so, he provided an opening for other Hip Hop artists and fans to critique him and emphasise their own Hip Hop legitimacy. By stressing the living

nature of Hip Hop, Muph was strategically positioning himself and the audience as insiders, as part of an authentic Hip Hop scene. The assemblage of seven thousand two hundred people at the Adelaide Entertainment Centre became the tangible evidence in the argument that Hip Hop was not dead, as illustrated by Muph's declaration that perhaps someone should "send Nas a photo". A boundary had been drawn.

1.5 Drawing Boundaries: Am I an Insider?

In the following section I reflect on my own fieldwork experiences in order to further explore how Hip Hoppers make distinctions between insiders and outsiders. I conducted my fieldwork at home, in my own country (Australia), primarily in my town of residence (Adelaide) and within a community that I considered myself a part of (the Hip Hop scene). My own interest in Hip Hop was sparked in my late teens when many of my high school friends and I became interested in several popular American Hip Hop songs and artists. This initial interest inspired further research, with the Internet in particular providing a plethora of information about numerous Hip Hop artists. When I moved away from my home town of Mildura to Adelaide to attend University my Hip Hop resources were dramatically increased. I began to frequent record stores and Hip Hop shops, buying my first records before I had a record player or turntable to listen to them. While my early interest in Hip Hop was very music-centric, my shift to Adelaide exposed me to a whole range of new influences; Graffiti on the train lines, B-Boys and B-Girls at events, and CDs, videos, DVDs and magazines that were not available in-store where I grew up.

For approximately nine years now my everyday life has involved listening to Hip Hop, attending Hip Hop gigs, browsing Hip Hop forums and engaging with Hip Hop in various other ways. However, I have never been an active producer of Hip Hop – I don't MC or Break Dance, I'm no DJ and I'm certainly not a Graffiti Writer. Does this mean that I am an insider or an outsider? Bennett contends that possible contradictions present in the insider/researcher role are often ignored by researchers who tend to 'display an uncritical acceptance of insider knowledge as an end in itself' (Bennett 2002, p. 461). This is something that I actively tried to avoid over the course of my research. I argue that by examining how I was received by members of the Adelaide and Melbourne Hip Hop scenes we can gain valuable insight into what is valued in

these scenes and, in particular, how distinctions between insiders and outsiders are conceptualised and constituted. When I began the fieldwork that informs this thesis I soon discovered that my lack of participation in the Hip Hop scene meant that I was viewed by many Hip Hoppers as inauthentic or as an outsider.

In his study of Hip Hop in Japan, Condry (1999) discovered that Japanese Hip Hop enthusiasts make clear distinctions between consumers and fans: ‘To buy is not enough to be a fan, one must actively engage with hip-hop culture, especially by finding one’s own expressive style’ (Condry 1999, p. 179). He goes on to state that the ultimate Japanese Hip Hop fan is also a producer, an idea that illustrates the important role that production plays in being recognised as a Hip Hop insider in the Japanese Hip Hop scene. My own research affirms that performing Hip Hop is highly privileged in the Australian Hip Hop scene. Hip Hoppers place an important emphasis on being directly involved in one of the Four Elements (see section 1.1) and this was a primary part of the attraction of the form for many people:

That’s the thing that is great about Hip Hop, if you like dancing you can B-Boy, if you’re artistic you can Graff [write Graffiti], if you are into word play then you can rap, if you’re musical you can produce [music]. There is something in it for everyone. Everyone can be involved

(Ty, Author’s Interview).

As part of his research into the Adelaide Hip Hop scene, Arthur (2010) learnt to DJ stating that it was ‘imperative that he learnt one of these practices [the Four Elements]’ (Arthur 2010, p. 66). While I agree that practicing one of the Four Elements can be a means for a researcher to gain additional insight into Hip Hop, I do not feel that it is an integral part of a methodologically sound study. As I discuss in this section, while not practicing one of the Four Elements was sometimes a barrier to my full inclusion in the Hip Hop scene, it was also a valuable opportunity for reflection. It enabled me to observe first-hand the importance that Hip Hoppers place on being actively involved in the production of Hip Hop culture. However, during my time in the field I also noted that as the Hip Hop scene in Australia continues to grow it is becoming much more common place for people to consume Hip Hop without personally practicing one of the Elements. This is weakening the connection between authenticity and production.

For example, during an informal conversation with one of my participants I was asked about my opinion on a Hip Hop record. I gave a fairly tentative answer because I was talking to an MC who I felt had more first-hand experience and, therefore, more knowledge than me. However, this MC rejected my hesitant claim that my opinion was less insightful because I was not an MC. He argued that my opinion was just as relevant regardless of the fact that I didn't MC, demonstrating that consumers are not necessarily less authentic Hip Hoppers than people who produce Hip Hop. Nonetheless, it is important to note that producing Hip Hop does play a key role in allowing Hip Hoppers to form social networks and connect with other Hip Hop enthusiasts. By entering MC Battles, rapping at parties, 'getting up' on trains and so on, people are able to meet fellow Hip Hop fans and artists.¹⁴ These meetings often lead to friendships and professional collaborations.

Despite my years of Hip Hop fandom, prior to my research I was not at all socially active in the local scene. By this, I mean that I often attended events with my own circle of friends and did not seek out new acquaintances. Because I did not produce Hip Hop (in any of the Elements not just musical production), my network of Hip Hop contacts was quite limited. This is not to say that it is impossible to be highly socially active in the local Hip Hop scene without practicing one of the Elements. I merely want to point out that in my own experience, producing Hip Hop can provide an important basis for the development of social relationships between Hip Hoppers. I observed that many people knew each other through their mutual interest in a particular Element, getting together to share information or equipment and to practice their chosen craft.

While I have a strong passion for Hip Hop and would describe myself as an avid Hip Hop fan, I discovered that because I was not known within Hip Hop circles, my insiderness was often questioned. The majority of people that I interviewed did not know who I was prior to me contacting them about my research. This meant that I did not have any authenticity in their eyes. As Peterson discusses, 'authenticity is a claim that is...either accepted or rejected by relevant others' (Peterson 2005, p. 1086). In effect, because people did not know who I was when I first entered the field, I had no

¹⁴ 'Getting up' is a term used to refer to writing Graffiti.

way of making any kind of claims to authenticity. The only details that people did know about me, that I was a researcher, were often perceived negatively. This is because the idea that ‘university and college teachers are often most interested in translating hip-hop’s cultural forms and practices into abstract jargon, building their academic careers on the backs of MCs, DJs, B-boys and graffiti artists’ (Forman 2004a, p. 4) is quite widespread. As I discuss in chapters 5 and 6, Hip Hoppers are highly suspicious and often overtly hostile towards people who they argue are interested in Hip Hop merely to make money and not for the “love” of Hip Hop.

This issue is discussed in detail by Maxwell (2005) in an article titled ‘When Worlds Collide: A Subculture Writes Back’. In this article Maxwell describes how a journalistic account of Hip Hop and his own Hip Hop scholarship were received by Hip Hop enthusiasts on various online forums. He recounts how he was challenged by Hip Hoppers who reacted incredulously to his admission that he did not ‘love’ Hip Hop. Even though Maxwell is an academic who does ‘profess a love for thinking about cultural and social phenomena’ (Maxwell 2005, p. 12) his lack of ‘love’ for Hip Hop meant that he was viewed as an outsider whose ‘right to write’ about Hip Hop was questioned (ibid). My own time in the field demonstrates that even when a researcher does have a self-professed ‘love’ for their object of study, as I do for Hip Hop, there is a dramatic difference between having an interest and a passion in a culture and being accepted as an insider. As Bennett discusses, researchers conducting work in areas where they believe they have insider knowledge need to carefully consider the nature of their field role, in particular, ‘the extent to which he/she is really considered to be an ‘insider’ by those who are being researched’ (Bennett 2002, pp. 463-464).

1.6 Respecting the Passion: Methods and Motivations:

It’s just my life...I just feel like it’s an extension of myself, it’s my only real outlet, if I didn’t have that, I don’t know, I think I’d just go crazy. It’s my form of expression I suppose. It’s all I really think about

(Alex, Author’s Interview).

Throughout my time in the field this is something I have heard many times, people speaking about their passion, their love for Hip Hop; how it drives them and inspires them. As a researcher whose job it has been to ‘study’ Hip Hop I have sometimes felt

like I have intruded on this passion. What right did I have to ‘examine’ Hip Hop and how could I adequately represent that passion in a thesis? Perhaps more to the point, how could I hope to tell the people who ‘eat, sleep and breathe Hip Hop’ anything about it?¹⁵ These concerns are reflective of questions which strike at the very core of what anthropology is and how it should be practiced. My anxieties about researching and representing Hip Hop culture are indicative of broader methodological and theoretical debates about the nature of anthropology. What should anthropologists study and how should they go about it?

When I began my research I knew that many people in the Hip Hop community felt a strong sense of animosity towards institutions like the media who they believed often printed shallow, ill researched and sometimes patronising accounts of Hip Hop culture. Therefore, I wanted to give Hip Hoppers a voice, to create an account of Hip Hop culture that they would approve of. I thought that I would be able to achieve this aim if I was rigorous enough and if I utilised a writing style that was accessible and that incorporated the thoughts and actions of my participants. However, I failed to take into consideration the diversity of Hip Hoppers and my own privileged position as a researcher. While I still hope that my thesis represents the views and the concerns of Hip Hoppers, I am highly aware of my role as the author of this text. I have tried to centre the voices of my participants in this text by using extensive quotes and descriptive prose. However, the use of these devices does not overcome the fact that I have chosen what to quote and what not to quote, just as I decided who to attempt to interview and what questions to ask. It is clear that a written thesis has certain limitations.

These limitations were explored in the text *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus eds 1986) and are highlighted by Hastrup and Hervik (1994) who state: ‘If our aim were solely to let the natives speak for themselves quantities of tape recorders would do the trick’ (Hastrup and Hervik 1994, p. 5). This thesis is not a recorded interview or a Hip Hop gig. Nonetheless, it is directly informed by what Hip Hop fans and artists in Adelaide and Melbourne said and did. Throughout this thesis I have tried to represent

¹⁵ This is a common phrase that Hip Hoppers use to express their commitment to Hip Hop (See also Maxwell 2003).

and to acknowledge the passion of these Hip Hoppers. In her study of Graffiti Writing Macdonald (2001) notes that:

over and over I meet writers [Graffiti Writers] and every time I am struck by the intensity of feeling they have for graffiti and the massively important place it has in their lives

(Macdonald 2001, p. 6).

This overwhelming passion for and dedication to Hip Hop culture is sometimes left out of academic accounts and can result in rather flat depictions that overlook the enjoyment involved in spitting rhymes, scratching rhythms, throwing up a tag, throwing your body into the beat or simply nodding your head to the bass line of a track. I am aware that the restraints and formalities of an academic thesis will mean that some sections of this thesis are not riveting reading for Hip Hop fans. There are some parts of this thesis that Hip Hoppers will want to know more about, and others that they may not be interested in. Furthermore, not every Hip Hop producer or fan will agree with every view that is represented here. Hip Hop enthusiasts are not a homogenous group with identical opinions and there will be times in this thesis where I give space to ideas, practices and beliefs that some fans will reject as irrelevant, that do not fit into their own understanding of Hip Hop.¹⁶ Throughout my research and the writing of this thesis it has been my aim to respect each of these differing views, and the passion for Hip Hop that lies behind them.

¹⁶ This was also experienced by Maxwell (2003) who was criticised by some of his informants for writing about particular aspects of Hip Hop.

Chapter 2

Contested Origins: Defining Hip Hop Culture in Australia:

You've gotta know where it [Hip Hop] came from, to know where you're at, and pay respect to the people who came before you. So you can actually bring something to it

(Brian, Author's Interview).

In this chapter I explore how 'authenticity is structured, defined and employed' (Stokes 1994, p. 7) by Australian Hip Hoppers through an examination of debates about the origins and traditions that constitute Hip Hop culture. The vast majority of my informants told me that it was important to know about Hip Hop's history. They argue that it is only by learning about the origins of the form that people can truly understand what Hip Hop means. By educating themselves about the history of Hip Hop culture, they believe that they more fully appreciate and understand not only the current state of the Hip Hop scene but the future possibilities.

The old saying, there's no future without a past, if you're not aware of what's happened in the past you can't build from that

(Fred, Author's Interview).

But what aspects of the 'past' are important? Examining this question in the Australian context is particularly revealing because of Hip Hop's status as a foreign cultural import. Hip Hop's 'history' did not begin in Australia but can be traced back to the South Bronx, New York City, where a series of events, influences and styles coalesced to form what we now call 'Hip Hop'.¹⁷ What then is the relationship between Hip Hop's American history and the current Australian Hip Hop scene? Do Australians make connections between their own contemporary practices and Hip Hop's American roots? Before I can begin to answer these questions I need to provide some more information about how Australians were first exposed to Hip Hop and the development of the Hip Hop scene in Australia. The aim of this section is not to provide an

¹⁷ I acknowledge that any historical account of the origins of a complex cultural movement may be open to interpretation and debate. However, as Bennett (2000, p. 134) discusses, there is generally agreement among academics and non-academics alike that Hip Hop originated in the 1970s in the South Bronx.

exhaustive and definitive history of Australian Hip Hop but rather to give some key contextual details that will inform my later analysis.

2.1 “This is it!”: Hip Hop in Australia:¹⁸

There will always be speculation involved in tracing the arrival of Hip Hop in Australia. This is because information, in this case the styles and sounds of Hip Hop, has an amazing ability to spread in the most unlikely and untraceable ways. There is always going to be a level of ambiguity involved in discussing precise dates and orders of historical events and their respective importance. It is important to acknowledge that personal experiences of Hip Hop can be vastly different. That said, this does not mean that we cannot uncover certain trends and patterns and establish certain facts. Firstly, it is impossible that Hip Hop in Australia predates American Hip Hop, and unlikely that much Hip Hop culture was consumed or produced by Australian in the very early years of its American development. This means that Hip Hop’s earliest presence in Australia dates to the mid 1970s. Like Hip Hop in many other countries outside of America, Australians were introduced to Hip Hop en masse in the early 1980s through various media (films; music and music video clips; books; and; television and newspaper coverage) that were explicitly about or referenced Hip Hop. The context and the length of the coverage seemed to be un-important, even the smallest glimpse of B-Boying/B-Girling, Graffiti Writing, MCing or DJing was enough to capture Australian imaginations.

Films such as *Wild Style* (1983), *Flash Dance* (1983) *Style Wars* (1983) and *Beat Street* (1984); the books *Subway Art* (Cooper and Chalfant 1984) and the follow up *Spray Can Art* (Chalfant and Prigoff 1987); and music such as Malcolm McLaren’s track ‘Buffalo Girls’, featured on the album *Duck Rock* (1983), and Grand Master Flash and the Furious Five’s track ‘The Message’, on the album of the same name (*The Message* 1982) are all cited by Australian Hip Hop enthusiasts as their first introduction to Hip Hop culture.¹⁹ Tracking the exact arrival of these media products in Australia is

¹⁸ “This is it!” is an iconic line from the documentary film *Style Wars* (1983) which is discussed in this section. It captures a moment of exhilaration when New York Graffiti Writers wait for a Graffiti covered train to approach.

¹⁹ *Spray Can Art* (1987) featured Graffiti from around the world including Sydney, illustrating how quickly the form spread after the publication of *Subway Art* (1984) which documented New York Graffiti.

difficult. I have been unable to discover Australian release dates for some of these titles, or an Australian edition of *Subway Art* (Cooper and Chalfant 1984). Similarly, while it is easy to establish when a music track or album was released or recorded, it is near impossible to discover exactly when and how they were played, or aired in the case of music video clips, in Australia. *Style Wars* (1983) for example was actually not released on video cassette until the mid 1990s and then later on DVD ('Style Wars DVD Press Kit' 2004, p. 15). It originally aired in America in a one hour cut down format on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in January 1984 (ibid, p. 2). From here the bootlegging began and it was only through illegal copying that the film spread.²⁰

Nonetheless, it is clear that mediated popular culture forms played a key role in the development of Hip Hop in Australia. The power of these mediums is explored in more detail by Maxwell (2003) who outlines how the 'Buffalo Girls' music video clip became part of what he calls the 'standard narrative' (Maxwell 2003, p. 50) of Hip Hop in Sydney. Considered by many to be musically trivial, it was the B-Boying and Graffiti Writing featured in the film clip that captivated many Australians. Maxwell discusses how even Hip Hoppers who would have been three years old when the clip was first released can 'recall' this moment (Maxwell 2003, p. 57). Maxwell does not question whether each person that he spoke to viewed 'Buffalo Girls' and then fell in love with Hip Hop. He explains that it is not his aim to dispel or discredit this 'standard narrative', instead arguing that it is important to 'note and assess the discursive fact that the clip has come to stand for a moment of origin' (Maxwell 2003, p. 59). Likewise, my aim here is not to try and discover the 'true' history of Hip Hop and to expose 'false' histories, but to reflect on how particular discourses are authenticated and given authority:

An accepted or "instituted", history becomes an orthodoxy, the history, which can be used to define generic boundaries, excluding some texts, practices, or agents, while including others. This is an ongoing process, negotiated in a developing field of flux, characterised by change and overdetermined by a number of discourses and interests

(Maxwell 2003, p. 57).

²⁰ I did not find any evidence that *Style Wars* was screened on Australian television in the 1980s but have heard that it was aired in New Zealand. I could not find any formal documentation of this, but I was told that it was from New Zealand that taped copies came to Australia and that they were very highly prized objects.

As I discussed in the introduction, questions about how the history, traditions, and origins of Hip Hop should be conceptualised and expressed in Australia are being heightened by the growing popularity of Australian Hip Hop. In this chapter I explore how questions about authenticity are played out in debates about the history and origins of Hip Hop. I begin by defining the term authenticity in more detail.

2.2 Defining Authenticity:

Thornton states that ‘authenticity is arguably the most important value ascribed to popular music. It is found in different kinds of music by diverse musicians, critics and fans, but it is rarely analyzed and is persistently mystified’ (Thornton 1996, p. 26). This quote illustrates the problems faced when we use the concept of authenticity, namely, that authenticity is a highly ambiguous term that is attributed by numerous individuals and groups to diverse cultural forms and cultural practices. Thus, as Moore (2002, p. 210) points out, whether or not something is authentic is highly dependent upon who ‘we’ are. In this thesis I stress the culturally constructed nature of authenticity, arguing that what is authentic is ‘socially agreed-upon’ (Harrison 2008, p. 1785). As discussed in my introduction, the aim of my research is to examine how Hip Hop fans and artists in Australia construct, contest, and define these ‘socially agreed-upon authentic standards’ (ibid). Like Grazian (2004, p. 45), I contend that people ‘frequently disagree on what specific kinds of symbols connote or suggest authenticity’.

However, I dispute Grazian’s claim that the search for authenticity can never be resolved because it masks a ‘hollow and empty core that resides at its center’ (Grazian 2004, p. 46). This argument overlooks how particular groups of people naturalise and universalise their own understandings of authenticity. The Hip Hoppers that I interviewed and engaged with were not seeking authenticity. They located authenticity in specific practices and beliefs and their actions affirmed these understandings. Therefore, I support Thornton’s (1996) contention that authenticity is not an inherent property of some objects and practices, but it is a ‘cultural value anchored in concrete, historical practices of production and consumption’ (Thornton 1996, p. 5). In her ethnography *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, Thornton contends that new forms of authenticity can arise as technological, economic and legal

developments lead to the formation of new ‘aesthetics and judgements of value’ (Thornton 1996, p. 4).

Thornton charts these developments in the context of dance music in terms of a shift from live music cultures to ‘disc cultures’. She argues that for many years the main site of musical authenticity has been the live performance and outlines how musicians and music unions have attempted to propagate the view that recorded music is dead music (Thornton, 1996, p. 42). Thornton notes that when modes of musical production and consumption change, these changes are often decried as challenging the authenticity of the music. However, over time such developments can alter the ways that authenticity is defined, attributed and expressed. Thus, when the recording studio came to prominence, producers began to edit recordings and the introduction of new instruments such as synthesizers and samplers meant that recordings no longer merely reproduced or represented actual live performances but became sources of original musical creation themselves (Thornton 1996, p. 27). This demonstrates that what is considered to be authentic is always culturally and historically specific.

Connell and Gibson (2003) also stress the culturally constructed nature of authenticity, however, they indicate that authenticity in music has often been constructed in terms of assumptions about the moment of commodification; ‘when indigenous or folk musical traditions came into contact with wider musical economies’ (Connell and Gibson 2003, p. 28). They argue against the reduction of authenticity to notions of ‘purity’ and ‘tradition’ stating that indigenous people have always drawn in alien elements of culture and were rarely completely culturally isolated (ibid, p. 27). As such, it is impossible to identify a singular moment when, through the incorporation of outside elements, music becomes inauthentic. Connell and Gibson (2003) contend that authenticity can be better understood by examining how music is valued, and the ‘shifts in value that occur as music is perceived to have been disembedded from its social and cultural origins’ (Connell and Gibson 2003, p. 28). This framework allows us to identify the values that lie behind different conceptions of authenticity. In the following section I explore the values that inform different conceptions of authenticity in the Australian Hip Hop scene. I draw on Bennett (2000) to argue that debates about authenticity often centre on the issue of race, in particular, whether or not the cultural significance of Hip Hop is

based on its dialogue with African-American youth, or more broadly, the displaced people of African origin who make up the African diaspora (Bennett 2000, p. 133).

2.3 Hip Hop, Authenticity and Race:

As Templeton (2003) discusses, ‘the question of whether or not race is (or should be) a factor in hip hop practices, as well as the consideration of the authentic within the context of hip hop’s global consumption, have generated polarizing debates among hip hop fans as well as scholars’ (Templeton 2003, p. 241). For many Hip Hop fans and scholars, Hip Hop’s ‘only authentic cultural resonance is with the experience of inner-city African-Americans’ (Bennett 2000, p. 135). This encapsulates the idea that Hip Hop is a form that rightfully belongs to the urban poor and the ethnically oppressed. Yet, the above quote only recognises African-American involvement in the production of Hip Hop. Authors such as Lipsitz (1994) and Decker (1994) have questioned the validity of such arguments emphasizing the centrality of the African-Diaspora to the ‘cultural dialogue of hip hop’ (ibid, p. 136). However, this work still tends to depict Hip Hop as an essentially ‘Black’ cultural form (ibid). This is a view that is quite prevalent, the practice of MCing is often traced back to story-telling African griots (Poschardt 1998, pp. 151-152) and rapper Wise Intelligent even suggests that ‘the potency of melanin in the Black man makes him naturally rhythmic...this is blood’ (Malone 2000, n.p.).

This discourse excludes the involvement of Latino and White youth in Hip Hop’s development and has the potential to close off the significance of Hip Hop outside of African and African-American contexts (Bennett 2000, p. 135).²¹ The effects of this discourse are demonstrated by DJ and member of the Cold Crush Brothers, Charlie Chase, who told Flores (2000) that because he was Hispanic he was not accepted in rap: ‘Because to them it’s a Black thing and something that’s from their roots and shit’ (Chase in Flores 2000, p. 120). Flores (2000) highlights the contribution of Latinos to the formation of Hip Hop arguing that the reluctance to fully acknowledge this

²¹ This is also a contentious issue. While Mitchell (1996; 2003) argues that the beginnings of Hip Hop were multicultural, Poschardt (1998) definitely states that ‘No whites were present at the birth of hip-hop’ (Poschardt 1998, p. 203). Hinds (2002) a former editor of the American Hip Hop magazine *The Source*, argues that White youth were there at Hip Hop’s beginnings but suggests that their participation didn’t extend beyond spectatorship. However, he does state that ‘in the myth making about hip-hop’s origins its early racial makeup too often get homogenized as solely African-American’ (Hinds 2002, p. 48).

contribution and the slow acceptance of Spanish rhymes is primarily a result of the ‘marketing of rap, through the eighties, as a strictly African American style with a characteristically Afrocentric message’ (Flores 2000, p. 128).

Baldwin (2004) indicates that it was only as Hip Hop became more popular that ‘the nation-conscious Afrocentric genre grew’ (Baldwin 2004, p. 162). He understands this increase in Afrocentricity as a language that allowed African-Americans to maintain borders around Hip Hop’s definition during its growth (Baldwin 2004, p. 163). The rapid expansion of a musical scene beyond small-scale groups can result in the appropriation of a formerly contained musical style by others who do not necessarily share the same values (O’Connor 2002, p. 227). The emphasis on Hip Hop as a strictly African-American or Black form can be seen as a reaction to the mainstream expansion of the culture, as a form of defense against possible ‘misreadings’ of the culture by outsiders. This view is typified by this remark from Potter who states: ‘there is always a danger that it [Hip Hop] will be appropriated in such a way that its histories are obscured and its messages replaced by others’ (Potter 1995, p. 146). As Hip Hop becomes increasingly global, the values that Hip Hop represents; or the ‘histories’ and ‘messages’ of Hip Hop; become increasingly contested.

These kinds of contestations are illustrated in Fink’s (2006) study of Hip Hop in Japan. Fink outlines how an article published in *The Japan Times* titled ‘Who Copped My Hip Hop’ ignited discussion about the ‘values’ of Hip Hop on the hiphopmusic.com message board (Fink 2006, p. 203). The author of the article Eric Prideaux stopped Japanese youth in the Shibuya district wearing Hip Hop gear and asked them about Malcolm X. His rationale for doing this was to discover if an appreciation for Hip Hop was accompanied by an increased awareness of Black America. Prideaux, an African-American living in Japan, felt that Hip Hop culture had been misappropriated by Japanese youth. The article sparked intense debate on the Hiphopmusic.com message board about the relationship between authenticity, ethnicity and nationality. As Fink (2006) points out, these debates were not simply arguments between American and Japanese Hip Hop fans but were illustrative of the diverse ways that Hip Hop is conceptualised and understood within and across both scenes (Fink 2006, p. 204). Thus, while some American Hip Hop fans were critical of Prideaux for contending that

Hip Hop was an exclusively African-American form, others were supportive of this claim.

In her analysis of these debates, Fink argues that Hip Hop is a 'site of cultural negotiations' (Fink 2006, p. 205) and that fans will continue to discuss and debate the connection between ethnicity and authenticity. She concludes that as authenticity is globalised, what is authentic will become relative to each Hip Hop scene or *genba*, a Japanese term for 'actual site' (Fink 2006 pp. 201, 206). While I agree with Fink's argument that authenticity is becoming increasingly localised, I contend that localisation is also being resisted by some Hip Hoppers who argue that Hip Hop can become too localised. In these cases, the localisation of Hip Hop is viewed as a distortion of a formerly 'authentic' tradition.

2.4 Problematising Localisation:

In an article about indigenous modernities Robbins (2001) argues that anthropologists have tended to over-emphasise the transformative power of localisation, suggesting that 'no matter what modernity is to begin with...once cooked in the heat of local fires it will have lost its shape to a significant extent and become something indigenous and distinctive' (Robbins 2001, p. 901) Robbins is critical of the assertion that 'when local cultures cut modernity to fit their own dimensions they can make it assume almost any form they like', arguing that modernity has some content and that scholars need to 'give this content some play' (ibid 2001, pp. 901-902). Pennycook and Mitchell (2009) take up this argument and apply it to the appropriation of Hip Hop, stating that 'the struggle for localisation is one that has to deal with the content of what is being localised' (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009, p. 31). I argue that Hip Hop fans in Australia have to work to overcome the common perception that Hip Hop is an authentically African-American or Black cultural form.

This perception comes from both within the Australian Hip Hop scene and from outside it. Australian Hip Hoppers are frequently exposed to the view that 'Whites' are inauthentically Hip Hop, through various local and international media sources and their engagement with Hip Hoppers from other countries. For example, one participant reported being directly attacked on the forum section of website www.allhiphop.com

for being a White MC who had “stolen” Hip Hop. Even though Hip Hop has been adopted in numerous contexts and countries across the globe, many fans and artists still understand Hip Hop as an African-American culture (Hess 2005, p. 372). This point is also made by Maxwell (2003) in his study of Hip Hop in Sydney in the 1990s. Maxwell contends that there is a discontinuity between the standard narrative of African-American Hip Hop and the experience of young people in Australia. In order to keep Hip Hop alive, or in Maxwell’s words, to ‘cultivate’ (Maxwell 2003, p. 43) Hip Hop culture, these discontinuities must be negotiated by Australian Hip Hoppers.

In their research Pennycook and Mitchell (2009) provide an apt example of these kinds of negotiations. They discuss how Indigenous Australian Wire MC and Somali-Canadian MC K’Naan give life to Hip Hop by revising the ‘dominant narrative of Black American exclusive ownership of Hip Hop and construct[ing] themselves as artists who have an equal right to claim Hip Hop’ (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009, p. 31). Their article, ‘Hip Hop as Dusty Foot Philosophy: Engaging Locality’, demonstrates the dangers of entering the field with a-priori conceptions about localisation. In the article they argue that precisely what it means for Hip Hop to become localised has been relatively under-theorised. They suggest that the common depiction of localisation as a linear process, whereby cultural forms like Hip Hop emanate from one source and are localised when they are adopted elsewhere, does not fully account for the complexities of appropriation. Through interviews with Wire MC and MC K’Naan, they illustrate how Hip Hop fans are able to construct narratives that challenge the depiction of the South Bronx, U.S.A, as the source of Hip Hop culture, instead positing the origins of Hip Hop culture within already existing local traditions (Alim 2009).

For Wire MC and MC K’Naan Hip Hop does not become localised, but rather, ‘*it has always been local*’ (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009, p. 30, original emphasis). Wire MC and MC K’Naan construct Hip Hop as an extension of Blackness or Africanness, and in doing so, constitute Hip Hop as a part of indigenous tradition: ‘Hip Hop is a part of Aboriginal culture, I think it always has been’ (Wire MC in Pennycook and Mitchell 2009, p. 30). This is not to suggest that Hip Hop was invented by Indigenous Australians, but to explore how ‘Hip Hop is seen to have a direct link back to traditional ways of singing, dancing and telling stories’ (ibid). This example demonstrates that the origins of Hip Hop are not stable, but are constantly being re-worked as people struggle

to authenticate their own cultural practices and beliefs. Culture and tradition are not unchanging concepts that are handed up from the past; they are historically and socially constructed for contemporary purposes (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983; Hanson 1989, p. 890). This kind of cultural invention is not completely arbitrary, as Lindstrom (2008) discusses in a review of debates about *kastom* in Melanesia, ‘cultural invention must play with what already exists, and makes sense’ (Lindstrom 2008, p. 171).

It may seem like an unlikely fit but the analysis of *kastom* in Melanesia can help us to understand the political functions of ‘custom’ ‘history’, ‘tradition’ and ‘origins’ in the Australian Hip Hop scene. The Bislama (Vanuatu Pidgin English) term for custom is *kastom*, a phrase that has been subject to re-evaluation and critique as theorists and the ni-Vanuatu (indigenous citizens) explore how the term is given meaning and utilised in Vanuatu (Lindstrom 2008, p. 161; Cummings 2008, p. 133). While *kastom* is often invoked as timeless and static, Cummings (2008) argues that it is a potent political resource that can be subject to negotiation (Cummings 2008, pp. 139-144). Similarly, Tonkinson defines *kastom* as ‘a body of beliefs, orientations and practices that, while inviting perceptions of continuity, stability and shared identity, possess an inherent potential for manipulation and contestation’ (Tonkinson 2000, p. 170). This definition demonstrates that ‘tradition’ can be harnessed as a marker of political identity (Lindstrom 2008, p. 166). The classification of practices and beliefs as the continuation of tradition, or conversely as the corruption of tradition can be a powerful authenticating strategy.

Debates about Hip Hop authenticity and race often centre on the issue of origins (Harrison 2009, p. 95). The ‘origins’ of Hip Hop are frequently used by both Hip Hop scholars and members of Hip Hop scenes as a ‘measure for assessing the legitimacy of its contemporary manifestations’ (ibid). As I outlined above, Wire MC and MC K’Naan define Hip Hop as a part of indigenous tradition and in doing so, they claim Hip Hop as their own. For Wire MC, Hip Hop is a continuation of Australian Aboriginal beliefs and practices: ‘...it was a natural evolution for me to move into Hip Hop and continue the corroborèè’ (Wire MC in Pennycook and Mitchell 2009, p. 35). Similarly, MC K’Naan connects Hip Hop to traditional African practices arguing that Hip Hop is an originally African form that has been Americanised; ‘...in Africa, you will find an ancient form of Hip Hop’ (MC K’Naan in Pennycook and Mitchell, p. 34).

In his study of Nigerian Hip Hop Omoniyi (2009) also examines how particular features of Hip Hop are understood by some West Africans as elements of ‘long-standing African oral tradition’ (Omoniyi 2009, pp. 116-117). He calls this the ‘Boomerang Hypothesis’ (ibid) in order to emphasise the movement of Hip Hop from Africa to America and back ‘home’ again. My own research informants were predominantly Anglo-Australians who did not link Hip Hop to pre-existing local traditions and therefore, did not understand Hip Hop as already local or as a ‘Boomerang’ returning home. Their claim to Hip Hop was made on very different grounds. These differences suggest that race plays a key role in determining Hip Hop ideologies. In the following section I outline how Anglo-Australian Hip Hop fans and artists construct narratives that position themselves as part of an authentic Hip Hop tradition.

2.5 Claiming Hip Hop: Being True to Yourself:

As noted above, the majority of my research participants were Anglo-Australians. The racial bias of my research informants was partly driven by my own research interests and was also influenced by the serendipities of fieldwork and the racial make-up of the Adelaide Hip Hop scene where I conducted most of my fieldwork.²² When I designed this research project I did so in light of recent criticisms of the field of Hip Hop studies that argued that accounts of Hip Hop had tended to focus on the adoption of Hip Hop by marginalised groups and that this emphasis did not reflect the diverse range of people who participated in Hip Hop culture (Connor 2003). In particular, Connor (2003) argued that scholars have tended to ignore ‘more privileged practitioners’ (Connor 2003, p. 48) and that this was reflective of an ‘assumption that it is only under conditions of economic, political and social oppression that appropriated forms of hip hop can truly be considered authentic’ (ibid). My time in the field demonstrated that members of the Australian Hip Hop scene are predominantly middle-class White males (see chapter 7 for a discussion of this gender imbalance).

Despite the growing number of studies that explore the relationship between race and authenticity in different national Hip Hop scenes such as Japan (Cornyetz 1994; Condry

²² While I acknowledge concerns by authors such as Fernandes (2003) that the adoption of Hip Hop by Indigenous Australians has not been adequately examined by researchers, my own study does not fill this void. This is an area for important future research which is already being addressed by several scholars (Stavrias 2005; Mitchell 2006a, 2006b; Pennycook and Mitchell 2009; White 2009; Morgan and Warren 2011).

2006). Cuba (Fernandes 2003), Brazil (Pardue 2008) and America (Harrison 2009; Sharma 2010), there are relatively few sociological or anthropological accounts of how White Hip Hop fans and artists across the globe understand their appropriation of Hip Hop. The methodological weakness of many studies of White Hip Hop production and consumption has limited their insightfulness. For example, Bakari Kitwana's *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop: Wankstas, Wiggers, Wannabes, and the New Reality of Race in America* (2005) is a journalistic account that does draw on interviews with White youth but suffers from a lack of methodological rigour. Similarly, the persuasiveness of Yousman's article 'Blackophilia and Blackophobia: White Youth, the Consumption of Rap Music and White Supremacy' is constrained by a lack of supporting evidence. As he states in his conclusion: 'To fully explore this issue further would require detailed interview, survey, and ethnographic research with White youth' (Yousman 2003, p. 389).

One of the first full length texts to examine the consumption and production of Hip Hop by White youth was Maxwell's book *Phat Beats, Dope Rhymes: Hip Hop Down Under Comin' Upper* (2003). This book is an insightful account of how Hip Hop fans and artists in Sydney, Australia 'justified and sustained their claim to Hip Hopness' (Maxwell 2003, p. X). Maxwell contends that the 'mismatches' between discourses of ethnicity found in African-American Hip Hop and the reality of the ethnic make-up of Sydney forms an:

absolutely critical axis for analysis, not simply to weigh the respective scenes, or imaginaries, against each other with a view to discussing "authenticity" or "culture" in a reified sense, but because these disjunctions are experienced as impediments (or points of contact, to be sure) to processes of identification, requiring of interpretation and reconciliation

(ibid, p. 63).

Using the example of Vanilla Ice (a White rapper whom for many epitomises imitation at its worst), Maxwell argues that White Hip Hop enthusiasts need to come up with an authenticating trope which can account for Vanilla Ice's fakeness but doesn't exclude themselves, also White, from Hip Hop authenticity. He argues that the solution is to:

identify an authenticity deriving not from color or race, but from a notion of truthfulness to one's self. It turns out that it is okay to be white and into Hip Hop as long as you don't *misrepresent* who you are, as long as you do not simulate blackness

(Maxwell 2003, p. 161, original emphasis).

Arthur (2006) expands this argument to include nationality stating that:

In the Australian Hip Hop scene there is not a problem with being "white" and Australian as long as you do not misrepresent who you are, and simulate blackness, or where you are from and simulate Americanness

(Arthur 2006, p. 9).

Both of these quotes illustrate that for Australian Hip Hop fans, the essence of Hip Hop is being natural or being 'yourself'. To be authentically Hip Hop is not predicated on 'Blackness' but rather on representing 'who you are' (ibid) and 'where you are from' (ibid). Therefore, many Australian Hip Hop fans are dismissive of Australians who they describe as merely imitating American Hip Hop, and in particular, Blackness (Maxwell 2003; see also Pennycook 2010; Arthur 2010).

The emphasis that White Hip Hoppers place on being 'yourself' is also explored by Harkness (2010) in his account of White Hip Hoppers in the Chicago Hip Hop scene. Harkness draws on Maxwell (2003) to argue that White rappers in Chicago claim authenticity by positioning themselves as sincere and honest (Harkness 2010, p. 77). He states that White Hip Hoppers can maintain credibility by 'Keeping it Real' and not pretending to be anything other than what they are (ibid). This position is articulated by rapper Junior X who states that when he raps he 'never talk[s] about anything I don't know about' (Junior X in Harkness 2010, p. 76). In chapters 3 and 4 I explore how Australian Hip Hoppers employ the discourse of 'keeping it real' through a more detailed analysis of their language use and the lyrical themes that Hip Hoppers define as authentic. Harkness states that the question that fueled his research was 'How do White rappers create and maintain authenticity when they are clearly inauthentic by the standards of hip-hop?' (ibid).

By framing the relationship between authenticity and Hip Hop in this way, Harkness fails to examine how the 'standards of hip-hop' (ibid) can be shaped and re-shaped by

White Hip Hoppers. While Harkness contends that White Hip Hoppers are ‘clearly inauthentic’ by the standards of Hip Hop, he does not adequately explore how these standards are constituted and whose standards they are. These ‘standards’ simply do not apply to some Australian Hip Hoppers who are re-defining what Hip Hop means in the Australian context. For these fans and artists, Hip Hop is not an authentically Black cultural form, it is a national cultural form. According to these Hip Hop enthusiasts ‘being true to yourself’ means representing a distinctly Australian mode of Hip Hop, with its own history and traditions:

There has to come a time when it’s all about Australian Hip Hop, well it is for me anyway. When I talk about the history of Hip Hop I am talking about the Australian History. This does not mean that I don’t acknowledge that Hip Hop didn’t start out here, but it does mean that I am thinking about where Hip Hop is going. We’re making our own traditions

(AJ, Author’s Interview).

