Title of the thesis:

'Hip Hop versus Rap': An Ethnography of the Cultural Politics of New Hip Hop Practices

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Declaration:

I the candidate do declare that the PhD thesis here submitted for examination by The University of London to be wholly my own work.

Signed: ....

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Abstract

Using field observations, interview narratives, and lyrical analysis, this thesis argues that the increasing presence of hip hop arts in social spheres not popularly associated with hip hop such as community activism, school-based education and theatre is traceable to an intra cultural political struggle I term 'hip hop versus rap'. Hip hop versus rap opposes the notion of a temporally prior, authentic hip hop culture to its degeneration into commercial and 'anti-social' rap music. As a redemptive discourse hip hop versus rap seeks to annex a socially responsible hip hop culture from its popular caricature by culturally exogenous interests. As part of a progressive grassroots, hip hop's extension into new educational and artistic domains thus marks, at one level, a continuation of longstanding black diaspora struggles around race and cultural cooptation. Correspondingly, a hallmark of its pedagogic practices on the ground is a continuous reflexive commentary on the progressive uses to which hip hop can and should be put. These new hip hop practices, moreover, are philosophically and politically heterogeneous with respect to their sources, motives, and output. Hip hop versus rap can equally serve racial absolutism and mysticism, on the one hand, and, on the other, an avowed commitment to artistic and pedagogic innovation troubling fixed cultural and ethnic borders. Of equal significance, however, hip hop's 'communitarian' 'grassroots' turn is also related to emerging forms of municipal and state sponsorship. In conditions of social risk and individualisation youth and educational services are seen as needing as far as possible to be fashioned around the cultural dispositions and preferences of their 'at-risk' users - or consumers. This means that another signal feature of hip hop versus rap – particularly as an educational project – is the way in which it marks a convergent point of vernacular cultural politics and histories and historically novel approaches by the state to the support, control and regulation of problem youth.

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CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

From Municipal Hip Hop to 'Hip Hop versus Rap'

Thesis and Remit of the Study

Are the recent efforts of practitioners and artists at the grassroots to mobilise hip hop educationally and politically, or to develop a more community orientated, independent base for artistic exploration, evidence of a mature 'post-hip hop culture' emerging from out of the shadow of socially irresponsible rap music (Asante JR., 2008)? This is a seductive image pitting the authentic grassroots of hip hop culture against co-opting and exploitative forces and cultural sell-outs: *hip hop versus rap*. It constructs hip hop culture as a sacred irreducible core occluded by, but ultimately redeemable from, rap's profane accretions. On the side of the angels, a temporally prior hip hop: its 'old money'. On the side of the devils, commercial rap: a Parvenu caricature. As a narrative, hip hop versus rap depicts hip hop's organic intellectuals – its 'conscious heads' – working to reclaim the culture from the Augean stables of pop and gangsta rap music. The redemptive conclusion to this narrative is hip hop returned to its original constituency and proper social function as vehicle for uplift. But for all its intuitive appeal, can the sacred and profane in hip hop really be so annexed? What of the fact that this opposition, from the outset, has been an intrinsic rhetorical element of hip hop culture, part of its antiphonic 'battle' aesthetic of phony artistic war? Indeed, I would argue that it is this very reflexiveness which makes hip hop versus rap an altogether more vacillating construction than its Manichean rendering could possibly ever allow. For at the very moment in which hip hop versus rap presumptively asserts a self-evident ethical opposition, requiring neither proofs nor further demonstration, it playfully adverts to the radically rhetorical, 'sporting' nature of hip hop culture. In so doing, it wants simultaneously to suggest that this is about repelling cultural outsiders and settling a family dispute. But the autonomous character of this formation both at a discursive and at an institutional level is also highly open to question. One of the founding terms of the intra-cultural politics of a 'post-hip hop culture' is the radical promise to penetrate public and municipal institutions from below, to storm the gates of the citadel. A hip hop 'underground' unyoked to rap music will make it possible to wrest acknowledgement of the