Why should we care about America anymore? Maybe people will think that is misguided but I think we produce Hip Hop that is absolutely on par with them [Americans] so if there’s Hip Hop that is awesome from Australia why wouldn’t I chose that first?

(Ethan, Author’s Interview).

As the above quote from AJ suggests, some Hip Hoppers argue that Australians are making their own Hip Hop traditions and as they do so, the American history of Hip Hop becomes increasingly distanced from their own experience of Hip Hop. Ethan states this even more adamantly when he suggests that Australian Hip Hoppers should not “care about America” anymore.

Hip Hop has now been a part of the lives of many Australians for nearly thirty years. As the above quotes illustrate, for some people, this means that the American origins of the form are no longer important. Their Hip Hop pioneers are not the stalwarts of the ‘essential Bronx Moment’ (Forman n.d. in Alim 2009, p. 7) but are the Australians who have made Hip Hop their own. Afrika Bambaataa, Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash are being usurped by Def Wish Cast, The Herd and the Hilltop Hoods.²³ These changes

²³ I have chosen these names as examples of artists who some Hip Hoppers argue are integral players in the history of the American and Australian Hip Hop scene respectively. The selection of these particular names and the omission of others should not be read as a judgment about the popularity or success of Hip Hop artists. A multitude of different names could be listed here just as validly.

are not welcomed by all Australian Hip Hoppers, and in fact they are actively resisted by many who fear that Hip Hop in Australia is becoming too nationalistic and parochial. Two distinct groups of Hip Hoppers are emerging, those that view Hip Hop as a transnational cultural form and those that view Hip Hop as a national cultural form. Thus, while some Hip Hop fans and artists work hard to maintain a sense of continuity and connection with Hip Hop's American past, others are adamant that Australian Hip Hop needs to become a separate cultural entity.

During the course of my fieldwork I noticed that the differences between these two positions were often generational. Age plays a key role in determining how Hip Hoppers view the significance of both contemporary American Hip Hop and the history of Hip Hop in America. I use the term 'generational' with some hesitation because I do not believe that all Hip Hoppers of a certain era share identical ideological views and consumption practices. It is not my intention to suggest that all Hip Hop fans and artists fit neatly into a defined ideological position based on their age, however, while there were some exceptions (see the quote from Julian below), the majority of the younger Hip Hoppers that I interviewed did place less value on the relevance of American Hip Hop to the Australian scene. Such fans and performers typically have a significantly different comprehension of American Hip Hop than what I loosely term the 'first generation' of Australian Hip Hop enthusiasts, those who were active in forming the foundations of the Australian Hip Hop scene in the 1980s. The 'first generation' of Australian Hip Hoppers recount passionate memories about the first Hip Hop track they ever heard, music video that they watched or dog-eared Hip Hop book they treasured – nearly all of them American.

The importance of such films, albums, video clips and books was highlighted to me when one of my informants Jake invited my boyfriend and I to a house warming party at his newly purchased flat. Like all new home owners Jake was eager to take us on a guided tour. A significant portion of this tour was taken up by us standing eagerly around the large bookcases that dominated his lounge room and housed his record and DVD collection and a large array of other Hip Hop paraphernalia.²⁴ We spent several

²⁴ This included large coffee table style books about Hip Hop (in particular Graffiti), some cassette tapes and videos, vinyl toys and a framed signed Hip Hop concert ticket.

minutes surveying the shelves and commenting on objects as Jake pointed out some of his favourite albums. I made a passing comment about Jake's DVD copy of the 1984 Hip Hop drama *Beat Street* and he laughingly said:

No Hip Hop fan without it! It's a pretty so-so film really, but I remember going to the cinema again and again to see it with my mates. It really was when I first got hooked on Hip Hop

(Jake, Author's Field notes).

As Hegarty (2004) discusses in a newspaper article about the 2004 Melbourne Hip Hop Film Festival: 'Ask any hip-hop fan or artist what their first memories of hip-hop were and it's likely to be *Beat Street* or a music video' (Hegarty 2004, p. 18) Those who grew up learning about and loving American Hip Hop portray Australian Hip Hop as a continuation of that Hip Hop tradition. Therefore, it is very important to them that Hip Hop fans know about Hip Hop's American origins. This is because, I was told, Australians were introduced to Hip Hop as an already fully formed 'culture':

I'm from the 80s generation, the whole *Beat Street*, *Spray Can Art*, *Subway Art* - generation. So what was it, 83, 84? That mid 80s, pre-packaged, Four Elements of Hip Hop culture. That's how I got introduced to it

(Fred, Author's Interview).

It was already all put together – that was the attraction, seeing kids Breaking [Break Dancing], the music and this amazing vibrant art that we'd later learn was Graffiti, it was just so rich

(Geoff, Author's Interview).

According to these fans, Hip Hop already had a distinct cultural identity and associated set of cultural practices before it came to this country. Therefore, what Hip Hop is, or should be, is closely tied to Hip Hop's American roots. As Hip Hop fan Patrick states in the excerpt below, for him, the history of the Australian and American Hip Hop scenes are intertwined:

Patrick: There's nothing worse, I think, than being uninformed, that applies to anything. But yeah I think there's a lot to be said for knowing about stuff and taking heart in it and knowing just how deep the roots of this culture go and where it comes from and how hard people had to work to get it where it is, it didn't sort of, just appear out of nowhere.²⁵

Dianne: Do you think it's important that people know about the history in America, or only how Hip Hop developed in Australia?

Patrick: I don't think you can separate the two. There wouldn't be an Australian Hip Hop without an American Hip Hop. And of course there wouldn't be Australian Hip Hop without its history. But if you go back to the roots of that, it's inextricably linked with what's happening in the States, because that's where all the influence came from. So I think if you know both and you can see the progression of where it all started and where it's come to now (Author's Interview).

Hip Hoppers like Patrick make a direct correlation between the history of American Hip Hop and Australia's Hip Hop history. They argue that Hip Hop in Australia cannot exist without Hip Hop in America:

When it's all said and done, there can't be Hip Hop here [Australia] without America

(Max, Author's Interview).

Given that many Australian Hip Hoppers literally grew up with American Hip Hop it is unsurprising that the styles, sounds and histories of American Hip Hop are important to them. However, as discussed earlier, this viewpoint is not always reliant on age. While older Hip Hop fans and artists are more likely to emphasise the importance of the American history of Hip Hop, this is not always the case. For some younger Hip Hop fans, 'researching' America's Hip Hop history is an important part of being an authentic Hip Hopper. This is exemplified in this quote from Julian, a Hip Hop fan who was nineteen when I interviewed him in 2007:

I don't know how anyone can call themselves a Hip Hop fan and not know what *Subway Art* is, not know who Dondi is, not know what real electro is, not this

²⁵ I should note that Patrick was a history teacher and discussed his own predilection towards stressing the importance of historical knowledge.

modern day version of electro but the stuff that Hip Hop was built on.²⁶ I would hate to lose all of that, I think it's critical that people research stuff

(Julian, Author's Interview).

Julian was not part of the 'first generation' of Australian Hip Hop fans and was not even born when Australians were first being exposed to Hip Hop. He was not a Graffiti Writer himself, he did not grow up in New York City, and he was not old enough to have stared wide-eyed at *Subway Art* (Cooper and Chalfant 1984) when it was first released. That Julian still cares about who Dondi was, and perhaps most importantly, that he is adamant that other people should know, is reflective of the importance that many Hip Hoppers still place on the American 'roots' of Hip Hop. In the above quote, Julian contends that an authentic "Hip Hop fan" should "know" about particular aspects of Hip Hop's American history. By defining not "knowing" about the "stuff that Hip Hop was built on" as a cultural loss, Julian is critiquing the views of Hip Hoppers like Ethan and AJ, introduced earlier in this section, who contend that this 'history' is not as important as "making our own traditions" (AJ, Author's Interview).

The majority of people that I interviewed were first attracted to Hip Hop through American sources.²⁷ Such fans and artists want to see that the history of American Hip Hop is being preserved and respected. For them, knowing about Hip Hop's history, both in America and Australia, has become an integral part of being an authentic Hip Hopper. It forms an essential part of the criteria by which they assess each other's cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) and define 'who is in and who is out' (Solomon 2005, p. 3). These Hip Hoppers privilege a particular version of the history of Hip Hop and are suspicious of people who know little about this history or who do not afford it the same importance. They equate not knowing about the American origins of Hip Hop as a marker of a perceived lack of dedication to the form. Not taking the time and/or effort to investigate and educate yourself about Hip Hop's American past is viewed as reflective of a lack of passion and commitment. Being unaware of, or knowing little

²⁶ 'Dondi', full name Donald White, was a highly influential and respected early New York Graffiti Writer. His work is prominently featured in the book *Subway Art*. After his death in 1998 his brother Michael White and friend and fellow Graffiti Writer 'Zephyr' (Andrew Witten) collaborated to produce the book *Dondi White: Style Master General, The Life of Graffiti Artist Dondi White* (Witten and White 2001).

²⁷ Commonly mentioned artists that sparked these people's interest in Hip Hop included LL Cool J, Run DMC, Public Enemy, Beastie Boys, N.W.A., Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls.

about important landmarks in Hip Hop's history such as, particular musical releases and Hip Hop artists; and the historical context in which Hip Hop developed; can be read as signs of inauthenticity.

2.6 A New Generation: The Rise of 'Australian Hip Hop':

Yet, as I discussed earlier, not all Hip Hoppers view American Hip Hop in this same way. We are seeing the development of a new generation of Hip Hoppers; those that only listen to Australian Hip Hop music and who have a different understanding of Hip Hop's 'origins'. Although these Hip Hop enthusiasts know that Hip Hop was not invented by Australians, they are not interested in the American origins of Hip Hop because they argue that Australian Hip Hop has become a distinct and separate cultural form. In the past you could safely assume that a Hip Hop fan or artist living in Australia would also listen to and engage with American Hip Hop.²⁸ This is no longer the case. More Australian Hip Hop fans are encountering Australian Hip Hop as their first point of Hip Hop contact and are choosing to exclusively consume Australian made Hip Hop.

For example, several people that I interviewed who were in the eighteen to twenty five year old bracket cited the Australian Hip Hop compilation *Culture of Kings* as one of the very first Hip Hop albums they purchased. Released in 2000 the compilation was put together by DJ Dyems from Adelaide Hip Hop group Terra Firma in collaboration with Obese Records and featured eighteen tracks from Hip Hop artists across Australia.²⁹ It is described on the Obese Records website as setting, 'the standard for Hip Hop compilations in Australia' (Obese Records, 'Discography Culture of Kings'). The successful franchise spawned *Culture of Kings: Volume 2* released in 2002 and *Culture of Kings: Volume 3* in 2003, both with two discs/LPs of music.³⁰ Dyems indicates that the *Culture of Kings* compilations were so successful because:

[T]here is something for everyone on there. There's the harder stuff like Terminal Illness, and then Urthboy's on number 2, and you know, it's got a

²⁸ It is important to note here that Australian Hip Hop fans do not automatically like any and all Hip Hop just because it comes from America, people do have varying tastes.

²⁹ The vinyl release was put out by Pulling Strings Productions.

³⁰ All three compilations were released on both CD and Vinyl.

wide range of groups. So it shows that it's not all one style of music when you play it to someone. It's like, 'Oh, that's different to the other tracks'
(Dyems in Local Noise 2007, n.p.).

Similarly a reviewer of *Culture of Kings: Volume 3* stated:

Australian Hip Hop is here to stay and Culture of Kings is well placed as the best guide to the full range of the music being made in this country. While Culture of Kings 3 isn't quite as eclectic as previous issues, the selection takes in some of the best emerging MCs and the strongest of the old school

(Calico 2004, n.p.).

The *Culture of Kings* compilations were hugely appealing to both avid Australian Hip Hop fans and those who knew little or nothing about Australian Hip Hop artists. As indicated above, a large part of this attraction was the diversity of these compilations. If you really liked a track by a particular artist you could then explore what other projects they had been involved in or if they had released any solo albums. Unlike many music compilations the *Culture of Kings* series often featured tracks that had not previously been released.³¹ In many ways the *Culture of Kings* series helped to crystallise the idea of a cohesive 'Australian Hip Hop' community. Prior to this the Australian Hip Hop scene was fairly fragmented along state lines and there was little interaction between Hip Hoppers in different Australian cities.

As Simplex from Terra Firma states:

And that's the first time I heard dudes like Downsyde, and Matty B. It exposed all these new people, like you hadn't ever heard these cunts before, and it brought everyone who was doing stuff around that time – 2000 and before – together, sort of thing

(Simplex in Local Noise 2007, n.p.).

DJ Dyems adds:

That did what it was meant to do as well. Basically, around the country everyone had their own little scenes and everything. And it has linked everyone together and we've just seen it go from there

(Dyems in Local Noise 2007, n.p.).

³¹ Although many of them would be featured on future albums.

These links laid the foundations for the development of a nation-wide Australian Hip Hop scene. As more people became interested and exposed to local Hip Hop, avenues opened for nation-wide tours, interstate collaborations and communication. The advent of and increased usage of the Internet played a large role in facilitating these kinds of connections.

As the Australian Hip Hop scene grew, younger Hip Hoppers were introduced to Australian Hip Hop music on a much more consistent scale. I use the term consistent to refer to both the quality and the quantity of Hip Hop releases that were available. The newfound consistency of Australian Hip Hop releases made it possible for local fans to listen solely to Australian Hip Hop music. In the past, the low number of albums released and artists touring would have made this a very limited musical preference. Several years ago it would have been absolutely unheard of to find a Hip Hop fan in Australia who did not listen to any American Hip Hop. This ‘new generation’ of Hip Hop enthusiast sees little connection between American Hip Hop and Hip Hop in this country. They argue that Hip Hop has developed to the point where the American origins and history are no longer as significant:

I think it just holds us back, always looking over to America, this is Australian Hip Hop, we can do it however we like, too much focus on the past is not healthy

(Matthew, Author’s Interview).

In Matt’s opinion, Australian Hip Hop is compromised by a continual “focus on the past” (ibid). Here we see that claims which stress the importance of ‘tradition’ and ‘history’ are not always accepted as authentic. In fact, in this case, Matt is critical of the focus that some Hip Hoppers place on “the past”. He condemns this point of view as an out of date modality and authenticates his own opinion by classifying it as modern and contemporary:

I reckon some of these people have got to get with the program, they’re a bit jaded I think. Stuck in how Hip Hop was for them and not getting on board with where it’s going

(Matthew, Author’s Interview).

Matt told me that he was eager for Australian Hip Hop to be seen as “its own separate category of Hip Hop” (ibid). By this, he meant that Australian Hip Hop should be

regarded as a distinct musical genre, a different kind of Hip Hop. This view is at odds with the majority of Hip Hoppers that I interviewed. Several people I spoke to specifically rejected the formation of an ‘Australian’ sub-category of Hip Hop:

Aussie Hip Hop is not a separate kind of Hip Hop, I do not think that it should be isolated. OK maybe you can have a section for Australian Hip Hop in a music store so that it is easy to find, but that does not mean that it is some totally different thing

(Tim, Author’s Interview).

Others were bemused and even angered by fans who professed to only care about ‘Australian Hip Hop’:

I seriously don’t get it, I don’t understand it, how you can cut yourself off from all the good music? Hip Hop comes from America. I get being proud about Aussie Hip Hop, but to not listen to anything else? Odd

(Stuart, Author’s Interview).

Tim and Stuart are confused and annoyed by Hip Hoppers who solely listen to Hip Hop music produced by Australians and that separate Australian Hip Hop from Hip Hop produced elsewhere.

These divergent views illustrate that Hip Hop fans and artists view the ‘history’ of Hip Hop in different ways. Thus, while some Australian Hip Hop artists emphasise the significance of the American ‘origins’ of Hip Hop and cast their practices and beliefs as contiguous with American ‘tradition’, while others assert that what matters most is not the American history of Hip Hop but its Australian development. As such, these Hip Hoppers are invested in demonstrating that Australian Hip Hop has its own history and traditions. These two positions highlight the fact that ‘history, by its very nature, is contingent and selective’ (Harrison 2009, p. 95). In the following section I integrate the issue of race into this discussion, arguing that White Hip Hop fans are still negotiating their position in a culture that is often defined as authentically African or African-American.

2.7 White Washing Hip Hop? Nationality, Ethnicity and Authenticity:

In his study of Hip Hop in Massachusetts, Rodriquez argues that White Hip Hoppers remove the racially coded meanings from Hip Hop and replace them with colour-blind ones (Rodriquez 2006). Drawing on Hall (1997), he contends that this kind of colour-blind ideology can nullify Hip Hop's ability to be culturally meaningful for African-Americans (Rodriquez 2006, p. 663). Rodriquez defines Hip Hop as an 'unmistakably African American art form' (Rodriquez 2006, p. 648) and therefore, argues that 'color-blind eyes' (Rodriquez 2006, p. 663) can undermine Hip Hop's association with Blackness. My own research data also illustrates that many White Australian Hip Hop fans utilise colour-blind ideologies to authenticate their own appropriation of Hip Hop. This is evident in the kinds of discourses outlined in section 2.5, whereby Hip Hoppers argue that Hip Hop is primarily about 'being true to yourself'. This kind of ideology is illustrated in this quote from Mark who argues that it is actually against the "spirit" of Hip Hop to make divisions based on race:

Nobody owns any form of music. It adapts and evolves with every new person that gets involved. I think it is against the spirit of Hip Hop to put a divide in based on race

(Mark, Author's Interview).

Similarly, Alex argues that people should not be excluded from their involvement in Hip Hop on racial grounds:

I suppose it's like everything – jazz and rock and everything, it's happened with every music genre I think [the appropriation of Black music]. I think it's [Hip Hop] for everybody. Lots of rappers I listen to are White – Atmosphere, Brother Ali, I just feel it's for everybody. It shouldn't hold any, you know, strictly just for one race of people or anything like that

(Alex, Author's Interview).

However, some Hip Hop fans are concerned that this kind of colour-blind ideology and the rise of Australian Hip Hop nationalism can be taken too far:

Sometimes I go to gigs and I am kind of shocked by the crowd that rocks up, to some people Hip Hop is becoming this Aussie identity thing. I'm not against that but I do think it can become too extreme. It can become racist

(Tim, Author's Interview).

Especially on online forums I have noticed it. Some of the really racist views. And I just wonder, why do these people like Hip Hop?

(Stuart, Author's Interview).

You have all these new fans coming up that don't know enough about Hip Hop, about the legacy of it. In particular, I find it disturbing how over patriotic some Hip Hop has become, I would even say bordering on racist. How can you be racist when you're using a Black culture to do it? They are too concerned with being Australian and not enough about being Hip Hop

(Will, Author's Interview).

Tim, Stuart, and Will are concerned that race is being erased from discourses about Hip Hop in this country. Many Hip Hop fans and artists contend that Australians need to respect and acknowledge that Hip Hop was, and continues to be, an important medium for the expression of racial identities:

If you recognise the history then you know that [that Hip Hop was originally a primarily African-American and Latino cultural form] and you know that jazz and rock and roll and the blues and that funk and that soul, Hip Hop, have all been Black music first and foremost. And therefore you understand that and you pay your respects to it and you don't go out and start saying things or doing things that ignore or insult that legacy

(Patrick, Author's Interview).

Some Hip Hoppers fear that people are doing things to "insult that legacy" (ibid). They argue that the failure to acknowledge the American history of Hip Hop is also a failure to acknowledge a long history of White exploitation of Black cultural forms.

Nonetheless, how this 'respect' for this history should be practiced remains a highly complex issue. Many Australian Hip Hoppers are defensive about their appropriation of Hip Hop because they feel that their authenticity is constantly under attack. Furthermore, while they may believe that it is important to acknowledge the 'Black' origins of Hip Hop, they are unsure of how to go about it:

I think some people would just want us [White people] to stop making Hip Hop. Stop being involved in it. I just can't do that. So, where do we go from here?

(Phillip, Author's Interview).

This will probably sound really harsh but I am supposed to go around being like, sorry, sorry, sorry? I dunno. It really troubles me sometimes because who wants to be seen as exploitative or disrespectful or like you're causing the fucking death of Hip Hop, which is, when you read some stuff from the States [United States of America], that's how they judge it

(Simon, Author's Interview).

Australian Hip Hop fans are well aware of the fact that that Hip Hop is a highly important marker of African-American, 'Black' and Latino cultural identity for many people around the world and that many people see the White adoption of Hip Hop as weakening the artistic and ideological strength of the form. As such, they struggle to find ways to acknowledge the importance of Hip Hop as a site of ethnic and racial identity, while also avoiding the depiction of their own Hip Hop experience as inauthentic. In his study of the multi-racial San Francisco Bay Area Hip Hop scene, Harrison (2009, p. 84) contends that deliberations concerning Hip Hop, race and authenticity often centre on whether or not Hip Hop can legitimately be claimed by people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds.³² He notes that there is no simple answer to these questions and moves debates about Hip Hop authenticity in a fruitful direction by instead calling attention to 'how the very concept of *authenticity* gets marshaled in the service of specific individual and collective social interests' (ibid p. 85, original emphasis). Similarly, Omoniyi states that:

While it is undesirable to completely discountenance the importance of origin, whether myth or reality, in any consideration of Hip Hop identity, the more interesting task is to explore the ways in which members of various global Hip Hop communities furnish themselves with a Hip Hop history and ideology that demarginalizes them and situates them squarely in the center

(Omoniyi 2009, p. 122).

In this chapter I have demonstrated that different Australian Hip Hop fans 'marshal' (ibid) authenticity (Harrison 2009, p. 85) and 'furnish themselves with a Hip Hop history' (Omoniyi 2009, p. 122) in distinct ways. While all Australian Hip Hop fans and artists recognise that Hip Hop developed in America, some argue that these origins

³² These kinds of questions are not unique to Hip Hop. Hebdige's (1979/2002) study of punk culture highlights the often contradictory and problematic ways in which musical appropriation and race can intersect. Similarly, Rudinow (1994) and Daley (2003) have explored the relationship between authenticity and 'Blackness' in their accounts of the White appropriation of blues music.

are no longer relevant to the contemporary Australian Hip Hop scene. For these Hip Hoppers there is no doubt that Australians, and in particular White Australians, can legitimately claim Hip Hop as their own. Yet, for other Australian Hip Hoppers, the White claim to Hip Hop must be accompanied by an acknowledgement of the long history of White appropriation, and exploitation, of 'Black' cultural forms. The aim of this thesis is not to decipher which of these understandings of Hip Hop is legitimate, or if Hip Hop is an essentially 'Black' cultural form, but to examine why such accounts are important and how they have shaped the expression of Hip Hop in Australia. Debates about whether or not Hip Hop is 'Black music' are drawn upon by Hip Hop enthusiasts who are 'making their own claims to understanding "real hip hop" and justifying their relationship to it' (Harrison 2009, p. 102).

While some Hip Hoppers make an ideological break between American Hip Hop and Australian Hip Hop, suggesting that the Australian Hip Hop scene is no longer connected to the American Hip Hop scene, other fans maintain that the authenticity of the Australian Hip Hop scene is predicated on its relationship to American Hip Hop. The differences between these positions demonstrates that localisation can be complex and contradictory. Even though both groups of Hip Hop fans and performers define Australian Hip Hop as 'localised', they remain divided as to how this 'localisation' should be expressed. These findings suggest that researchers who are analysing the effects of globalisation need to be attentive to the diverse ways that cross-cultural appropriation is understood by the appropriators themselves. My research contributes to the theorisation of localisation by demonstrating that localisation can also be understood as a cultural loss. Thus, some Australian Hip Hoppers are concerned that Hip Hop's 'history' and 'origins' are being forgotten by Australian Hip Hop fans who place too much importance on "being Australian" (Will, Author's Interview). This example illustrates that the localisation of cultural forms is not always viewed as positive, because as Hip Hopper Rex asserts, Hip Hop can become "too local" (Rex, Author's Interview) and therefore, inauthentic.

However, as I will discuss in the following chapter, while some Australian are critical of the 'new generation' of Hip Hoppers who emphasise the importance of nationality, this does not mean that these Hip Hoppers believe that Hip Hop should not be localised at all. Indeed, they argue that to be authentic, Hip Hop produced by Australians must

reflect the realities of Australian life. In chapter 3 I examine this issue in more detail through a discussion of what is known as the ‘accent debate’ in Australian Hip Hop circles. This debate centres on whether or not Australian Hip Hop fans should rap in their ‘native’ or ‘Australian’ accent or assume an American accent when performing their rhymes. My analysis of the ‘accent debate’ further reveals the complex ways that ideas about authenticity are negotiated and transformed as Hip Hop culture is appropriated outside of the U.S.A.

Chapter 3

The Accent Debate

In chapter 2, I argued that some Australian Hip Hop enthusiasts are concerned that Hip Hop in Australia is becoming increasingly disconnected from its American roots. However, while these Hip Hoppers argue that the American ‘history’ and ‘origins’ of Hip Hop are important, they are also critical of Australians who merely imitate or copy American Hip Hop. They are eager to assert the uniqueness of Australian Hip Hop and to demonstrate that Australian Hip Hoppers are creative and original. At first glance it appears that this is a contradictory position. How can Hip Hoppers argue that they are staying ‘true’ to Hip Hop’s traditions while also championing the distinct nature of Australian Hip Hop? Hip Hop fans and artists circumvent this kind of logic by asserting that the most important Hip Hop tradition is ‘being true to yourself’, a concept introduced in chapter 2. Using this rationale, Hip Hoppers are able to emphasise the traditional nature of Australian Hip Hop, whilst simultaneously arguing that Hip Hop has been moulded to express specifically Australian concerns:

As has been mentioned by many, we are not ‘copying’ an imported culture. We have instead adopted the culture and turned it into our own version. There is a canyon of difference between the two concepts

(Idiot Proof 2005, p. 13).

Of course, as I illustrate in this thesis, the constitution of this ‘version’ of Hip Hop is subject to ongoing negotiation. In this chapter, I explore these negotiations in more depth through the examination of what is known as the ‘accent debate’ by Australian Hip Hoppers. This debate centres on whether or not Australian Hip Hop fans should rap in their ‘native’ or ‘Australian’ accent or assume an American accent when performing their rhymes. My analysis of the ‘accent debate’ demonstrates that the discourse of ‘being true to yourself’ or ‘keeping it real’ is drawn upon by a range of Australian Hip Hoppers to authenticate their own practices and beliefs. In this chapter I examine how these discourses operate in practice by exploring how Hip Hop enthusiasts define, ascribe, and perform, ‘realness’ or ‘truthfulness’ through their language use.

3.1 Keeping it Real:

The phrase ‘keeping it real’ is used so frequently by Hip Hoppers that Cutler (2003) argues that it is practically a Hip Hop mantra (Cutler 2003, p. 212). Similarly, McLeod (1999) notes that he heard the phrase, or other variations like being ‘real’ or ‘true’, hundreds or thousands of times during the 1990s (McLeod 1999, p. 137). While both of these authors are writing about Hip Hop in America, Australian Hip Hoppers also espouse the ‘keeping it real’ discourse. This was made clear when Australian Hip Hop group Koolism won the ‘Best Urban Album’ ARIA for their album *Part 3: Random Thoughts* in 2004. During part of their acceptance speech group member DJ Danielsan dedicated the award ‘to Mnemonic Ascent and all the Australians that ‘keep it real’ for want of a better phrase. Be yourself’.³³ Danielsan’s adjunct ‘for want of a better phrase’ suggests that Hip Hop enthusiasts use the expression ‘keeping it real’ with some hesitation. When I conducted interviews I found that while many Hip Hoppers believe in the ethos represented by the term, the use of the phrase itself has become somewhat clichéd and redundant:

It’s just a term thrown about. It’s like a dog barking almost, people throw it around and they don’t really, not that it’s a complex term, ‘keeping it real’ but it’s thrown about so often and it’s just really more of a crutch...Say a word enough times and they just don’t have any meaning anymore

(Michael, Author’s Interview).

Michael implies that the term has been used so often that it now has very little meaning. Similarly, Adelaide Graffiti Writer Todd told me that he was frustrated by the over-use of the phrase:

If people go on too much about keeping it real [puts on a voice] ‘Oh yo I’m keeping it real, check me out I’m keeping it real, oh yeah’ [ends voice] then it makes me suspicious. Keeping it real is something you need to do and shut up about [laughs]. If you’re talking about it too much then it’s corny

(Todd, Author’s Interview).

In Todd’s opinion, ‘keeping it real’ is something that you need to do. It is embodied in action not in speech. Talking too much about realness can become a marker of your

³³ See Arthur (2006) for a more extensive discussion of this event.

insincerity and therefore, your fakeness. Despite this dismissal of ‘talk’, in this chapter I argue that one of the ways that Australian Hip Hoppers measure the embodied performance of ‘realness’ is through language use.

3.2 Analysing Language Use in Global Hip Hop Cultures:

Given that one of the most recognisable features of Hip Hop music is rapping or MCing, it is surprising that language is one of the least analysed features of Hip Hop culture (Alim 2009). Studies of Hip Hop that do examine language have demonstrated that local cultural politics often influence decisions about language use (Bennett 2000; Fenn and Perullo 2000; Mitchell 2000; Pennycook 2003; Richardson 2006; Alim 2011). An important recent contribution to this field is the 2009 edited volume *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth identities, and the Politics of Language*. This collection of essays aims to add to our understanding of Hip Hop by exploring ‘language choice and agency, speech style and stylization, codeswitching and language mixing, crossing and sociolinguistic variation, and language use and globalisation’ (Alim 2009, p. 5). In chapter 2 I referred to the work of Pennycook and Mitchell (2009) which appears in this volume. In this article they argue that language use plays an important role in the localisation of Hip Hop (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009, p. 36). In numerous countries all around the world, Hip Hop has been taken up in local languages.³⁴

However, this does not mean that the use of English implies globalisation and the use of local languages implies localisation (ibid). This is clearly demonstrated in Fenn and Perullo’s (2000) study of Hip Hop in Tanzania and Malawi. Hip Hop enthusiasts in these countries use both English and other languages in their rap and everyday speech. In Tanzania Hip Hoppers use English and Swahili and in Malawi they use English and Chichewa. Fenn and Perullo (2000) conclude that it is too simplistic to argue that the use of English reflects a ‘global influence’ and the use of other local languages reflects a ‘local influence’. The decision to use English or another language is not always understood in terms of a ‘foreign’ versus ‘indigenous’ binary (Fenn and Perullo 2000, p. 90). Instead, when, where and how performers and enthusiasts choose to use these

³⁴ This is not always a smooth process. Manabe (2006, p. 1) argues that rapping in Japanese poses several problems for Japanese Hip Hop artists because Japanese has ‘completely different syntax, vocabulary, accent patterns and phonemes’ than English.

languages is determined by the perceived appropriateness of each language for different contexts. Fenn and Perullo (2000) contend that which language is seen as appropriate in different circumstances is often a matter of dispute. For example, in Malawi one Hip Hop group performing in a 'Rap and Ragga' competition explained that they decided to rap in Chichewa because they thought that more people would understand their message about HIV/AIDS (Fenn and Perullo 2000, p. 85). Conversely, several other performers in the same competition said that they used English in their songs because they believed that more people in the town spoke English (ibid).

Decisions about language use are influenced by social, political and historical factors. When Hip Hoppers chose to rap in English, African-American English, their national or official languages, regional or local dialects, or a combination of all of the above, they are positioning themselves within a particular discursive landscape. Thus, when MC Solaar used 'well-written French' (MC Solaar in Mitchell 1996, p. 40) and deliberately avoided slang on his first album he was trying to counter the bad reputation that American Hip Hop had in France (ibid). In Aotearoa/New Zealand where only three percent of the population speaks Maori fluently, the use of Maori language in Hip Hop can be a potent statement about self preservation (Mitchell 2001b, p. 280; see also Pennycook and Mitchell 2009) and the shift from the use of English lyrics to German lyrics in Hip Hop music was an important moment of nationalism for some German Hip Hoppers (Bennett 2000).³⁵ These examples demonstrate that ideologies are 'produced, reproduced, and contested through language' (Cutler 2003, p. 211; cf. Sarkar and Dawn 2007).

In Australian Hip Hop music, English is the dominant language. Other dialects and languages are used by some Hip Hoppers but this is definitely not the norm. Australian Hip Hoppers who use languages other than English are overwhelmingly in the minority. However, while English is the primary language used in Australian Hip Hop music, this does not mean that it is always used in the same way by everyone. In many cases, the issue for Australian Hip Hoppers is not whether or not English is being used, but the style with which it is used (Fenn and Perullo 2000, p. 89). Questions about style in

³⁵ Although, as Bennett's (2000) research makes clear, the use of German language in Hip Hop is not always celebrated.

Australia often centre on accent use. When Hip Hop enthusiasts assess whether or not someone is ‘keeping it real’, the accent that they chose to rap in is an important part of the criteria by which they are judged.³⁶ It is important to note here that I am not a linguist and my research did not involve the analysis of language substructures such as morphology, phonology or syntax. My discussion of accent use in Hip Hop music is not based on a quantitative evaluation of distinguishing phonological features or the pronunciation of words. Instead, it is based on distinctions that Hip Hoppers themselves make about what constitutes an ‘Australian’ or other accent.

My findings provide important insights into how particular language forms and practices are imbued with authenticity. This is because most Hip Hop fans and artists are not linguists and they do not consider phonological rules or phonological features when they assess differences in accent use. Instead they make distinctions about accent usage based on their own subjective value judgements. As I discuss below, this can cause problems. The differing ways that people distinguish between accents is highlighted by Smith (2005) in the text *Singing Australian*. In this text Australian Country music singer Graeme Connors argues that Australians should ‘sing with the accent we talk with, for goodness sake’ (Connors in Smith 2005, p. 116). Despite this passionate assertion, Smith (2005) contends that Connors own vocal style would be classified as ‘American’ by most Australians (ibid). This suggests that people’s self perception about their own actions may not always reflect popular opinion.

3.3 “How I talk”: Accent Use in Australian Hip Hop:

In the Australian Hip Hop scene there has been continued discussion for several years regarding how Australian Hip Hop MCs should rap. In the early years of Australian Hip Hop, MCs adopted American accents when they performed. As Bias B (a Melbourne MC) indicates, ‘when I first started rapping I didn’t like Aussie Hip Hop. I thought the accent sucked so, like many people back then, I started with an American twang’ (Bias B in Murphey 2004, p. 68). For many early MCs then, the sound of an Australian accent in a Hip Hop track seemed out of place, ‘A lot of people tried to rap

³⁶ Language use can also be utilised to engage in what Coupland refers to as ‘strategic inauthenticity’ (2001). This is explored in Clarke and Hiscock’s (2009) account of the Newfoundland Hip Hop group Gazebo Unit who perform and parody a ‘skeet’ identity in their music. The role of language use in parodic stylisation is also examined in Thompson’s (2010) discussion of Mr. Ebbo, a self-proclaimed ‘Maasai rapper’.

in Australian accents, but they found that ockerisms weren't in harmony with the music, so it took a bit longer to find its feet' (DJ Ransom in Donovan 2004, p. 4). Because Australian artists were initially exposed to Hip Hop coming out of America, the use of any other accent seemed unnatural to them. However, over time, Australians began to experiment with MCing in their native accents. As more and more Australian Hip Hop artists began to use their own accent, a whole new legion of Hip Hoppers emerged who were exposed to Australian accents in local Hip Hop. This exposure eventually led to the normalisation of the Australian accent in Australian Hip Hop music. As Alex discusses:

Rapping how you talk. I can't see why you'd do it any other way. I myself started rapping American...I grew up in the country and all I ever heard was American Hip Hop, I didn't even know Australian Hip Hop existed until I was seventeen and I moved to Brisbane. Went to Rocking Horse Records in Brisbane and got introduced to Australian Hip Hop and as soon as I heard it I was like "yep". I just started rapping how I talked

(Alex, Author's Interview).

Today, rapping in your 'native' accent is very much privileged in the Australian scene. Despite this, some Australian artists still choose to rap in American (AmE) accents. Artists that do rap in American accents are often criticised and the overwhelming majority of people that I interviewed do not approve of artists who rap in an American accent when it is not their everyday speaking voice: "If you're not American why try and be one?" (Luke, Author's Interview). Not rapping "how you talk" was seen as not 'being true to yourself'. As MC Tornts states:

I write raps how I talk. All my opinions about this fuckin' world and the people in it are how I feel, so cop it sweet. There's fake American accent homeboy geeks who think they're from Brooklyn so I take the piss out of them

(Tornts in DJ Brand 2003, p. 26).

Of course, this raises many questions. Namely, what is an 'Australian' or 'native' accent and how can an outsider judge if you are 'being true to yourself'? Considering the multicultural diversity of Australia and the presence of various accents and language speaking groups, we must be cautious of making assumptions about what an 'Australian' accent is. My fieldwork demonstrates that in the Australian Hip Hop scene

an ‘Australian’ accent is typically defined as a fairly broad Anglo-Australian accent, or what O’Hanlon (2006) describes in linguistic terms as a broad AusE accent. The normalisation of a broad AusE accent as the dominant Australian Hip Hop mode has stifled the use of other accents. As MC Raceless from Melbourne Group Curse Ov Dialect discusses, ‘I think a lot of people see Aussie hip-hop in the context of a racial, Anglo thing...In so many cases over the years I’ve seen ethnic rappers trying to be more Anglo because that’s the norm, and that’s just bullshit’ (MC Raceless in Rule 2008, n.p.).

Similarly, Aboriginal Australian MC Wire states that he feels like he is being ‘colonised’ by White Hip Hoppers who pressure him to use a particular Australian accent, ‘having White boys come up to me and saying “You know, maybe you should rap a bit more Aussie.” And I’m like “What?! Are you trying to colonise me again dude?! Stop it. Stop it’ (Wire MC in Pennycook and Mitchell 2009, p. 37). Linguists such as O’Hanlon (2006) and Dominello (2008) have argued that the use of AusE accents can be linked to the authentication of an Australian Hip Hop identity. They argue that Australian Hip Hop fans express their belonging to the Australian Hip Hop community through their accent usage. Yet, as the above quote suggests, the privileging of the AusE accent can also alienate those who do not use it. While no one that I interviewed argued that all Hip Hoppers should rap in an AusE accent regardless of their everyday speaking voice, they did argue that MCs should rap in their ‘native’ accent.

Thus, we can see that the idea of ‘nativeness’ is a key one. Hip Hop enthusiasts who disapprove of accents are not disapproving of the accents themselves, but the adoption of those accents. Therefore, where you are ‘from’ and how you are perceived to speak ‘normally’ become key factors in determining whether or not someone is ‘adopting’ an accent. During the course of my fieldwork I heard many stories that demonstrated the problems encountered when Hip Hoppers make assumptions about people’s cultural background and therefore how they should rap. In a street press article about the Eco-Action Benefit Gig where Adelaide Hip Hop group Business as Usual performed, the reviewer stated: ‘their ‘character’ MC bothered me with his faux-American accent’ (Dagman 2006, n.p.). Ironically, the MC in question was not adopting a ‘faux-American’ accent but is actually Canadian. Similarly, I heard stories about Sudanese

immigrants being chastised for rapping in American accents at MC Battles, only to be defended by people who presumed they were African-American and therefore, rapping in their 'native' accent.