marginalised creative brilliance of the socially excluded from indifferent or hostile 'mainstream' centres of cultural power. However, the actual politics of the situation are far murkier and more complex than this binomial postulate would suggest. For hip hop's communitarian face is also animated by political imperatives and regulatory agendas from beyond the bounds of family. In recent years youth policy has taken a hard headed attitude to cultural relevancy and sensitivity. Individualized trajectories in conditions of globalized risk have demanded the recalibrating of youth and educational services for the most disadvantaged around the identities and preferences of their users. The global ubiquity of urban hip hop culture thus makes it a natural candidate for mobilisation by the state. By supporting artists and educators to run hip hop workshops targeted at particular young people, institutions and municipal authorities are able to devolve - or disperse - control at the grassroots. So that in practice hip hop versus rap and its 'new hip hop practices' provide instances of hegemonic and declaredly counter hegemonic interests and sectors critically converging on common discursive and even disciplinary ground. Indeed, the very hip hop activist trope of 'edutainment' already hints at the difficulty of separating consciousness-raising from governance in actual instances of practice.

What therefore follows is my attempt to explore through ethnographic fieldwork some recent London based examples of hip hop outreach projects that at some level owe their political, moral, aesthetic and social agendas to the construction: *hip hop versus rap*. I examine a set of related hip hop institutional forms, scenes, and practices that include: consciousness raising lectures, school and youth club based emcee and poetry workshops, and experiments with hip hop theatre. In an effort to do justice to commonalities and differences, I show how each of these community projects reflexively debate and re-negotiate the proper boundaries of hip hop's purpose and collective identity. At the heart of this study sits a pivotal cultural figure: the hip hop 'raptivist', 'edutainer', 'organic' or 'movement intellectual'. By their pedagogic pronouncements and various deeds this figure is seen helping to found, and secure a berth for themselves within, a (post) hip hop counter-public sphere. Through a series of fieldwork examples, I examine the latter's role, formation, practices, techniques and persona as artist and educator. This requires a searching exploration of hip hop versus rap as social mission. For example, if hip hop's

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organic intellectuals sincerely believe that the sacred and the profane in hip hop can be – should be – safely annexed, and if this belief aligns with the regulatory agendas of the state, what implications for young people's freedom of expression and informal assembly and socialising? In other words, what kinds of culture emerges from the conjunction between municipally supported hip hop outreach in the community and the everyday expressive scenes and peer groups of informal hip hop culture? I thus explore in detail the types of creative expression and youthful forms of energy being, variously, elicited, mobilised, liberated, channelled, prescribed and purged through the artistic and educational workshops of some hip hop organic intellectuals. If creative freedom and autonomy comprise a central thread of the thesis so too does racial and cultural identity - both its reifying and mystification and its unsettling and expansion. All this largely revolves around hip hop deeds of title. Again, the figure of the hip hop organic intellectual is pivotal. For in the *mise-en-scene* of hip hop versus rap it is they, as self-appointed gate-keepers of the culture, who repeatedly pose and answer the question: to whom does this recombinant hip hop properly belong? Which racial and cultural persons is it vital that hip hop activists bring back within the cultural fold - and why? However, underlining the ideological heterogeneity of hip hop versus rap, what I seek to highlight is that such questions can in different locale equally incite a racially absolutist and a cosmopolitan response. For example, towards the end of the thesis, I show how hip hop theatre practitioners, for whom the creative scope of hip hop is an expression of its rooted *and* global character, construct a far more porous and inclusive cultural formation than neo-traditionalists for whom *roots* are all. If the latter see it as their mission to wrest hip hop from culturally exogenous interests and to return it to the racial *volk*, then the former disrupt this particular chromatic economy by suggesting creative form, expression, and political honesty trump identity. In so doing, these practitioners are seen to make a critical contribution to the historic problematic of white people's presence and involvement in black culture.

What should quite quickly become apparent is my profound philosophical and political disquiet with the implications for young people of the convergence of the municipal and the subcultural. It is my view that this *potentially* represents a form of cultural enclosure, one that reflects and refracts many other shrinking social horizons located

beyond the particular scenes of everyday hip hop culture. If this study can go some way to challenging simplistic or glibly optimistic views concerning the entanglements of policy makers, educators, artists and youth in the context of neoliberal welfare then I feel it will have been of some service. At the same time, as I trace in my various readings and interpretations of the 'data', these entanglements – at all levels – demonstrate just how the annexing of sacred and profane profoundly misses hip hop culture's radically social, immanent character. I therefore need to emphasise that I am not claiming that hip hop versus rap is *reducible* to this moment of convergence. Moreover, I draw much redemptive hope from the cultural interfusions and encounters between hip hop and other traditions and practices I observed and participated in over the course of my fieldwork. Some of the organic intellectuals in this study were arguably guilty of a certain political myopia and naiveté, some even of outright racial chauvinism and snake oil selling. Others, however, were an idealistic beacon for the emergent possibilities of new hip hop practices. These artists and educators are conducting experiments at the level of form, content and identity beyond the cash nexus and are prepared to challenge some of hip hop's own racialised shibboleths. As for young people who wish to elude surveillance: there is always the *cipher*...