As the above examples illustrate, in performance alone these factors are usually completely indistinguishable. The emphasis on rapping "how you talk" means that the possibility for people to make mistakes about someone's 'native' background and therefore how they should rap is ever present. It is interesting to note that the aversion to the adoption of American accents does not typically result in American Hip Hop being less valued by Australian fans. This suggests that the 'accent debate' is an ideological and not an aesthetic issue. By this I mean that Australians do not inherently dislike the aesthetic quality of American accents. As most Australian Hip Hop fans were introduced to the culture through American Hip Hop (chapter 2) it would be rather ridiculous to suggest that they found American accents in anyway unappealing. Thus, it is not American accents per say that Australians do not like, but the fact that people are changing their accents and therefore, are not 'keeping it real'.³⁷ An American can rap in an American accent because they are American. An Australian cannot rap in an American accent because they are not. Changing your accent is seen to be at odds with the central Hip Hop ideology of 'being yourself'. As Hip Hopper Mark indicates:

Hip Hop is very localised whether that locality is New York, LA or Melbourne. The subject matter is about what is around them, the accent is what is local for them too. As well as being localised Hip Hop has an element of 'truth' to it, and changing an accent for your music is not sticking by these 'unspoken rules'

(Mark, Author's Interview).

The "unspoken rules" Mark refers to here are the codes and beliefs he has learnt from Hip Hop and applied to every aspect of his life. Coming from a Graffiti background Mark identifies "honesty, respect and an awareness of my surroundings" (ibid) as some of these guiding rules. Similarly, bedroom DJ Andrew states:

Hip Hop started out in the Bronx, as people expressing themselves; obviously our lived reality is different. The important thing is, I think, not what your

³⁷ The fact that Australians were changing to American and not any other nationalities accents reflects the historic legacy and continued impact of American Hip Hop on the Australian Hip Hop scene.

message is, but that it is your message. So it's a context thing. You don't rap in an American accent because you're not American. I find the whole thing [adopting accents] kind of bizarre

(Andrew, Author's Interview).

Hip Hoppers who are opposed to the adoption of American accents by Australian MCs draw on the idea of a core Hip Hop ethos to cement their argument. They construct a particular definition of Hip Hop and then employ that idea. What is Hip Hop all about? What is its true essence? For Andrew is it self-expression and for Mark it is a set of ideological beliefs. By drawing on a particular definition of what Hip Hop is, they are able to discredit what it is not. Assuming an American accent is characterised as denying part of yourself and attempting to be something that you are not. These are both at odds with a typical understanding of Hip Hop. Hip Hop fan Greg put it this way:

If you're putting on an accent it just shows how insecure you are, you're not comfortable to be yourself. I think it harks back to Australians still not being sure about their role in the Hip Hop landscape. Rapping American is almost saying, Aussies can't rap

(Greg, Author's Interview).

Greg understands putting on an American accent as reflecting insecurity about the role of Australian Hip Hop in the global Hip Hop context. He identifies not being 'comfortable' to rap in your own accent as being demonstrative of an underlying feeling of inadequacy. Thus, using your native (i.e. Australian) accent is tied to notions of an Australian Hip Hop identity. If the Australian voice is not suited to rapping, then should Australians rap at all? For Greg, the use of American accents by Australian rappers calls into question the legitimacy of Australian Hip Hop. It also presents a picture to the outside world that he is unsettled by, "I don't want people to think we're just trying to be American" (Greg, Author's Interview).

Given Hip Hop's status as a cultural import and the struggle that Australian Hip Hop fans had to go through to establish themselves as legitimate, the argument that Australian Hip Hoppers are 'trying to be American' is offensive to many Hip Hoppers. When Hip Hop first arrived in Australia many members of the general public viewed Hip Hop as a solely African-American cultural form. Its adoption by primarily White Australian youth was characterised as imitative and decried in a context where

Americanisation was viewed as a polluting threat to Australian culture. While some of these fears are now abating, in the early years of Hip Hop's development in Australia it was not unusual for rap to be mockingly referred to by its critics as 'crap' and to be derided in the mainstream media for being musically simplistic. Hip Hop was an alien cultural form on the Australian cultural landscape, and therefore, its fans had to work hard to naturalise it. MC Sereck from Def Wish Cast outlines how he and other early Hip Hop fans had to fight to find a place for Hip Hop in Australia:

The venue owners were just like: 'What the hell is going on?' It clashed with the Angels and Cold Chisel and all that rock stuff they were playing, and we really had to break down those barriers ourselves

(MC Sereck in Rule 2008, n.p.)

As MC Brad Strut recalls, the efforts of these early groups paved the way for future Hip Hop artists:

I think you're first wave was like the Def Wish Cast's and your AKA Brothers, those sort of crews. We were the generation that was inspired off those guys to come out next and do it...it gave us the inspiration to think well 'we can actually go and make hip-hop music'. Cause at the time we started making hip-hop music, if you told people you were a rapper you'd get laughed at. Australia was full of bogan Guns and Roses fuckers, we're talking early nineties you know what I mean

(Brad Strut in PZ 2007, p.17).

This sentiment is echoed by Fred, who argues that the dismissal of Hip Hop is an ongoing trend:

Sure it's tough now...I know that they [Hip Hop fans] probably cop shit at school still for being into Hip Hop, but that's nothing new. We were ostracised for liking 'rap music'³⁸

(Fred, Author's Interview).

But why should Hip Hop fans be ostracised? Adelaide R and B DJ Lisa D identifies a 'cultural cringe' towards Australian Hip Hop: 'the Aussie hip-hop accent is hard to get accustomed to' (Caruso 2005, p. 7). In the past, Hip Hop was not seen as an

³⁸ It is interesting to note that Fred says 'rap music' and not Hip Hop. Fred was using this term to stress the ignorance of his detractors. This is because Hip Hoppers do not typically refer to Hip Hop as 'rap music'. It is a term which marks its user as an outsider.

‘authentically’ Australian cultural form. As the above quotes from Brad Strut and Sereck suggest, rock music was the dominant popular music of the 1980s and 1990s. Hip Hoppers had to work to encourage promoters and venue owners to put on Hip Hop events and to gain respect from the broader Australian public. Hip Hop was not seen as an ‘authentic’ musical form in Australia because of its strong links to American, in particular African-American, culture. As a new cultural form, little was known about Hip Hop and its styles and conventions were unfamiliar. What was often emphasised about Hip Hop was its connection to America, more specifically, the role of African-American and Latino youth in its development and the ‘urban’ context of its origin. Thus, the ‘foreignness’ of Hip Hop contributed to the idea that Hip Hop was somehow out of place in the Australian context.

Because of this, Hip Hoppers have had to battle to be taken seriously in Australia. As Lisa suggests, some listeners cannot get used to the Australian accent in Hip Hop. Such listeners pass over Australian Hip Hop as a second rate imitation of American Hip Hop. Richard, a Hip Hop fan from Melbourne expressed this view clearly:

I don’t listen to Aussie Hip Hop; it’s just not the same. To be honest, the accent is jarring. If I want to listen to Hip Hop I’ll listen to American stuff

(Richard, Author’s Interview).

Evident in this statement is the idea that Australian Hip Hop is a sub-standard version of American Hip Hop. For Richard, there is no reason to listen to Australian Hip Hop when he can listen to American Hip Hop which he sees as a superior product.

Australian Hip Hoppers are very aware of these kinds of arguments and opinions and this awareness has fueled their desire to be recognised as original artists rather than imitators. I argue that Australian Hip Hop artists draw on their use of native accents to emphasise their originality. The use of ‘native’ accents has become an important part of the Australian Hip Hop identity. It allows Australian Hip Hop fans to proclaim their uniqueness and assert their own creativity. It also gives them the means by which to deny claims of imitation. The use of the Australian accent in Australian Hip Hop marks the music as different from American Hip Hop, it stresses the idea that Hip Hop has been localised to the Australian context. Given the struggles that Australian Hip

Hoppers have faced to be accepted, the use of Australian accents can be seen as demonstrative of a newfound sense of confidence in Australian Hip Hop:

Rapping as ourselves, it was like saying, we are not self conscious, we don't care what you think, this is how we do it

(Anthony, Author's Interview).

Being Australian and rapping in an American accent is therefore seen as setting back the legitimacy of Australian Hip Hop:

The big issue with this [rapping in an American accent] is how much some of the founders of Australian Hip Hop had to fight the image of 'want to be' Americans and show a whole generation that it was okay to rap in your local accent

(Mark, Author's Interview).

3.4 Wanna Be Americans: Accent Use and National Identity:

As the above quote from Mark demonstrates, many Australian Hip Hoppers are concerned with fighting the image that they are 'wanna be' Americans. Mark equates rapping in an American accent with wanting to be American, and therefore, being inauthentic. This view is unanimously rejected by those Hip Hoppers who do rap in American accents. DJ Katch from the Australian Hip Hop group the Resin Dogs states: 'are they saying just because I don't sing down a microphone in an Aussie accent that it does not make me an Australian?' (DJ Katch in Devic 2008, p. 25). He is critical of the argument that he must use an Australian accent in his music to be considered Australian. Given the fact that the assumption of American accents by Australian musicians is commonplace in so many other music genres (O'Hanlon 2006), Katch goes on to question why the adoption of American accents is so problematic for Hip Hoppers:

No one ever goes after Aussie people in dance music or rock and roll who sing in an American accent and no-one has issues with that so I find it quite funny when it's brought up because it's like, why hip-hop?

(ibid).

I contend that this comes back to the issue of rapping 'how you talk'. Hip Hoppers argue that rapping is more akin to everyday speech than singing. They maintain that

there is less of a performative veneer between talking and rapping than there is between rapping and singing. Although rappers certainly do stress and mouth words differently when they rap, and the structural form of rapping is quite different to that of normal speech, there remains a stronger link between rapping and talking than between singing and talking. The strength of this link is questioned by artists who adopt American accents. They often argue that rapping in an ‘Australian’ accent is no more natural or normal than rapping in an American one, stating that even rappers who do use their own accents still exaggerate or warp their sound. Jarrod an eighteen year old Adelaide MC who raps in an American accent told me that being “too ocker” (Jarrod, Author’s Interview) was just as false as adopting an American accent:

They’re all actors too, they can’t say they don’t stress words differently, rapping is not like everyday speaking, if it was it would be pretty dull. They pump up their ‘Aussie-ness’ to a level that is almost laughable

(ibid).

Here we see that both groups (‘native’ accent rappers and adopted ‘American’ accent rappers) employ the idea of ‘realness’ to bolster their claims. Rappers who do adopt American accents do so because it feels natural to them:

When I open my mouth and start rapping that’s just how it is, that’s how I flow. To sit down and consciously decide to have an Aussie accent, that would be making a change, that would be fake

(Brad, Author’s Interview).

Brad feels that he is being ‘real’ because he is rapping in a way that feels right to him. He argues that changing the way he raps, not his use of an American accent, would make him ‘fake’. MC Rukas puts it this way:

What I really hate, is rappers that are more comfortable rapping in an American accent, putting on an overly Australian accent to fit in even though it doesn’t come natural to them. How is that being real?

(MC Rukas in God, 2007, n.p.).

This apparent discrepancy is explored by Dominello (2008) who studied the phonological differences in Australian Hip Hop artist’s regular speech and their performances. Dominello (2008) found that in their everyday speech Hip Hop artists

tended to use a standard AusE accent, while in their performances they adopted an exaggerated broad AusE accent (Dominello 2008, p. 43). The methodology employed in this research was to compare the phonological features of a released music single from two Australian Hip Hop artists (the Hilltop Hoods and Pegz) with a recorded interview taken from the Triple J website. Dominello (2008) concludes that despite their assertions that they are ‘keeping it real’, Australian Hip Hop artists often exaggerate their accents and hence, they are not ‘being true to themselves’ (Dominello 2008, p. 46).

Here we see illustrated the intrinsic problem with the ‘being yourself’ or being ‘true to yourself’ concept. If rapping in an American accent (when you are not American) is ‘being yourself’ then is it ok? Michael, an owner of a Hip Hop store, explores this view in relation to a discussion of the term ‘selling out’:

From the start you can aspire to go in a particular direction, have you sold out? No, because that’s your direction. But if you’ve tried to perpetuate one thing and all of a sudden you’re pushing something else, that’s generally the definition of selling out I guess

(Michael, Author’s Interview).

Making value judgments about other people’s actions is inherently complicated. Such judgments usually rest on the perceived motivation of the person. For example, many people that I spoke to defined the rationale for Australians rapping in an American accent as market driven. By this, they mean that the only reason someone would choose to rap in an American accent is in order to try and reach a wider audience and make more sales. Because the American Hip Hop market is so large, rapping in an American accent is seen to make sense in fiscal terms. As Damien put it:

The only reason you’d put on a yank accent is to try and break into the American market. Because they [Americans] rule the Hip Hop roost and they tend not to listen to anything with a different twang, be it UK, Aussie, whatever

(Damien, Author’s Interview).

MC Suffa from the Hilltop Hoods takes this argument one step further, equating rapping in an adopted American accent to both profiteering agendas and insecurities about being Australian:

We've still got people in the scene that are ashamed of being Australian and have to put on an American accent...It's a shame the young people are listening to them too. You can tell the difference between the two camps, mainly by the people who want commercial success versus the people that want to make music and have some credibility

(Suffa in Sams 2006, n.p.)

But how can you tell if someone just wants to 'make music' (ibid) or make money? Being able to discern someone's intentions is overly problematic. How can you claim to know another person's motivation? Hip Hop promoter Layton made this statement:

You tell by their progression, judging on their previous releases what you've seen of them when they perform live, that kind of thing. What you already know of them and if they start to change in what you perceive as a bad way or what – like some people you can tell they've changed their accent along the way and it's quite obvious and there'll be some people who just change their style of beats, you can tell that they're trying to go for a more commercialised sound

(Layton, Author's Interview).

However, Layton expressed quite a liberal view indicating that "at the end of the day it's just personal choice, that might be what they like or what they want to make" (ibid). It is clear that advocates of both 'native' and adopted 'American' accents use the concept of honesty to support their arguments. Both groups of rappers utilise the idea of "putting on" an accent to argue that their use of accents is natural and normal, and that to rap any other way would be artificial.

3.5 'The Accent Debate': A Never Ending Story:

The continued existence of Australian rappers using American accents means that the controversy surrounding the accent issue has been ongoing. When I was conducting interviews and would ask about the 'accent debate' many people would become visibly frustrated. They would let out a sigh or a groan, awkwardly pause, shake their heads or laugh. Many people that I spoke to think that accents should no longer be an issue and they are tired of the debate being constantly re-ignited. This is a very common view. For example, in a thread titled 'Terms/Topics/Things to know before venturing outside of this subforum' in the new members section of the Australian Hip Hop forum Ozhiphop.com, poster Nevaless lists 'Accent Debates' with this definition:

More played out around here than cross colours/happy pants. Dont bother, you will be flamed

(Nevaless in Oz Hip Hop forum ‘Terms/Topics/Things to know before venturing outside of this subforum’, forum discussion).

When I asked DJ and Hip Hop producer, Fred if he was tired of accents being an issue he said, “Yeah I am, but I’ve heard it for over 10 years” (Fred, Author’s Interview). The ‘accent debate’ is frustrating to many people because it never seems to be resolved. No matter what objections or reservations people have about the use of American accents, they cannot stop people adopting them. Thus, the debate is circular.

It is easy to see why revisiting the same issues for over 10 years would be wearisome. However, as Fred went on to say, “for young kids it’s a really good, healthy debate for them to sort out. And make their own opinion” (ibid). Similarly, Hip Hop fan Adam said “We need it [the debate], it’s an important thing to keep on talking about” (Adam, Author’s Interview). As Hip Hop continues to attract more and more new fans, the accent issue is confronted by a whole new set of individuals. If we take again the example of Hip Hop forum Ozhiphop, we can see that what is ordinary to one person can be new to another. While concerns about accents are novel to new posters, to regular forum contributors they are repetitive and mundane. Thus, forum stalwart Nevaless employed the ‘newb members’ section to warn and educate newcomers about the ‘played out’ nature of the accent debate. His post is pinned so that it always stays at the top of the forum subsection.

The circular nature of the ‘accent debate’ has led some people to completely dismiss it. Hip Hop fan Patrick thinks that there is little interaction between proponents of the opposing view points:

I don’t know if it is really an ongoing debate still. I think you’ve got your people who think its crap, and they make up one camp and you’ve got your people who don’t care or think you should be able to do it however you want, and they make another camp and I think that’s where the scenes don’t really cross over so much

(Patrick, Author’s Interview).

Here we see that disagreements about accents actually caused a schism in the Hip Hop scene. This schism is not simply an ideological one but actually physically separates Hip Hop artists and fans in very specific ways. For example, artists who do adopt American accents are very unlikely to perform at shows with artists who do not.³⁹ I discovered that there is very little cross over between the two groups of artists and the two groups of fans. In fact, some Hip Hoppers who do not like the adoption of American accents by Australian artists simply will not listen to such artist's music:

If someone is rapping in an accent [American accent] and I know they're from Melbourne, I switch off immediately. Even if they are talented, I just think, what a shame, and don't listen anymore

(Zach, Author's Interview).

Likewise, fans who don't enjoy the sound of 'native' accent rappers are obviously not listening to them. This lack of interaction between the two groups means that for some people the accent debate is no longer an issue, "I don't really think about it at all, or hear about it that much" (Seth, Author's Interview). For Seth then, the accent debate no longer matters. As an MC himself, he has decided how he will rap, and he is more focused on his own music than what other people are doing. Being surrounded by like-minded people also means that accents do not always need to be discussed.

Interestingly, although most Hip Hop fans and artists that I spoke too disagreed with the use of American accents by non-Americans, the majority also respected the right of rappers to perform however they chose. They were usually not concerned with forcing their opinions on others. Perhaps some of this open-mindedness can be attributed to the realisation that no matter how fiercely they fought for the 'native' accent cause, they ultimately had no power to stop people rapping one way or another. For example, in the liner notes of the Hip Hop compilation *Airheads 2* we find this quote:

Should we start the Natural Accent Movement or should we just tear down the Fake Accent Club? Nah, waste of time, let's just get on with what we enjoy doing and have some fun making music that sounds like you. The Listener. ENJOY!

(*Airheads 2: Australian Beats and Rhymes* 2005).

³⁹ The exception to this rule is large scale concert events which feature a wide range of artists from different musical genres. For example, The Big Day Out.

Despite the assertion that people should just get on with making music and having fun, it is clear that even broaching the accent issue in the liner notes of a CD is making a statement; that Australian Hip Hop should sound ‘Australian’ or, like “you” (ibid). Once again, the issue is one of context. As Patrick indicates:

It’s [Hip Hop] an expression of who you are. It’s not about coming, even though it started like that, I don’t think it’s about coming from the ghetto. It’s an expression of how you live and the people who started it, that’s where they lived so that’s how it started. I think it’s about being true to who you are. I think that’s why the whole accent debate started and all that kind of stuff about ‘pretending’ to be somebody who you’re not

(Patrick, Author’s Interview).

Here we see the cross over between accent issues and content issues. In this chapter I have introduced the argument that in order to ‘keep it real’, Hip Hoppers should rap in their ‘native’ accent. According to this argument, if you speak in an Australian accent, you should rap in an Australian accent. In chapter 4 I introduce the contention that Australians should not only rap in their ‘native’ accents but should also rap about issues that are ‘Australian’. As Patrick went on to say:

I mean, you start talking about shooting people and struggling in the streets and everything, the fact of the matter is that most people in Australia don’t and haven’t lived like that, so that particular message is not going to be relevant. But like I said before, I think the important thing for me, for Hip Hop, is not to portray that image, it’s to portray the image of the life you live and who you are

(ibid).

3.6 Separating the Real from the Fake:⁴⁰

In this chapter I have demonstrated that Hip Hoppers privilege the use of accents that they define as ‘natural’ and therefore, real. Yet, as the ‘accent debate’ demonstrates, what constitutes ‘realness’ is a matter of contention. Both Australian Hip Hoppers who rap in American accents and those who rap in their ‘native’ accents criticise each other for being inauthentic. However, this does not mean that both positions are equally accepted. Rapping in your ‘native’ accent has become the dominant practice in the Australian Hip Hop scene and Australians who choose to rap in American accents are in

⁴⁰ This heading references the song ‘Separate the Real from the Fake’ from the Common Cause album *With A Purpose* (2008).

the minority. Weapon X, an Australian MC who does rap in an American accent, stated in a 2007 interview that he was ‘kind of an anomaly now’ (Weapon X in G Force 2007, n.p.) because so few Australian artists adopt American accents. Such artists are frequently criticised by other Hip Hoppers: for example, Adelaide MC Brian describes adopting an American accent in your music as “kinda pathetic” (Brian, Author’s Interview):

If you’re going to rap in an American accent you may as well go all the way and actually start speaking in an American accent in everyday life if you’re going to do that and that’s kinda pathetic. It’s about the same sort of logic

(ibid)

The dismissal of Australian artists who adopt American accents highlights the importance that Australian Hip Hoppers place on ‘being true to yourself’ or ‘keeping it real’. Hip Hoppers make judgements about “who you are” (Patrick, Author’s Interview) and therefore, how you should rap.

Artists like the afore mentioned Weapon X and his fellow group member Ken Hell are often attacked on internet forums and even in Hip Hop song lyrics by Hip Hoppers who argue that they are not being ‘true’ to “who they are” (ibid) in their music. In the track ‘Blackout’ MC Trials from the Adelaide group the Funkoars raps: ‘Hilltop and Oars - That's the truth/Weapon X and Ken Hell - That's the booth/The shit's fake’ (*The Greatest Hits* 2006).⁴¹ There was much discussion amongst Hip Hoppers regarding what Trials meant by the term ‘booth’. The general consensus was that he was attacking Weapon X and Ken Hell for not being who they portray in their music or in the recording ‘booth’. This criticism is akin to the derogatory claim that someone is a ‘studio gangster’, which is a label that is often used by American Hip Hoppers to discredit other artists. When Hip Hoppers call someone a ‘studio gangster’ or state that they are ‘the booth’ and not the ‘truth’, they are suggesting that the person in question is ‘fake’ because they are promoting a particular image in their music that is not reflective of their lived experience.

⁴¹ Hilltop refers to the Adelaide Hip Hop group the Hilltop Hoods. Oars is short for Funkoars.

In the following chapter, I demonstrate that Hip Hoppers contend that Hip Hop lyrics are more “personal” or autobiographical than song lyrics in other musical genres. Therefore, they are critical of Hip Hop artists who they argue do not represent their own experience in their lyrics. Yet, despite the emphasis that Hip Hoppers place on the autobiographical ‘truth’ of Hip Hop lyrics, we must be careful not to oversimplify or essentialise the relationship between personal experience and authenticity. Australian Hip Hoppers write and perform both autobiographical lyrics and fictional narratives. It is reductionist to argue that Hip Hoppers artists are authentic only when they rap about issues or themes that they have personally experienced and are therefore ‘real’. In his study of popular music titled *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music*, Frith (1998) asserts that the distinction between ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ lyrics is arbitrary because songs are not usually ‘statements of sociological or psychological truth’ (Frith 1998, p. 163). Therefore, he argues that we need to question why ‘some sorts of words are *heard* as real or unreal’ (ibid, original emphasis).

In this chapter I have shown that Hip Hop lyrics can be *heard* (ibid) as ‘unreal’ or ‘fake’ when there is a perceived incongruence between an artist’s speaking voice and their rapping voice. In chapter 4 I demonstrate that Hip Hop lyrics are also heard as unreal when artists are thought to be simulating American Hip Hop or rapping about issues or ideas that they define as ‘foreign’. Certain lyrical themes such as those often featured in Gangsta Rap are typically categorised as inauthentic in the Australian context because “most people in Australia don’t and haven’t lived like that” (Patrick, Author’s Interview). While Australians do listen to such Hip Hop, they argue that Australians should not produce it because its lyrical themes do not reflect the Australian context.

Chapter 4

“Who You Are”: Authentic Lyrical Content.

In their introduction to the edited volume *You Wrote My Life: Lyrical Themes in Country Music*, Peterson and McLaurin (1994) state that while country music is often understood by fans, practitioners and commentators as a musical form that ‘tells it like it is’ (Peterson and McLaurin 1994, p. 6), any ‘cultural mirror has facets that distort what it reflects’ (ibid). They note that no matter how ‘true to life’ the lyrics of a particular song may be, no country musician will perform them if they depict them in a way that does not fit the image they want to project (Peterson and McLaurin 1994, p. 7). They recount an instance when two country musicians refused to record a song written by an amateur song writer because they were concerned about how the song portrayed them. While this example highlights the different attitudes that country musicians and Hip Hop artists have to performing songs written by other people (see section 4.1), it also demonstrates that we need to examine when and why some lyrics are defined as ‘truthful’ while others are classified as ‘fake’.

In this chapter I show that Hip Hoppers define Hip Hop as a musical form that is more “personal” or autobiographical than other genres. Therefore, they assert that Hip Hop artist’s lyrics should reflect “who they are” (Patrick, Author’s Interview). However, as I will discuss, discerning who someone ‘is’ and therefore what they can rap about, is extremely problematic. Furthermore, while Hip Hoppers emphasise the autobiographical nature of Hip Hop lyrics, they also acknowledge that artists do use creative license and story-telling in their music. Australian Hip Hop artists often rap about fantastical ideas and present themselves in performances (at live shows, in film clips and so on) in very different ways than is their everyday behaviour. Many MCs and artists adopt characters and exaggerate elements of the truth for dramatic effect. These practices complicate the assertion that Hip Hop lyrics should be based in ‘self-experience’.

4.1 “Hip Hop is More Personal”: Autobiographical Lyrics:

My participants contend that Hip Hop is a highly personal musical form and that, unlike songs from other music genres, Hip Hop tracks are highly individually referential:

I think Hip Hop is one of the only genres where you make music about you. So to a certain extent you have to be that person you rap about. Hip Hop has always been about bragging where other musical styles aren't. Hip Hop is very first person. I guess in other genre's your lyrics can be a generic story someone else wrote for you that has nothing to do with your life or personality

(Mark, Author's Interview).

There is an implicit understanding that Hip Hop artists are what they say they are. Hip Hop is more personal

(Rex, Author's Interview).

If Hip Hop is all "about you" or "more personal", then lyrical content becomes crucial. Hip Hoppers contend that the connection between what an MC says and their self identity is stronger in Hip Hop than in other music genres. Because of the intricate nature of the word play in rapping and the differences in individual intonation, breathing patterns and annunciation, it is virtually unheard of for rappers to cover other Hip Hop songs. Sometimes rappers will accompany another rapper on stage and join in at points, but it is highly unusual for someone to actually perform another rapper's song in its entirety, especially without the other artist present.⁴² This may also be because of the time it would take to memorise a rap song in full. According to many Hip Hop artists this gives Hip Hop more legitimacy than other musical forms:

It really drives me crazy when people say that Hip Hop is not original. How many desperate cover bands and tribute bands are there? Rock bands stuck playing other people's music and singing other people's stuff all day long. That is their career. In Hip Hop you don't get that. People write their own rhymes and they rap it themselves. We do not do cover songs

(Drew, Author's Interview).

In the Australian Hip Hop scene, cover bands, tribute bands, and cover songs are commonly dismissed as inauthentic. Given that Hip Hop enthusiasts situate the act of sampling as an essential Hip Hop practice, the dismissal of cover songs and tribute bands highlights the nuanced distinctions that Hip Hoppers make between originality

⁴² Negus (1999) demonstrates that the perception that Hip Hop songs cannot be covered affects decisions made by music industry executives about the level of capital to invest in the production of Hip Hop. This is because it is assumed that Hip Hop tracks are less likely to earn 'ongoing copyright revenue from their reuse' (Negus 1999, p. 498).

and derivation. Sampling, defined by Marshall (2006, p. 868) as the ‘use of elements from other performers’ recordings, for example, funk records, to make hip-hop beats’, is celebrated by Hip Hop fans as an act of creativity. According to Drew, performing a cover song does not involve this same level of ingenuity because according to him, cover bands and tribute bands only play “other people’s music”. This ideology fits into a Western understanding of creativity that privileges innovation or transformation over repetition and reproduction. In different cultural contexts this is not the case. Numerous studies of cover bands and songs, particularly in Japan, have illustrated that people can give cover songs new sensibilities and new meanings (Stevens 2008, p. 149).

This is clearly demonstrated in Yano’s (2005) work on Enka, a sentimental Japanese popular ballad form. Yano argues that the prevalence of cover songs in Enka can be understood in the Japanese context as *kata* (patterned form). *Kata* relies on repetition as the means through which authenticity is accrued over time. This reflects the prevailing cultural value that ‘knowing, practicing and replicating patterned forms carries far greater prestige than originality’ (Yano 2005, p. 196). Thus, the cover songs and tribute bands that Drew is so dismissive of are actually privileged in a context where repetition performs the function of historically embedding and validating expression (Yano 2005, p. 193). Similarly, the edited volume *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture* (Homan ed. 2006) explores the complex ways that authenticity can be ascribed to tribute bands. In this book Bennett (2006) makes a key distinction between cover bands and tribute bands. Mosser (2008) also argues that the term ‘cover song’ is not specific enough to account for the differences between various types of covers. He breaks down the cover song into four categories: reduplication covers, interpretive covers, send-up (ironic) covers, and parody covers (Mosser 2008, n.p.).

These are differences that Drew glosses over. For him, both cover bands and tribute bands are equally inauthentic. In rejecting cover bands and tribute bands, Drew is emphasising the originality of Hip Hop. As his comments suggest, Hip Hop enthusiasts typically assume that the lyrics of a Hip Hop track are written by the rapper who performs it and this has become a marker of authenticity (cf. Hess 2005, p. 300). From this perspective, cover bands and tribute bands can never be authentic because they do

not write their own lyrics. This rhetoric demonstrates that Hip Hoppers place a high value on ‘self-creation and individuality’ (Armstrong 2004, p. 337). Hip Hoppers contend that Hip Hop artists are more likely to write their own lyrics and that this reflects a higher level of innovation, creativity and truthfulness. It is very rare for Hip Hop artists to employ other people to write their lyrics and people do not usually seek out pre-written lyrics to record. When raps are written by individuals other than the performing artist, this fact is actively concealed. Such writers are called ‘ghost writers’ and receive no official credit:

I think Hip Hop is more legitimate and authentic, compared to other music genres, because in other music genres some people don’t write their own music. Hip Hop is about expressing yourself rather than having a ghost writer

(Samuel, Author’s Interview).

Not too many people with get away with doing cover songs and stuff like that in Hip Hop, it just doesn’t work and if it is, it’s because it’s a tribute to a great artist, they make it really obvious, that’s why they’re doing it. Like there’s a Pharoah Monch song paying tribute to a Public Enemy song, something like that, but that was a clear tribute. There’s a lot of people who go under ghost writers and stuff like that in the U.S. but they won’t necessarily credit that ghost writer because they want to come off as original and authentic

(Brian, Author’s Interview).

Hip Hop fans argue that the link between the rapper and their lyrical content is more developed in Hip Hop than in other genres where authorship is not assumed by default. This has clear ramifications for authenticity debates, as what you say in a Hip Hop song is intrinsically linked to your individual identity. Even if the rhymes in question are clearly fantastical and not related to your everyday life, their authorship is attributed to you. Thus, you are held accountable for what you say.

The above comments also demonstrate how claims to authenticity are made vis-à-vis other musical genres. It is telling that Samuel compares Hip Hop to other musical

genres and that Drew equates cover bands and tribute bands with “rock bands”.⁴³ While cover bands and tribute bands can be found in almost every musical genre, Drew may have singled out rock because rock fans are often very vocal about their hostility towards Hip Hop. In particular, some rock fans blame the declining availability of live music venues in Australia on the growing popularity and affordability of Hip Hop DJs.⁴⁴ In the 1980s Australian Hip Hop fans and artists had to work to carve out a space for themselves in a national music scene that was dominated by rock, folk and country music. As such, Hip Hoppers often position themselves against fans and artists from these genres, denouncing their authenticity while celebrating their own:

I don't see why country music is so quintessentially 'Australian'. Half of them are still singing in American accents about their Smith and Wessons or whatever! And they have the gall to criticise us

(Zach, Author's Interview).

Once again, we see the overlap between accent and content issues. Shane rejects Australian country music artists for both singing in American accents and for singing about American themes, symbolised by the quintessential American gun, the Smith and Wesson. While I am sure that country music performers and enthusiasts would strongly object to this appraisal, it is through these kinds of oppositions that Hip Hop performers and fans assert their own authenticity and position Hip Hop as a more ‘truthful’ or ‘personal’ musical form than other genres. As I discussed in chapter 3, Hip Hoppers argue that Hip Hop is primarily about ‘being true to yourself’. Therefore, they are critical of artists who are perceived to be rapping about issues and ideas that are not ‘true’ to their own experience.

⁴³ Rock musicians can also be critical of cover bands. In her study of rock culture in Liverpool, Cohen (1991) found that while many rock bands started off playing other people's material they usually progressed to creating their own music: ‘Thereafter many were against performing a lot of covers because they felt that to do so showed a lack of creativity and initiative’ (Cohen 1991, p. 184).

⁴⁴ Other DJs, for example House DJs, Trance DJs and so on, are also included in these complaints. Other important factors that have contributed to this decline are changes to gambling laws, liquor licensing and the gentrification of inner city housing areas (cf. Homan 2008).

4.2 “Portraying the Image of the Life you Live”: Authentic Lyrical Content:

Australian Hip Hoppers are particularly disapproving of lyrical themes that they argue are imitative or derivative of American Hip Hop. This is demonstrated in the following quote from Australian DJ Danielsan:

When my friends and I listened to rap albums coming out of the States, we weren't trying to copy the way they talked; we just saw people talking about their area – the Bronx or Compton. We were making tapes talking about Chifley and Woden. Then you had others who didn't quite get it, talking about South Central when they live in Parramatta

(Danielsan in Colman 2005, p. 4).

In the above quote Danielsan suggests that Hip Hop is intrinsically linked to its environment of production. Where you live, therefore, is a key factor in determining what kind of Hip Hop you make. This view is echoed by my informants who state that Hip Hop lyrics should be reflective of the everyday realities of Australian life and that Hip Hop artists should “portray the image of the life you live and who you are” (Patrick, Author’s Interview).⁴⁵ Hip Hoppers who draw on themes and ideas that are perceived to be ‘American’ or ‘foreign’ are characterised by most Australian Hip Hoppers as being ‘fake’, or in Danielsan’s words, people who don’t ‘quite get it’ (ibid). In particular, lyrics that mention money, material possessions, luxurious living and other forms of social excess are viewed very suspiciously by Australian Hip Hop performers and fans:

When they’re talking about making money or cars and this and that, it doesn’t really interest me because it’s not authentic. Everybody’s talking about that, it’s bullshit, it’s contrived, it’s materialistic. And that doesn’t interest me

(Michael, Author’s Interview).

Rapping about personal wealth is disparaged because most Hip Hop artists are not financially secure. As such, discussions about wealth are viewed as inauthentic posturing. That is, artists are seen to be pretending to be wealthy when they are not, a practice that undercuts the ‘being true to yourself’ discourse. The rationale for this

⁴⁵ See section 3.5 for a longer version of this quote.

pretence is believed to be the fostering of an image that will sell more records. Furthermore, a preoccupation with money is often associated with ‘mainstream’ American Hip Hop artists. Many of the Hip Hoppers I spoke too are extremely critical of Australian artists who portray an image that they associate with this mainstream American Hip Hop. This image is seen to be epitomised by American Hip Hop artists like 50 Cent:

50 Cent kind of Hip Hop...all that guns, ridiculous violence crap, with fifty gold chains hanging off your neck and that bling bling stereotype. I mean come on, bling-bling? Who in their right mind says that? If I read one more newspaper story about Hip Hop with bling bling in the title I’ll go nuts

(Steve, Author’s Interview).

Here Steve expresses contempt for the way that Hip Hop is often covered in the mainstream press. He contends that the journalistic preoccupation with terms like ‘bling bling’ suggests a level of ignorance as it is a term that no one in their “right mind” would use. Steve is articulating a certain definition of authentic Hip Hop, one that journalists often fail to recognise. He went on to argue that talking about bling bling was an American trope that was not relevant to Australian life:

That whole bling bling thing might fit in the American context, but it just seems pretentious here. Who wears diamonds here? Who is a thug here? These things might have some kind of meaning to a very small section of our population but they don’t to me

(Steve, Author’s Interview).

Steve associates the term bling bling with being a “thug” and wearing diamonds, things that he argues are only relevant to a very small section of the Australian population and that have no meaning to him. Of course many Australians do wear diamonds, in particular women. What Steve is referring to here is a particular style of jewelry that some Hip Hop artists wear; oversized diamond encrusted crosses, dollar sign necklaces, large earrings, rings, lavish watches and so on. Wearing this kind of jewelry was also criticised by Adelaide B-Boy, Peter:

I associate wearing all that stuff with really crap, mainstream American Hip Hop. Here if you were to carry around a ‘pimp cup’ you would just be seen as such a wanker.⁴⁶ I’m sure people also think that about American MCs who do it, but it is more accepted there. There is just some stuff, doing a drive by, pimps, ho’s, that stuff does not fly here

(Peter, Author’s Interview).

Peter’s statement can be compared with quotes from Maxwell’s (2003) ethnography of Sydney Hip Hop, wherein Hip Hop artists Mick E and E.S.P discuss the authenticity of a rap that they recorded about a drive-by shooting in far Western Sydney. Mick E and E.S.P discuss how they witnessed a drive-by shooting that took place after a Hip Hop performance and then wrote about it the next day. While they describe the drive-by as ‘American’ (Mick E in Maxwell 2003, p. 44) and ‘stupid’ (E.S.P in Maxwell 2003, p. 45), they state that they wrote about the incident because it happened in Australia. E.S.P goes on to argue that Hip Hop is about ‘self-experience, self expression’ (ibid) and that events like drive-bys are a part of their lived reality: ‘they’re happening here’ (ibid). Mick E and E.S.P contend that drive-bys are an authentic source of lyrical inspiration because they witnessed a drive-by and were compelled to write about it. Therefore, they are ‘being true to themselves’ because they are writing about what they know.

That E.S.P and Mick E felt that they needed to justify the authenticity of these lyrics demonstrates the pervasiveness of the idea that Hip Hoppers should rap about “the life you live and who you are” (Patrick, Author’s Interview). Unlike E.S.P and Mick E, Peter argues that certain experiences and lyrical themes are “American” and therefore, they do not “fly here”. By using the term “fly” he is suggesting that such themes are not accepted by Australian Hip Hoppers. Both of these perspectives illustrate that the perceived relevance of lyrics is primarily based on the artist’s ‘self-experience’ (Maxwell 2003). The global pervasiveness of this discourse is illustrated by the fact that Malaysian MC, Joe Flizzow from the group Too Phat is also critical of artists who are not perceived to be ‘keeping it real’ (Joe Flizzow in Pennycook 2007, p. 106):

⁴⁶ American MC Lil Jon carries around a jewel encrusted chalice that he calls a pimp cup.

If suddenly I start rapping about pushing cocaine or rocking bling bling, then ... that wouldn't be keeping it real...we talk about issues that are relevant to the Malaysian scene

(ibid).

Tanzanian rappers are also critical of Hip Hop artists that 'copy American rap rather than rapping about local issues' (Thompson 2008, p. 40). Both Joe Flizzow and Steve associate the term bling bling with a particular style of Hip Hop that is not relevant to them. Steve goes even further in identifying bling bling as a distinctly American "thing". Australian Hip Hoppers are chastised for being 'fake' when they rap in American accents and when they rap about themes and ideas that are defined as being American. This is illustrated in the song 'Why Do I Try So Hard?' by Australian Hip Hop group Two Up. In this song Two Up condemn Australian Hip Hop fans who are primarily influenced by American Hip Hop: "Could someone tell me what's up with these try hard homies?/Their caps are back to front but I think they're phonies" (*Tastes like Chicken* 2002). As Pennycook (2007) discusses in his analysis of the lyrics in this track, Hip Hoppers can be critical of people who are seen to 'adhere too closely to an American version of hip-hop' (Pennycook 2007, p. 106). However, Pennycook also warns that we must not oversimplify the process by which some lyrical themes and not others are classified as 'local'.

Pennycook uses the example of lyrics from the aforementioned Malaysian Hip Hop group Too Phat to illustrate the difficulties that can be faced when scholars attempt to distinguish between 'local' and 'global' lyrical references or language use (Pennycook 2007, p. 111). In their song 'If I Die Tonight' MCs Mista Malique and Joe Flizzow refer to Malaysian Chinese and Indian food (fried *kuey teow* and *roti canai*), Muslim prayers at dawn and two sneaker styles (Jordans and Air Force Ones) (ibid). Pennycook uses these lyrics to discuss the complexities of localisation by questioning which of these references can be defined as 'local':

Although we may be comfortable to say that fried *kuey teow* is a local reference (although even that, when we take into account other diasporas and travel, may not be so clear), can we assume that other references are not local? Or, put another way, when do Malique's Jordan's become local?

(Pennycook 2007, p. 111).

Pennycook argues that we need to view enactment and recontextualisation as parts of the localisation process and that when we do so, it is difficult to assess which aspects of Too Phat's rhymes are 'local' and which are 'global'. He states that we should not overlook how mimetic language use can also be 'local' when it is 'seen as *enactment* rather than *copying*' (Pennycook 2007, p. 110, original emphasis).

Australian Hip Hoppers make distinctions between their own creative appropriation of Hip Hop or 'enactment' and the practices of other Hip Hoppers who are viewed as merely 'copying' American Hip Hop. Arthur (2010) argues that these people are called 'Homies' by other Hip Hop fans, and this contention is reflected in the way that Two Up use the term in the above lyrical extract. According to Arthur's research, Homies are people who identify with Hip Hop but who are perceived to have a limited understanding of the culture (Arthur 2010, p. 105). They are people who emulate American Hip Hop and in particular Gangsta Rap.⁴⁷ Arthur (2010) argues that Australian Hip Hoppers distance themselves from people that they classify as 'Homies' and are often frustrated by the general public's inability to distinguish between Homies and 'real' Hip Hoppers. Likewise, Maxwell (2003) states that in the Sydney Hip Hop scene the term 'Homie' is used to label 'anyone adopting what insiders saw as the superficial trappings of Hip Hop style' (Maxwell 2003, p. 131) without truly committing themselves to Hip Hop culture. As will I discuss in chapter 5, committing yourself to Hip Hop culture involves demonstrating a 'love' or a 'passion' for Hip Hop.

Here Hip Hoppers are 'policing cultural boundaries' (ibid), they are drawing lines that situate certain styles, practices and people and not others as a part of Hip Hop culture. This kind of boundary construction is clearly demonstrated in the above excerpt from Mick E and E.S.P. Mick E and E.S.P. recognise that rapping about a drive-by could be understood as a sign of fakeness, as evidence that they are simulating American Hip Hop. They attempt to nullify this potential critique by arguing that they are not rapping about an issue that is American but something that they have personally observed and experienced. In doing so, they distance themselves from other Hip Hoppers or Homies

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the history of Gangsta Rap and content analysis of Gangsta Rap lyrics see Armstrong 2001. Armstrong (2001) argues that the foundational period of Gangsta Rap was from 1987 to 1993. He identifies Bushwick Bill, Dr. Dre, Eazy-E, Geto Boys, Ice Cube, Ice-T, MC Ren, N.W.A., Scarface, Snoop Doggy Dogg, Too Much Trouble (Baby Geto Boys), Too \$hort, and Willie D as important members of the genre.

who are characterised as inauthentically reproducing American Hip Hop. While no one that I interviewed used the term ‘Homie’, they were incredibly dismissive of Hip Hop enthusiasts who they described as promoting and creating a shallow, American-centric style of Hip Hop. Such Hip Hoppers were explicitly positioned as outsiders, as people who might have appropriated some of the trappings of Hip Hop culture but who did not really understand its depth. Thus, while some Australian Hip Hop fans construe their own appropriation of Hip Hop as creative, they are concerned about the actions of other Australians who they understand to be consuming and reproducing American Hip Hop.

These anxieties are clearly expressed in the 2006 track ‘Globalized’ by Australian Hip Hop artist Matty B. ‘Globalized’ opens with the following spoken word introduction:

I look around my neighbourhood and I see a lot of American things going on, I see a lot of American shops, a lot of American labels, and I see a lot of Australian kids acting American. And I’ll tell you why, it’s because America is trying to take the whole world over, we gotta stop it right now

(Simple But Effective 2006).

The rapped chorus of the song states: “Now days, nobody cares for the local guys/Look around yourself mate – we’re being globalised” (ibid). The song is a critique of globalisation, in particular the negative impacts of American imperialism. Matty B describes a world where the global influence of the U.S.A dramatically affects people’s everyday lives. In the first two verses of the song he raps about the 2003 Iraq invasion, depicting America as a dominating political and military force.⁴⁸ In the third and final verse he explains the internal conflict that he feels when he consumes “American owned” products:

So I sit here, searching for a solution/To a problem to which I’ve made a huge contribution/From my BMX Bikes to my new pair of Nikes/America makes a dollar off everything that I like/No matter how I try to fight and do what’s right/American blokes make profit off toast and Vegemite.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Although Iraq was invaded by a multi-national force led by the U.S.A., Matty B focuses on the role that ‘America’ played in ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’.

⁴⁹ ‘Blokes’ is Australian slang for men.

When Matty B talks about globalisation it is apparent that he is primarily concerned with Americanisation. As I outlined in chapter 1, concerns about Americanisation have dominated much of the globalisation discourse; the anxiety being that cultural differences will become standardised as local products give way to a flow of American made television, music, food and clothes. Yet, why might an Australian Hip Hop artist be worried about Americanisation? After all, Hip Hop is an originally American cultural form. Matty B explained his motivations further in an interview with journalist Jodi Hammond:

[H]ip hop has made a lot of Australian kids a little too American and I think it has made them a little negative, too, with all the gangsta hip hop around. I see a lot of kids hanging at the bus stop wearing caps backwards, wearing a lot of American labels and talking pretty American, sounding pretty American. I wanted to show them that you can make good rap music and you can have complex rhyme patterns and good beats and hit good subject matters in an Australian accent

(Matty B in Hammond 2006, p. 8).

Matty B differentiates between practices and influences that he defines as being “too American” and “good rap music” (ibid). He identifies four characteristics that make up good rap music: 1) Complex rhyme patterns 2) Good beats 3) Good subject matter and 4) An Australian accent. In doing so, he takes on a paternalistic role, stating that he wants to show “Australian kids” that they can make Hip Hop without replicating American Hip Hop.

Many of the Hip Hoppers that I interviewed made very similar statements. As Maxwell (2003) discusses, Hip Hoppers frequently emphasise the importance of educating yourself and others about Hip Hop culture, and as I demonstrated in chapter 2, they are often anxious to ensure that newer Hip Hop enthusiasts privilege the same practices, values and information that they do. Some Australian Hip Hop fans and performers position their own appropriation of Hip Hop as creative while condemning other people for merely simulating American Hip Hop. Both Two Up and Matty B suggest that these fans and artists can be identified by their propensity to wear caps backwards. While wearing a baseball cap backwards was once a fairly common practice amongst Australian youth and Hip Hoppers in particular, Two Up and Matty B suggest that wearing a cap backwards is inauthentic. They link it to being a particular kind of Hip Hopper; one that is “phonie” or “a little too American”.

The lyrics of ‘Why Do I Try So Hard?’ and ‘Globalized’ illustrate that the appropriation of Hip Hop does not involve the whole-sale adoption of American values. Hip Hoppers both within and outside of America commonly use Hip Hop to condemn aspects of American life. Japanese Hip Hop fans use the form to discuss the implications of September 11 (Condry 2006) and Somali-Canadian MC K’Naan rejects the violence and materialism of some American Hip Hop lyrics (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009). The majority of Australian Hip Hoppers that I interviewed reject lyrical themes and ideas that they argue are not relevant to their own circumstances. As I outlined above, inappropriate lyrics are often those that are commonly associated with mainstream American Hip Hop. More specifically, Hip Hop fan Rhett associates these kinds of lyrics with American Gangsta Rap, Hyphy and Southern Hip Hop:

Some of the stuff in Southern Hip Hop, or Gangsta Rap even, it is specific to that context. Like the Hyphy kind of sound that didn’t take off here because it was a local thing – a Bay Area thing. All the kind of imagery and language associated with it, calling your cars ‘whips’ and all this kind of stuff. Here that doesn’t fit

(Rhett, Author’s Interview).

Hyphy is a distinct type of Hip Hop, and it could be argued, a culture in its own right, that developed in the San Francisco Bay Area.⁵⁰ Rhett contends that Hyphy is a “local thing” and that therefore, it doesn’t “fit” in the Australian context. He associates Hyphy with certain lyrical themes and even some fashion items that he argues, Australians should not talk about:

I like that kind of Hip Hop if the right people are doing it, but if you are some kid living at home with your parents in Burnside and you’re all like check out my chains or what not, I mean come on!

(Rhett, Author’s Interview).

The fact that Rhett associates a “kid living at home” and rapping about his “chains” with the Adelaide suburb of Burnside, which is typically viewed by Adelaide residents as a very affluent area of Adelaide, demonstrates that class, age and life experience all play important roles in establishing the perceived appropriateness of certain lyrical themes and practices. Rhett’s assertion that he likes “that kind of Hip Hop if the right

⁵⁰ I do not have the required space to examine the history of the Hyphy musical movement here. In brief, the term ‘Hyphy’ (slang for getting ‘hyped up’) has come to represent a particular style of music, dance forms and fashion.

people are doing it” suggests that the authenticity of Hip Hop lyrics is not determined by the lyrics themselves, but by the rapper who is performing them. Thus, a “kid” from “Burnside” cannot talk about his “chains” but a Hyphy MC from the Bay Area can. While many Australian Hip Hop fans appreciate the lyrical content of American Gangsta Rap or Hyphy, they are often critical of Australians who rap about similar themes:

Gangsta Rap comes from a certain place...if I rap about how I can't wear red
down Rundle Mall that is just stupid

(Tim, Author's Interview).

When Tim talks about not being able to wear the colour red he is referencing American gang wars, red being the colour worn by and commonly associated with members of the Los Angeles gang the Bloods. He juxtaposes the fact that wearing particular colours can be highly dangerous in certain areas of L.A. with the relative safety of wearing any colour in the shopping Mall in the centre of Adelaide. Tim concludes that rapping about not being able to wear red in Rundle Mall is “just stupid” (ibid), because it is not part of this “place” (ibid). When he talks about the “certain place” that Gangsta Rap comes from, it is clear that he thinks that life in Adelaide is not comparable to life in the streets of L.A., the city most strongly associated with Gangsta Rap.

The perceived disjuncture between Australian life and the narratives of struggle and survival that commonly feature in American Hip Hop was recently parodied in an Australian car advertisement for the KIA Sportage ('KIA Video Gallery', n.p.). In this advertisement a White, presumably middle-class male drives his Sportage through the peaceful and affluent suburban streets surrounding his home while he raps the lyrics to the 1982 American Hip Hop song 'The Message' by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five which is playing on his car stereo. The advertisement is intended to humourously compare the driver's own suburb with the politically charged lyrics of 'The Message', which documented the harsh realities of living in the South Bronx in the 1980s. Lines from 'The Message' that do not appear in the advertisement include: 'Broken glass everywhere/People pissin' on the stairs, you know they just don't care/I can't take the smell, can't take the noise/Got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice/Rats in the front room, roaches in the back/Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat' (*The Message* 1982).

The driver does not rap these lyrics but loudly performs the chorus of the song, ‘Don’t push me cause I’m close to the edge/I’m trying not to lose my head’ and ‘It’s like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from going under’.⁵¹ In one version of the advertisement he sheepishly turns down the music in his car when he passes an elderly couple in their driveway and in another he is chastised by his wife when he returns home without having bought nappies.⁵² The implication of the advertisement is that the performance of this song by a White, middle-class Australia is comical.⁵³ The advertisement illustrates how Australian life can be positioned as incomparable to the lives of many American Hip Hop artists who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. That said, we must be careful not to assume that all Australians share the same life experiences. I interviewed one Adelaide MC who was heavily influenced by Gangsta Rap and who objected to the idea that he shared no commonalities with American Gangsta rappers. This rapper was from the Northern suburbs of Adelaide, an area that is stigmatised by many Adelaide residents as being an area of low socioeconomic status and high crime rates. He made this statement:

I don’t reckon, I mean who is to tell me what I can’t rap about? If they came out here they would see that there are gangs, and people do get messed up in fights and other things. People did bring knives to school and all of that. I am not saying it is exactly the same as being from the Bronx or Compton, but no middle-class, upper-class snob should say that Australians can’t relate to that. Maybe they don’t live it, but drugs dealers hang out on my street, half the people I know have babies and they are kids themselves

(Simon, Author’s Interview).

Simon emphasises the importance of class, expressing his frustration with other Hip Hoppers or “snobs” who try to “tell” him what to rap about. While he states that life in Adelaide is not identical to life in the Bronx or Compton, he also argues that his everyday life involves experiences that middle or upper class Adelaide residents are not exposed to such as; gangs and other violent criminal activity, drug dealers and teenage pregnancy. Simon makes a connection between life in the Northern Suburbs of

⁵¹ The advertisement also features two original members of the group who performed the song, Melle Mel and Scorpio. They are passengers in the car and accompany the White male with his rapping but mysteriously disappear when he pulls up in his driveway.

⁵² Diapers.

⁵³ The advertisement also appeals to youthful nostalgia and fun through the closing tag line ‘Grow Up, Not Old’.

Adelaide and the experience of the American ghetto. His comments demonstrate that the classification of certain lyrical themes as authentic or inauthentic are determined by who is doing the classifying and in particular, their socioeconomic status or geographical location. Hip Hoppers who are from different socioeconomic backgrounds and/or different suburbs can have different life experiences and therefore, may make different judgements about the appropriateness of particular lyrical themes.

4.3 Being True: Class and Everyday Life:

In his study of Hip Hop in Sydney Maxwell (2003) argues that Hip Hoppers are divided about whether or not people who are perceived to be from middle-class backgrounds can authentically claim Hip Hop (Maxwell, 2003, pp. 54, 65). As I demonstrate in this thesis, who is seen to have the right to claim Hip Hop is a contested issue. In chapter 2 I explored how nationality and race can be experienced as barriers that Australian Hip Hoppers must negotiate in order to position themselves as authentically Hip Hop. Simon's quote illustrates that class and geography also play important roles in debates about authenticity. Like Hip Hoppers from the Western Suburbs of Sydney (Maxwell 2003), Simon constructs the Northern Suburbs of Adelaide as being analogous to the inner-city ghettos of America. Maxwell (2003) notes that the geographical diffusion of the population throughout the expanses of Greater Sydney effectively denied the association of Sydney Hip Hop culture with the traditional site of Hip Hop authenticity, the inner city. This did not mean that this association was abandoned, but rather that the Western Suburbs of Sydney emerged as the local equivalent to the ghetto, and discourses of socioeconomic marginalisation continued to remain prevalent aspects of the culture.

However, Maxwell (2003) contends that there are tensions between those who identify with the socioeconomic characteristics of African-American Hip Hop 'as members of disadvantaged, discriminated against or even oppressed class, ethnic and geographical populations...and those who are perceived as having more "middle-class" backgrounds"'(Maxwell 2003, p. 54). Throughout this thesis I have argued that Hip Hoppers draw on the ideology of being 'true to yourself' to overcome the assertion that Anglo-Australians cannot authentically claim Hip Hop. This is also used to counter the assertion that middle class or upper class Australians cannot authentically appropriate

Hip Hop. My research suggests that tensions between people who identify with the socioeconomic characteristics of African-American and those who are perceived as having middle class or upper class backgrounds are becoming less prevalent. Over time it has become more acceptable for people from a wide range of backgrounds to perform Hip Hop, to listen to Hip Hop music and, to be recognised as Hip Hop ‘insiders’. This is evident in this quote from Alex, a Hip Hop MC, who stated that “everybody makes Hip Hop now...you don’t have to be poor or anything like that” (Alex, Author’s Interview).

While Alex told me that he has been through “hard times” and that he found it “helpful” to write about the hardships that he has experienced, he maintains that people do not have to be “poor” to be an MC or involved in Hip Hop. Like Alex, many of the Hip Hoppers that I interviewed suggested that you do not need to be socioeconomically marginalised to appropriate Hip Hop. Rather, they argue that what is important is being ‘true to yourself’ to use a phrase from chapter 3. However, it should be noted that the majority of my participants are highly educated people who did not self-identify as economically disadvantaged or underprivileged.⁵⁴ My informants included; high school teachers, social workers, and several university students in a number of academic disciplines including Law, Medicine and Development Studies. My interview with Simon led me to think more carefully about how people from various suburbs and/or regions within the same city might understand Hip Hop differently. This is an area where important future research could be carried out.

While many of my informants argue that class is not an indicator of authenticity and that people from all backgrounds can produce and consume Hip Hop, further research will establish whether the dominance of this viewpoint reflects a bias in my sample or a

⁵⁴ A potential weakness of my research was that in the early stages of my fieldwork I did not adequately document where my informants lived and their occupations. This was because when I would ask people about where they lived they would often respond with “Adelaide” or “Melbourne”. Early in my research I did not envisage how internal divisions within these cities might affect how people consume and produce Hip Hop. Furthermore, it took me some time to feel confident in asking people what I felt were sensitive questions about their economic and employment status. As I built up more rapport with my participants I was able to earn their trust and to ask these kinds of questions. People also began to divulge much more information to me during informal conversations as I began to spend more time with them. Nonetheless, there were some people who I only interviewed once and had no ongoing contact with. This means that I have incomplete information about some of my participants’ occupations and where they live within the broader regions of Adelaide and Melbourne.

shift in the significance attributed to class as a marker of authenticity. Arthur (2010) found that Hip Hop enthusiasts did not partake in a class struggle (Arthur 2010, p. 99) which suggests that such a shift is taking place. Despite the fact that many of the Hip Hoppers that Arthur interviewed were unemployed or in casual or part-time work, he found that only a small minority made any reference to their socioeconomic circumstances and no one indicated that their involvement in Hip Hop was a direct response to their social class or economic conditions (ibid). My research demonstrates that Hip Hoppers do not judge authenticity based on socioeconomic status or apparent marginalisation alone, rather, they are concerned about the apparent truthfulness of the way in which people represent themselves.

Although Simon objects to middle class and upper class Hip Hoppers who tell him what to rap about, he does not argue that such people should not rap themselves. Likewise, while Rhett is critical of kids from Burnside who adopt the mannerisms, fashions and styles that he associates with Hyphy, he does not suggest that such people should not adopt Hip Hop at all. Hip Hoppers are critical of people who are perceived to be misrepresenting themselves, whether it is through their consumption practices, their accent use, their lyrics or their dress. Hip Hop performers and fans make distinctions between behaviors and practices that they define as artificial and those that are ‘honest’ or ‘real’. They privilege lyrical content that is understood as a representation of the artist’s life and cultural context. As I discussed in sections 4.1 and 4.2, Hip Hoppers argue that Hip Hop is a more “personal” musical form than other genres and this means that Hip Hop fans and artists emphasise their ‘local allegiances and territorial identities’ (Armstrong 2004, p. 336; cf. Forman 2004b). Thus, your location or place plays a key role in determining the perceived appropriateness of your language use and lyrical content.

Artists who are argued to be simulating American Hip Hop, whether through their accent use or their lyrical content, are viewed by the majority of Australian Hip Hoppers as inauthentic. This is because adopting an American accent and rapping about themes that are constituted as ‘American’ contradicts the Hip Hop ethos of ‘being true to yourself’. That said, we must be cautious about setting up a false dichotomy with authentic Australian Hip Hop on one side and inauthentic American Hip Hop on the other. In fact, many people that I interviewed were angered by the one dimensional

way that American Hip Hop is often depicted in Australia. Tony Mitchell an Australian academic and profuse writer about the Australian Hip Hop scene has been criticised for making these kinds of assumptions. His assertion that, ‘for a sense of innovation, surprise, and musical substance in hip-hop culture and rap music, it is becoming increasingly necessary to look outside the USA’ (Mitchell 2001, p. 3) has been challenged by theorists who argue that it is an unfair characterisation of the USA Hip Hop scene (Templeton 2003; Basu and Lemelle 2006). Furthermore, ‘American’ rhymes are not the only lyrical themes that can be classified as dishonest or unnatural.

4.4 Kangaroos and Didgeridoos: Australian Hip Hop clichés?

I’m standing on the outer edge of a cipher. The cipher is a tight knit group of approximately five people, although a further group of people like me are grouped around the main attraction, listening in. A cipher is the colloquial term for a spontaneous MC Battle that usually happens on the street or some other public space. However, ciphers can occur at any time or place where a number of MCs have gathered. Common times when ciphers occur are at parties or other social gatherings and outside Hip Hop events, often in car parks. A typical cipher involves a number of people standing in a circle, each taking turns to rap. Depending on the occasion a curious crowd may gather around the cipher – or it may just be witnessed by the handful of MCs actually involved. At this cipher an exchange happened that I could only partially capture in the field notes that I would later write.⁵⁵ The cipher rumbled on, with each MC taking their turn and filling the air with their rhymes. Then one MC, finished his rap with the following statement:

I’ll make your head bounce like a kangaroo/Beats, rhymes and didgeridoo’s/Passing it over to you [indicates to the next MC].⁵⁶

This rhyme was immediately seized on by the next MC who began to critique the previous rapper’s choice of words:

Kangaroos, didgeridoos - what the FUCK!/I’m about to run amuck/On this Aussie stereotype/Don’t believe the hype/You’re more clichéd than Paul Hogan and his barbie/You don’t have to rap about your Jeep and your RV/But that don’t mean it’s all about Holden/Drinking a cold one/Vegemite, Uggies, the Southern Cross/You’re a try hard ocker rapper and you just lost.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ It should be noted that the transcripts of the rhymes that I provide here should not be read as quotes. This is because I was not recording this event and could not take scratch notes at the time. Therefore, this exchange is written from memory and may be inaccurate.

⁵⁶ The term Didgeridoo, which can also be spelt Didjeridu and Didjiridu, is used to describe an ‘Aboriginal (orig. Arnhem Land) wind instrument, a long, wooden, tubular instrument producing a low pitched resonant sound’ (Hughes 1989, p. 162).

⁵⁷ Barbie is short for barbeque. RV is an American abbreviation for Recreation Vehicle. Uggies is Australian slang for Ug Boots.

At the end of each attack cheers, laughter and excited exclamations burst forth from the crowd and the other MCs who were witnessing the exchange. Later, the first MC told me that he had immediately regretted his choice of words and that as soon as he had uttered them he knew that he would be “in for it” (Author’s Field notes).

Yet, why was this MC being attacked for choosing to rap about kangaroos and didgeridoos? In this chapter I have demonstrated that Australian Hip Hoppers privilege lyrics that they define as being culturally relevant or part of their own lived experience. This example highlights that what constitutes relevance is very complex. After all, both kangaroos and didgeridoos are iconic Australian symbols that are often used to represent the Australian nation. So why does rapping about them make you a cliché, or even worse, as cliché as the classic 1984 Paul Hogan ‘Throw another shrimp on the barbie’ advertisement? I theorise that it is precisely because kangaroos and didgeridoos are so iconic that their use in rhymes is dismissed as inauthentic. For many Australian Hip Hoppers, kangaroos and didgeridoos are not ‘local’, they are national symbols that have become disconnected from their own everyday lives. I am certain that this is not the case for all Australians, for example the track ‘Down River’ by five young Aboriginal Australians who refer to themselves as the Barkandji Boys features the lines ‘When the river’s high we jump off the bridge/When we get home we play some didge’ (Collie-Holmes 2008; ‘Music and Video, Down River: The Wilcannia Mob Story’).⁵⁸

While I do not want to promote an essentialised understanding of the relationship between race and authenticity or a stereotypical understanding of indigenous Australians, I contend that unlike the use of the line ‘beats, rhymes and didgeridoos’ that is critiqued in the above vignette, the Barkandji Boy’s use of terms like ‘didge’, short for didgeridoo, is much more likely to be accepted as ‘honest’ and therefore, authentic. Conversely, my participants who live in suburban or metropolitan Adelaide and Melbourne typically view the use of overtly nationalistic imagery in Hip Hop as “cliché”. This is because, early in Hip Hop’s Australian development many Hip Hoppers were looking for ways to localise Hip Hop and to make it their own. The way that many people did this was through the incorporation of quintessentially Australian imagery in their lyrics; thongs (footwear not underwear), VB (for the Victorians), Cork

⁵⁸ This track was recorded as part of a workshop run by Shopfront Theatre in the New South Wales town of Wilcannia and achieved national notoriety when it was played on Triple J Radio and international attention when it was remixed by UK rapper M.I.A. in 2007 (Collie-Holmes 2008).

Hats and Stubbie Shorts have all featured in Hip Hop lyrics and freestyles. Over time, these kinds of lyrical themes began to be dismissed as too simplistic, too obvious and too “corny”: “It’s just totally corny. I like to think that we’ve moved on from that” (Simon, Author’s Interview).

The fact that Simon likes to think Australians have “moved on” from drawing on such distinctly Australian imagery illustrates how early attempts to localise Hip Hop are now viewed by many Hip Hoppers as out dated. This clearly demonstrates that the authenticity of particular lyrical themes can change over time. While the employment of specifically Australian symbols was an early strategy used to overcome the assertion that Hip Hop was foreign or that Australian Hip Hoppers were fake, it is now considered to be redundant. Over emphasising your nationality is viewed by some Hip Hoppers as just as fake as adopting mannerisms, language and lyrical themes that are classified as being American. As MC Pressure raps on the track ‘Classic Example’ featuring American MC Pharoahe Monch, this is “Australian Hip Hop but not kangaroos” (*State of the Art* 2009).

This example further illustrates the importance that Hip Hop fans place on ‘truthful’ self-expression. As Hip Hopper Mark discusses, “to a certain extent you have to be that person you rap about” (Mark, Author’s Interview) and for some Hip Hoppers this means foregoing references to kangaroos. However, the fact that Mark includes the proviso “to a certain extent” in the above quote implies that we must be careful not to reduce Hip Hop lyrics to simple narratives of lived experience (Hess 2006, n.p.). Hess (2006) argues that we should not neglect the ‘complex fictions created in the music through its use of hyperbole, metaphor, and parody’ (Hess 2006, n.p.). Through an analysis of the controversial track ‘Cop Killer’, by American Hip Hop artist Ice-T, Hess demonstrates that it is problematic to reduce Hip Hop lyrics to ‘direct reporting’ (ibid).⁵⁹ He concludes that while ‘autobiographical veracity is a central dimension of credibility in performing hip-hop music...hip-hop lyrics create complex structures of reference that go beyond a simple chronicle of the lives of its artists’ (ibid).

⁵⁹ As Hess notes, this track was recorded with Ice-T’s group Body Count and can be classified as metal rather than Hip Hop.

4.4 Beyond Autobiography:

In chapter 3 I introduced a lyrical extract from MC Trials from the Adelaide group the Funkoars wherein Trials attacks Melbourne Hip Hop artists Weapon X and Ken Hell for being fake. Despite the fact that Trials condemns Weapon X and Ken Hell for not truthfully representing themselves in their music, he also raps about ideas and themes that are clearly fantastical and not based in autobiography. On the same album where he critiques Weapon X and Ken Hell for being fake, Trials raps that he is the ‘type of guy’ that has a ‘girl in the trunk tied up’ (‘Da Na Na’, *The Greatest Hits* 2006) a claim which it can be assumed is not meant to be taken seriously. As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, Hip Hop artists commonly exaggerate the truth and use fictional narratives in their lyrics. This is illustrated in the following interview excerpt from Melbourne MC, Billy Bunks. In the interview Bunks is asked; ‘are the stories you tell personally experienced or is it left to the discretion of the listener to distinguish between fact and fiction?’ (Certified Scribe 2008, n.p.) and he wittily replies:

the stories and shit on the album are either true or largely based on actual events. Obviously theres a bit of dramatic effect used here and there, like ‘where I fucked her in the park now the grass don’t grow’ in actual fact it was merely a couple of willows that died, there’s still some grass in spots

(Billy Bunks in Certified Scribe 2008, n.p.).

Hip Hoppers do not simply represent their own realities word for word in their lyrics. They do not write solely about their own lives, or reference only situations that they have experienced first hand. To do so would severely limit the thematic scope of their songs, the subject matter of their lyrics and the dynamism of their performances. This suggests that when Hip Hoppers assess the ‘truth’ of an artist’s lyrics they are not solely concerned with autobiographical veracity. The perceived life experience of an artist does play an important role in determining the kinds of lyrics that are viewed as authentic (e.g. whether or not an artist should rap about a drive-by, kangaroos or themes like teenage pregnancy), however, lived experience is not the only consideration. When Hip Hoppers make judgements about whether or not an artist is ‘honest’ or being ‘true’ to themselves in their lyrics they also consider the perceived intentions of the artist. They make assessments about whether or not the artist is exploring a creative avenue or

'lying'. This is evident in the following conversation that I had with an Australian rapper about American MCs, Kool Keith and Vanilla Ice.

Dianne: But how do you draw that line, between being real and being fake?

Geoffrey: Kool Keith is a good example, he has all these mental personas, the most famous being Dr. Octagon.⁶⁰ But he goes by like a ton of names; Black Elvis, Robbie Analog, it goes on and on. I mean Kool Keith is obviously not even his real name. Do I really think he is some kind of a Hip Hop Doctor, slash, time traveling gynecologist from Jupiter? Obviously no. It is all about being creative. But then you have someone like Vanilla Ice who also takes creative license. He makes up all this rubbish about his past and his street cred [credibility] and passes it off as real.⁶¹ There is no comparison between these two things.

Dianne: Is it about the intentions of the artist?

Geoffrey: Yeah absolutely, does Kool Keith want you to actually believe that he's from Jupiter? No. But Vanilla Ice wants you to believe that he's all hard up.

Artists who overtly adopt characterisations, mannerisms, personas or the like are not defined as fake because the role-playing nature of their actions is explicit. Such artists are seen as enacting certain roles, not trying to be them. Conversely, artists like Vanilla Ice who set out to intentionally deceive their audience often become the object of ridicule.⁶² This is further demonstrated in the following statement from Melbourne Hip Hop fan, Cain:

I couldn't care less if it [putting on a persona] is just to entertain, but if it is to deliberately lie about yourself, then that is when it is totally wrong to me

(Cain, Author's Interview).

According to Cain, it is only when story-telling and other creative techniques move from being structural devices designed to entertain to implements used to actually foster

⁶⁰ Dr. Octagon is the persona that Kool Keith adopts on various albums including *Dr. Octagonecologist* (1996) and *The Return of Dr. Octagon* (2006). However Dan 'The Automator' Nakamura who produced the album *Dr. Octagonecologist* argues that Dr. Octagon is in fact a three person group made up of himself, Kool Keith and DJ Q-Bert (Downs 2006, n.p.).

⁶¹ Geoffrey is referring to the controversy surrounding the publication of false biographical information about Vanilla Ice's life. In particular, that he had gang affiliations and had been stabbed in a fight.

⁶² I recognise that there is some dispute about whether or not Vanilla Ice had prior knowledge that SBK Records were falsifying the information in their press releases.

a false reality that they become unacceptable. Hip Hop artists are not automatically categorised as inauthentic when there is seen to be a disjuncture between the way that they present themselves and their perceived lived reality. Rather, the distinction between real and fake is primarily based on the perceived intentions of the artist and in particular, whether their motivations are deemed to be artistic or monetary:

If someone is rapping about something and I think they are just doing it to get success, it is just bullshit. Rap about what you want to rap about, not what you think is going to make you money

(Peter, Author's Interview).

When pretences adopted by artists are linked to money-making motives they are commonly dismissed. This is because, as Peter states, Hip Hop artists should rap about “what they want to” and not what they think will earn them money. When Hip Hop artists rap about issues that are perceived to be beyond the realms of their own ‘experience’ they must demonstrate that their intent is to entertain or to pursue a creative avenue and not to intentionally deceive their audience. This is because, as Hess (2005) discusses, in order to maintain realness Hip Hoppers must ‘perform dedication to making music rather than making money’ (Hess, 2005, p. 299). Therefore, Hip Hoppers make nuanced distinctions between fictional narratives that are deemed to be creative acts and fictional narratives that are viewed as calculating attempts to make money. They are critical of artists who elaborate or fabricate their life history in order to create a particular image and, it is argued, to sell more records. This is evident in the following quote from Hip Hop artist Craig who states that he:

Always, want[s] to make music that I believe in and that is honest and I’m not trying to rip off a listener or a fan or anything. I don’t want to put something out there just because it was the latest trend and it’s going to be successful based on that

(Craig, Author's Interview).

Craig equates being real with making music based on your own personal interests and not the potential for commercial success. He makes a distinction between, what Frith defines as, ‘music-as-expression and music-as-commodity’ (Frith 1988, p. 11), suggesting that the influence of market forces or “the latest trend” can corrupt the integrity of artistic production. His assertion that he wants to make “honest” music implies that making music that is determined by the “latest trend” is dishonest. This

view is based in a particular understanding of the relationship between creativity and commerce, namely that creativity is constrained and diluted by the industrialisation of the production of music.

In this chapter I have argued that Hip Hoppers reject lyrical themes that can be categorised as ‘American’ or ‘foreign’ and therefore, not ‘real’. However, when Hip Hoppers make judgements about whether or not an MCs lyrics reflect “who they are” they are not solely based on autobiographical veracity. The perceived intentions of the artist also play a critical role in determining the apparent ‘truthfulness’ or ‘honesty’ of Hip Hop lyrics. Australian Hip Hoppers are very critical of people who they argue make music in order to profit and not for the “love” of Hip Hop. Hip Hoppers are viewed as inauthentic when they are thought to be solely motivated by the ambition to make money. In the following chapter I demonstrate that Hip Hoppers view creativity and commerce as opposing forces that need to be separated, a view that is based in a romanticised conception of art that is dominant in ‘Western’ society (Hesmondhalgh 2007, p. 20). In chapter 5 I explore this opposition by analysing the concept of ‘selling out’ and introducing a case study of arguably the most successful Australian Hip Hop group to date, the Hilltop Hoods.

Chapter 5

For Love or Money? Constructing Insiderness:

I opened this thesis with a description of events that took place at the HTH/ASO Show in Adelaide, Australia. This brief account focused on one of the support acts that entertained the crowd at this show (Muph, Plutonic and DJ Slap 618) and in particular, on the words of MC Muph. Of course for many of the people who attended this show, the action only really began after the support acts had played and the Hilltop Hoods took the stage with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. I interviewed six people who attended this show and they described the show as: “historic”, “massive”, “monumental”, “a huge win for the Hoods”, “a landmark that demonstrates where we’re at”, “an awesome show of support for the scene” and “a confirmation that Hip Hop is here to stay” (Author’s Field notes). The historic nature of the event was further emphasised on the night by British MC Mystro who made this statement during his performance:

I know we keep telling you to make some noise but listen, this is something historical right here yeah? And you lot are part of it so you gotta make sure you remember that, tell your kids, your grandkids and their kids!

(Mystro in *City of Light* 2007).

The HTH/ASO Show was seen as historic not only because it was the first time that an Australian Hip Hop group had collaborated with a Symphony Orchestra but also because of the size of the event. As I discussed in section 1.4 of my introduction, the HTH/ASO Show was viewed as illustrative of the increasing appeal of Hip Hop in Australia. In the lead up to the show many Hip Hoppers discussed what kind of people would attend this event. They wondered if the show would attract people who would not usually go to a Hip Hop concert. I certainly observed that the crowd at this show was more diverse than a typical Hip Hop show, in particular, there were many people who appeared to be above thirty years of age in the audience.⁶³ The broad appeal of the show and the fact that an Australian Hip Hop group could attract such a large audience

⁶³ I estimate that the majority of people at a typical Hip Hop gig are in the eighteen to thirty year old age bracket with a high number in their early to mid twenties.

was viewed by many Hip Hop fans as evidence that the Hip Hop scene was continuing to grow and to flourish.

However, not all Hip Hoppers agreed. For some Hip Hop enthusiasts the high attendance numbers at the HTH/ASO Show did not signal that Hip Hop was alive, but rather, that it was being corrupted. Such fans argued that the Hilltop Hoods had ‘sold out’ by working with a Symphony Orchestra to remix their album *The Hard Road* (2006).⁶⁴ They were critical of the resulting album, *The Hard Road: Restrung* (2007) and of the performance of these tracks at the HTH/ASO Show that I described above.⁶⁵ Thus, while some fans saw the success of the Hilltop Hoods and the growing popularity of Hip Hop as an exciting opportunity, others were cautious about the future of Hip Hop in Australia. Over the course of my research I frequently observed Hip Hoppers talking about the future viability and authenticity of Hip Hop culture. As the most commercially successful Australian Hip Hop group to date, the Hilltop Hoods often featured in these discussions. They were cited by different Hip Hoppers as an example of both the dangers and the rewards of the growing Hip Hop scene.

In this chapter I use the case study of the Hilltop Hoods to explore the relationship between authenticity, financial success and commercialisation. I argue that in order to be considered authentic, Hip Hoppers must perform their commitment to Hip Hop by demonstrating that they have ‘paid their dues’ and are not solely motivated by economic gain. They must work to position themselves as insiders who ‘love’ Hip Hop and are not utilising Hip Hop for their own commercial purposes. I draw on discussions from three threads on the Australian Hip Hop website Ozhiphop.com that centred on the authenticity of the Hilltop Hoods. The website Ozhiphop.com was created in 2002 and is an extremely popular source of information for Australian Hip Hop enthusiasts.⁶⁶ People use the site for numerous purposes including; checking the extensive gig guide available on the forum, talking about Hip Hop products such as clothing, movies, books and music, discussing upcoming or past Hip Hop events, posting photos of Graffiti, participating in online MC Battles and talking about a plethora of non-Hip Hop related

⁶⁴ The Hilltop Hoods worked with composer Jamie Messenger to compose the orchestral score for the album, which was then performed by members of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.

⁶⁵ This album also features content that did not appear on *The Hard Road* (2006).

⁶⁶ In 2011 the site changed ownership from original site creator Mass MC to forum contributor LJ (Email Comm. ‘Ozhiphop.Com New Owner, Call out & Info’ received 17 April 2011).

topics. Twenty four of the twenty seven people that I interviewed post on the Ozhiphop.com/forum or read the forum but do not contribute to it.⁶⁷ In this chapter I supplement information from discussions on Ozhiphop.com with quotes from my own interviews. By analysing how the success of the Hilltop Hoods is received by various Hip Hop fans and artists we gain valuable insight into the values and ideologies that are privileged by Hip Hoppers.

5.1 For the Love of Hip Hop:

Hip Hoppers consistently speak about how their beliefs and behaviours are shaped by a “love” for Hip Hop. It was extremely common for the people that I interviewed to state that they “loved” Hip Hop or to describe their attachment to Hip Hop as an all-consuming passion, an addiction or a way of life. This discourse acts to legitimise people’s involvement in Hip Hop and to communicate how important that involvement is to them. By emphasising their love for Hip Hop, they are able to counter the still wide-spread belief that Australians and in particular White Australians cannot authentically produce Hip Hop (see chapter 2). This discourse also enables them to confront the idea that Hip Hop is a trivial fad that should not be taken seriously. Maxwell (2003) notes that when the initial media interest in Hip Hop began to lapse and Hip Hop became unfashionable, Sydney Hip Hoppers saw themselves as a persecuted minority. He describes how MC Ser Reck from Sydney group Def Wish Cast announced: ‘Fads don’t last ten years!’ (Ser Reck in Maxwell 2003, p. 39) at a Hip Hop performance at Site nightclub in King’s Cross.