I will now discuss the emergence of the study.

hip hop and youth(work)

'The past informs our thinking in the present, the present informs our reconstructions of the past'.

(Charmaz, 2009: 48)

In the 1990s and early noughties, when I was a central London-based youth worker, hip hop was acquiring an increasingly strong visible and audible presence in educational, community, and outreach settings. It had become common to the point of being routine to encounter rappers, spoken word poets, break-dancers, graffiti writers and hip hop DJs running workshops in secondary schools, youth clubs and juvenile justice programmes. Often targeted at young people 'at-risk' and/or from black and ethnic minority communities

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these hip hop workshops were frequently grafted onto existing social-education programmes addressing citizenship, drug-education, sexual health, and diversity (see Bradford, 2005: 249-250). Often there would be an overarching theme such as 'respect'. Moreover, the instrumental, therapeutic designs of the organisations providing financial support for the use of hip hop arts with 'at-risk' youth were usually quite blatant (see Mirza, 2005). Particularly where such sponsorship originated with a targeted crime prevention and/or youth inclusion programme such as Connexions or PAYP (Positive Activities for Young People) (see Cowling, 2004). The following passage from 2007 comes from the promotional blurb for the South Kilburn New Deal for the Community 'Graffiti Youth Diversion Project'. It is fairly illustrative of what I have subsequently come to call 'municipal hip hop':

> This is a project to remove all existing graffiti in public areas that are not covered under the Brent Housing contract and to maintain a graffiti-free environment. In conjunction with this project a youth diversion element is being developed. The intention of the project is to engage with the young people responsible for graffiti in South Kilburn and give them the opportunity of expressing their creativity in a positive way as well as educating them on the dangers of the toxins they are exposed to. It forms part of the Safer Routes project to provide a safe and attractive environment for local residents and businesses. The OK Club, True to the Game and Street Care are working together on the project. Street Care are [sic] providing the 'clean up' side of the project. The OK Club and True to the Game are running Graffiti art sessions at the OK Club working with a group of young people from South Kilburn.[1]

My initial, overpowering response to the municipal use of hip hop arts for such forms of pedagogy was a profound ambivalence that verged on outright antipathy. A frequent refrain within North American writings on hip hop pedagogy is the political stakes involved in 'access to public space and community resources and the interpretation of Black expression' (Rose, 1991: 289; see Ards, 2004; Baker Jr., 1990). Closer to home in the early 1990s Paul Willis produced an important piece of research on British youth cultures that later became the book *Common Culture*. It argued persuasively for a radical change in funding and support for youth arts and arts education that would reflect the actual conditions and modes in which young people were daily engaging with and using culture. Willis argued that arts provision should reflect how UK youth were disrupting tidily discrete notions of cultural production and consumption and were making a mockery of vainly paternalistic efforts to civilise them through exposure to high culture. From this angle the

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[1] Find at: http://www.skndc.net/index.php?art_id=000060.

diffusion of hip hop culture throughout 'the structures and institutions of civil society' with the backing of the UK state had all the makings of a 'storming of the citadels' (Kelley, 1984). Municipal hip hop could potentially be an answer to idealistic demands 'from below' for social inclusion, recognition of ethnic diversity, and a more sensitive, equitable distribution of cultural resources and opportunities (see Wallinger and Warnock, 2000). It could be exemplary of educational frameworks and cultural institutions being more responsive to the on the ground realities of young people's 'symbolic creativity' (Willis, 1990).

It is true that the hip hop artists and practitioners I saw being hired to deliver hip hop workshops were often cut from the same cloth as the very risky and 'hard-to-reach' social groups constructed by officialdom as *other* to mainstream respectable society (see Jocson, 2006; Stovall, 2006). However, what little of this literature seemed surprisingly to consider was how such apparently egalitarian facts on the ground might also be eloquent of the cultural-political agendas of the sponsoring agencies - as with the graffiti clean-up project cited above. In the passage I quote, hip hop idioms and municipal regulatory concerns and measures are fused into a single discourse. In other words, municipally sponsored hip hop was something far more politically equivocal and culturally complex than conclusive evidence that the grassroots was wresting official support and recognition for the 'common cultures' of youth.[2] From my berth as a London youth worker municipal hip hop seemed at least as much an expression of long emergent political and institutional imperatives as proof of the culturally marginalised striking a blow for social justice (see Baker JR., 1990). For example, during the period I refer to one of the things that struck me was that hip hop, ironically, was enjoying an ever increasing popularity with youth policy makers at precisely the moment during which the latter were waging a determined crusade to eliminate informal youth work and its historically voluntary basis (Jeffs and Smith, 1994). From at least the early 1990s youth services had become ever more orientated towards crime prevention and the performance of explicit surveillance functions (see Jeffs and Smith, 1994; Waiton, 2001). The programmes they were offering were, at least ostensibly, structured around behaviour modification and young people gaining accreditation and paper credentials (DfES, 2005; see Jeffs and Smith, 2002). At the time many youth workers

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[2] Both Huq (2006/2007) and Pardue's (2004/2007) research into hip hop pedagogy is a notable exception to this critical lacuna.

and social workers loudly complained that their professional integrity and autonomy was, for ideological reasons, being eroded. They were losing the capacity to work with young people in a flexible, supportive, democratic and 'empowering' way (Colley, 2003). The intrusive forms of control and regulation which were increasingly the lot of youth in the 1990s, whether at school, in the youth club or on the street, had their deafening echo in the occupational reorganisation and micro-management of front-line social and educational workers (Finlayson, 2003). Youth workers were having a battery of prescriptive working practices and structures imposed on them from above. New forms of regulation and auditing from the school of The New Public Management: 'risk management', 'assessment', 'multi-agency' working and 'information sharing', were the occupational order of the day (Bradford, 2005; Keith, 2005). The essential purpose of this general reconfiguration of youth work was to restrict the scope of individual workers for informal independent action, to increase their surveillance function with youth, and to yoke their practice to hard outcomes (Goldson et al, 2000). This was the era, remember, in which ASBOs, ABCs (Acceptable Behaviour Contracts) and curfews were first introduced. There was now to be a concerted 'zero-tolerance' of youth disorder, and youth work was increasingly conceived of in terms of what Anthony Giddens calls 'productive welfare' (see Muncie, 2005). Simon Bradford opines that:

> The notion of risk offers limitless possibilities for identifying new sites for expert intervention in the social and material worlds, powerfully justifying professional activity, of which the multi-agency approach is an expression. The concept's utility lies in its capacity to render the entire domain in which the young person is located potentially knowable and amenable to the calculus of professional evaluation and intervention. As such it greatly facilitates the expansion of governmental activity.

(Bradford, 2005: 250)

I was struck by how the rap emceeing, DJ and graffiti writing sessions I was encountering on a daily basis as a youth work professional appeared to align so seamlessly with these imperatives. How the efforts of their facilitators to get young people to stop 'chatting slackness' and say something 'positive' in their lyrics, or to daub a municipal space with a fluorescent encomium to 'unity' or 'community' not only felt like a rather desultory form of censorship or empty moralising but somehow represented *control from elsewhere.* How the New Labour vulgate of 'inclusion', 'participation', and 'cultural diversity' to my eyes made

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culturally sensitive provision of youth arts – e.g. hip hop – indistinguishable from the corralling and monitoring of problem inner-city youth (Fairclough, 2000; Levitas, 1998). Explicitly so when many youth projects at the time using hip hop, particularly those whose origin lay in Home Office funding, such as PAYP and Positive Futures, involved a compulsory or coercive element (see Crabbe et al, 2006; see also Blackman, 2004). This particular species of zero-tolerance, with its environmental determinism, involved clasping the deviant subject in as clammy and stifling an embrace as possible. Here was an enforced *gemeinschaft* where 'hard' interventions to suppress anti-social behaviour such as ASBOs and curfews were complemented by insidious attempts to conscript subjectivity. Stanley Cohen well describes this new regime of social control:

> In the new ideology of corrections, there is no real or symbolic wilderness, just the omnipresent community into which the deviant has to be unobtrusively 'integrated' or 'reintegrated'. Boundary blurring implies both the deeper penetration of social control into the social body and the easing of any measures of exclusion and stigmatization. Deviants must remain in their own natural society as long as possible.