This defiant statement illustrates both the importance that Hip Hop fans and artists place on the longevity of their culture and their contempt for claims that Hip Hop is a passing trend. Hip Hoppers use the longevity of Hip Hop to demonstrate its cultural significance, arguing that Hip Hop has survived in Australia in spite of the fluxes of media interest and public opinion about the form: ‘working hard to stay true and to

⁶⁷ In his study of a ‘straightedge’ Internet forum, Williams (2006) found that there were two types of forum users, those that used the forum to supplement their participation in a face-to face straight edge scene, and those who primarily or solely participated in the straight edge scene through the forum. He argues that these two types of users have different conceptions of what constitutes authentic subcultural participation. Space restrictions mean that I am unable to provide a detailed examination of the relationship between ‘online’, ‘offline’ and authenticity in the Australian Hip Hop scene. This is an important area where further research could be carried out to provide further insight into the ways that authenticity is defined and expressed by Australian Hip Hop enthusiasts.

maintain the Culture, these people felt their commitment to Hip Hop to have withstood a series of tests' (Maxwell, 2003, p. 56). Despite the growing popularity of Hip Hop and subsequent changes in the way that Hip Hop is covered in the mainstream media, many people that I interviewed described instances in which they felt belittled by friends, family members and acquaintances because of their interest in Hip Hop or times when they felt that Hip Hop culture was being attacked or misrepresented in the media. Hip Hoppers commonly respond to these perceived challenges to their authenticity by positioning Hip Hop as a culture with a rich history and important traditions.

As I stated in section 1.1 of my introduction, classifying Hip Hop as a culture and not just a musical form is one of the ways that Hip Hoppers distinguish between authentic and inauthentic Hip Hop. This emphasis came through very clearly when I asked my participants how they defined Hip Hop. I tried to avoid asking leading questions and so decided to ask the rather general, "How would you define Hip Hop?" The simplicity of this question often caused concern for my interviewees who wanted to ensure that I was aware of the difference between Hip Hop music and Hip Hop culture: "I am assuming we are talking about a culture and not just the music" (Mark, Author's Interview).

For Mark and for many of my informants, Hip Hop was much more than a musical genre:

Hip hop to me is a lifestyle and a moral base, I guess in a corny way you could say it's a religion of sorts
(Mark, Author's Interview).

Obviously it's a culture, many elements, but it is basically a life style – it's almost like a religion in some ways...but yeah it's just a way of living
(Craig, Author's Interview).

It's obviously a way of life, it's a culture, it's something that you're dedicated to
(Fred, Author's Interview).

Strikingly, both Mark and Craig refer to Hip Hop as a religion. This is a powerful way of communicating the central role that Hip Hop plays in their lives. Given the reverent way that these fans talk about Hip Hop, it is evident that Hip Hop is very important to

them. As Fred suggests above, Hip Hop is something that you are “dedicated to”. This dedication or love for Hip Hop plays a key role in debates about authenticity. Whether or not a Hip Hop artist or fan is perceived as truly in “love” with Hip Hop is a critical factor which is used to assess their integrity. People who do not love Hip Hop or had betrayed their love for Hip Hop for the lures of financial success or other rewards like fame are commonly referred to by Hip Hoppers as ‘sell outs’.⁶⁸ When Hip Hoppers make judgements about authenticity these assessments are based in a historically specific understanding of the relationship between commerce and culture.

5.2 Music as Expression versus Music as Commodity:

Frith (1988) notes that the commodification of music and the role of the music industry in that commodification is viewed by many people as ‘bad for music’ (Frith 1988, p. 11):

[H]owever much we may use and enjoy its products, we retain a sense that the music industry is a bad thing – bad for music, bad for us...[w]hat is bad about the music industry is the layer of deceit and hype and exploitation it places between us and our creativity

(Frith 1988, pp. 11-12).

This view of the music industry is explored in Cohen’s (1991) analysis of the music making practices of two Liverpool rock bands, the Jactars and Crikey it’s the Cromptons!. Cohen (1991) argues that the expressions of anti-commercialism made by these bands are representative of the contradictions that exist between creativity and commerce in rock culture (Cohen 1991, pp. 194-195, 198). As Frith (1983) discusses, ‘the belief in a continuing struggle between music and commerce is the core of rock ideology’ (Frith 1983, p. 40). Similarly, in his analysis of rock music, Rowe (1995) argues that questions about the relationship between making music and making money have been at the centre of rock discourse since its inception (Rowe 1995, p. 20). He claims that many accounts of rock construe rock history in terms of the subordination of ‘singers, musicians and composers to the imperatives of capitalism’ (ibid).

⁶⁸ In this chapter I deliberately use emotive language like the term betrayed because it captures the intensity of the discussions that I had with my participants about these issues.

Rowe contends that this kind of mass cultural critique pre-dates the emergence of rock music and can be traced back to early fears about the industrialisation of the production of culture and the emergence of ‘mass’ radio and film music in the 1930s and 1940s (ibid). Perhaps the most famous critique of the effects of the relationship between culture and industry is the work of Horkheimer and Adorno, which was first published in 1947. Here I am using John Cumming’s (2000) translation of Adorno and Horkheimer’s text, originally titled *Philosophische Fragmente* and later published as *Dialektik der Aufklärung (Dialectic of Enlightenment)*. In this text Horkheimer and Adorno (2000) use the term ‘culture industry’ to argue that the means of cultural production are becoming increasingly industrialised and therefore, standardised. According to Horkheimer and Adorno the culture industry creates products that are geared towards the demands of a capitalist economy (During 1995, p. 29). They contend that the culture industry turns the production of culture into a business and that this results in the replacement of artistic works with commodities that are designed to have mass appeal.

Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the culture industry exerts incredible control over the minds and actions of people (Strinati 2003): ‘the culture industry does not sublimate; it represses’ (Horkheimer and Adorno 2000, p. 140). In the decades since the publication of Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique of the culture industry, numerous scholars have demonstrated that people are more active consumers and producers than the culture industry concept allows (Ang 1985; Liebes and Katz 1993; Negus 1997). In particular, the shift from the use of the singular term the ‘culture industry’ to the plural ‘culture industries’ illustrates how our understanding of the culture industry has changed to account for the complexity and diversity of different forms of cultural production (Hesmondhalgh 2007, p. 16). Scholars like Jenkins (2003) have also argued that the corporate movement towards media convergence and new technological innovations are increasing people’s ability to participate in the ‘archiving, annotation, appropriation, transformation and recirculation of media content’ (Jenkins 2003, p. 286). In his study of fan culture Jenkins illustrates that media consumption has been radically transformed by developments that blur the line between producers and consumers and challenge the dominance of the ‘culture industry’.

These examples demonstrate that we should be cautious about reducing the industrialisation of the production of music to ‘the immanent logic of commodification’ (Rowe 1995, p. 22). However, Rowe also states that the discourse of rock music is deeply linked to the idea of resistance and therefore, rock music is an area of cultural production where the concept of ‘selling out’ has a strong resonance (ibid). Indeed, Rowe (1995) maintains that there are few areas of cultural production where the ethos of ‘selling out’ is so pronounced (ibid). Therefore, while he warns against reductionist mass culture critiques that define the industrialisation of musical production in terms of standardisation and pseudo-rebellion (e.g. Adorno 1938/1991), he notes that rock musicians and fans do make distinctions between rock music and other forms of musical production such as pop music. These distinctions rest on the idea that ‘some forms of culture are purely commercialized, while others, although operating in the commercial sphere, are essentially antithetical to it’ (Rowe 1995, p. 22). Although Rowe asserts that the idea of ‘selling out’ has a deeper resonance in rock music than in other forms of cultural production (ibid), I argue that the tensions between commerce and creativity and the prominence of discourses that privilege not ‘selling out’ are not unique to rock culture (cf. Thornton 1996, Peterson 1997, Hodgkinson 2002).

Basu (1998) argues that when African-American Hip Hop artists draw on the Hip Hop credo of ‘keeping it real’, they must navigate the tensions between ‘rap as a commodity and rap as a culture’ (Basu 1998, p. 372).⁶⁹ Hess (2005) argues that these tensions were exacerbated by the increased marketability of Hip Hop in America in the 1990s and McLeod (1999) states that the increase in Hip Hop sales and exposure during this period placed Hip Hoppers in the ‘contradictory’ position of being inside ‘a mainstream culture they had, in part, defined themselves as being against’ (McLeod 1999, p. 136). While scholars like Rose (1994) and Basu (1998) have argued that accounts of Hip Hop’s historical relationship to the commodity system have been romanticised and nostalgically reinterpreted, the ideology that commercialism and authenticity are diametrically opposed dominates Hip Hop discourse in Australia. In the following section I explore this opposition by defining the term ‘sell out’ and demonstrating that ‘selling out’ is viewed by Australian Hip Hoppers as the ultimate mark of

⁶⁹ Basu uses both the terms ‘rap’ and ‘hip hop culture’ in her article without defining the difference between the two terms. In this thesis I use the phrase ‘Hip Hop’ instead of ‘rap’.

inauthenticity. Before I do so, I provide some more background information about the Hilltop Hoods, whose success has made them the targets of numerous ‘sell out’ accusations.

5.3 The Challenges of Success: The Hilltop Hoods:

According to their online biography, the story of the Hilltop Hoods began when MC Suffa met MC Pressure at Blackwood High School in the Adelaide Hills. The pair formed a friendship based on their ‘common love of music’ (‘Biography’ n.d.) and when they later met DJ Debris, they formed the group the Hilltop Hoods.⁷⁰ At the time of writing the Hilltop Hoods have released six full length albums; *A Matter of Time* (1999), *Left Foot, Right Foot* (2001), *The Calling* (2003), *The Hard Road* (2006), *The Hard Road: Restrung* (2007) and *State of the Art* (2009). They have also released three DVDs; *The Calling Live* (2005), *City of Light* (2007) and *Parade of the Dead* (2010). The Hilltop Hoods are the most commercially successful Australian Hip Hop group to date. It is important to note that while the Hilltop Hoods have been extremely successful in the Australian market, they have not yet achieved widespread international recognition. However, this may be beginning to change. In 2011 they conducted a European tour with multiple shows in Switzerland, Scotland, Ireland, London and Germany and they are currently planning shows in Canada (‘Gigs’ n.d.).⁷¹

While their earlier releases were well received by Australian Hip Hop fans, it was not until the release of *The Calling* (2003) that the Hilltop Hoods began to achieve more widespread critical acclaim and higher record sales. *The Calling* (2003) achieved the ARIA Accreditation of Platinum in 2006, which means that 70,000 units were tracked from ARIA Member Wholesalers to Retailers. In that same year *The Hard Road* (2006) also achieved Platinum Accreditation. *The Hard Road* (2006) was the first Australian Hip Hop album to debut at number one on the ARIA charts and would also win the group two ARIA Awards (Best Independent Release 2006 and Best Urban Release 2006). The group followed up this achievement with *The Hard Road: Restrung* winning the 2007 ARIA Award for Best Urban Release. In 2008 the Hilltop Hoods left

⁷⁰ This official biography does not discuss the early role of DJ Next in the group. DJ Next contributed to two early Hilltop Hoods releases, the EP *Back Once Again* and their first full length release *A Matter of Time*.

⁷¹ This is not the first time that they have toured internationally.

their former record label Obese Records and created their own label Golden Era Records. *State of the Art* (2009) was the first album that they distributed through this label and it has become the highest selling Australian Hip Hop album of all time. It achieved Gold Accreditation in one day (35,000 tracked units), Platinum status in one week and is now double Platinum (140,000 tracked units). The album also won the 2009 ARIA for Best Urban Release.

As I indicated earlier, not all Hip Hoppers view these milestones as positive achievements. Some people argue that the Hilltop Hoods have reached a broader audience by changing their music and becoming 'sell outs'. Being labeled a sell out is an extremely offensive accusation in Hip Hop circles because it is a term that is used to classify a person or thing as inauthentic. As I have demonstrated in this thesis, being real or true is highly important to Hip Hop fans and artists. Therefore, to be called a sell out is to have the truthfulness or veracity of your self-expression called into question. For this reason it is never employed as a self-descriptor, it is always applied to other people. According to my informants, a sell out is someone who is perceived to have compromised their artistic integrity for financial or other social gains such as fame. The term sell out obviously has clear monetary associations; a sell out is someone who puts financial gain, or the possibility of financial gain, above their own personal passions and beliefs.

In her study of popular music culture in Liverpool, Cohen (2007) states that the notion of selling out took hold in 'independent' or 'alternative' rock culture after the emergence of punk in the 1970s (Cohen 2007, p. 145). She contends that the 'do-it-yourself' aesthetic promoted by punks was expressed in an anti-commercial ethos that privileged independent record labels. Thus, selling out was an accusation that was aimed at musicians who 'engaging in financial dealings with major rather than independent music companies' (ibid). As I will demonstrate in this chapter, independence and an anti-commercial ethos are central to Australian Hip Hoppers understanding of selling out. Cohen (2007) also identifies other factors that influenced how Liverpool residents in the 1980s and 1990s defined selling out. She discusses how many Liverpoolians configured selling out in spatial terms. Thus, people who left Liverpool to pursue their music careers in other cities were often accused of selling out.

Musicians were understood to owe a debt to the city of Liverpool and to be respected they needed to demonstrate that they had ‘paid their dues’ to Liverpool.

While the Hip Hop artists that I interviewed were often very proud of their city or town of origin, they did not typically define selling out in spatial terms. It is quite common for Hip Hoppers who live in regional centres to move to a capital city to pursue their interest in Hip Hop (i.e. as a musical artist, Graffiti Writer or B-Boy/B-Girl) and these movements are not negatively received. Cohen (2007) argues that the policy initiatives of the Liverpool music industry encouraged a rhetoric of ‘loss, abandonment and marginality’ (Cohen 2007, p. 147) that promoted Liverpool as a place that ‘leaked talent’ to the corrupting ‘bright lights’ of London. She cites several local factors that contributed to this rhetoric, including the notoriety of former Liverpool residents the Beatles, Liverpool’s extreme economic problems and the strong emphasis that many residents placed on the uniqueness of Liverpool (ibid). Some Adelaide Hip Hoppers do lament the fact that Adelaide is sometimes excluded from international Hip Hop tours because of its smaller population, but on the whole, neither Adelaide nor Melbourne are categorised as ‘weak’ cities ‘leaking’ talent in the same way that Liverpool is (ibid).

In fact, unlike Liverpool, Melbourne is one of the destinations, akin to London, that talent from other regions might travel to. Furthermore, given its size, Adelaide has produced a high number of successful Hip Hop artists (e.g. Hilltop Hoods, The Funkoars, Delta, Vents, Terra Firma, Adroit Effusive) the majority of whom remain in the area. Future studies in other Australian cities or regional centres may reveal that selling out is defined in spatial terms in these areas, however, in Adelaide and Melbourne this is not typically the case. Yet, this does not mean that Australian Hip Hoppers do not place importance on the concept of ‘paying your dues’. According to Cohen (2007) Liverpool musicians are expected to pay their dues to the city of Liverpool itself (Cohen 2007, p. 145). In particular, successful musicians are expected to invest in major projects in the area. For example, when Paul McCartney of Beatles fame did not give back to the community in this way he was criticised for his perceived lack of commitment to Liverpool. In 1996 McCartney helped to establish the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA), however, a well known Manchester music promoter and broadcaster argued that this initiative had come ‘too late’ (Cohen 2007, p.

146): ‘Paul McCartney had to put his name to something, otherwise he couldn’t have come back to Liverpool again’ (Cohen 2007, pp. 146-147).

My research demonstrates that Hip Hop enthusiasts in Adelaide and Melbourne do not place the same kind of significance on paying dues to their place of origin as the informants in Cohen’s study. While Hip Hop fans and artists are proud of their cities of origin and do want to give back to their local communities, they are primarily concerned with paying dues to Hip Hop itself rather than to their home towns. As I outlined above, the Australian cities of Adelaide and Melbourne are not affected by the economic problems that shape the de-industrialised city of Liverpool and therefore, they are not understood as cities that need to be nurtured and protected. This does not mean that Hip Hoppers show no concern for their city of origin or the places where they live, but rather these concerns are subsumed by a broader interest in nurturing and protecting Hip Hop culture. When Hip Hoppers talk about paying your dues, they are not only interested in ensuring the future viability of the cities in which they live, but also the future viability of the Hip Hop scene.

In the Australian Hip Hop context, sell outs are predominantly defined as people who are motivated by the possibility of monetary gain and not by their love for Hip Hop culture. These motivations are viewed as exploitative and potentially damaging to the reputation and the integrity of Hip Hop culture. Hip Hoppers assess these motivations by identifying changes in artist’s behaviour. As I will discuss below, some Hip Hop fans and artists argue that the Hilltop Hoods are creating music that is designed to sell as many units as possible and this is reducing the artistic and cultural merit of their musical production. According to some Hip Hoppers, the Hilltop Hoods have changed and this means that they have sold out.

5.4 Authenticity, Change and Commercialisation:

The majority of people I spoke to defined selling out in terms of change:

Being one thing and then flip-flopping and being another, they call that in politics back-flipping I guess. You’re one thing and then all of a sudden you’re something else and it’s clear, although it’s not said, it’s clear to most people

that, that it's a result of having dollar signs in your eyes or whatever. That's generally the motivation

(Michael, Author's Interview).

However, change in and of itself is not enough to mark someone as a sell out. For example, Mark, a manager of an Adelaide Hip Hop group stated that selling out is "changing your sound to achieve a goal not obtainable with the music you are passionate about" (Mark, Author's Interview). A sell out is someone who is seen to be making not only a change but a compromise:

Selling out is when you change your normal way of making an album from the music to the promo to what you do with your video clip, if this is changing drastically from the normal behavior of an artist just to make money and get notice in the mainstream, then they are selling out

(Layton, Author's Interview).

Some Hip Hop fans argue that the Hilltop Hoods have made these kinds of changes. That they have altered the sound of their music in order to achieve greater commercial success and in Layton's words to "get notice in the mainstream" (ibid).

In a thread about the HTH/ASO Show, Ozhiphop.com forum member Mothman308 attacked the Hoods for producing albums that, he argues, are attempts to 'garner commercial support':

I have liked the Hoods since way back in the day when fuck all people knew them and I think *The Hard Road* is easily their weakest release. It is an attempt to garner commercial support started by tracks like *nosebleed section*. They have successfully done this, clown prince etc, but it is at the expense of respect from REAL heads.

(Mothman308 in 'Oz Hip Hop Forum, *The Hard Road Restrung Album Launch – The Hilltop Hoods Live with Adelaide Symphony Orchestra*', forum discussion).

The track that Mothman308 references here 'The Nosebleed Section' was one of the most popular singles on the 2003 Hilltop Hoods album *The Calling*. Thus, Mothman308 is suggesting that following the success of 'The Nosebleed Section' the

Hilltop Hoods made a conscious decision to alter their music, a decision that has lost them the respect of “real heads”.⁷²

Mothman308’s comments stirred up a lot of discussion in the thread as people debated whether or not the increasing popular appeal of the group is evidence that they have compromised the integrity of their music. Some posters on the forum angrily attacked Mothman308 for suggesting that the Hilltop Hoods were sell outs:

’REAL’ heads dont sit there and cry if their fav goup gets some mainstream love. Good on em.

(Underground Arsonist *ibid*).

hard Road was a dope album from start to finish. Don’t hate cos they’ve paid their dues and are getting the support and cash they deserve after making great tracks since the 90’s. Any ‘real head’ as previously stated would be happy for them.

(Self-Ish *ibid*).

The central argument of people who opposed Mothman308’s views was that while the Hilltop Hoods had achieved commercial success, they had not changed their sound or contradicted their values in order to do so. This point of view was dismissed by Mothman308 who clarified his argument:

I’m not angry they got commercial love im just angry they went commercial

(Mothman308 *ibid*).

Thus, Mothman308 is suggesting that the Hilltop Hoods have not achieved commercial success but rather, they have become “commercial”. From his usage of the term it is clear that Mothman308 views being “commercial” with disdain. He makes a distinction between artists who operate in the commercial sphere and those who are commercial. Here the term commercial is being used as an ideological label to describe someone who produces a particular kind of music. Thus, Mothman308 contends that while the Hilltop Hoods may have been authentic in the past, they have become “commercial”

⁷² Hip Hop fans and producers sometimes refer to themselves as ‘Hip Hop heads’ or in this example, “real heads”.

and should no longer be respected. This is further illustrated when he states: ‘Are you implying paying dues entitles you to sell out for the almighty \$?’ (ibid).

Mothman308 suggests that while the Hilltop Hoods may have paid their dues in the past, this does not excuse their current behavior. The debate between Mothman308 and other contributors to Ozhiphop.com/forum primarily centred on the perceived motivations of the Hilltop Hoods, in particular, if they were being motivated by money or by the satisfaction of making music that they loved. Eventually the discussion in this thread moved on to questions about the availability of tickets for the HTH/ASO Show and the pricing of the tickets. However in 2008, questions about the authenticity of the Hoods surfaced on Ozhiphop.com/forum again when they announced that they were releasing a shoe design.

In 2008 the Hilltop Hoods announced that they were releasing a shoe in collaboration with DC Shoes.⁷³ The shoe featured the Hilltop Hoods logo, a design by John Engelhardt who designs all of the groups album covers and had lyrics from their song ‘City of Light’ imprinted in the shoe’s liner (‘Hilltop Hoods Interview’ 2008, n.p.). The lyrics were designed by Adelaide Graffiti Writer Adrok from the crew Nasty Arts who the Hilltop Hoods reference in the song ‘City of Light’. The release of the co-designed, Hilltop Hoods Remix DC Sneaker was met with mixed reactions. In a thread on Ozhiphop.com/forum many people responded with stark one word or one line posts to the news about the shoe:

This is too far...

(sussed in Oz Hip Hop forum, ‘New DC Hilltop Hoods Shoes – 1st Feb 2008’, forum discussion).

Sellouts

(Infern07 in ibid).

what a fuckin joke

(blotsy in ibid).

⁷³ The shoes are still for sale on the Golden Era Records website (‘Hilltop Hoods Remix DC Shoe’, n.p.).

Other people were interested in purchasing the shoe and were critical of those who labeled the Hilltop Hoods as sell outs for working with DC:

I can't think of a single hiphopper that wouldn't want to have their own line of sneakers.

some of you kids have definitely got this one twisted.

(2BiZ in *ibid*).

Do sellouts go to a free show that they're not even meant to be performing at and then decide to get up on stage and do some tracks? Would sellouts rock up to COV [City of Verses] shows to support relatively unknown and up and coming artists?⁷⁴

(Czech_won_too in *ibid*).

you cant call an act a sellout simply cos ther audience expands

(CHASE1 in *ibid*).

The above quotes illustrate the diverse range of motivations that Hip Hop fans attribute to the Hilltop Hoods actions. For some, the fact that they have released a shoe is evidence that they simply want to make as much money as possible. For others, creating a shoe line is the realisation of every Hip Hoppers dream, an opportunity that cannot be turned down.⁷⁵ The behaviour of the Hoods is also examined and used to demonstrate that they are not sell outs. The implication of Czech_won_too's comment is that people who were solely interested in making money would not take the time to attend local Adelaide Hip Hop shows like COV. According to Czech_won_too the fact that the Hoods still attend these kinds of events demonstrates that they are still paying their dues and contributing to the Australian Hip Hop scene. Likewise, the comment made by CHASE1 echoes the sentiments of many posters in the aforementioned HTH/ASO thread, namely that a Hip Hop artist should not be labeled a sell out just because their audience expands.

⁷⁴ City of Verses is a Adelaide Hip Hop event.

⁷⁵ For an account of the importance placed on shoes by many Hip Hoppers see the documentary *Just For Kicks* (2005).

Once again, a distinction is being made between artists who achieve commercial success and those who become commercial or 'sell out'. This is evident in the following quote from Brian an Adelaide MC who told me:

If someone changes their entire sound of their music just to grab a market well that could be considered a sell out but I don't think just because someone's successful they're a sell out. I don't see anything wrong with that

(Brian, Author's Interview).

The above quote illustrates that Hip Hop artists who are successful are not automatically classified as 'sell outs'. The perceived motivations of the producer play a central role in determining whether or not someone is defined as a sell out. This is why whether or not the Hilltop Hoods are sell outs or "commercial" is so angrily debated on the Ozhiphop.com forums. Different people interpret their actions and their perceived motivations in diverse ways.

Significantly, the Hoods are not silent on these issues. This was illustrated when they responded to complaints about the editing of the swearing on *The Hard Road: Restrung* (2007). When the Hoods recorded *The Hard Road: Restrung* they edited out the swearing that had originally appeared in the tracks as recorded on *The Hard Road* (2006). Some people suggested that this proved that they had become commercial because they had censored themselves in order to appeal to a broader audience. In fact, much of the discussion in the afore-mentioned Ozhiphop.com thread about the album centred on this issue. Eventually the Hilltop Hoods responded to these criticisms through a post on their Myspace page. While this post is no longer available on Myspace, it has been reproduced on numerous online forums, including Ozhiphop.com. I include an abridged version below:

Hey Everyone,

A few people are curious why 'The Hard Road Restrung' has been edited to have the 'offensive' language removed. To cut a long story short we were working under the assumption that it was a requirement of working with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. Turns out that it wasn't (they've been really cool to work with, really flexible and laid back). By the time we found this out it was way too late in the mixing process to go back and change the edits...

Cheers

Suffa

Suffa was also asked why they had removed the swearing in an interview published in *Underrated Magazine*:

Why the removal of swearing from the album?

Suffa: People have gone crazy over that online haven't they. When we originally started working on it we just assumed it wouldn't be cool to have it in, I mean we are working with a symphony orchestra. When they said it would have been ok we were too far along in the process to go back and add it again

(Suffa in Scott 2007, p. 9).

In the above quote, Suffa argues that they removed the swearing from the album because they thought that would be a requirement of working with an orchestra, not because they were interested in making the album more accessible to a wider audience.

This point was stressed by American MC Okwerdz posting as OkWeRdZ on Ozhiphop.com. Okwerdz made a guest appearance on the track 'Conversations from a Speak Easy: Restrung' and surprised the audience at the HTH/ASO Show by joining the Hoods on stage and rapping his verse. Below is an edited section of his comment from the Ozhiphop.com thread:

YES it sucks that curses have to be edited out (me being a HUGE fan of profanity), but these are the way things had to be played out so just appreciate what u got. adding the symphony has NOTHING to do with just making more money... and some people have a real misconception of the term "selling out". selling out is NOT, and i repeat is NOT going mainstream or blowing up...SELLING OUT is always talking about how u hate pepsi and then turning around and doing a pepsi commercial because they offered you a large sum of money. selling out is when u do something u dont want to do because of money

(OkWeRdZ in Oz Hip Hop Forum, 'Hilltop Hoods – The Hard Road Restrung', forum discussion).

Once again, selling out is connected to change and importantly, to change that is directly motivated by economic gain. Changing your image, music or lifestyle in order to make money is viewed by Hip Hoppers as the epitome of inauthenticity not only because it violates the Hip Hop mantra of 'being true' but also because it is seen as evidence of a lack of love for Hip Hop. The Hip Hoppers that I engaged with argue that

Hip Hop should be primarily about self-expression and not monetary gain. For them, making Hip Hop music, or any kind of involvement in Hip Hop, is understood as a passion, a love, and a commitment. Yet, crucially, as a commitment that should not require any kind of monetary compensation. Australian Hip Hoppers perceived to be primarily interested in making money are condemned for their inauthenticity.

Some Hip Hop fans argued that the Hilltop Hoods had betrayed their love for Hip Hop because they saw the release of *The Hard Road: Restrung* as a calculated attempt to earn more money, ‘smells like the Hoods just want more \$’ (Intoxicated in *ibid*). As in the thread about the HTH/ASO Show, these claims were dismissed by fans who argued that the Hoods were pursuing a creative avenue:

And to anyone that says that this is a money making venture by the hoods, just take a thing about how much this venture would have cost them, and how much they are set to lose if the album doesnt sell well. It seems pretty clear to me that they are simply doing it for the love of music.

(Edits in *ibid*).

Edits argues that the sheer cost of working with an orchestra calls into question the assertion that the Hilltop Hoods undertook this venture simply to make more money. The cost of working with an orchestra was also highlighted by the Hilltop Hoods themselves, with MC Pressure stating in an interview: ‘Yes, basically, it's a very, very expensive remix album. Orchestras do not come cheap’ (Pressure in McCabe 2007, n.p.). By focusing attention on the money it cost them to produce the album the Hilltop Hoods can mitigate the persuasiveness of accusations that they made the album to make money. In the following section I draw on excerpts from the Hilltop Hoods lyrics to further explore the narratives that they employ to stress their dedication to Hip Hop. I contend that as the Hilltop Hoods have become more successful, they have had to work harder to assert that they are committed to Hip Hop.

5.5 Performing Commitment - Paying your Dues:

It's been so long, we're glad we came/Before we gathered fame or had a name/Our story hasn't changed with accolades/We're still standing and we'll be back again...How long you been here? We're been here for years

(Chorus 1 and 2, ‘Still Standing’, *State of the Art* 2009).

Let me introduce myself, raise them beers/Suffa MC, been doing this for more than ten years.../It's all about the culture, never been about the money

(Suffa in 'Testimonial Year', *The Calling* 2003).

Cos I did what I was called to do/It's hip hop, I did it all for you/We true to this, got clout on turntables getting played/We doing this without a label not getting payed

(Suffa in 'The Calling', *The Calling* 2003).

I once had respect for this game, but now this game of respect/Is sold to the highest bidder with some fame and a cheque/Now any layman can get respect without breaking his neck/Paying dues, time these crews started paying some debt

(Pressure in 'Illusionary Lines', *The Calling* 2003).

The above excerpts from Hilltop Hoods lyrics all emphasise the Hoods commitment to Hip Hop. They discuss how long they have been making Hip Hop and stress that they are 'true' to Hip Hop. Perhaps most decisively Suffa raps: 'It's all about the culture, never been about the money' (ibid). In 'Illusionary Lines' they explicitly reference the idea of paying your dues to Hip Hop, denouncing Hip Hop crews that achieve fame and fortune without paying their debt to Hip Hop. As I outlined in section 5.1, Hip Hoppers commonly define selling out in terms of changes that are motivated by potential monetary gain. In the above lyrical extracts the Hilltop Hoods clearly rebuke claims that they are sell outs by arguing that their 'story hasn't changed with accolades'. Here they suggest that despite their fame they are 'still standing', still committed to Hip Hop, still the same artists.

While I am cautious of over-emphasising the importance of these selected lines from the Hilltop Hoods musical catalogue (cf. Cohen 1993), when I analysed the lyrics of various Hilltop Hoods songs I discovered that they frequently discuss the theme of authenticity in their music. Indeed, the regularity of these references made it difficult to decide which extracts from their songs to include in the above examples. I did not interview any members of the Hilltop Hoods and this means that I cannot unequivocally state why they chose to rap about particular issues and what their intentions are. Nonetheless, the fact that they frequently talk about how long they have been making Hip Hop and their love for Hip Hop suggests that these are important details that they

want their audience to know. Furthermore, while I did not speak to the Hilltop Hoods, I did interview numerous other Hip Hop fans and artists who commented on the way that the Hilltop Hoods present themselves in their lyrics:

They are positioning themselves against that whole selling out ideology. Plus, how long you have been making Hip Hop is important. If I had been doing it for like nearly twenty years or whatever I would want people to know about it! They want people to know that they care about Hip Hop.

(Julian, Author's Interview).

Well they don't want people to think they are commercial, they are communicating their love for Hip Hop and that they care about Hip Hop, they don't just want to use it for their own gain

(Adam, Author's Interview).

Evident in these quotes is the belief that the Hilltop Hoods rap about particular issues and ideas because they want to communicate that they “care” for Hip Hop. Both Adam and Julian make a clear link between the public's perception of Hoods and their lyrical content. That is, it is assumed that the Hilltop Hoods want to reinforce particular ideas about their dedication and love for Hip Hop and to dismiss negative inferences, such as the suggestion that they are using Hip Hop “for their own gain”. I argue that the Hilltop Hoods show that they “care” for Hip Hop, to use Adam and Julian's phrasing, not only by stating this in their lyrics but also through everyday actions like attending local shows (see section 5.2) and more public gestures like the Hilltop Hoods Initiative (HHI). The HHI is an example of how the Hilltop Hoods pay their dues to Hip Hop and give back to the Australian Hip Hop scene.

Set up in 2005, the HHI is a scheme designed to assist new Hip Hop artists to record their work and to provide them with mentoring and other business skills. The HHI has been awarded to seven Australian Hip Hop artists/groups as of 2011 (General Knowledge, Subsketch, Particular People, Jimblah, K21, 1/6 and Koolta). In 2005 the winners received \$3000 to help with the manufacture and distribution of their first professionally released CD and mentoring sessions with former Hilltop Hoods manager PJ Murton (Xpose 2007, n.p.). When the initiative first began it was a collaborative venture with Arts SA and was only open to South Australian residents. In 2009 the Hoods partnered with the Australian Performing Rights Association (APRA) and made

the initiative national ('The Hilltop Hoods Initiative Goes National' 2009, n.p.). Over time the prizes awarded to the winner/s have increased with the 2011 winner, Adelaide MC and producer Koolta, receiving \$10,000 and other prizes including legal advice and a package from DC Shoes ('Koolta wins the 2011 Hilltop Hoods Initiative' 2011, n.p.). It could be argued that this scheme is an example of paying dues to the city of Adelaide as discussed in section 5.1. I have no doubt that the Hilltop Hoods are extremely proud of being from Adelaide, this was made clear when they performed the track 'City of Light: Restrung' at the HTH/ASO Show and added the chorus: "If you're proud of your city make some noise/If you're proud of where you're from raise your voice" (*City of Light* 2007). The move to make the scheme a national initiative suggests that the Hilltop Hoods are interested in supporting not just South Australian Hip Hop but Australian Hip Hop more broadly, regardless of the artist's residence. While this scheme could be viewed from a cynical perspective as a marketing and publicity stunt for the Hilltop Hoods themselves, I argue that it demonstrates the importance that Hip Hop fans and artists place on supporting the Hip Hop scene. My interviews demonstrate that many people expect the Hilltop Hoods to make financial contributions to the Hip Hop scene because of their status as the most commercially successful Australian Hip Hop group to date:

They have a lot of money, well I suppose really you don't know do you, but I'm sure they've got a lot more money than most of us, so it is expected really, if I had money I would put on gigs and do things. Support other artists

(Will, Author's Interview).

Even though Will admits that he does not really know how much money the Hilltop Hoods actually earn, he surmises that it is "a lot" and that regardless of the amount it is more than what he earns and what most Hip Hop enthusiasts earn. He contends that the Hilltop Hoods have an obligation to give back to the community and suggests that he would do the same if he were in the financial position to do so. B-Boy Keith also said that he thought the Hilltop Hoods "have to" be involved in schemes like the HHI if they want to be respected. As the Hilltop Hoods have become more popular, it has become more important for them to assert their authenticity. Hip Hoppers assume that they are financially successful and that therefore, they should make monetary contributions to the Australian Hip Hop scene. Giving back to the Hip Hop community by attending

Hip Hop gigs and through more formal endeavors such as the organisation of the HHI enables the Hilltop Hoods to demonstrate that they are ‘paying their dues’ and are Hip Hop insiders. In the following section I discuss another key factor that contributes to the construction of the Hilltop Hoods as insiders; the fact that they have not signed to a major record label and are therefore, viewed as ‘independent’.

5.6 Maintaining Control: The Importance of ‘Independence’:

In section 5.3 I outlined Cohen’s (2007) argument that independence is privileged in alternative and rock music culture. Cohen states that following the do-it-yourself ethos of punk, signing to a major record label became associated with selling out in these music scenes. This is also the case in the Adelaide and Melbourne Hip Hop scenes. Signing to a major record label is typically viewed with contempt and suspicion. This is because major record labels are positioned as inauthentic outsiders and importantly, as corporations made up of individuals who are motivated by economic imperatives. Thus, major record labels are viewed as profit-making enterprises that have not paid their dues and do not love Hip Hop. This is reflected in the below interview excerpt:

Dianne: How do you define selling out? Do you use that term?

Alex: When it’s not doing, when it’s not for the love anymore I suppose. When you’re just making music for money.

Dianne: Do you think signing to a major label is selling out?

Alex: Well you’d only do that to make money I suppose. And major labels don’t know anything about real Hip Hop culture or anything, and they’re just there to make money as well. For me when music just becomes all about money there is no feeling anymore.

Alex positions major labels as entities that do not know anything about “real Hip Hop”. He argues that when people are motivated solely by money then the resulting product is diminished and “there is no feeling anymore”. This is a typical view about major record labels. For many Hip Hoppers, signing to a major record label is the ultimate symbol of selling out. It is an act that is seen to demonstrate that you have prioritised money over your love for Hip Hop:

How majors operate, again, they're not interested in music, that's for sure, ok? They care solely about how it's going to sell, that's their motivation...therefore you're dancing to the tune of the major and that is on the basis of selling records and being the next muppet

(Michael, Author's Interview).

Earlier, I demonstrated that the distinction between music as commodity and music as expression is central to discourses of authenticity in rock music. Throughout this chapter I have illustrated that this discourse is also privileged by Hip Hoppers who differentiate between people who are motivated by a "love" for Hip Hop and those who view Hip Hop as a commodity. In the above quote, Michael states the major record labels are not "interested" in music but are solely concerned with Hip Hop as a commodity that is made to "sell". In his account of rock music Rowe (1995) argues that 'organizational independence is a widely shared index of cultural integrity' (Rowe 1995, p. 23). According to Rowe, in rock discourse independent record labels are positioned in opposition to major record labels. Thus, while independent labels are associated with freedom, autonomy and authenticity, major record labels are associated with control, rationalisation and inauthenticity (Rowe 1995, p. 24). These associations are clearly represented in the above statements from Australian Hip Hoppers.

However, while Rowe (1995) points out that this discourse and the commerce-culture debate are central to the ideology of rock, he also argues that the opposition between major and independent record labels cannot be empirically substantiated because of the complex linkages that exist between them. These linkages are explored by Hesmondhalgh (1999) in his discussion of the musical genre 'indie', a term which is an abbreviation of 'independent record company' (Hesmondhalgh 1999, p. 35). In his account of the history of indie and the trajectories of two British independent companies, Creation and One Little Indian, Hesmondhalgh (1999) contends that we need to be cautious about celebrating the 'purity' of forms of musical production that are positioned in opposition to entrepreneurialism (Hesmondhalgh 1999, p. 40). He argues that 'deals with major record companies are not necessarily, in themselves, a source of aesthetic compromise' (Hesmondhalgh 1999, p. 34), adding that the complex partnerships between major corporations and the 'indie' sector cannot be solely reduced to the discourse of 'selling out' (Hesmondhalgh 1999, p. 52).

I support Hesmondhalgh's contention that theorists need to question the commerce-culture dichotomy and to recognise that partnerships between independents and majors can be based on more than 'the desire to make money' (Hesmondhalgh 1999, p. 52). However, I argue that Hesmondhalgh does not adequately explore how ideological distinctions between independent and major record labels are actually used by musicians and fans to authenticate their own practices and tastes. In a later study of 'indie rock' Hibbett (2005) explores how the category of indie rock 'satisfies among audiences a desire for social differentiation' (Hibbett 2005, p. 56). Drawing on Bourdieu (1984), Hibbett explores how the category of 'indie rock' is used by people to maintain, challenge and create social distinctions (ibid). He notes that indie rock producers and fans correlate 'independence' with 'artistic integrity and aesthetic quality' (Hibbett 2005, p. 58). Furthermore, indie rock enthusiasts argue that indie rock and so-called 'mainstream' or 'radio friendly' music are mutually exclusive (ibid, p. 60). Hibbett contends that the relationship between the 'mainstream' and 'indie rock' is equivalent to Bourdieu's description of the relationship between 'popular' and 'high' art, in that it supplies a 'bastion from which the cultured few may fend off the multitude' (Hibbett 2005, p. 62).