(Cohen, 1993: 77)

What I initially felt I was witnessing therefore was not just a straightforward recuperation of a once pristinely trangressive subculture (see Plant, 2003). As I discuss in chapter two, from its very beginnings hip hop has enjoyed a complicated relationship with commercial and mainstream culture. Furthermore, by the time of its municipal co-optation, hip hop had long been enlisted as a global cultural envoy of postmodern American capital (Asante JR., 2008; Basu and Lemelle, 2006).[3] No, here was a hard headed appreciation by those with a professional investment in youth that going with the grain of the everyday symbolic creativity and lifestyles Paul Willis had celebrated might yield positive results in modifying and shaping the conduct of a generation seemingly impervious to direct exhortation and coercion (see Binkley, 2007). To my cynical eyes this was a strategic incursion – a form of enclosure - by the state into one of youth's tactical interstitial spaces (see de-Certeau, 1988); hip hop mobilised to channel and ultimately attenuate these young people's libidinous, creative energies. In the aforementioned graffiti project, *a fait accompli* by the authorities is finessed as a generous accommodation to the needs of youth for creative self-

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[3] And, in the process, of course, this has seen hip hop's local re-articulations and grassroots networks globally proliferate (see Gilroy, 2006a).

expression. The project declares that it shall 'give them the opportunity of expressing their creativity in a *positive* way' (italics added). Vandalism is convertible into officially sanctioned, 'positive' expression through its domestication by the state. Hence, the use of hip hop to *unobtrusively* integrate deviant youth represented as far as I was concerned a sequestering of one of the few expressive mediums and repertoires available to young people to publicly vent dissatisfaction in their own inchoate way against the symbolic violence of that same state (Bourgois, 2003). The criminologist Wayne Presdee speaks of 'rendering justified anger as impotent' as one of the desired outcome of such frictionless techniques of young people's regulation in the community (Presdee, 2004: 47). In other words, to regard the municipal sponsoring of hip hop in largely un-problematic terms as positive evidence of a more egalitarian, culturally sensitive public policy (see Huq, 2006/2007) was to fail to appreciate how social control is now dispersed (Cohen, 1993). It was to overlook how a more culturally democratic provision shaped around young people's informal creativity and identity could be so easily harnessed to a mission of pacifying, socialising and civilising. So that going with the cultural grain became, consciously or not, as much about new technologies of management as anything counter-hegemonic. All that said, Bradford (2005: 248-252) is quite correct to point out that aspects of both the 'liberal' and 'radical' traditions in youth work social education – particularly a concern with self-regulation and responsible conduct – have always been amenable to recuperation by targeted behaviour modification programmes, reflecting the often ambiguous historical role of youth work as a 'social therapy' (see Lasch, 1995).

But underlying my instinctive mistrust of municipal hip hop were also core aspects of my own biography. I had grown up in London in indigent circumstances and in the late seventies and early eighties had lived through – and in – punk, reggae and hip hop. In each of these scenes I had personally been drawn to those zones, as much imaginative as actual, where the youth subculture interfaces with countercultural possibilities (see Gilroy, 2006a). Hip hop had seemed to offer insubordination with politicised rebellion. It and punk, hip hop's generational twin, were the last spectacular, symbolically oppositional youth subcultures, both of which embodied, and arguably endured in meaningful ways, long beyond their moment (see Clarke, 2003; Ferrell, 2001). The iconography of New York's hip

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hop culture: whole car graffiti daubed subway trains rattling through decimated neighbourhoods setting off the latter's uniform drear with fluorescent calligraphy and pop cultural characters; black and brown youth in Puma trainers and Kangol hats facing off in rap and dance battles against a backdrop of municipal squalor, became imaginatively fused with my own forays into London's very early hip hop scene as a would be rapper in my mid teens railing lyrically against Thatcher. The gritty images that play in my head are one part the London of my own youth, one part the New York known then only through film and television (see Cooper, 2006). They depict a less 'abstract' (Lefebvre, 2003), more irregularly textured social space. The 'public' world of my inner-city childhood spent on the streets with my friends was one of concentric, overlapping oeuvres of profane self-expression and playful transgression (see Borden, 2001; de-Certeau, 1988; Cooper, 2006). Moreover, the youth clubs I had attended were places where young people went to discover and explore each other with nary a youth worker in sight. Any suggestion of being dragooned, corralled, worked on, and we would have bolted out the door. My nostalgia for this time, hip hop's youth, is deeply tinged with a keen, almost utopian yearning for all the things that a present day 'assimilationist' youth work is organised to countermand: the common, the discrepant and the serendipitous (Drakeford and McCarthy, 2001: 111). Municipal hip hop and its therapeutics of 'positive' thinking and finding 'constructive' alternatives to youthful expressions of profanity and ill-will seemed profoundly contrary to the raucously impertinent life-force hip hop culture once emerged out of, and, to my mind, continues to renew itself with (see Gidley, 2007; Reynolds, 2007/2009).

Hence, my starting to research hip hop as a municipally supported 'youth art' and popular cultural pedagogy, was, at least initially, driven by a concern with young people's freedom of movement and expression, and derived at once from a politicised relation to youth work and my own cultural biography. As I started to explore the available body of literature on the community based outreach and pedagogic uses of hip hop culture, it began to occur to me that a way of conceptualising what still struck me as a sequestering of young people's expression was to understand it as a turning of *hip hop against hip hop*. It was precisely the aspects of hip hop culture which epitomised feral and anti-social behaviour, the illegal graffiti tagging and the profanely impertinent idiom of the emcee lyrics youth produce and

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exchange informally, that the authorities were deploying hip hop artists against. The ethnographic work of anthropologist Derek Pardue (2004/2007) which examines the relationship between Brazilian hip hop hoppers and the Brazilian state was pivotal in my coming to this insight. Pardue observed that the basic need to find 'employment channels' for impoverished Brazilian hip hoppers from the urban *peripheria* and the assimilationist concerns of the state produced a complex, in many ways mutually beneficial articulation of hip hop and the municipal. On the one hand, here was recognition of marginalized cultural actors and their practices by the state, making possible the expansion of hip hop to new cultural and social spheres. On the other, the exigencies of survival, in Pardue's view, led hip hoppers in the employ of the state to become a mouthpiece for ideologies which countermanded hip hop's resistive capacity. So, for example, Pardue noted how a 'posse' of 'rap professors' working in a Sao Paulo youth prison encouraged the young inmates to express sentiments in their rap lyrics congenial to the stance of the authorities:

> In these lyrics there are no explicit agents of violence, only victims who struggle for peace and resolution. Rap professors implicitly encouraged students to replace violence with expression and understanding. Naming violence and thus investing in social criticism becomes an obstacle in the overall goal to educate oneself and overcome adversity. FEBEM [correctional facility] teenagers and members of posse Hausa emphasized self-development in favour of topics such as racism and police violence.

(Pardue, 2004: 425)

Moreover, in the context of 'permission' graffiti writing, this attenuation of transgressive libido was perhaps even more marked. Illegal graffiti writing customarily involves physical risk, law-breaking and, critically, the conquering of 'semantic spaces, previously claimed as semiotic property' (see Keith, 2005; Macdonald, 2002; Paul 107, 2003). Pardue saw that in the prison graffiti workshops there was an inevitable prohibition on youth seeking to 'refigure' forbidden and off-limits public spaces with semiotic tokens of their 'presence' (Pardue, 2004: 426-428). This, again, was coupled with an ideological massaging of the content of the 'message' such as 'say no to drugs'. He concluded from his fieldwork that 'The decontextualisation of the graffiti act in the FEBEM workshops worked to disengage the expression from a sociality of public semiotics. FEBEM graffiti became framed and contained' (ibid: 427).