Like many indie rockers, Hip Hoppers position themselves against people who they define as being a part of mainstream or mass culture and who are characterised as having less taste and agency than themselves. In doing so, they become the 'cultured few' (ibid) the insiders who can be distinguished from the 'multitude' (ibid). These kinds of distinctions, between insiders and outsiders, were explored by Becker in his book *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviancy* (1966). In this text Becker describes how jazz musicians define themselves in opposition to the 'squares' that make up their audiences and lack 'hipness' (Becker 1966, p. 90):

The musician thus sees himself as a creative artist who should be free from outside control, a person different from and better than those outsiders who he calls squares

(Becker 1966, p. 91).

Unlike the jazz musicians in Becker's study who expressed contempt for jazz fans and argued that only other musicians could be 'hip' (ibid), Hip Hop artists do not argue that all Hip Hop fans are inauthentic 'outsiders'. However, they do differentiate between

their own consumption practices and the practices of disparaged cultural others, the ‘undifferentiated masses they described as the ‘mainstream’’ (Arthur, 2010, pp. 102-103).

In chapter 4 I introduced Maxwell (2003) and Arthur’s (2010) contention that Hip Hoppers identify against Homies, a term used to condemn Australians who ‘copy’ American Hip Hop. However, Arthur (2010) makes a distinction between ‘Homies’ who are a tangible group of people and the ‘mainstream’. He notes that during his fieldwork in the Adelaide Hip Hop scene he did not encounter anyone who identified as being part of mainstream or mass culture. While he did speak to people who indicated that they had mainstream tastes in cultural products or were critical of products that had become mainstream, the concept itself was used in a very abstract way (Arthur 2010, p. 103). Thus, Arthur concludes that the mainstream is a cultural construct, an ‘imagined other’ (ibid) that Hip Hop fans identify against. This claim mirrors work by Thornton (1996) who argues that terms like ‘mainstream’ and ‘commercial’ are often used in us versus them binaries, where the mainstream is depicted as an outpost of either mass or dominant culture (Thornton 1996, p. 92).

In her study of club culture Thornton describes how clubbers primarily refer to this unsophisticated ‘mainstream’ as ‘Sharon and Tracey’, a phrase used to describe people who lacked taste (Thornton 1996, p. 99).⁷⁶ Thornton argues that these kinds of classifications act to imbue clubbers with authenticity and that the belittlement of stereotypical cultural ‘others’ helps to foster a sense of community and shared identity (Thornton 1996, p. 111). Like the clubbers in Thornton’s study, Hip Hop producers and consumers contrast their own commitment and dedication to Hip Hop with the perceived fickleness of ‘mainstream’ audiences who are argued to lack initiative. Despite academic critiques of the pessimism of Horkheimer and Adorno’s (2000) work (see section 5.2), many people, including Hip Hop artists and fans, still presume the existence of a passive, manipulated mass that is controlled by the ‘culture industry’. Hip Hoppers most frequently associate this ‘mindless’ mass with the consumption of ‘pop’ music. They contrast the production of Hip Hop with the production of other

⁷⁶ Thornton notes that the ‘femininity of these representations of the mainstream is hard to deny’ (Thornton 1996, p. 103) an issue which I explore in more depth in chapter 7. The term also has class connotations (see Thornton 1996, p. 101).

forms of music arguing that unlike musical genres like pop, Hip Hoppers are able to retain creative control over their music.⁷⁷

Oakes (2004) states that pop music is often marginalised as the inauthentic doppelganger to rock, Hip Hop and other forms of music. While Oakes notes the broadness of the pop music category, he argues that the term pop music is often used to describe music that is ‘supposedly more concerned with crafts-manship (i.e. its status as a commodity) than with self-expression (i.e. its status as an artistic statement)’ (Oakes 2004, p. 70). This concern with craftsmanship is expressed in the ‘madness’ (ibid) of pop music, a quality that draws attention to the human effort and calculation that went into its production (ibid). Oakes uses a compelling case study, the events which take place at the Loser’s Lounge, to argue that it is the madness of pop music that leads people to dismiss it as being artificial and inauthentic. The Loser’s Lounge is an event held in New York City where the repertoire of a particular pop music performer or song writing team is interpreted (Oakes 2004, p. 63). Performances at the Loser’s Lounge challenge the traditional association between naturalness and authenticity, because they privilege qualities that are typically associated with ‘bad music’ (Oakes 2004).

The Hip Hoppers that I interviewed did tend to categorise pop music as inauthentic because of its perceived madness. Of course as Oakes discusses, all music is made: ‘music is by definition *constructed*, created out of intentionally organized patterns of sound’ (Oakes 2004, p. 71, original emphasis). Why then, do Hip Hoppers criticise the madness of pop music and not Hip Hop? When Hip Hoppers are critical of pop music, they are privileging a particular kind of madness. After all, madness is a ‘matter of perception, where certain aural and formal qualities have come to function as markers of artifice’ (Oakes 2004, p. 71). Over the course of my research people referred to pop musicians using a number of derisive terms that all suggest a lack of agency and creative control. Terms that people used to describe pop musicians included; “puppets”, “tools of industry” and “parrots”. This is very different to the language used to describe pop musicians by the audiences and performers at the Loser’s Lounge. As

⁷⁷ Arthur argues that Hip Hop fans identify against a number of subcultural others, and in particular the ‘rave’ subculture (Arthur 2010, p. 107).

Oakes (2004) states, people at the Loser's Lounge tend to use terms that stress the creativity of the artists whose music they are performing and listening to:

Referring to lounge music recording artists as “songwriters” and “composers”, even if they were more popularly known as performers and stars in their own right, acted as a rhetorical move to portray lounge musicians as skilled individuals who were the creators of musical works

(Oakes 2004, p. 68).

In contrast to the discourses used by people at the Loser's Lounge to authenticate their own taste in ‘bad music’ (Oakes 2004) Hip Hoppers are adamant that pop music singers and artists have very little control over the music that they release. They do not view them as ‘skilled’ ‘creators’ (ibid) but rather as pawns of the ‘culture industry’. This lack of control is primarily attributed to their relationship with major labels that are argued to carefully manage both their image and their music. This view is clearly demonstrated in Michael's assertion that people who are signed to major labels become “muppets” who are “dancing to the tune” of the label (Michael, Author's Interview).

The Hip Hoppers that I interviewed depict major labels as exploitative and manipulative outsiders who lure inexperienced or naïve artists into signing onerous contracts. These contracts are viewed as stripping the artist of their creativity and forcing them to produce music that is determined by the record label. It is typically assumed that signing to a major label means signing over creative control and losing your independence. The connections that Hip Hoppers make between a lack of independence, commercialisation and ‘pop’ music is evident in the following quote from Hip Hop promoter Layton:

Major labels that make Hip Hop and they change their music purely to make money, I just call that pop music, I don't class it as Hip Hop anymore

(Layton, Author's Interview).

Producing music independently is a factor which is used to assess authenticity in the Australian Hip Hop scene. The Hilltop Hoods have never been signed to a major record label and this is viewed by many Hip Hoppers as a mark of their authenticity. For many years they were one of the most high profile groups signed to arguably the most

successful independent Australian Hip Hop label, Obese Records.⁷⁸ As I discussed in section 5.1, the Hilltop Hoods left Obese and formed their own record label Golden Era Records. Their history with Obese and the creation of their own independent record label has helped to secure their reputation as people who are in control of their own music and are therefore, authentic. Because major record labels are defined by Hip Hoppers as organisations that are primarily interested in making money, being signed to a major label has become associated with selling out. The authenticity that is attributed to producing music independently is further demonstrated in the following quote from Patrick about the Hilltop Hoods:

Because of their background and because they've been around for so long and they've done, the hard yards and they've released their stuff independently and they've done it all, I think they get a lot of respect for where they've gotten to. I think if there's ever going to be any sort of anger about people becoming successful it is going back to that major label stuff about people who just appear on the scene and get to go to these big shows or award ceremonies and haven't done all of that

(Patrick, Author's Interview).

Patrick contrasts the career of the Hoods with a hypothetical scenario whereby someone from a "major label" becomes successful without having "done" everything that the Hilltop Hoods have. He suggests that Hip Hoppers become angry when people like this just "appear on the scene" and become successful without having done the "hard yards". This quote illustrates the importance that Hip Hoppers place on 'paying your dues' or demonstrating your commitment to Hip Hop. I argue that because they are viewed as uncommitted to Hip Hop, major record labels are defined as a threat to the authenticity of Australian Hip Hop. It is assumed that major record labels are organisations that do not have the necessary knowledge to produce authentic Hip Hop. Even if such record labels are seen as understanding Hip Hop, it is argued that this understanding is compromised by the ultimate agenda of the label which is defined as making as much money as possible.

⁷⁸ Like any group of people, not all Hip Hoppers support Obese Records. For example, see the song 'Monopoly' by Australian MC Brad Strut which is rumoured to be an attack on Obese (*Legend Official* 2007).

In this chapter I have demonstrated that Hip Hop fans and artists are critical of people and organisations such as major record labels who they argue do not “love” Hip Hop and are motivated by economic imperatives. Therefore, artists like the Hilltop Hoods who are very commercially successful have to work to demonstrate their commitment to Hip Hop and therefore, their authenticity. As Peterson states, ‘authenticity is a claim that is made by or for someone, thing, or performance and either accepted or rejected by relevant others’ (Peterson 2005, p. 1086). In this chapter I have explored this process by describing how Hip Hoppers actively work to position themselves as insiders, as people who are interested in and dedicated to Hip Hop culture. However, as illustrated in the extracts from the forum www.ozhiphop.com/forum, these claims to authenticity can be vigorously disputed. I have shown throughout this chapter that profiting financially from Hip Hop is understood by the vast majority of Hip Hoppers as a potentially corrupting force that can diminish artistic and personal authenticity.

Yet, as the case study of the Hilltop Hoods illustrates, people can make money from Hip Hop without losing their credibility. Thus, while some people labeled the Hilltop Hoods ‘sell outs’ others were proud of their success and the way that they had achieved it. Even though Hip Hoppers can be extremely suspicious of people who make economic gains from Hip Hop, this does not mean that they militantly oppose anybody who profits from Hip Hop. As I will discuss in chapter 6, they contend that only ‘insiders’ should make money from their participation in Hip Hop culture. In the following chapter I analyse a marketing campaign implemented by the Jays Jays brand to examine how distinctions between insiders and outsiders are made in more depth. In this chapter I have tended to assume that being motivated by a love for Hip Hop has positive ramifications. In chapter 6 I consider how loving and caring about Hip Hop can also be viewed as potentially weakening and damaging the future prosperity of the Australian Hip Hop scene.

Chapter 6

Supporting the Scene: Keeping Hip Hop ‘Alive’:

In chapter 5 I argued that in order to be considered authentic people who participate in or appropriate Hip Hop must demonstrate that they are committed to Hip Hop culture and not solely motivated by potential economic gain. I used the case study of the success of the Hilltop Hoods to examine the ideology of ‘selling out’ and how different Hip Hoppers define the Hoods as authentic or inauthentic depending on their interpretation of the group’s behaviour and music. I demonstrated that an anti-commercial ethos is central to discourses of authenticity in the Australian Hip Hop scene. However, this does not mean that Hip Hoppers are opposed to people profiting from Hip Hop. Rather, they are sensitive about who profits from Hip Hop and how they do so. For example, Bloustein (2008, p. 195) describes how she asked DJ Shep, the co-founding director of Adelaide Hip Hop and skate store Da Klinik if he had been accused of ‘selling out’. Although Shep replied that ‘No-one does their job for free!’ (ibid), Bloustein contends that Shep, like many young entrepreneurs held ‘onto the romantic and paradoxical distinction between art and commerce’ (Bloustein 2008, p. 200) and was not primarily motivated by financial reward. Thus, Shep states that his business provides him with the opportunity to ‘not just do what we love but actually get paid for what we love’ (Shep in Martin 2004, n.p.).

Muggleton (2000/2002) and Hodkinson (2002) state that people who do not adequately establish their commitment to a subcultural group can be rejected by others who classify them as ‘part-timers’. In relation to Australian Hip Hop, Maxwell (2003, pp. 131 and 137) cites the use of the term ‘half-steppers’ to describe people who are dismissed by other Hip Hoppers for their lack of cultural knowledge and for adopting Hip Hop fashion without having ‘a fucking clue what they were doing’ (D’Souza 1994 in Maxwell 2003, p. 131). While no one that I interviewed used the term ‘half-stepper’ they were critical of people who they argued did not understand the depth of Hip Hop culture or who attempted to forge an association with Hip Hop for their own economic gain without having ‘paid their dues’ (see chapter 5). In this chapter I analyse a marketing campaign run by the Jays Jays brand to further examine how people who attempt to engender a connection between themselves and Hip Hop culture can be

criticised by Hip Hop enthusiasts if they are considered to be ‘outsiders’ who are not committed to the future prosperity of the Hip Hop scene. I demonstrate that Hip Hoppers condemn individuals and organisations that do not ‘support’ the Hip Hop scene. Yet, as I will discuss, the issue of ‘support’ is a contentious one because some Hip Hoppers argue that when ‘support’ for Australian Hip Hop is not moderated it becomes destructive. I conclude the chapter by introducing debates about the value of a logo which I refer to as the ‘Support Australian Hip Hop Logo’. This logo was created by Australian record label Obese Records and has instigated a number of discussions about how and indeed, if, Australians should ‘support’ Australian Hip Hop.

6.1 Media, Commerce and Commitment:

Like jazz musicians (Becker 1966), clubbers (Thornton 1996), and indie rock fans (Hibbett 2005), Hip Hoppers identify against ‘mainstream’ consumers who they depict as having less agency and taste than themselves. However, in her account of clubbers, Thornton warns that scholars need to examine these kinds of classifications, and should not ‘get caught up in denigrating or...celebrating the ‘mainstream’’ (Thornton 1996, p. 96). She is critical of the abstract and a-historical way that the ‘mainstream’ is represented in the work of scholars like Hebdige (1979/2002) who set up a mainstream/subculture dichotomy and argue that formerly resistant subcultures are inevitably ‘incorporated’ into the mainstream. In his famous account of teddy boys, mods, rockers, skin-heads and punks titled *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* Hebdige (1979/2002) argues that the subversive power of subcultures are inevitably defused when subcultural signs are converted into commodities and when the deviant behavior of subcultures are re-defined by dominant groups (Hebdige 1979/2002, p. 94). Thus, according to Hebdige:

Youth cultural styles may begin by issuing symbolic challenges, but they must inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions; by creating new sets of commodities, new industries or rejuvenating old ones

(Hebdige 1979/2002, p. 96).

Thornton contends that this argument is ‘wistful’ (Thornton 1996, p. 124) because subcultures are ‘not organic, unmediated social formations, nor are they autonomous, grassroots cultures which only meet the media upon recuperative ‘selling out’ (ibid p.

160). Unlike Hebdige who situates the media and the market in opposition to subcultural authenticity arguing that both play a role in the cycle of defusion and incorporation that 'encloses each successive subculture' (Hebdige 1979/2002, p. 100), Thornton argues that different forms of media play a critical role in the formation and the development of subcultures (Thornton 1996, pp. 116-117). She states that the monolithic concept of 'the media' does not account for the diverse ways that various media forms, which she labels mass, niche and micro-media, are used by subcultural groups (ibid). Thus, she contends that while clubbers define themselves in opposition to 'mass media', typified by 'prime-time television, national public service radio and mass circulation tabloid newspapers' (Thornton 1996, p. 122), they romanticise and legitimate other forms of media such as flyers, fanzines and pirate radio which Thornton labels 'micro-media' (Thornton 1996, p. 137).

The third media form that Thornton identifies is 'niche-media', a term used to describe the music and style press (Thornton 1996, p. 151). Thornton states that niche media do not simply 'cover subcultures they help to construct them' (ibid). As such, she is critical of the idea that 'authentic culture is somehow outside media and commerce' (Thornton 1996, p. 116). As Hodkinson (2002) discusses, the value of Thornton's work is the 'assertion that subculture can retain relevance in a media-saturated society' (Hodkinson 2002, p. 153). From this perspective media coverage and commercialisation do not inevitably result in defusion but can also positively contribute to the longevity of subcultural groups. Thus, while Hebdige (1979/2002) viewed the appropriation of the 'signs' of punk by couture fashion designer Zhondra Rhodes and the subsequent coverage in a 1977 issue of *Cosmopolitan* as signaling the 'subculture's imminent demise' (Hebdige 1979/2002, p. 96), Thornton considers how mass media and niche-media coverage can actually help to foster a sense of group identity and distinction. In particular, Thornton explores how negative mass-media coverage or 'moral panics' (Cohen 1972/1990) can play a factor in legitimating and authenticating subcultures (Thornton 1996, p. 132).

Yet, while she emphasises the important role that negative press coverage can play in the development of subcultures, Thornton still asserts that positive mass media coverage is a 'subcultural kiss of death' (Thornton 1996, p. 135). She uses the example of a brief period in 1988 when 'acid house' was receiving positive mass media coverage

that, she argues, would have resulted in the subculture's abandonment had they continued (ibid). In contrast to Thornton, Hodkinson (2002) contends that positive mass media coverage can be enthusiastically received by already committed subcultural participants if it is in 'small quantities' and can serve to strengthen their sense of group identity (Hodkinson 2002, p. 156). In his ethnographic study of the goth subculture, Hodkinson found that while goths did appreciate the positive mass media coverage of goth they also feared that such coverage could result in their subculture becoming 'over-popular' (ibid). This is consistent with Thornton's contention that subcultural capital, drawing on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, can be diminished when it becomes too accessible (cf. Hibbett 2005).

The relationship between accessibility and authenticity is also explored by Muggleton in his account of the practices and beliefs of members of various subcultural groups such as punks, mods, rockers and hippies (Muggleton 2000/2002). In one interview, two of Muggleton's participants named Suzie and Mags discuss how they became frustrated when 'grunge' fashion was sold in stores like Top Shop and more people began to adopt a 'grunge' style. Suzie makes a clear distinction between her own authentic consumption practices and the actions of:

people that had probably never heard of...they'd heard of, like, Teen Spirit but hadn't heard of Mudhoney or any of the other, like, grunge bands that were fairly big then, and were just buying stuff from Top Shop

(Suzie in Muggleton 2000/2002, p. 141).

In this quote Suzie is critical of people who dress in clothing associated with 'grunge' music but do not have an adequate understanding of grunge itself. She establishes this by stating that such people would only know the single 'Smells like Teen Spirit' which was a hit song by the group Nirvana (*Nevermind* 1991) but would not have 'heard of' a 'fairly big' grunge group like Mudhoney. In his analysis of this quote Muggleton states that:

the fact that certain people were not aware of them [Mudhoney], yet had heard a successful chart single by a grunge band, is a comment on their taste for only the commercial element of such music. The falsity of grunge 'fashion' is clearly being equated here with the superficiality of commercially successful grunge music

(Muggleton 2000/2002, p. 143).

Very similar arguments are made by Australian Hip Hoppers who condemn ‘mainstream’ consumers of Hip Hop for their supposedly inauthentic interest in Hip Hop culture. As evident in discussions introduced in chapter 5 about the growing appeal of acts like the Hilltop Hoods, some Hip Hoppers are concerned that as Hip Hop gains more mass-media exposure it will attract a more ‘mainstream’ audience. Indeed, knowledge of the Hilltop Hoods is often used as a gauge of cultural capital by Hip Hoppers who are attempting to assess how much someone knows about the Australian Hip Hop scene and therefore, if they are an authentic Hip Hopper or a ‘mainstream’ consumer. It is very common for people on online forums and in person to question people about the Hilltop Hoods early albums because it is assumed that a ‘mainstream’ fan will only know about the Hoods more recent and most popular work. Similarly, like Suzie’s above complaint about people who might know a track like ‘Smells Like Teen Spirit’ but no other grunge music, people who only know about the Hilltop Hoods and no other Hip Hop groups can be dismissed by other Hip Hoppers for being superficial.

Hip Hoppers work hard to distinguish themselves from the perceived superficiality of these newer fans who, they argue, like Hip Hop simply because it is increasingly covered in the mass-media. Thus, they make clear distinctions between their own critical use of media and the following of ‘trends’ by other people who are argued to lack initiative. This is demonstrated in the following quote from Layton who stated that Hip Hop is at:

a bit of a stage now where it’s starting to get more love from the mainstream and it’s kind of almost stepping into being ‘cool’ with the younger generation almost getting to, you know, work it’s way into having a little bit of input into the pop industry, where you have people who will just be getting into Hip Hop because they see other people into it and think it’s cool. I think that’s going to wash in and wash out like all genres do with pop music, just kind of comes and goes like trends

(Layton, Author’s Interview).

Layton states that Hip Hop is beginning to become “cool” and that more people will begin to get into Hip Hop because they see that other people like it and that it is popular. However, Layton surmises that this stage of mainstream acceptance is a “trend” that will “wash in and wash out”. His use of the phrase “wash in and wash out”

implies that mainstream audiences are passive consumers who are swept along with the currents of “trends”. Conversely, it suggests that once the fickle ‘mainstream’ audience has been washed “out”, only authentic Hip Hoppers will remain. These examples demonstrate that distinctions made by members of various cultural groups such as clubbers (Thornton 1996), goths (Hodkinson 2002) and punks (Muggleton 2000/2002) who define themselves as committed in contrast to the supposed shallowness of the ‘mainstream’ are shared by Hip Hoppers. Muggleton (2000/2002) contends that these distinctions are framed by a particular understanding of media consumption, whereby subculturalists emphasise their own autonomy and denigrate cultural ‘others’ for being ‘mass-media-influenced’ (Muggleton 2000/2002, p. 137)

These kinds of distinctions are evident in the following excerpts from the track ‘Wordem Up’ by Melbourne MC, Bias B, which features on the album *Been There, Done That* (2007). Bias B explores a number of issues on this album including the loss of his mother at the age of seventeen, family struggles and the effects of divorce, his ability to catch women in an elaborate fishing metaphor, and problems facing the Hip Hop scene due to alcohol fueled violence at venues. The track ‘Wordem Up’ is an explosive and aggressive Hip Hop song that attacks the integrity of a number of institutions and individuals, in particular, major record labels and the Australian Hip Hop artists signed to them. The chorus states:

Word em Up/Bias tell it how it is/Serve it up/That’s not talent that’s shit/I’ve heard enough/Look what you’re selling to the kids/No wonder no one comes to your gigs

(*Been There Done That* 2007).

Near the end of the song *Bias* raps:

Call that a hit?/Man I’m calling it quits/All the kids that I talk to will be calling it shit/But they push it up the charts with some catchy hook/A plastic look/And get all of these spastics hooked/On some wack shit that’s backed by some cash and a gimmick/Hip Hop it ain’t a fashion – I live it!

In this track Bias attacks organisations and individuals that market ‘shit’ Hip Hop to the ‘kids’. His use of the phrase ‘kids’ and in particular the lines ‘push it up the charts with some catchy hook/A plastic look/And get all of these spastics hooked’ suggests that

major record labels and other organisations have the power to control some people's consumption habits. However, Bias makes a key distinction between people who will be 'calling it shit' and the 'spastics' that will consume it. The 'spastics' in Bias's track can be equated with demonised 'mainstream' consumers whose lack of taste is contrasted with Bias's own cultural connoisseurship and his commitment to Hip Hop. This affirms the argument introduced in chapter 5 that participation in Hip Hop culture should be motivated by a "love" for the culture. Thus, Bias argues that Hip Hop is much more than a 'fashion' to him, it is his life. He compares his own interest in Hip Hop with the actions of people who are solely concerned with making money from Hip Hop.

However, in his track 'Shit Hot' from the same album, Bias boasts extensively about money. He talks up his earning capacity, his talent and his overall greatness:

I'm shit hot/Look I know it myself/You like my wrist watch? So does everyone else/I've got a trophy on the shelf/From the comp, that I won/I got so confident told everyone I'd won before the comp begun/And you never see me paying for gigs/Always my name on the list/As well as taking some chicks/And I ain't paying for my piss.../I'm flying for free/Doing shows around the country/Hotels, drinks as well/And still come home with money

Is there a contradiction here? If Bias is so against Hip Hoppers cashing in on the culture then why is he bragging about his watch and how much money he is making? How are these two ideas reconciled? I contend that Hip Hop fans and artists are not against people profiting from Hip Hop, rather, they are against 'outsiders' profiting from Hip Hop.

In his study of goth culture Hodkinson explores the roles that producers such as clothing retailers, promoters and other entrepreneurs play in the formation of the goth scene, arguing that commerce and subculture are 'highly compatible' (Hodkinson 2002, p. 122). Like the goth subculture, Hip Hop culture is not antithetical to or 'outside' consumerism (ibid, p. 121). Yet, as evident in the above lyrical extracts from Bias B and in accounts of the ideological differences between major and independent record labels in chapter 5, Hip Hoppers do make distinctions between authentic modes of commercialisation and 'selling out'. In his account of goth, Hodkinson makes an important distinction between '*non-subcultural* producers' (Hodkinson 2002, p. 109

original emphasis) who are located outside the subculture and ‘*subcultural* producers’ (ibid, original emphasis) who are ‘motivated wholly or partially by their own involvement in and enthusiasm for the subculture’ (ibid) He concludes that theorists need to consider the non-financial motives that influence commercial entrepreneurs. While Hodkinson does not focus on the perceived authenticity of non-subcultural producers compared to subcultural producers, my research demonstrates that non-subcultural producers or ‘outsiders’ who attempt to profit from Hip Hop are rejected by Hip Hop enthusiasts.

Hip Hoppers define ‘outsiders’ as people who have not demonstrated their commitment to Hip Hop culture:

If another shop [Hip Hop shop] was to open in Melbourne next week I’d have no problem with that as long as they shop was owned and run by people within the scene. But when it’s someone that goes, cool, I’ve got a hundred grand, I’ve talked to a few people I know what’s popular, I’ll start up a Hip Hop shop, then it’s like, well, I can’t stop you doing that but ethically it’s like, nahh not what Hip Hop’s about

(Fred, Author’s Interview).

Just like in Bias’s track ‘Wordem Up’, outsiders are people who invest in Hip Hop solely as a business. They are viewed as people who have no connection to Hip Hop except for a monetary one. Such people are seen as having no real insight into Hip Hop culture, and this is why their business schemes are often seen as failures, because real Hip Hoppers will be “calling it shit’ (*Been There Done That* 2007). When Hip Hop fans determine whether or not someone can make money from Hip Hop and still be respected, the key factor is an assessment of whether or not that person or organisation is an ‘insider’ who has demonstrated that they have a passion for and a commitment to Hip Hop. As Fred went on to say:

At the end of the day, there’s nothing wrong with the people that come from within Hip Hop culture making money from it, it’s their life

(Fred, Author’s Interview).

As I noted in section 1.6 of my introduction, this is why I was viewed with suspicion by some Hip Hoppers when I first met them. They were concerned that I would use my

position for my own personal gain by publishing a book from my research which was assumed to be a lucrative endeavour. I had to work to demonstrate that my interest in Hip Hop was genuine and that I was not an ‘outsider’ attempting to unfairly profit from Hip Hop. In the following section I use the case study of the reception of a *Jays Jays* marketing campaign to further illustrate how an organisation can be classified as an ‘outsider’ and criticised for appropriating practices that Hip Hoppers define as belonging to them.

6.2 Defining Outsiders: Critiquing Jay Jays:

In 2005 the clothing retailer Jay Jays commissioned a marketing campaign featuring Television spots shot in popular Melbourne Graffiti spot Hosier Lane (see Figure 2) and in-store Graffiti inspired point of sale banners and window stickers.



Figure 2: Bins covered in Graffiti in Hosier Lane, Melbourne (Author’s Photo, 2009).

According to their website, Jay Jays are a clothing brand that are ‘all about being yourself and expressing who you are through clothing that won’t bust your budget’ (Jay Jays ‘About Us’ n.d.). At present they have 950 stores across Australia, New Zealand and South Africa (Jay Jays ‘Jobs’ n.d.).

The thirty second Jay Jays Television commercial filmed in Hosier Lane starred four youths (two males and two females) and was dominated by the sound track, a Hip Hop style song with rapped lyrics. The actors performed the song and the commercial did not feature any dialogue. It opened with a shot of the female lead character stenciling the image of the male lead character onto a wall.⁷⁹ The male lead who raps the majority of the song is then introduced. He walks down the laneway as the other two characters jump out from the shadows. Throughout the commercial the characters, clad in Jay Jays clothing, dance and pose as the male lead raps the song. The female lead holds her spray can as she dances. The heavily Graffiti covered walls of Hosier Lane feature prominently in the background as the words '20 Dollar Polos' appear on the screen. The commercial ends with the female lead spraying paint directly to camera, revealing the image of the secondary male character who says 'uh-huh'. The closing shot is an aerial shot of the laneway with the Jay Jays logo superimposed on the asphalt in a stenciled style.

Hosier Lane is a lane way in Melbourne which has become well known for its legal and illegal Graffiti and street art. It has become a popular destination for tourists, walking art tours and even wedding pictures.⁸⁰ The use of Hosier Lane as a setting for a commercial advertisement and the utilisation of cultural markers associated with Hip Hop and Graffiti to sell the Jay Jays brand generated heated debate within the Hip Hop community. What right did Jay Jays have to appropriate Hip Hop culture as part of their marketing campaign? The Jay Jays advertisement is a particularly interesting case study because the filming took place in a public space, although the filmmakers would have needed a permit from the Melbourne City Council. It does not seem unreasonable to assume that the Graffiti painted in Hosier Lane was meant to be seen, consumed and interacted with. In fact, the very nature of Graffiti, often illegal, anonymous and highly public seems to defy traditional interpretations of ownership.

The fact that Hip Hoppers were offended by the appropriation of Hip Hop culture by Jays Jays highlights how people or organisations that are not deemed to be Hip Hop insiders can be criticised when they use Hip Hop culture to promote their brand.

⁷⁹ Stenciling is a form of Graffiti or Street Art in which a custom made stencil is designed and then cut out by the artist. The stencil is then applied to a wall and sprayed with paint to achieve the desired effect.

⁸⁰ See for example, http://www.walktoart.com.au/walking_tour_art.html

Furthermore, despite Graffiti's enigmatically public format, I contend that Graffiti Writers paint predominantly for themselves and for other Writers. The public nature of Graffiti does not mean that Graffiti Writers abandon ideas of ownership and control. Before I consider how and why Jay Jays were positioned by Hip Hoppers as an inauthentic 'outsider' I need to provide some more information about the history and origins of Graffiti.

If we trace the origin of the word 'Graffiti' we can see that it comes from the Italian, 'graffito' meaning a scratching or a scribbling, reflecting the fact that marking names and words on surfaces is an ancient practice (*Macquarie Dictionary Online* 2011, n.p.). However, in this chapter my focus is on Graffiti as it is known as an Element of Hip Hop culture and not as simply any act of inscription. Graffiti as a cultural form is typically pin pointed as emerging from New York City in the late 1960s to early 1970s, however, Powers (1999) traces it back to as early as the 1940s in L.A, and 1959 in Philadelphia. By 1971 Graffiti's presence was substantial enough to attract the interest of *The New York Times* (21 July 1971, p. 37) who ran an article on a youth named Demetrius who was tagging 'Taki 183' all over New York. A tag can be thought of as a Graffiti Writer's signature. It refers to both the name a Graffiti Writer has chosen for themselves (their tag) which they write and a form of Graffiti Writing (tagging). As more and more people became involved in tagging, competition grew and artistic boundaries were pushed as Writers began to develop new styles and painting techniques. The Graffiti repertoire evolved to include 'throw ups' which were significantly larger than tags and typically used two colours and bubble letters, and 'pieces', short for masterpieces, alternatively known as 'burners', which were much more involved and time consuming works (see Figure 3, p. 139)



Figure 3: Black tags written on top of a more colourful ‘piece’ or ‘burner’ in a Melbourne Laneway (Author’s Photo, 2009).

Acknowledging the competitive nature of Graffiti Writing is important because, as Macdonald contends, earning fame and respect or becoming ‘known’ are integral facets of Graffiti Writing (Macdonald 2002). Graffiti Writers actively seek to build their reputations within the Graffiti Writing community. Although pseudonyms are adopted, tags and pieces are not anonymous works. A Writer’s status and identity are intrinsically linked to their painted pieces. This is why the act of ‘capping’ or ‘crossing out’ (deliberately going over or putting a line through another Graffiti Writers work) is seen as an act of absolute aggression and disrespect. To cap another Writer’s work is to make a very explicit statement about your relationship with them. When a Graffiti Writer looks at a tag they don’t see a random collection of letters, they see a name and a person. They see composition, can control, style, location and difficulty of placement. These are all criteria used to assess the Writer’s skill level. What may be a simple line on a wall to a member of the general public can be loaded with significance for a Graffiti Writer. Macdonald argues that Graffiti Writers revel in this distinction, stating:

‘writers use the city as their canvas aware that outsiders know nothing or little of the markings they see’ (Macdonald 2002, p. 158).

Therefore, Graffiti Writers and Hip Hop enthusiasts felt violated when their work was taken out of its cultural context and featured in a Jay Jays commercial. Criticisms of the Jay Jays campaign focused on the inauthenticity of the advertisement with individuals describing it as “try hard”, “wack”, “wrong” and “cringe worthy” (Author’s field notes). As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, Hip Hoppers make very clear differentiations between insiders and outsiders or ‘us’ and ‘them’. This dichotomy becomes crucial when we consider why the Jay Jays campaign was so despised. Who is, or is not, defined as a part of Hip Hop culture plays a critical role in determining who is seen to have the right to utilise Graffiti imagery and practices. Jay Jays did not have the insider status necessary to imbue their appropriation of Graffiti imagery with credibility. In the eyes of many Hip Hoppers, they had unsuccessfully tried to forge a link between their company and Hip Hop culture. Because Jay Jays were viewed as an organisation that had not contributed to or supported Hip Hop culture before this campaign, their attempt to engender this connection was viewed as exploitative and contrived. To use a phrase introduced in chapter 5, Jays Jays did not convincingly demonstrate that they “loved” Hip Hop or indeed, that they had any interest in it beyond its usage as a marketing tool.

This lack of commitment to Hip Hop culture was mocked by contributors to the Hip Hop message board Ozhiphop with poster Cax suggesting Graffiti Writers should: ‘Pick up a can and bomb a Jay Jays store near you’ (Cax in Oz Hip Hop Forum, ‘Ill Al on Jay Jays’ forum discussion). This post was met with the response: ‘hell yeah, let’s see how much they love graff in their stores’ (Mr. Focus in *ibid*). The implication here was that if Jay Jays were so eager to be associated with Graffiti then they wouldn’t mind a few tags and pieces painted on their store fronts. Similarly, posters on the online forum of Hip Hop magazine *Stealth* sarcastically critiqued the commercial:

The chick would be more hardcore if she was using Exports.⁸¹ Everyone knows real street artiste's use Exports. These ad exec's don't know nothin'

(Lab Gangsta in Stealth Magazine Message Board 'New Jay Jays Ad Shot in Hosier Lane', forum discussion).

I argue that members of the Hip Hop community constructed Jay Jays as ignorant 'outsiders' in order to disarm and delegitimize their appropriation of Graffiti imagery. By positioning Jay Jays and the executives who created the advertisement as people who 'don't know' anything, Hip Hoppers are able to constitute themselves as the people who do know and to legitimate their position as authorities on Hip Hop.

While I do not want to minimise the very real frustration and anger that Hip Hoppers felt when they viewed the Jays Jays advertisement, I argue that the advertisement did not threaten the authenticity of Hip Hop culture in Australia. Unlike Thornton (1996, p. 135) who states that positive mass media coverage has negative implications for the longevity of a subculture, I contend that regardless of whether it is negative or positive, mass-media coverage enables members of cultural groups to re-assert their position as 'insiders' able to critique and dismiss 'outsider' representations of 'their' culture. Although Hip Hoppers are concerned about the appeal of such advertisements to 'mainstream' consumers and the implications that the increased publicity might have on the popularity of Hip Hop (cf. Hodkinson 2002), they also revel in the opportunity to establish their own 'insider' status. Ziff and Rao state that because appropriation implies some form of taking, it 'contemplates a relationship between persons and groups' (Ziff and Rao 1997, p. 3). Therefore, the need to define who is or is not part of a cultural group is implicit in most of what is said about appropriation.

Yet, as Ziff and Rao discuss, when boundary lines are drawn, problems of definition emerge. Hip Hop enthusiasts are not a homogenous group; Hip Hop means many different things to many different people. However, this does not mean that the term is so indistinct as to have lost all significance. I argue that defining Hip Hop and therefore, insiderness, is an ongoing and active process, one that is performed in dialogue with 'outsider' representations of the form like the Jay Jays commercial. As Maxwell argues, 'the claim that someone is an outsider...is not grounded in an

⁸¹ 'Exports' is the common name given to a cheap Australian brand of spray paint.

uncomplicated insiderness; rather, it is the very gesture that establishes insiderness, that competes for it' (Maxwell 2005, p. 17). By denouncing the Jays Jays advertising campaign Hip Hoppers are able to constitute their own insider status. The establishment of 'insiderness' vis-a-vis inauthentic 'outsiders' is clearly demonstrated in the following quotes from Hip Hop enthusiasts that are not specifically about the Jays Jays campaign but reflect more broadly on the appropriation of Hip Hop culture by "corporations" or "large organisations" in marketing campaigns:

These corporations are thieving off something that we as a community worked hard to build. Now cause it's trendy they want in? This is an absolute joke to me

(Mark, Author's Interview).

Similarly, Hip Hopper Michael said:

It's just typical of a large organisation wanting to associate themselves with something that they view as vibrant or is a market they need to tap, no real interest except for tapping a market

(Michael, Author's Interview).

I contend that because Jays Jays are viewed as having "no real interest" in Hip Hop culture and are not seen as part of the "community" that "worked hard to build" Hip Hop, their use of rap and Graffiti references in their advertisement is rejected as being a marketing ploy.

The relationship between a commitment to the Australian Hip Hop scene and the perceived authenticity of different brands and corporations is also explored by Arthur (2006) in the article 'Authenticity and Consumption in the Australian Hip Hop Culture'. In this article Arthur (2006) demonstrates that Hip Hoppers typically valorise brands that are produced in Australia and that they are more likely to wear clothing produced by a company based in their own state. An example from my own fieldwork that illustrates this point is that people in Melbourne tend to strongly identify with the brand Burn Clothing (www.burnclothing.com.au) produced by a Melbourne Graffiti crew of the same name, Burn Crew (cf. Arthur 2010, pp. 224-225).⁸² Furthermore, Arthur

⁸² Melbourne is sometimes referred to by Hip Hoppers and Graffiti Writers in particular as 'Mel-burn' and the brand 'Burn' references this play on words. This term derives from Graffiti slang for an elaborate Graffiti work which can be called a 'burner'.

(2006) demonstrates that certain American brands like Ecko are dismissed by Australian Hip Hoppers because they are associated with commercialisation or ‘selling out’. Arthur states that Ecko is judged inauthentic because it has become associated with the disparaged ‘mainstream’ and therefore, is no longer considered a brand that represents Hip Hop culture. However, this does not mean that all American brands are classified as inauthentic by Australian Hip Hoppers.