Hip hop culture and the municipal: divergences and convergences

This reading of municipal hip hop as hip hop 'framed and contained' was useful for first making sense of some of the complex social and situational imbrications of youth policy, municipal organisation, and hip hop practitioner encountered in my own professional life. However, as I soon learned, for all its virtues this essentially structural/functionalist understanding of hip hop's articulation with the municipal far from told the full story of hip hop culture's expansion into new practices, domains and institutions including educational outreach. I was essentially reading the phenomenon of hip hop workshops through the prism of the political powers seeking access to the subjectivities of 'at-risk' youth (see Brown, 2005; Rose, 2004). This was highly valid in terms of structural questions - and certainly informs the theoretical approach taken to this study - but also insufficient. Particularly as regards the agency of the practitioners designing and facilitating this work, and therefore mediating said power structures - let alone the agency of the young participants (Alexander, 2003). These workshops, I was to discover, were more than a symptom of something hidden from direct view (Craib, 1992). Karen O'Reilly says, 'When you begin a grounded theory project, it is impossible to know what categories will be important or what will emerge as relevant processes to pursue and elaborate' (O'Reilly, 2009: 97). Despite having already done some fieldwork and much reading I was still missing a more culturally and historically attuned understanding of this phenomenon from the side of hip hop culture. As Raymond Williams states it, 'our hardest task, theoretically, is to find a non-metaphysical and non subjectivist explanation of emergent cultural practice' (Williams, 1973: 12). I may have garnered much knowledge of hip hop over the course of my life as an aficionado who had for a time rapped. But only once I had embarked on a committed study of the literature on hip hop, and had resumed my fieldwork, did it become evident that I had initially overlooked or missed key facets of its vernacular history and cultural politics (see Chang, 2007). I was finding out that hip hop's expansion into new domains of grassroots action, which included its articulation to the municipal, was decisively related to an intra-cultural politics intrinsic to the ontology of hip hop culture (see Kitwana, 2002). This intra-cultural politics I quickly gave the discursive figure 'hip hop versus rap'

based on a lecture project of that name attended during the fieldwork. I will now briefly outline how hip hop versus rap forms part of hip hop's foundational ontology.

From its earliest days hip hop artists and informed commentators have loudly deliberated over what – and indeed who - in the culture is worthy of respect. Verbally, in artistic form, and in writing missives have been issued asserting which expressions in hip hop are authentic and credible, which betray or corrupt the culture (see Kitwana, 2002; Hoch, 2006). In the guts of the vernacular this concerns who and what is 'real', 'wack' or 'fake' and thus either an adornment or a source of embarrassment. At its most elemental hip hop versus rap as a discursive figure constructs an opposition between 'hip hop' as a *culture* offering scope for legitimate, authentic and credible expression, and 'rap' as a *corruption* of this culture. However, it is not the art of rap emceeing that is being disavowed or arraigned in this construction. For, of course, rap emceeing is one of hip hop's four foundational artistic elements. Rather, it is 'rap' as a placeholder for all in hip hop culture, according to hip hop artists and informed commentary, that is, variously, irresponsible, inauthentic, commodified, destructive, formulaic, and socially regressive. In practical terms this essentially boils down to commercially popular rap music and/or rap with an 'anti-social' lyrical content. Hip hop is the 'real' culture; rap is a 'fake' masquerading as hip hop. This finds expression in a series of binomial oppositions: authentic/fake; positive/negative; sacred/profane; conscious/unaware; responsible/escapist; community/self; peaceful/violent; underground/commercial; innovative/formulaic; illegal/legal; dissident/mainstream; black/white (see Perry, 2004).

Combinations of these binaries pepper the lyrics of a range of hip hop artists, the messages of many graffiti writers, the decrees and actions of hip hop dancers, DJs, fans, journalists and academic researchers. This intra-cultural politics has various sources and expressions, a number of which I examine in the next chapter. However, it needs to be emphasised that hip hop versus rap is intrinsically related to hip hop's antiphonic battle aesthetic where each artistic expression, be it in words, writing, dance or music, potentially elicits a competitive, hyperbolic response which can include rhetorically questioning an opponent's entitlement to be part of the culture. It is also a discourse that reflects the persistence of, and can be a vehicle for, longstanding African diaspora cultural politics related to divergent strategies for

survival, resistance, and adaptation (see Dyson, 2007; Marable, 2003). Further, hip hop versus rap is crucially traceable to anxieties generated by hip hop's global commercial success and diffusion and the consequence of these developments socially, morally and economically for the social strata from which the culture derives (see Asante JR., 2008). As an actual phenomenon, hip hop versus rap encapsulates a fairly broad range of cultural expressions and ideological perspectives. It can equally be about sealing endogenous borders, repelling racial and cultural outsiders, and attempting to draw certain people back within designated bounds, as about efforts to mobilise hip hop politically, or to secure the conditions for artistic and cultural autonomy and experimentation. The common factor is a concern with cultural legitimacy, authenticity and credibility.