Arthur states that even though brands like Adidas, Nike and Puma do not support the Australian Hip Hop scene they are still respected because of their associations with the origins of Hip Hop culture documented in films like *Wild Style* (1983) (see section 2.1) and in music videos such as ‘My Adidas’ by American Hip Hop group Run DMC. For example, he states that the brand Zoo York is widely liked by Australian Hip Hoppers because of its ‘association with the spiritual home [New York] and history of Hip Hop’ (Arthur 2006, p. 114). I would add that even though these brands may not contribute directly to the Australian Hip Hop scene they do work to propagate their association with Hip Hop more broadly through the release of products designed to appeal specifically to Hip Hoppers such as Adidas’s ‘End to End’ shoe line which featured designs by well known Graffiti Writers. Therefore, I argue that only brands which are viewed as committed to Hip Hop culture or that have a long-standing historical relationship to Hip Hop culture are able to utilise Hip Hop references in their marketing campaigns or products without being criticised by Hip Hop enthusiasts.

That said, I do not want to suggest that all Hip Hoppers agree as to what constitutes ‘commitment’ to the Australian Hip Hop scene or to argue that every Hip Hop producer or fan views particular brands such as Adidas or Jay Jays in the same way. What I do want to emphasise is that it is much more likely that a brand or organisation will be viewed as authentic if they work to establish themselves as Hip Hop insiders who support the Australian Hip Hop community. Of course, as Maxwell (2005) discusses in his account of the extremely negative reactions of Hip Hoppers to an article about Hip Hop published in the Sydney Morning Herald in 2004, not all media accounts of Hip Hop are targeted at Hip Hoppers. Likewise, not all marketing campaigns set out to appeal to Hip Hoppers themselves and it can be assumed that many advertisers do not care if Hip Hoppers consider their advertisements to be inauthentic if they appeal to their target demographic. As such it needs to be acknowledged that debates about

commitment and support may be irrelevant to people who are not invested in the ‘field’ (Bourdieu 1984) of Hip Hop.

Nonetheless, as I have established throughout this thesis, who has the right to profit from and to adopt Hip Hop culture is of crucial significance to Hip Hop performers and fans. Thus, Hip Hoppers are adamant that only people who are contributing to the Hip Hop scene, that “come from within it” (Author’s Interview) in Fred’s words should make money from it. As such, Hip Hoppers have to work to position themselves as insiders, as people that are contributing to and supporting the Hip Hop ‘scene’ as it is colloquially referred to. The importance placed on supporting the scene is particularly prominent in Adelaide where the smaller population size means that the survival of the Hip Hop scene is more tenuous and people have to work harder to ensure that events are well attended and are economically viable.⁸³ Hip Hop manager and Graffiti Writer Mark made this broader comment about how Australia’s small population influences the arts scene:

In Australia I think it is important to actively support anything you like in the arts world. We have such a small population that it is quite easy for the artist to not understand their popularity if you’re not actively participating in some way

(Mark, Author’s Interview).

The implication here is that if people do not attend events and engage with the arts world then this can radically affect the future prosperity of particular art scenes. In terms of Hip Hop, promoter Layton expressed frustration with Hip Hoppers who expected people to support their own creative endeavours but were not giving back to the Hip Hop scene themselves:

Some people that are trying to make their own music and trying to break through into what is the Adelaide Hip Hop scene, but don’t support people that have come before them and, don’t support the scene itself – that they want to support them. So, if you want to be a part of it and keep it alive, then you’ve got to support local things. Like going to the Hip Hop stores and buying the CD there instead of JB Hi Fi. Because that store is going to be there and that store promotes Hip Hop and keeps it alive, whereas JB Hi Fi they just sell CD’s. So I

⁸³ In his study of goth culture Hodkinson demonstrates that goths frequently discuss the importance of ‘contributing to the scene’ (Hodkinson 2002, p. 126).

think it's important for people to realise what keeps the Hip Hop scene alive in Adelaide and not take it for granted

(Layton, Author's Interview).

Just as Jays Jays were criticised for appropriating Hip Hop culture without investing in the form or demonstrating any commitment to the Australian Hip Hop scene, Layton is critical of people who expect others to 'support' their own music-making practices but do not adequately contribute to the survival of the Hip Hop scene themselves. He lists practices such as shopping at Hip Hop stores instead of large organisations like JB Hi Fi as being reflective of an individual's commitment to the ongoing survival of Hip Hop. Yet, as I will discuss in the final section of this chapter, how this 'support' should be manifested is a matter of contention from some Hip Hoppers. In particular, some Hip Hop producers and consumers are concerned that the importance that some Hip Hoppers place on "being Australian" (see chapter 2) is resulting in the patriotic support of Hip Hop that is not high quality. As I will demonstrate in the following section, this kind of support is surmised to harm rather than to help the long term survival of Hip Hop in Australia.

6.3 Too Much Love? Strengthening or Weakening Hip Hop in Australia:

I'm hurrying down the sloped, tunnel like entrance of the Adelaide Train Station and glancing upwards to check the monitor that displays timetabling information. Although I'm technically 'in the field' Hip Hop is not on my mind right now, I'm more concerned with which train I'm going to catch home. As I walk my eyes are drawn to the fluorescent light that illuminates my way. It is plastered with four stickers, two 'Hello My Name Is' stickers that someone has tagged, one plain white sticker, also tagged, and one 'Support Australian Hip Hop' sticker. This sticker features a stylised map of Australia and the words 'Support Australian Hip Hop'. It's times like these that you wish you had a camera with you. I make some scratch notes about the stickers on the train ride home – I consider who might have put them there and why; imagining them jumping up and sticking them there before quickly moving on. My attention is drawn in particular to the 'Support Australian Hip Hop' sticker. What was the motivation for including this sticker? The other stickers are explained more neatly, tagging is an integral part of Graffiti Writing and although tags are traditionally written using markers or aerosol cans, it is still quite common for people to tag stickers and put them up. This enables them to get their tag up with less risk and mess –stickers can be put up quickly with minimal effort. So why was the 'Support Australian Hip Hop' sticker included? Was whoever put it there making an ideological statement - a public declaration of pride in Australian Hip Hop? Or was it just another sticker that they happened to have?

The 'Support Australian Hip Hop' Logo was created by Melbourne based Hip Hop record label and Hip Hop store Obese Records. It appears on much of their marketing material, in particular on tour posters, their website and CD and Record covers. You can download the image freely from their website and it has become a general marker of Australian Hip Hop affiliation utilised by many Australian Hip Hop enthusiasts, predominantly on Myspace and Facebook pages.⁸⁴ One Adelaide Hip Hop group Van Demonz has even used the image for a key chain they made available on Zazzle.com ('SUPPORT Aussie Hip Hop Key Chain' n.d.).⁸⁵ However, Obese do own the copyright to the image and its usage, although as far as I am aware, they do not vigilantly enforce their rights. This has led to some confusion as people are somewhat unsure who actually created and owns the logo. In 2004 this became clear when someone made a post on the Ozhiphop.com forum to ask about the origins of the logo. This question was spurred by the official use of the logo (on their album cover) by non Obese artists Hykoo and Osinaka. Poster Obese Records made this reply in the thread:

the logo in question is copywrite to Obese Records. it appears on the hykoo n Osinaka release as they had written permission to use it. if you would like to use it you must ask/write to Pegz and get his written permission to use it.
Team Obese⁸⁶

(Obese Records in Oz Hip Hop Forum 'The Support Australian Hiphop logo'
forum discussion)

The amount of people using the logo probably makes this copyright difficult to police and I assume Obese are not highly concerned by personal, small-scale usage of the image. At one time you could buy the logo as a sticker from the Obese Records online store. In fact they are still listed on the Obese website (eight dollars for a 190mm x 160mm sticker) but they are out of stock (Obese Records Official Online Store, 'Stickers', n.d.). These stickers were also occasionally included with Obese Records Hip Hop releases or handed out by independent Hip Hop retailers with a purchase from their store.

⁸⁴ The logo can be downloaded and viewed at <http://www.obeserecords.com/media.htm>.

⁸⁵ Zazzle is a site where you can upload any design and make it available for people to purchase in various mediums (clothing, barware, accessories etc.). The items are not produced unless someone orders them.

⁸⁶ Pegz is the owner of Obese Records and an Australian Hip Hop MC.

At first glance the message of these stickers seem self-evident and unproblematic, ‘Support Australian Hip Hop’. However, I discovered that people have varying reactions to this logo and the associated ideals that it is seen to represent. The phrase ‘Support Australian Hip Hop’ coupled with a stylised map of Australia, brought into focus debates about what ‘Australian’ Hip Hop is, and how it should be expressed, understood and ‘supported’. It should be noted that although I use an investigation of the logo as an initial analytical starting point, I do move beyond specific reactions to the logo to a more general discussion of the idea of ‘support’. I argue that Hip Hoppers are concerned that ‘Australian’ Hip Hop, in particular Hip Hop music, is being uncritically championed. By that, I mean that Hip Hop that is not very ‘good’ is being accepted and in some cases, praised, merely because it is Australian. The size of the Australian Hip Hop scene is the oft stated rationale for this behaviour. People do not want to offend other Hip Hoppers who they know, possibly like, and will have to often deal with. This perceived lack of impartiality is seen to lead to lower quality Hip Hop gaining popular support.

Thus, when I asked DJ and Hip Hop store employee Rod whether he thought it is important for Australians to “support the local scene” he answered:

Well if you asked that to [name of Hip Hop artist] I know he’d say yes and he’d be very strongly militant about it. As far as I’m concerned, I think to an extent yes, but don’t just blindly support something because it’s local. You should support good music and that’s all that really matters. The ‘Support Australian Hip Hop’ ideology that exists in this country is all very good and well for the scene, but it can actually be damaging if you’re supporting something that’s terrible. I think everyone would agree they’d rather have a scene small but of high quality, than massive full of mediocre drops

(Rod, Author’s Interview).

The logo, ‘Support Australian Hip Hop’ became a flash point for many of these discussions. What kinds of support should be given to Australian Hip Hop and how should that support be manifested? Some Hip Hoppers are concerned that logos like the ‘Support Australian Hip Hop’ image promote the idea that Australians should support all Australian Hip Hop. However, as Hip Hopper Fred discusses, this is not necessarily the case. Fred argues that the Australian Hip Hop scene has developed to a stage where constructive criticism and consumer selectivity are very important:

In the 90s, early 90s, where there was hardly anything, if there was a show you had to go to that show because that's all you got to see. If there was a release you'd go, oh wow that is the only Aussie release this month I'll buy that. Whereas now it's like, well this month, there's been five releases, and of these five I like two so I'll buy those two. You don't, I know [there's] the whole logo 'Support Australian Hip Hop' I guess you could do that on many different levels but at the end of the day it's about supporting quality. Quality music. And that stands for anything

(Fred, Author's Interview).

Similarly, while recognising the integral importance of local support, MC Craig argues that people should only support Hip Hop that they personally like:

I think it's important to support the local Hip Hop that you like, not just support it because it's Australian, I mean we get a lot of, it's pretty crazy in comparison to a lot of other countries how much support we actually do get from locals. Without that support we wouldn't be able to do these shows, put out these albums. Without local support, it's just back to making music not letting anyone hear it, or just letting your mates hear it

(Craig, Author's Interview).

People do recognise the positive impact of having a community of Hip Hop fans and artists who are willing to engage both financially and emotionally with Australian Hip Hop. They understand that without this interest and enthusiasm Hip Hop cannot survive in this country:

I think the key thing is to realise that without people getting out there, buying releases, putting on shows, getting up on walls, all of that, Hip Hop won't survive

(Geoffrey, Author's Interview).

However, opinion is divided as to when and if this support can go too far and begin to have a negative influence. As Geoffrey continued on:

I tend not to worry too much about the so called 'wrong' people getting support, it's all pretty positive to me. It's all growth

(ibid).

Yet, not everyone agreed. Keith argues that supporting the “so-called ‘wrong’ people” (ibid.) has the potential to weaken the image of Australian Hip Hop and that this would have tangible impacts on the viability of Hip Hop’s future:

I think we have to stop looking so short term, sure you can try and support some shit Hip Hop and hope that they get better, but what about the people that go to the show, that see them and think ‘Australian hip hop is fucked’? What about potential fans that get turned off by it? It’s like, if I, we need to be building strong foundations here and letting this stuff slide now is just gonna ruin us down the track I reckon, how can skills get better if second rate stuff is tolerated?

(Keith, Author’s Interview).

This kind of opinion is well illustrated by a piece printed in Adelaide Street Press Magazine, *Onion* in 2008. Featuring the ‘Support Australian Hip Hop’ Logo at the top of the column the piece was titled ‘XPIZZLE’S BITCH SLAP’ and read as follows:

Hip hop I love you but step out of line and I will beat that ass. Support Australian hip hop has becomes somewhat of a battle cry in this country, it is something I am passionate about myself, but the support BECAUSE it’s Australian movement is fucking stupid. The growth of the Australian scene is my passion and this is why the ‘support it because it’s Australian hip hop’ chant pisses me off. Why limit it by classifying it as some form of Special Ed child that needs extra help to succeed? Oh, look here comes little Oz hip hop with a limp, better give it a head start. Fuck that, support it because it’s dope and if it’s wack call it shit regardless of where it came from. Our best is world class, as good as anything I hear annually from around the globe, but our worst, much like that from overseas, makes stabbing your groin with a letter opener to stop the ear pain seem appealing. Keep your ears open and search out our own, but don’t be afraid to call a spade a fucking wack local artist. The Support Australian Hip Hop Movement, you have been pimp slapped

(XPIZZLE 2008, p. 6).

Evident in this article is the idea that an overemphasis on ‘Supporting Australian Hip Hop’ can lead to an unhealthy and fragile local scene. Honesty was seen to be needed to ensure the future prosperity and growth of Australian Hip Hop culture.⁸⁷ From this perspective, ‘supporting’ Australian Hip Hop only becomes problematic when that support is seen to be motivated not by an appreciation or interest in the

⁸⁷ This article was not the only journalistic piece to reflect these sentiments. A very similar article was posted on the online blog of the Australian Hip Hop magazine *Peak Street*, titled ‘Fuck ‘Supporting Australian Hip Hop’ at <<http://peakstreet.com/post/5303946172/fuck-aussie-hip-hop>>.

form/music/event being supported but by a desire to help “give it [Australian Hip Hop] a head start” (ibid). While well intentioned, it is argued that this ideology will only hurt Australian Hip Hop in the long term.

It is important to note here that not everyone I interviewed saw the issue of ‘support’ as a contentious one. Some people thought it was highly unlikely that people would go out of their way to encourage Hip Hop that they didn’t personally like:

I don’t know why you’d support something you don’t like. I think more than anything you go to gigs that you like
(Patrick, Author’s Interview).

While others recognised the restraints that the ‘Support Australian Hip Hop’ logo’s function as a marketing tool placed on its form:

Well the logo can’t say, ‘Support Good Australian Hip Hop’ can it? It’s not as catchy [laughs]
(Adam, Author’s Interview).

Similarly John stated:

I don’t think you can read too much into this stuff [the logo]. I’ve seen where people have got copies of that logo and written ‘fuck nationality’ across them. I get their point, making everything about ‘Australian Hip Hop’ can be dangerous. It can be too introspective, too limiting. But is that what Obese is trying to say? I doubt it
(John, Author’s Interview).

It is not my intention to propose that Obese are actively suggesting that all Australian Hip Hop should automatically be supported regardless of quality. Rather, I use this example to problematise and analyse the contention that authentic Hip Hoppers are those who are committed to or who “love” Hip Hop. In this chapter I have demonstrated that Hip Hoppers are often extremely critical of ‘outsiders’ who are believed to use Hip Hop for their own monetary gain. However, debates about the authenticity of the ‘Support Australian Hip Hop’ logo illustrate that ‘commitment’ is not always celebrated. This is because some Hip Hoppers argue that “blind support” (Rod, Author’s Interview) for local Hip Hop will actually damage the future prosperity of the Hip Hop scene.

In chapter 5 I suggested that having “love” for Hip Hop is a positive and valued trait. Yet, as evident in the above quotes from Australian Hip Hoppers, having too much love can also be depicted as suffocating the ‘life’ and the development of Hip Hop culture. In this chapter I have illustrated that what being committed to or supporting the Hip Hop scene actually involves can be contentious as Hip Hoppers with differing visions for the future of Hip Hop struggle to legitimise their own understanding of what Hip Hop is and how it should continue to develop. However, while I have shown that the manifestation of ‘commitment’ or ‘support’ can be disputed, this does not mean that the concept itself is irrelevant. Being committed to or “loving” Hip Hop remains of paramount importance to Hip Hoppers. As illustrated in the rejection of the Jays Jays campaign that utilised Hip Hop culture, if you are not committed to Hip Hop then you cannot claim ownership of it. In the following chapter I further explore the idea of commitment and dedication to Hip Hop by exploring how a person’s gender can influence the way that commitment to the Hip Hop scene is assessed and evaluated. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, women are much more likely to be viewed as lacking commitment to Hip Hop culture and therefore, authenticity.

Chapter 7

Masculinity, Authenticity and Hip Hop Culture:

In this chapter I examine the relationship between gender and authenticity in the Australian Hip Hop scene. As I discussed in chapters 5 and 6, Hip Hoppers must demonstrate that they are dedicated and committed to Hip Hop culture. Women who participate in Hip Hop are commonly positioned as lacking commitment to Hip Hop and are viewed with suspicion by other Hip Hoppers. My findings support work by theorists who argue that Hip Hop scenes (Maxwell 2003; Arthur 2010) and, more narrowly, the Graffiti Writing subculture (Macdonald 2002) are primarily domains in which masculinity is constituted, performed and asserted. In the Australian Hip Hop scene, traits and practices that are understood to be masculine are privileged over those which are denigrated as feminine (cf. McLeod 1999). In this thesis, I have illustrated that all Hip Hop enthusiasts have to work imbue themselves with authenticity and to constitute themselves as Hip Hop insiders. This task is especially difficult for women because Hip Hop, and in particular DJing, MCing, B-Boying/B-Girling and Graffiti Writing, are normalised as ‘male’ activities.

I draw on interviews with three female Hip Hop enthusiasts to examine how women ‘experience and carve space within this male-dominated and often misogynistic environment’ (Macdonald 2002, p. 97). In doing so, I seek to address a gap in the literature on Hip Hop and gender that has primarily focused on the experience of African-American women and has predominantly utilised evidence from the textual analysis of song lyrics and/or music videos. As Alim (2009) discusses, there is a need for accounts of the construction of gender in Hip Hop that ‘take us beyond the tired “bitch” and “ho” critiques to an ethnographic understanding of how youth interpret and make use of “misogynistic” and “homophobic” texts’ (Alim 2009, p. 16). These “bitch” and “ho” critiques typically invoke moral panics about the violent and sexist nature of some Hip Hop or seek to uncover whether or not there is a link between the consumption of Hip Hop and behaviors such as the objectification of women (cf. Kistler and Lee 2010). Therefore, much of the writing about Hip Hop and gender is methodologically weak because it does not engage with Hip Hoppers themselves, male or female.

For example, in an article about the music of American female MC Lil' Kim and all female R and B group Destiny's Child, Humann (2007) notes that the lyrics of these songs can be empowering for women. However, she is also critical of Lil' Kim and Destiny's Child for failing to fully 'speak out against the existing socio-economic and political structure of patriarchal capitalism' (Humann 2007, p. 97). While Humann rightly demonstrates that theorists should avoid over-simplifying the complexity of Hip Hop lyrics, her analysis is driven by her interest in 'red feminism' (Humann 2007, p. 99). Humann (2007) concludes that the lyrics and actions of artists like Lil' Kim and Destiny's Child can never truly empower women because they support capitalism. Articles such as this fail to explore how Hip Hop producers and consumers actually understand gender and make no effort to engage with Hip Hoppers themselves to more critically examine concepts like 'empowerment'. In this chapter I draw on qualitative data from interviews and participant observation to move beyond the textual analysis of Hip Hop lyrics and music videos to explore how Hip Hop is constituted as a masculine activity and the effect that this has on women who are involved in Hip Hop culture.

7.1 Where are the Women?

When I tell friends, acquaintances and even fellow researchers about my research one of the first questions they often ask is "What about women? Do women like Hip Hop?" As a woman who likes Hip Hop I can resoundingly answer that "Yes! Women do like Hip Hop". Women are involved in every facet of Hip Hop production and consumption; there are female DJs, MCs, Graffiti Writers, B-Girls, publicists, promoters and so on. However, these women make up a very small minority of Hip Hoppers. Over the course of my research, I was frequently one of only a small number of women in the audience at Hip Hop gigs and of the numerous events I attended, female MC's only performed at two shows. When I went to Street Science, a monthly Hip Hop workshop held in Noble Park, Melbourne, I was the only female present apart from an employee from the local city council who was there to help run the event. Women do attend workshops like Street Science and it may have been a coincidence that no women attended on the night that I was there. Nonetheless, women are vastly outnumbered by men at most Hip Hop events in Adelaide and Melbourne.

As Arthur (2010) notes however, there are some exceptions to this gender imbalance. When Hip Hop artists become more popular the number of men and women who attend their shows becomes more equal. I have also noted a slow and steady increase in the number of women who attend shows since I moved to Adelaide in 2001. Despite this increase, men make up the vast majority of Hip Hop participants. This gender imbalance is not unique to the Australian Hip Hop scene, scholars writing about Hip Hop in Cuba (Armstead 2007; Fernandes 2007) Brazil (Pardue 2008; 2010), Japan (Condry 2006) and America (Gupta-Carlson 2010) have all noted the low number of women who participate in Hip Hop relative to men. In the introduction to a special issue of *Meridians* that focuses on the representation of women in Hip Hop and other popular music forms, Hobson and Bartlow (2008) state that ‘women in hip-hop...have battled against their marginalization since the genre’s inception’ (Hobson and Barlow 2008, p. 3).

As a woman conducting fieldwork in a culture that Arthur refers to as a ‘male enclave’ (Arthur 2010, p. 120) there were times when I felt patronised and excluded by male Hip Hoppers. It is difficult to unequivocally say whether this kind of treatment was reflective of a gender bias or was a result of my positioning as a researcher, which as I demonstrated in section 1.6, is not always a respected role. My time in the field and more broadly as a female Hip Hop fan for the past several years does lead me to believe that in some situations being male would have afforded me greater initial acceptance from the Hip Hoppers that I met and more access to certain social situations. At times my presence disrupted what one of my informants described as the “boy’s club”:

Don’t take it personally but you have to understand that sometimes guys talk in a really crass way and they do swear and they do carry on. And if there are girls there then they feel like they can’t do it, so it’s like a boy’s club I guess. They want to protect it

(Nathan, Author’s Interview).

This was made obvious when I was casually talking with a group of men and someone said the word “cunt” and then blushed and apologised. I doubt that this would have happened if I were male. While this example may seem trivial, it highlights how my gender was a factor that shaped my research and influenced my ability to develop rapport with my participants. It also suggests that the men that I engaged with may

have altered their behavior so that they did not do things that they thought might offend me.

Furthermore, Nathan's assertion that Hip Hop is a "boys club" that is transformed by the presence of women illustrates that the participation of women in Hip Hop culture can threaten the very function of Hip Hop culture for men. It challenges the construction of Hip Hop as a space where masculinity is affirmed, performed and constructed and where men can bond and create a sense of male solidarity. In her book *Rock Culture in Liverpool* (1991) Cohen argues that women are 'seen in some way as polluting' (Cohen 1991, p. 201) because they threaten the relationships between male members of rock groups (Cohen 1991, pp. 209-210) and intrude into male solidarity and masculine power (ibid, p. 222).⁸⁸ In a later article titled 'Men Making a Scene', Cohen (1997) explores in more detail how the Liverpool rock scene is 'socially and actively produced as male' (Cohen 1997, p. 24). In this article she critiques the idea that there is a 'natural' masculinity that rock culture reflects, instead arguing that it is through rock music that people can 'adopt, create and recreate masculine roles and identities' (Cohen 1997, p. 34). In this chapter I explore how Hip Hop is utilised by both men and women to create and recreate gender roles. I begin the chapter by introducing some contemporary debates about the differences between sex and gender.

7.2 Defining Authenticity Through Gender:

My research clearly demonstrates that members of the Adelaide and Melbourne Hip Hop scenes, like many Australians, view 'male' and 'female' as innate biological categories. Males and females are typically defined by Hip Hop performers and fans as being inherently different and these differences are used to account for the low number of women who are interested in Hip Hop. In interviews, both male and female Hip Hoppers define sex and gender as primarily biologically determined. Certain traits and behaviors are depicted as natural and inherent attributes of the male or female sex. However, as I will discuss in this chapter, at times this ideology is challenged by both women and men who argue that socialisation also plays a role in shaping normative sex roles or what are deemed to be masculine or feminine traits. What has become known

⁸⁸ For example, Cohen notes the ongoing resonance for Liverpool bands of debates surrounding the influence of Yoko Ono on the famous Beatles split and the assumption that women 'broke up' bands.

as the nature versus nurture debate is being played out here, with Hip Hop enthusiasts disputing to what extent behaviors and practices are determined by biological or cultural and social factors. The nature/nurture debate figures centrally in contemporary discussions about sex and gender. Historically, the term sex has been used to denote physical, biological characteristics while the term gender has been used to identify the historically and culturally constructed psychological features that are associated with biological sex.

From this perspective, sex is biologically determined and fixed, while gender rests on this 'existing natural division' (Jackson and Scott 2002, p. 15). The dominant conceptualisation of the relationship between sex and gender in Western society is that there are two sexes (male and female) which are biologically determined and two genders (woman and man) which are socially and culturally constructed. The pervasiveness of this discourse is discussed by Herdt (1994, p. 11) who argues that many in the Western tradition accept sexual dimorphism as the natural and commonsense order. However, anthropological research has demonstrated that both sex and gender are much more diverse than this dichotomy allows (Jacobs and Roberts 1989; Lancaster and di Leonardo 1997; Herdt 1994). The sex/gender dualism has been challenged by theorists who argue that biological sex has been under-theorised and should not be treated as a universal given (cf. Kessler 1996; Martin 1996).

In her text *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (2000) Fausto-Sterling contends that sex is not a purely physical category: 'What bodily signals and functions we define as male or female come already entangled in our ideas about gender' (Fausto-Sterling 2000, p. 4). She argues that sex is not solely determined by anatomical and physiological features and critiques the way that scientific knowledge is objectified and naturalised in debates about sex and gender:

labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision. We may use scientific knowledge to help us make the decision but only our beliefs about gender--not science--can define our sex. Furthermore, our beliefs about gender affect what kind of knowledge scientists produce about sex in the first place

(Fausto-Sterling 2000, p. 3).

Anthropologists have played a key role in questioning taken-for-granted or ethnocentric assumptions about sex and gender: ‘We know that the recognition of anatomical differences between women and men does not necessarily produce a discrete, fixed, binary categorization of sex in the manner of western discourse’ (Moore 1994, p. 13). Moore (1994) argues that understandings of gender vary both cross-culturally and within cultures and that therefore, we must avoid making generalisations about gender categories.

As such, my aim in this chapter is not to propose that any one conception of sex and gender is universal but to explore how a particular group of people, Hip Hop performers and fans in Adelaide and Melbourne, conceive and utilise a culturally specific sex/gender discourse. Thus, while theorists have deconstructed and analysed the two sex/gender system, my research demonstrates that this system is naturalised by Hip Hoppers who define sex and gender as static and unchanging. Unlike my informants who typically define gender in terms of what you are, I draw on West and Zimmerman (1987) to argue that people ‘do’ gender. West and Zimmerman (1987) contend that gender is produced through the ‘doing’ of gender which: ‘involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’’ (West and Zimmerman 1987, p. 126). Thus, manhood and womanhood; masculinity and femininity; are performed, enacted and contested constructs. The performance of gender is also explored by Butler (1990) in the book *Gender Trouble* and applied specifically to the study of popular music by Bayton (1997) in an article that explores why so few women play the electric guitar.

Bayton (1997) draws on Butler to argue that femininity and masculinity are constituted through ‘acts’ that require ‘work’ and that an act like playing the electric guitar works to enhance a male’s masculinity because it has ‘traditionally masculine connotations’ (Bayton 1997, p. 40). Conversely, a female who chooses to play the electric guitar and not a traditionally ‘feminine’ instrument like the flute or the violin (Bayton 1997, p. 39) can be viewed as ‘breaking the gender code’ (ibid, p. 43). According to Bayton, the constitution of the electric guitar as a ‘male’ instrument whose mastery involves ‘male skills’ results in the ridicule, exclusion and harassment of female electric guitarists (Bayton 1997, pp. 37-49). I argue that like playing the electric guitar, producing and

consuming Hip Hop is classified by the majority of Hip Hoppers in Adelaide and Melbourne as a male activity. Through their participation in Hip Hop culture, male Hip Hoppers define, constitute and assert their masculinity. This creates problems for female Hip Hoppers whose participation in 'male' activities is sometimes seen as inappropriate. In the following section I explore in more detail how other popular music forms and Hip Hop in particular are constituted as 'male' activities.

7.3 Music Making and Hip Hop Culture as Masculine Activities:

In the preceding section I drew on Bayton's (1997) examination of female electric guitarists to illustrate how an act like playing an electric guitar can be classified as 'male'. This article was based on research material collected by Bayton in the 1980s for her unpublished doctoral thesis and updated in the 1990s for her book *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (1998). Elsewhere, Bayton (1993) has argued that women have been 'largely excluded from popular music-making and relegated to the role of fan' (Bayton 1993, p. 177). Bayton contends that this is because women are encouraged to fantasise about their male musical idols whereas men seek to emulate them: 'male fans buy a guitar; female fans buy a poster' (Bayton 1997, p. 40). This statement is supported by Cohen's argument that women tend to be stereotyped as the 'adoring fans who scream at male performers' (Cohen 1997, p. 17) and that they are associated with 'mass commercial entertainment' (ibid, p 30) whilst men are associated with the 'alternative and authentic' (ibid). It is also consistent with Thornton's (1996) assertion that the disparaged 'mainstream', explored in chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis, is constituted as feminine and passive by clubbers in the UK.

Similarly, in his study of authenticity debates in the U.S. Hip Hop scene, McLeod (1999) identifies a series of authenticity dimensions including the 'gender-sexual dimension' whereby 'hardness' is authentic and 'softness' is inauthentic (ibid, p. 142). According to this hard/soft dichotomy Hip Hoppers define masculinity and heterosexuality as authentic and femininity and homosexuality as inauthentic (ibid). McLeod does not examine why Hip Hoppers associate authenticity with masculinity or why more men than women participate in Hip Hop culture. He states that 'many hip-hop community members have observed that, for various reasons, hip-hop is a male-dominated area' (McLeod 1999, p. 142) but he does not examine what these might be.

I build on the work of Bayton (1993; 1997; 1998), Cohen (1991; 1997), and Baker and Cohen (2008) to outline how women have traditionally been marginalised from music making and to demonstrate that Hip Hop is no exception. Thus, while the production of popular music forms such as rock and Hip Hop are frequently normalised as ‘masculine’ activities, consuming music is more commonly equated with femininity, passivity and ultimately, inauthenticity.

The above authors identify a number of reasons that contribute to the exclusion of women from music-making including; the geographical location of many music venues which women may not feel comfortable in at night (Cohen 1997, p. 20), women’s association with the domestic sphere and the time burdens of completing domestic duties (Cohen 1997, p. 22; Bayton 1997), and in particular, the implications of gender norms or the ‘gender code’ discussed in Section 7.2. These gender norms or roles are further examined in Baker and Cohen’s (2008) account of gendered youth music making practices in Community Based Organisations (CBOs). In this study, part of the Playing for Life Project, Baker and Cohen (2008) found that women were absent from many activities held by the CBOs and in particular, those that utilised Hip Hop. They contend that because ‘music making is seen as a predominantly male activity; females who undertake such activity are thus risking prejudice and are seen as failing in their assigned gender role as consumers rather than producers of music’ (Baker and Cohen 2008, p. 321). Like Bayton’s (1997) study of female electric guitarists, this research suggests that when women participate in activities that are viewed as ‘masculine’ they can be harassed for failing to act in accordance with gendered expectations.

This kind of harassment is clearly documented in Macdonald’s study of Graffiti Writers in London and New York. In this study Macdonald (2002) notes that membership of the Graffiti subculture, like many subcultures, is predominantly male. She argues that subcultural scholars have tended to ignore gender and that when gender is discussed it is typically women who are the focus. Macdonald (2002) suggests that this has directed attention away from the ways that subcultures allow men to construct and confirm their masculine identities (Macdonald 2002, p. 96). Therefore, she is critical of analyses that focus on why more women are not involved in subcultures: ‘[r]ather than ask why men are present in subcultures, theorists have tended to ask why women are absent. Posing the question in this way has directed attention away from the potent significance of this

male skew' (ibid). Macdonald concludes that through Graffiti Writing men are able to construct a masculine identity and that the exclusion of women serves to protect this identity (Macdonald 2002, p. 228). She argues that Graffiti Writers assert their masculinity through positioning Graffiti as 'men's work' (Macdonald 2002, p. 98).

The risks and dangers that they must face in order to successfully write illegal Graffiti are understood by Graffiti Writers as tests that legitimate their manhood. By confronting these dangers and fears, male Graffiti Writers are able to prove their masculinity and in doing so, they constitute Graffiti Writing as a male activity. Conversely, women are defined as being too weak and fragile to face the trials of Graffiti Writing. As such, when women do demonstrate that they are able to successfully write Graffiti this diminishes the ability of Graffiti Writing to constitute masculinity and to represent 'maleness': 'A girl who can do the same thing as a boy has the ability to silence his masculine commentary' (Macdonald 2002, p. 128). As I noted at the beginning of this thesis, Graffiti Writing is classified by most Hip Hoppers as one of the Four Elements of Hip Hop culture. Due to time restraints and ethical concerns about gathering information about illegal activities, I decided not to include a detailed investigation of Graffiti Writing in my research. My focus has been on the production and consumption of Hip Hop music, an aspect of Hip Hop that is quite different to Graffiti Writing. As Macdonald notes, not every subculture is male based and meta-theories that depict all subcultures as spaces where masculinity is constructed should be avoided (Macdonald 2002, p. 150).

Consumers and producers of Hip Hop music do not face the same challenges and dangers as Graffiti Writers. Unlike Graffiti Writers, MCs, DJs and B-Boys/B-Girls do not have to jump fences and dodge security guards to practice their art. Acquiring a Hip Hop album does not involve the risk of legal prosecution or potential physical injury (unless you are stealing it).⁸⁹ Despite these differences, I argue that male MCs, DJs, B-Boys and Hip Hop fans do perform their masculinity through their participation in Hip Hop culture. While different practices are associated with each Element of Hip Hop and with Hip Hop fandom more broadly, male Hip Hoppers, whether they be MCs,

⁸⁹ This is more so the case when it comes to illegal downloading. Although prosecutions for illegal file sharing are increasing, downloading music or movies does not involve the same kind of risks as stealing physical objects from a store (e.g. security guards, surveillance and so on).

DJs, B-Boys, Graffiti Writers or Hip Hop fans, typically define Hip Hop as a competitive culture wherein men can prove their masculinity or manhood. Hip Hoppers often argue that achieving success as a DJ, MC, Break Dancer or Graffiti Writer demands a high level of aggression and competitiveness, qualities that women are depicted as lacking and which men are understood to naturally possess. In the following section I examine how physical and psychological strength and competitiveness are positioned as important characteristics of an authentic Hip Hopper but importantly, as traits that women are less likely to exhibit.

7.4 Strength, Competitiveness and Masculinity:

Women aren't as competitive and Hip Hop is competitive

(Peter, Author's Interview).

In the above quote, Peter suggests that, on some level, women and Hip Hop are mutually exclusive. This is because Hip Hop is competitive while women are not. From the context of our interview it is clear that when Peter said that women are not as competitive he meant that women are not as competitive as men. Therefore, Hip Hop is constituted as a naturally masculine activity. The connection between being male and performing Hip Hop was echoed by Hip Hop artist Colin who told me that the higher rate of male Hip Hop MCs can be accounted for by differences between the sexes:

Colin: Men have all this aggression you know, I just think women are not designed like that. Like in a Battle you really have to go for your opponent, you have to try to crush them. I don't think women like being so aggressive and I think they would be a bit too sensitive. If someone is full on attacking them in a Battle I don't think most women could handle it. There are definitely exceptions, but you just have to look and see how many women enter Battles, it is zero. There are well known female Battlers in other countries but no one has stepped up here yet.

Dianne: When you say women are not 'designed like that' what do you mean?

Colin: I guess part of it is how they are brought up. But also I think, you know male testosterone and all that. Men are always testing themselves against other men, who is the toughest. Who is this and that. Women aren't the same.

Colin argues that there are fundamental differences between men and women and he accounts for these differences in terms of both socialisation and biology. He suggests that women are biologically geared to be less able to cope with aggressive situations and that they are also socialised in ways that make them more “sensitive”. Thus, women are assumed to be unable to deal with the personal and critical nature of the attacks that are a routine part of MC Battles. Furthermore, Colin makes a connection between participating in MC Battles and an underlying male need or biological drive to “test” yourself and prove that you are tough. This is a need that Colin understands to be a uniquely male trait: “women aren’t the same”. The fact that Colin states that no Australian women have “stepped up” to be involved in MC Battles suggests that taking part in a Battle is understood as an act of courage or bravery. Colin indicates that needing to demonstrate your courage or bravery is a primarily male trait. Although he does state that there are some exceptions, he uses the assertion that “zero” women are involved in battling in Australia to demonstrate that there are clear differences between the temperaments of most men and women. According to Colin, men enter MC Battles because they are aggressive, women do not because they are sensitive.

Keith, a B-Boy, also depicts women as fundamentally different from men. He contends that physiological differences between men and women impact on the reception of women who B-Girl and on the willingness of women to participate in B-Boying/B-Girling:

Keith: Some of the moves, you have to be really strong to do it. This will probably sound sexist but lots of women just can’t do the more athletic moves. Then that means, some people think they are not as exciting to watch. So they get discriminated against in a way...obviously not every guy is physically strong either – but it’s much more likely and you can develop it more.

Dianne: How can they develop it more?

Keith: Over time you can build up much more muscle tone and core strength, women can too but there are certain limits.

Keith argues that the female body is not as strong as the male body.⁹⁰ While he notes that not all men are strong he states that it is more likely that a man will be stronger than a woman. Furthermore, while he depicts men as having the potential to be strong and as able to build up their strength and athleticism, the female physique is depicted as a restraint that impedes women's ability to B-Girl: "there are certain limitations". The fact that Keith notes that his remarks will probably sound sexist reflects the unease with which both men and women talk about gender and Hip Hop culture. I believe that my gender significantly shaped the way that people spoke to me about the construction and representation of masculinity and femininity in Hip Hop. People that I interviewed would often make comments that reflected a male bias and then quickly adjust them to include women. For example, when I was interviewing a former Battle MC he mentioned that battling was all about male ego. He then paused, looked at me and added "and female ego" with hesitation. I do not know whether or not this MC would have added "and female ego" if he was being interviewed by a male researcher. This example demonstrates that the normative Hip Hopper is a male Hip Hopper and certain traits like being egotistical are typically constructed as masculine not feminine traits.

Later on in our discussion Keith also suggested that beyond the physical demands of B-Boying/B-Girling, a lack of aggression or "killer instinct" as he worded it also plays a role in deterring women from Break Dancing:

Dianne: Do you think that's why there are less B-Girls [than B-Boys], because of the physical challenges?

Keith: Yeah definitely. It's just, as well, part of the battling too. The girls that I know that do it don't always want to fully diss [disrespect] people, they are not into that side of it. Whereas the guys are all fully 'yeah fuck this guy, watch me do THIS!' Girls don't necessarily have the same killer instinct.

Keith views not having a "killer instinct" as a deficiency that stops women from being interested in B-Boying/B-Girling and affects the way that they participate in the form. Thus, because they are seen to lack a "killer instinct" they are positioned as less likely

⁹⁰ This statement is very similar to one made by a Berlin Break Dancing tutor 'it's jumping and big movements that are physically challenging, I think this is why less girls are into it, they don't manage to do it physically' (Break Dancing Tutor in Baker and Cohen 2008, p. 326). However, as Baker and Cohen (2008) go on to discuss, there is more at stake here than the 'challenging physicality' of B-Boying/B-Girling. They describe how women are also excluded from Break Dancing sessions by men and can be too intimidated to dance in a 'room full of boys' (ibid).

to find B-Boying appealing and also less willing to engage in the competitive aspects of battling. As Keith went on to discuss, this meant that women were sometimes defined as inauthentic Break Dancers:

Dianne: Why is having a killer instinct important?

Keith: I think it is an integral part of B-Boying, that's how it started as people wanting to be better than other people. Of course it has all kinds of other functions, it's an aesthetic dance form, it could almost be considered as a form of exercise, it's about community and your mates and all of that, the music. But at its core it's about proving that you are the best B-Boy, that you are the most creative, that you are the strongest. If you're not battling then to me you are missing an important part of it.

Dianne: And you don't think that women are as interested in that part of it?

Keith: Yeah from my own experience.

As the above excerpts demonstrate, many Hip Hoppers define Hip Hop culture as a culture of competition, where being the best is important. The centrality of this ideology is made evident by the emphasis that is placed on the Four Elements of Hip Hop, practices that all involve competitive displays. In some cases these competitive displays are part of formal competitions like the DMC World DJ Championships for DJs or local events like the 2011 Aerosol Art Competition, King of Canvas, held for South Australian Graffiti Writers by the City of Onkaparinga (*Onkaparinga Magazine* 2011, p. 12).⁹¹ At other times they might be less formal like an MC getting called out to Battle at a party or in a cipher. Each Element involves battling on some level, whether it is a B-Boy, MC or DJing/Turndablistm Battle or the way that a Graffiti Writer wins respect and acclaim by writing Graffiti and having more style, courage or determination than other Writers.⁹² Keith suggests that because women do not have the same "killer instinct" as men they are less interested in battling which he defines as an "important part" of B-Boying/B-Girling.

⁹¹ It should be noted that at the time of writing there were no Australian heats for the DMC World DJ Championships, although there has been in the past and may be in the future.

⁹² This does not mean that Hip Hoppers who do not practice one of the Elements are not competitive. Competitiveness can come in many forms, such as who has the most or rarest records, who attends the most events and who has the most Hip Hop knowledge.

Both Keith and Colin identify battling as a key aspect of Hip Hop culture and suggest that wanting to compete in Battles is a primarily male trait. This is because women are thought to lack the psychological strength to engage in Battles, and in the case of B-Boying/B-Girling, the physical ability to perform some of the more athletic Break Dancing moves. It is suggested that it is more ‘natural’ for men to compete and that women lack the physical and psychological tools needed to win competitions. This view was critiqued by female Hip Hop fan Joan who told me that she thought it was “ridiculous” that men made generalisations about people’s ability based on their sex:

It’s a joke, it is ridiculous, what if you have breasts then you are somehow unable to hold a microphone? That is sometimes how I feel that men look at me and judge me and other women. Like there is some biological link between gender and Hip Hop. There isn’t. Women can do anything that men can

(Joan, Author’s Interview).

However, not all of the women that I interviewed agreed with Joan’s position. Hip Hop fan Chrissie suggested that battling or “proving something” is a predominantly male characteristic. Unlike Keith and Carl, Chrissie suggests that this need to prove yourself is not something to be admired:

You have all these men trying to prove something. Like these MC Battles that you have to sit through at so many gigs. Where they’re all like ‘fuck you, fuck this, fuck that, oh I slept with your mum’. To me that is just proving the immaturity of men! Or that they’re not men, they’re like little boys! Why would I want to be like that?

(Chrissie, Author’s Interview).

While many of the men that I interviewed viewed Battles as events where your participation gained you respect and admiration, Chrissie argues that being involved in an MC Battle should be derided not admired. Thus, while men typically view Battles as opportunities to construct their masculinity, Chrissie suggests that Battles actually demonstrate the immaturity of men. In the above statement we can see that even though Chrissie is critical of men who Battle, like Keith and Colin she understands battling as a primarily male trait “men trying to prove something” that she is happy not to be associated with: “Why would I want to be like that?”.

Female Hip Hopper Marissa also suggests that men are biologically geared to excel in certain areas of Hip Hop production. She also notes that she exhibits many qualities that she defines as “masculine qualities” and that she is more interested in Hip Hop than other women:

I do think that men have certain attributes that make them more aggressive, more competitive, more confident I would say. I have always felt like I am a bit of an outsider because I fit in with that, I guess I have more masculine qualities. I don't like dressing up, I don't care about fashion, I want to be in there with the guys doing stuff and I'm not happy hanging around like some other girls do. I don't know why I'm like that, but I do think I'm an exception

(Marissa, Author's Interview).

Being an “exception” in her words sometimes caused distress for Marissa who told me that she was not always able to relate to other women. Although she felt accepted by the male Hip Hoppers that she was friends with, Marissa sometimes worried that the commonalities that she shared with these men made her different, that because she did not care about fashion and other interests that she marked as ‘feminine’ that she was somehow not a “real woman”:

I guess sometimes you wonder what makes me different? Maybe it's growing up with brothers, maybe it's not having a good relationship with my mum, I dunno. Sometimes people will say to me ‘Oh she's like one of the guys’ and I have felt pride about that. But then again it's like, am I not a real woman because I'm into Hip Hop and I do all this stuff? Why do I have to be one of the ‘guys’? Why is it better to be one of the guys?

(ibid)

Marissa raised a number of social circumstances that may have contributed to her being “one of the guys” including being raised with brothers and not having a good relationship with her mother. Her tone suggested to me that she did not find these explanations convincing. She was also troubled by the argument that being ‘masculine’ or ‘one of the boys’ was somehow “better” than being feminine. In the above quote we can see how being feminine or a “real woman” is juxtaposed with having an interest in Hip Hop. Thus, being feminine and liking Hip Hop are often depicted as qualities that do not co-exist.

It is also important to note that Marissa makes a distinction between female Hip Hop fans like herself and those who are just ‘happy hanging around’. When I asked her more questions about this she expanded on the differences between herself and other women who are present at some Hip Hop events but are not in her words “part of the scene”:

You have the women that are just dating a guy so they come to the gig, you know, those that just want to look good or be seen and they don’t do anything. To me, they are not a part of the scene. In fact they’re the kind of people that make it really hard for women to be accepted in Hip Hop and get away from this whole slut thing

(Marissa, Author’s Interview).

Marissa suggests that some women are interested in Hip Hop for inauthentic reasons and they make it difficult for other women who are struggling to be taken seriously. She introduces a common trope that is used to describe female Hip Hoppers; the term “slut”. In the following section I explore how women can be defined as “sluts” who are not interested in Hip Hop by introducing debates about how male and female Hip Hoppers should dress.⁹³ I argue that in order to position themselves as Hip Hop insiders, many female Hip Hoppers adopt masculine forms of dress. The adoption of masculine dress by female Hip Hoppers further illustrates how Hip Hop is constituted as an authentically ‘masculine’ activity.

7.5 You Are What You Wear: Fashion and Authenticity:

The visual image of women just “hanging around” male Hip Hoppers is a potent one, and demonstrates the way that women are often positioned as peripheral to Hip Hop culture, as people that are there but not really important. The invisible status of women in youth subcultures was addressed in 1976 by Jenny Garber and Angela McRobbie in their contribution to the edited volume *Resistance through Rituals* titled ‘Girls and Subcultures’ (McRobbie and Garber 1976/2000). In this article McRobbie and Garber argue that the role of women in youth cultural groupings has tended to be overlooked

⁹³ As evidenced by the recent ‘slut walks’ held around the globe, the term ‘slut’ which is usually derogative can be claimed back by women. I observed this in action while waiting at a local train station on my way to a Hip Hop gig when two women loudly began to chant a song that included the lines: ‘We’re the south side sluts from the back of the bus/You better wear a connie [condom] if you’re fucking with us’. The women continued to sing this song on the train and they ended up to be attending the same Hip Hop gig that I was. I assume that they wrote the song themselves.

(McRobbie and Garber 1976/2000, p. 12). They attempt to make sense of this invisibility by questioning whether or not women are present in subcultures but not being accounted for, or if subcultural research is being carried out in such a way that the role of women is not being acknowledged. They conclude that it is difficult to assess the level of women's involvement in subcultures but identify various factors that constrain women's participation in subcultures, which are very similar to those discussed in section 7.2 of this chapter, including their lower levels of disposable income as compared to their male counterparts and societal pressures and double-standards that make it difficult for women to spend unsupervised time with the male sex or to appear to "get into trouble" (McRobbie and Garber 1976/2000, p. 16).

In the final section of this article they argue that women have been largely absent from subcultural studies because subcultures are defined by theorists in masculine terms. Thus, the cultural groupings that women or girls do engage in such as "teenybopper culture" (ibid p. 22) or fan culture have not traditionally been classified as 'subcultures'. While this argument draws important attention to the biases of subcultural research and highlights the importance of cultural groupings that are female dominated, it does not account for the experiences of women who do participate in male-centric cultural groups. McRobbie and Garber do introduce three brief accounts of women in different male-dominated subcultures; the motor-bike girl, the mod girl and the hippie girl (1976/2000, pp. 18-22). They argue that when women are present in male-dominated subcultures they are subordinated and marginalised. These descriptions of the role of women in three subcultures are extremely short and are not thoroughly substantiated with evidence, but they do demonstrate the importance of exploring the distinctive features of different subcultures and how these features influence the roles that women and men play in these cultural groupings.

Of particular interest to my own study is McRobbie and Garber's argument that the absence of exaggerated masculinity in the mod subculture attracted women and made the subculture more accessible to them. Conversely, I argue that the presence of exaggerated masculinity deters women from involvement in Hip Hop culture. My research demonstrates that the constitution of Hip Hop as a masculine culture poses significant challenges for women who want to be recognised as authentically Hip Hop. In order to be accepted in this environment some women adopt behaviors, styles of

dress and deportment that are traditionally defined as masculine. When women do dress in overtly ‘feminine’ attire their dedication to Hip Hop is often questioned and they are positioned, by both male Hip Hoppers and other female Hip Hoppers, as “sluts” who are interested in sexual relationships and not Hip Hop. If we compare the fashion worn by male mods, which was often uni-sex, androgynous and effeminate, with the fashion worn by male Hip Hoppers in Australia we can see distinct differences. The male Hip Hoppers that I interviewed consistently wore clothing that I would describe as the male Hip Hop uniform; oversized pants, particularly jeans, t-shirts, hooded jumpers or ‘hoodies’ and sneakers.

These items were viewed as appropriate male attire. Unlike their subcultural predecessors the male mods, the vast majority of male Hip Hoppers that I engaged with would never wear make-up or clothing that could be viewed as ‘feminine’ unless they were engaged in fancy dress. Indeed, when Hip Hop culture began to gain more attention in the mainstream press and attract new fans, fears about the legitimacy of these new Hip Hoppers were commonly expressed in diatribes that attacked their effeminate fashion sense. The ‘pink shirt’ was one item of clothing that was singled out as the hallmark of these newer fans and people frequently lamented the fact that men wearing pink shirts had infiltrated Hip Hop culture and were attending Hip Hop gigs. As I discussed in chapter 5, when the Hilltop Hoods launched a sneaker in collaboration with DC Shoes this outraged some Hip Hoppers who argued that they had sold out. Poster [djbouboncan1](#) made this comment in an [Ozhiphop.com](#) thread about the shoes:

you can check these shoes being modelled by every collared up, pink shirt wearing metro sporting half inch mohawks and the tightest of pants.....

([djbouboncan1](#) in Oz Hip Hop Forum, ‘NEW DC HILLTOP HOODS Shoes 1st FEB 08’, forum discussion).

This comment directly links the inauthenticity of the Hilltop Hoods sneaker with the inauthenticity of the kind of person who would wear it. Here authenticity is being defined in terms of dubious fashion choices.

Searching Ozhiphop.com for the phrase ‘pink shirt’ reveals a number of posts where wearing a pink shirt is linked to inauthenticity. In a thread about the Melbourne show on the Hilltop Hoods ‘Stopping All Stations’ Tour one person made the comment that:

there were tonnes of pink polo shirt wearing mainstream folks there and fair enough since hilltop are hitting the charts but they do take over from the true heads that are there

(N-Cision in Oz Hip Hop Forum ‘HILLTOP HOODS - Stopping All Stations Tour’, forum discussion).

Once again this illustrates the clear relationship between wearing a particular colour shirt that is denounced as being feminine or ‘metro’ and not being a real Hip Hopper.⁹⁴ Metro is short for ‘metro-sexual’ a term that was frequently used at the time to describe the supposed growing number of heterosexual men who exhibited ‘feminine traits’ such as being interested in fashion or self-grooming. Even though male Hip Hoppers are often very interested in their appearance and place a lot of importance on wearing particular brands or styles of clothing, they are often eager to assert that they do not care about fashion. This is because being interested in fashion is associated with femininity or metrosexuality. In his study of Australian Hip Hop, Arthur (2010) found that while male Hip Hoppers demonstrated an intimate understanding of fashion they were quick to emphasise that they were not interested in the topic. He argues that this is a ‘knee-jerk reaction to protect their masculine gender identities from being attacked for having a concern in what was perceived as an effeminate hobby’ (ibid).

The construction of fashion as a feminine interest and therefore an illegitimate one reflects an underlying bias that equates being masculine with being authentic and being feminine as being inauthentic. This distinction was articulated by Joan who told me that she was sick of being judged for refusing to wear clothes that were more ‘masculine’. The fact that Joan states that she refuses to change the way that she dresses highlights the power of this ideology. No one had told Joan that she must dress in a particular way, but she still felt constrained by pressure to subscribe to what she

⁹⁴ The kind of shirt was also important, note that N-Cision refers to the shirt as a polo shirt and djbourboncan1 refers to the pink shirt as a ‘collared up’ shirt. Wearing a polo shirt with the collar up was a fashion trend that was ridiculed by many Hip Hoppers.

viewed as a normative Hip Hop ideal. This pressure was manifested in the looks that she received at Hip Hop gigs that effectively censured her behavior:

There seems to be this unwritten thing that if you are a woman and you want to be accepted in Hip Hop then you have to hide your femininity. You have to take on a more masculine persona and dress in a more typical Hip Hop way. I have worn high heels to Hip Hop gigs before and the looks you get is ridiculous, not just from men mind you but from other chicks. It is as though wearing high heels automatically makes you some frivolous girl who could not possible care about the Hip Hop artist that's playing. I refuse to fall into that. Wearing a skirt doesn't make me a slut

(Joan, Author's Interview)

According to Joan, women who do not "hide" their femininity are commonly categorised as "sluts" who do not care about Hip Hop. In order to be accepted as authentic Hip Hop fans, women feel pressured to dress in a more masculine way. Joan is highly critical of this line of thought and insisted that how she or other women dress has nothing to do with their level of dedication to Hip Hop,

The diversity of the women that I interviewed is clearly demonstrated when the above quote is compared with the views of Marissa that I introduced earlier. According to Marissa, women who do dress in a more feminine way are typically less interested in Hip Hop. She argues that such women attend Hip Hop gigs for the "wrong reasons", namely to seek male sexual attention:

Well it's not practical is it, to wear high heels and stuff? So many of those girls you can just look at them and see that they do not care about Hip Hop and they only care about looking sexy. Get your eyes on the stage!

(Marissa, Author's Interview).

This quote is clearly at odds with Joan's assertion that what clothing you chose to wear to a Hip Hop event is irrelevant. However, even though Joan chooses to wear what she feels comfortable in to Hip Hop events, she is aware that this decision has ramifications and that she can be negatively judged for her actions.

Another female informant, Chrissie, also told me that she had experienced social censure when she had attended Hip Hop events dressed in what she described as a

“girly” way. She recounted situations where people were “giving her greasies” and that she thought it was because of the clothing she was wearing.⁹⁵ Chrissie dealt with this by changing the way that she dressed at some Hip Hop shows. She used the phrase “toning it down” to describe these changes, and said that she felt like people were more accepting of her when she dressed in a more masculine way. Chrissie also said that she really enjoyed wearing Hip Hop shirts that she defined as being “obscure” and that these kinds of clothes gave her Hip Hop “credibility”:

I think sometimes that way I dress is about disarming people’s judgements. So if I am wearing my Blackalicious shirt or some other shirt it is a way of overtly communicating, yes I know about this!⁹⁶ It starts conversations
(ibid).

By choosing to wear particular clothing items, namely t-shirts and hoodies that feature the logos or designs referencing the Hip Hop artists that she likes, Chrissie feels that she is able to project the image of an informed Hip Hopper and, to some extent, diffuse the impact of assumptions about her authenticity based on her gender.

As the above quotes illustrate, it is commonly assumed that women only participate in Hip Hop to gain the attention of men. By dressing in a more masculine way women like Chrissie feel that they are able to disrupt this assumption by communicating through dress that they “know about” Hip Hop and they are not willing to be objectified as mere sexual objects. While Chrissie experienced dressing in a more masculine way as liberating because it freed her from men’s sexual gaze, Joan defines wearing high heels and particular clothing items as an integral part of her identity that she refuses to “hide away”. She is not willing to change the way that she dresses in order to avoid being classified as promiscuous or not authentically Hip Hop:

It is important to me to be who I am. Isn’t that what Hip Hop is all about? I’m not going to wear sneakers because that’s what I should do. People can judge but if they come and talk to me they will see that I probably know more about Hip Hop than they do. I’m not just standing around waiting to get hit on

(Joan, Author’s Interview).

⁹⁵ Slang for greasy looks, a term used to describe someone giving you a bad or judgemental look.

⁹⁶ Blackalicious are an American Hip Hop group.

Joan is well aware that by dressing in a particular way she may be seen as a woman who in Marrison's words is just "hanging around". Someone who is waiting to be hit on by men. However, she is adamant that if people take the time to speak to her then she will be able to prove to them that she knows "more about Hip Hop than they do". As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, Hip Hoppers consistently value the ideal of being 'true' to yourself or 'keeping it real' and Joan appeals to this ideology by stating that she will not alter the way that she dresses because that would mean that she was not being "who I am". In this section I have argued that clothing choices are used by both male and female Hip Hoppers to assess other people's authenticity. What you wear is understood to speak volumes about your intentions and this means that women suffer the heavy burden of being dismissed as frivolous or as mere sexual objects if dress in a particular way. In the following section, I explore in more detail how women are positioned as subservient to men through their labeling as "just" someone's girlfriend.

7.6 Just a Girlfriend: A Lack of Dedication:

The assumption that women are not adequately dedicated to Hip Hop is not specific to the Australian context but is also commented on in Pardue's account of Brazilian Hip Hop. In his study Pardue (2008) explores the ways that Hip Hop is engendered as a masculine form in Brazil, as a site of machismo. He uses a vignette to demonstrate this by explaining an event that occurred when he was interviewing members of the Brazilian Hip Hop group Comando Negro at one of the member's houses (Pardue 2008, p. 134). During part of the interview, the girlfriends of the four members of the group arrived and sat with their partners on the couch. Pardue (2008) asked them to introduce themselves by saying something about how they were introduced to Hip Hop. One of the girlfriend's, Roselaine, remarked that when she met her partner Goa she changed her musical preferences and became interested in Hip Hop and the *movimento*. As Pardue discusses, the term *movimento* is used to describe the connection between the MNU (Unified Black Movement) and Hip Hop in one phrase "the movement". After she made this statement one of the other members of the group Comando Negro repeated her words but did so in a way that insinuated that she was primarily interested in "the movement" of her partner's penis.

Pardue expected that this double-entendre would be met with a quick comeback, that Rosealine and the girls would turn the table (*virar a mesa*). He argues that the humiliation that Roselaine suffered and the ensuing silence ‘demonstrated and confirmed a commonly held belief among hip hopper men and women that women only participate in hip hop to find boyfriends and have sexual relations’ (Pardue 2008, p. 134). The effects of this commonly held belief were demonstrated by my informant Chrissie who expressed her frustration at being categorised by many male Hip Hoppers as “just the girlfriend”. Chrissie was dating a Hip Hop DJ but stressed to me that she was interested in Hip Hop before they met and that was part of their initial attraction. She was irritated by the way that she was treated by some other Hip Hoppers who assumed that her partner was the one who was “really” interested in Hip Hop:

There have been times even when people have been at our house and I will be right there and they can ignore me. Or they will compliment him on things like a certain record and it will be something that I bought or found! They assume that he is my superior, I’m just the girlfriend and he is the one that is really into Hip Hop

(Chrissie, Author’s Interview).

The dismissal of women as “just the girlfriend” is also noted by one of Arthur’s (2010) female informants ‘we’re often seen as “some rapper’s girlfriend” or “just there to sleep with the MCs”’ (G-One in Arthur 2010, p. 121) and is highlighted by Macdonald in her study of Graffiti Writers. Macdonald (2002, p. 135) discusses how female Writers are consistently tested by male Writers who argue that women who are introduced to Graffiti by their male partners are not truly dedicated to the form. Chrissie suggested that this was an extremely unfair double-standard:

Men are introduced to Hip Hop in a whole range of ways. A guy might have a cousin who likes Hip Hop so they give him a tape and BAM he’s into it, or a mate or whatever. But that is never cast in terms of dependence. But women who are introduced to Hip Hop through men are seen as reliant on them and loyal to them, and not properly connected to Hip Hop

(Chrissie, Author’s Interview).

Chrissie’s argument is borne out by my research, the men that I interviewed frequently cited being introduced to Hip Hop through a male counterpart. However, they did not

view this relationship in terms of subservience. They attributed their interest in Hip Hop to their own agency. Therefore, while they may have been introduced to Hip Hop by someone else, they argue that it was through their own initiative that they pursued that interest. Conversely, women are commonly positioned as simply “going along with it”:

Lots of women just go along with it, they are interested in it because their boyfriend is and then once they don't have that boyfriend they don't care

(Marissa, Author's Interview).

Thus, it is assumed that most women are only temporarily interested in Hip Hop and that once their reason for their involvement is no longer there (e.g. they break up with their partner or their partner is no longer interested in Hip Hop) they will abandon the culture. Female Hip Hoppers like Chrissie who were dating male Hip Hoppers had to work hard to dislodge the label of “girlfriend” and to demonstrate that they should be respected as a Hip Hopper in their own right. These struggles are largely ignored by many men that I interviewed who argue that Hip Hop is a culture of equality where people who have “skills” are respected regardless of their race, gender or class. Arthur (2010) also states that one of his key informants was critical of his argument that women are excluded from Hip Hop (Arthur 2010, p. 232). However, while he notes this discrepancy between his own analysis and his informant's understanding, Arthur (2010) concludes that he is ‘confident that his interpretation is a true reflection of the phenomenon’ (Arthur 2010, p. 232).

Likewise, I argue that despite the discourse that the Australian Hip Hop scene is egalitarian, female Hip Hoppers are not always given equal treatment. Both Pardue (2008; 2010) and Macdonald (2002) state that Hip Hop culture in Brazil and the Graffiti Writing culture in London and New York respectively exhibit a very traditional view of gender. Thus, while the Graffiti Writers in Macdonald's study and the Hip Hoppers in Pardue's study challenged conventional ideas about the role and agency of young people and were often critical of many social institutions, they tended to reproduce and reinforce traditional ideas about sex roles and gender. This is also the case in the Australia Hip Hop scene. In this chapter I have demonstrated that the constitution of Hip Hop as a masculine culture shapes both women's and men's participation in Hip

Hop. While I do not doubt that stepping onto a stage to MC or performing one of the Four Elements can be an incredibly nerve-wracking experience for both men and women, I contend that it is particularly challenging for women who frequently encounter sexist reactions.

For example, Baker and Cohen (2008) describe how a female MC at a Battle in Newcastle was subject to ‘sexist chants’ from the crowd which led to her engage ‘in antifemale rhetoric’ (Baker and Cohen 2008, p. 335). Furthermore, as I have illustrated in this chapter, simply attending Hip Hop events can be a frustrating experience for women who are given “greasies” (see section 7.5) or classified as “sluts”. That said, I do not want to suggest that all male Hip Hoppers are sexist or to neglect the many positive male/female relationships that I observed during my time in the field. As briefly discussed above, Chrissie met her boyfriend through her participation in Hip Hop and Marissa had numerous very close male friends that she bonded with through Hip Hop. Even though Chrissie describes some of the negative ways that she is treated by other Hip Hoppers, it is clear that her relationship with her boyfriend and many other male Hip Hoppers are extremely positive. However, Chrissie is still critical of the way that some men or “guys” treat her:

It would be a lot easier for some guys if we would just go away and shut up I reckon. But I love Hip Hop so I won't do that

(Chrissie, Author's Interview).

This quote is another example of how Hip Hoppers use the discourse of “love” to describe the important role that Hip Hop plays in their lives. Thus, while Chrissie believes that it would be “easier” for some male Hip Hoppers if women were not involved in Hip Hop she stresses that her “love” for Hip Hop prevents her from doing that. In making this statement, Chrissie confronts the ideology that women lack dedication to Hip Hop and situates herself as a Hip Hop insider. My time in the field suggests however, that while female Hip Hoppers still face many challenges, it is becoming somewhat easier for women to claim positions as Hip Hop insiders. For example, over the course of my fieldwork I noticed that the fashion choices of women attending Hip Hop events are becoming increasingly diverse. The connection between

particular fashion styles and judgements about ‘dedication’ may be beginning to break down.

This was made apparent to me when a participant that I was interviewing spoke about how women attending Hip Hop events seemed less restricted in terms of their dress than male Hip Hoppers. During this conversation the participant stopped and looked down at my feet and noted that I was wearing a pair of thongs.⁹⁷ He remarked that it was interesting that I did not have to be wearing sneakers or dressing like a “B-Girl” to be a Hip Hopper. While it may seem like a trivial point, the acknowledgement by a male Hip Hopper that women can wear what they like and still be considered ‘authentic’ illustrates how attitudes towards female Hip Hoppers are beginning to shift. As I noted at the beginning of this thesis, since I moved to Adelaide in 2001 I have noted a slow but steady increase in the number of women who attend Hip Hop events and produce Hip Hop. As more women begin to take part in Hip Hop the naturalisation of Hip Hop as a masculine activity is being challenged and the presence of more female role models is influencing women’s desire and ability to participate in Hip Hop.

Yet, despite these changes, the gender imbalance between male and female participants in the Australian Hip Hop scene is still very visible. This led one American performer at a recent Hip Hop gig to comment on the number of women in the audience. MC Bukue One asked all the women in the audience to raise their hands and then commented on the extremely low number of women who were at the show ironically stating “now that’s progress!”⁹⁸ Future research will determine whether or not we can talk about “progress” without using irony and if women will continue to be marginalised in this male-dominated culture.

⁹⁷ ‘Thongs’ is an Australian term for footwear commonly referred to as ‘flip-flops’ in other countries or sandals.

⁹⁸ Bukue One was the support act at Del the Funkee Homosapien’s concert held at the Rocket Bar in Adelaide on the 27th of July 2011.

Conclusion

Hip Hop is “In My Blood”: The Importance of Authenticity:

As I indicated at the start of this thesis, Nas’s contention that *Hip Hop Is Dead* (2006) became a rallying cry when Melbourne MC Muph led the crowd at the HTH/ASO Show in the affirmation that Hip Hop was “alive”. As the Hip Hop scene in Australia continues to grow and to develop what constitutes ‘living’ or authentic Hip Hop remains a matter of contention. In this thesis I have examined how Hip Hoppers in Australia define, ascribe and perform authenticity by exploring debates concerning; Hip Hop’s ‘origins’ and the ongoing importance of Hip Hop ‘traditions’ (chapter 2); the nature of localisation in particular the implications of localisation on accent use (chapter 3) and lyrical content (chapter 4), commercialisation and commitment (chapters 5 and 6) and gender (chapter 7). I have demonstrated that Hip Hoppers are constantly making assessments and judgements about who is, or is not, an insider or an authentic Hip Hopper. These classifications are often challenged as various individuals and groups seek to legitimate their own understanding of Hip Hop and their own practices and beliefs.

As discussed in my introduction, the aim of this thesis has not been to determine what authentic Hip Hop is, but to explore how Hip Hoppers make judgements about authenticity. I have demonstrated that these judgements are influenced by social and cultural factors such as race, nationality, class, and gender. In his book *Distinction* (1984) Bourdieu argues that distinctions between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ art, ‘pure’ and ‘popular’ culture are not natural or inherent but are produced by specific social conditions. He states that:

consumption is, in this case, a stage in a process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code...A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded

(Bourdieu 1984, p. 2).

In this thesis I have examined how different Hip Hoppers work to position themselves as masters of the ‘code’ of Hip Hop. Furthermore, I have highlighted the struggles that can occur when people with various understandings of the ‘meaning’ of Hip Hop

attempt to legitimate their own particular decoded reading and to dismiss other readings as inauthentic.

My findings add to a growing body of literature that explores how Hip Hop is localised when it is appropriated outside of the U.S.A. This thesis clearly demonstrates that Hip Hop in Australia is not an imitation or a ‘copy’ of American Hip Hop. However, it also illustrates that scholars need to critically explore the complexities of localisation. As I argued in chapter 2, some Hip Hoppers argue that Hip Hop can become too local and therefore inauthentic. While scholars such as Mitchell (2007) have focused on the indigenisation of Hip Hop, arguing that Australian Hip Hoppers ‘tend to distance themselves from any direct US influence, projecting a distinctly local Hip Hop subculture’ (Mitchell 2007, n.p.) my research demonstrates that some Hip Hoppers actively work to position their practices as in continuity with American Hip Hop. There are a growing number of Australian Hip Hoppers who do not see ‘Australian Hip Hop’ as a separate genre or cultural form:

I’d like it [Hip Hop] one day not to be classified as ‘Aussie Hip Hop’: ‘Oh that’s an Aussie Hip Hop song, that’s a great Aussie Hip Hop song’, instead it might just be... ‘oh I like that song’

(Brian, Author’s Interview).

Brian’s statement reflects his belief that Hip Hop is a “universal language” (ibid) and echoes the sentiments, discussed in chapters 2 and 6, that Hip Hop can become too nationalistic and therefore, inauthentic.

Yet, as I noted in chapter 2, these sentiments are not shared by all Hip Hoppers and some Hip Hop enthusiasts are so proud of Australian Hip Hop that they no longer listen to Hip Hop produced in other countries. These different perspectives are evident in debates about whether or not people should use the term ‘Australian Hip Hop’ or ‘Hip Hop in Australia’.⁹⁹ Like Brian who hopes that one day a good Hip Hop song will not be prefaced with the moniker “Aussie Hip Hop song”, some Hip Hoppers argue that focusing on ‘Australian Hip Hop’ will result in an insular and unhealthy Hip Hop scene (see chapter 6). Thus, even though all Hip Hoppers contend that Hip Hop has been

⁹⁹ To avoid repetition I have used both these phrases throughout the thesis.

localised, not all Hip Hop enthusiasts agree about what this ‘localisation’ should entail. Future research will determine whether or not these disagreements will lead to rifts in the Hip Hop scene, such as those described in chapter 3 between Hip Hoppers who use different accents, or if the continuing localisation of Hip Hop will result in the emergence of a new musical genre or cultural practice such as ‘Urban Breakbeat Culture’ (Hesmondhalgh and Melville 2001) in the UK.

Throughout this thesis I have argued that the increasing popularity of Hip Hop in Australia has exacerbated debates about authenticity. As more and more people begin to listen to Hip Hop music or engage with the Four Elements, the lines between insiders and outsiders can become blurred. Indeed, my fieldwork demonstrated that Hip Hoppers are quite fearful about the future of Australian Hip Hop, and in particular who will retain ownership of the form. As Hip Hop artists like the Hilltop Hoods (see chapter 5) achieve higher record sales with every release, many Hip Hop enthusiasts are worried that Hip Hop will become an increasingly attractive target for ‘outsiders’ who want to exploit the culture to make money. These fears primarily centre on who controls the production of Hip Hop and are reflected in the following statement from Fred:

That’s always been my fear, is that there’ll be someone coming in to make a quick buck off it, that has got no knowledge of the culture. And I think in the past when people have tried to do that they’ve always failed, so, I guess that’s the whole thing, of things developing and moving further away from the roots of it

(Fred, Author’s Interview).

Earlier in this interview Fred stated that one of the best things about the Australian Hip Hop scene was that it was still “run” and “controlled” by the people that produce Hip Hop at a “grass roots” level. He went on to contrast the Australian Hip Hop scene with the American Hip Hop scene:

In the States where it’s just become so institutionalised and commercial. Maybe that’s why Nas said ‘Hip Hop is dead’

(ibid).

Once again we can see how the claim that Hip Hop is ‘dead’ resonated with Australian Hip Hoppers. However, here, Fred contrasts the Australian Hip Hop scene with the

American scene which he argues has become increasingly “commercial”. Thus, Hip Hop is feared to become ‘dead’ when it is appropriated by people who “have no knowledge of the culture” (ibid), people who do not understand the Hip Hop ‘code’ (Bourdieu 1984). When I conducted semi-structured interviews with my participants I would usually conclude the interview with questions about their future involvement in Hip Hop and how they would like to see the Hip Hop scene develop. Many people raised concerns similar to Fred’s above statement that Hip Hop insiders might lose control of the production and consumption of Hip Hop

This loss of control is so concerning for Hip Hoppers because it means that they will no longer be able to define what is or is not authentic Hip Hop. It is viewed as a threat to their authority as the ‘owners’ of Hip Hop culture. Future research will determine how Hip Hoppers cope with the increasing popularity of their culture, and indeed, if this rise in popularity continues. Not everyone that I interviewed thought that the Hip Hop scene would necessarily keep gaining popularity:

At the moment from a whole Australian perspective you’ve kinda got your independent labels like your Elephant Traks, and your Obese, Shogun Distribution and a few other ones, they’re all just sitting bubbling, maybe apart from Obese cause of Hilltops but aside from them, but everyone said, “ahh yeah major labels are going to sign up everyone and it’s going to be massive”, but it hasn’t really happened.¹⁰⁰ And I don’t know if it will for a while

(Nate, Author’s Interview).

It’s difficult to say whether the popularity we’ve seen in recent years will continue on and if it does that’s going to bring specific things with it. But on the other hand there’s no guarantee that it will

(Patrick, Author’s Interview).

In 2011, four years after these interviews were conducted, the future prosperity of Australian Hip Hop appears less certain. At the time of this interview Nate could not have foreseen that Shogun Distribution would collapse in 2010. In September 2011, the Associate Editor of Adelaide street press magazine *Rip It Up* cited the collapse of Shogun as one example in his argument that Hip Hop culture is now in a ‘perilous position’ (Knight 2011, p. 8). He went on to state that there are limited avenues for

¹⁰⁰ This interview was conducted when the Hilltop Hoods were still signed to Obese.

‘real’ Hip Hop acts in Australia unless they ‘sell out’ (ibid). These developments illustrate how quickly the fortunes of particular music scenes can change. However, regardless of whether or not Hip Hop in Australia is gaining or losing popularity, Hip Hoppers will always be concerned with marking out and defending the boundaries of authenticity. This is because Hip Hop is such an integral aspect of their lives, a point that is aptly demonstrated in the following quote from Mark:

Hip Hop is in my blood, I’m always going to be a Graff Writer, I’m always going to listen to the music. It’s something that is so much a part of who I am it is completely inseparable, it’s my identity

(Mark, Author’s Interview).

This sentiment was echoed by many of my participants who stress the central role that Hip Hop plays in their lives and their sense of self.¹⁰¹ Stokes (1994) argues that authenticity and identity are interrelated because ‘what one is (or wants to be) cannot be ‘inauthentic’, whatever else it is’ (Stokes 1994, p. 6). Thus, while theorists have challenged and deconstructed the notion of an essentialised ‘authentic’ identity, members of cultural groups still experience and understand authenticity in this way (Wheaton and Beal 2003, p. 159). Hip Hoppers do not often reflect on the processes by which some actions, beliefs and ideas and not others become imbued with authenticity because authenticity is naturalised and normalised. For example, in response to the question “Do you make distinctions between different Hip Hop genres”, Mark replied “Hip Hop is just that” (Author’s Interview). This statement clearly demonstrates how the constitution of Hip Hop can become self-evident ‘truth’: “Hip Hop is just that” (ibid). Therefore, as Harrison (2009) discusses in his account of the Bay Area Hip Hop scene, Hip Hoppers are not always aware that they are evaluating authenticity (Harrison 2009, p. 105).

¹⁰¹ It should be noted that my research participants were predominantly people who were heavily invested in Hip Hop. This is a common criticism of studies of music and subcultural groups, see for example, Donnelly’s critique of the theoretical and methodological approaches that she argues have limited the insightfulness of studies of extreme sports (Donnelly 2006). This limitation could be corrected by future research that explores in more detail how casual Hip Hop fans or members of the ‘mainstream’ discussed in chapters 5 and 6 understand authenticity. My focus on Hip Hoppers who are very committed and highly involved in Hip Hop culture should not be read as a disparagement of the legitimacy of other participants.

Australian Hip Hoppers do not go around interrogating other people to determine their authenticity and they do not constantly talk about who and what is ‘authentic’. Rather, their evaluations about authenticity are often taken-for-granted. They are espoused in routine discussions about a new Hip Hop release that they heard, the quality of a show they attended, or whether or not a particular clothing design or sneaker is desirable. They are performed in the use of a particular accent by an MC, a certain B-Boy/B-Girl move or a flourish of the cross-fader or spray can.¹⁰² They can be constituted in a simple look like the “greasy” look of censure that Chrissie discussed in chapter 7. Sometimes these evaluations are extremely explicit as illustrated in my discussion of the use of terms such as ‘sell out’ and ‘slut’ (chapters 5, 6 and 7) and the angry encounters that sometimes take place in online forums or in person when Hip Hoppers with opposing understandings of authenticity engage with each other.

By invoking notions of authenticity, Hip Hoppers are constituting identities that enable them to assert their difference and distinction from both the general public or the ‘mainstream’ and from other factional groups within the scene whom they may wish to be disassociated from. This is not a process that is unique to Hip Hoppers. Thus, while the central aim of this thesis has been to elucidate how Hip Hoppers constitute authenticity in the Australian context, my findings add to a growing body of scholarship that defines authenticity as an evaluative concept (Vannini and Williams 2009). As Stokes (1994) discusses:

authenticity is a trope of great persuasive power. It focuses a way of talking about music, a way of saying to outsiders and insiders alike ‘this is what is really significant about this music’, ‘this is the music that makes us different from other people’

(Stokes 1994, p. 7).

The strength of Stokes (1994) approach is that it emphasises how the concept of authenticity is utilised by people in order to communicate what is important to them about their own practices and beliefs and to situate themselves as ‘insiders’. Hip Hoppers will continue to create boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ or ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders’ as they work to give meaning to and to defend their understandings of a cultural form that is ‘in their blood’ to paraphrase Mark (Author’s Interview).

¹⁰² The cross-fader is used by a DJ to move between two records.

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