The notion of 'hip hop against hip hop' implied in somewhat stark terms the municipal cooptation of hip hop to countermand the anti-social or anomic actions and sentiments of 'at-risk' youth. As I have just discussed, 'hip hop versus rap' seeks essentially to annex a socially responsible, authentic hip hop culture from commercial, pop and/or gangsta rap music and their exogenous interests. At a practical level, this involves using art, critical commentary and grassroots activism to diagnose 'rap' pathogens in hip hop culture and to sometimes offer cures and courses of treatment. As this study will show one of the recently appointed vehicles for this cultural political project are programmes of hip hop education. But more broadly, whether the arena used is a rap song, a neighbourhood wall, a public lecture, a youth club emceeing session, or a piece of hip hop theatre, hip hop versus rap takes the form of edutainment. What this therefore means, for reasons which will hopefully become clear, is that the efforts of hip hop practitioners and activists to mobilise the culture on behalf of its better angels may in practice converge with, *but are not reducible to*, the imperatives of municipal cooptation.

As I will attempt to show in my findings, the desire of hip hop activists to counter the perceived damage caused to youth by negative rap by offering a socially 'conscious' hip hop alternative *is* locatable in the intra-cultural politics of hip hop. But this regulatory imperative creates an intriguing identity of interests with the assimilationist designs of municipal authorities set on taming and re-moulding the conduct of these same youth. And, what is more, owing to the fact that hip hop is far more a product of contemporary socio-

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historical conditions than some of its more essentialist voices would ever allow certain incipient therapeutic tendencies in both 'nihilistic' and 'conscious' hip hop actually align with the neoliberal pre-suppositions of latter day youth policy. I also show, however, how these 'new hip hop practices' can through an explicit concern with the cultural politics of *who hip hop belongs to* equally serve to seal or open endogenous borders, whilst all the while working for their maintenance. Linked to this is evidence from my fieldwork of genuinely progressive openings in new hip hop practices for hip hop's cultural development. The grassroots cross-arts experimentation I observed and participated in was expanding aesthetic and social compositional borders, and in the process providing an arena for intelligent debate over hip hop and race.

Thus, in the process of inquiring into the municipal cooptation of hip hop I had begun to realise that what I was actually witnessing was a phenomenon that reflected at once global political trends in their local articulation and the emergence of new hip hop practices on the ground. And whilst these new hip hop practices intersected at points both practically and discursively with the structural trends that were driving the reconfiguration of youth work and youth policy they also arose from a distinctive cultural politics and history of their own. For example, rap is figured in various and varying accounts in the chapters that follow as something at once internal and external to hip hop culture. What might be represented as an artistic instance of rank betrayal by a hitherto respected cultural insider can equally be depicted as a fifth columnist presence, or as a caricature or libel on the culture manufactured externally. This representational slipperiness arises largely from a vacillating tendency in hip hop versus rap discourse when dealing with questions that come down to social structure and individual agency (see Craib, 1992; Ortner, 2006). Sometimes rap expresses a moral and aesthetic failure on the part of individuals who have fallen prey to the worst tendencies and aspects endogenous to the vernacular culture. At other times it is about individuals choosing to sell out or exchange what is authentic and constructive for material baubles and instant gratification. Rap is also made in some accounts the antonym of a certain idealist ontology, synonymous with lack of individual 'consciousness' leading to a failure to resist mental capture by culturally external cosmologies and value systems. Still again, in a reversion to structuralist thinking rap may be a metonym for an oppressive social

system, or hegemonic order individuals are utterly powerless to resist (see Craib, 1992: 156; Sahlins, 1976).

What these findings will show is that new hip hop practices which extend into social spheres not popularly associated with hip hop both arise out of cultural political struggle and continue to wage cultural political struggle, chiefly around race and cultural cooptation but also the progressive uses to which hip hop can and should be put. They show hip hop arts being used reflexively in community based public spaces to narrate, debate and to educate about these themes. They show moments where this is being done in a manner that is populist, mystifying and defensive, and moments where it is intellectually searching, artistically innovative and culturally experimental. But where public policy and municipal imperatives concerning youth at-risk loom large, these findings also show that the terms of hip hop versus rap serves to blind the practitioners in this study to the way in which this cultural politics is also able to articulate with contemporary forms of social control. Moreover, whilst hip hop versus rap is nothing if not an equivocal phenomenon with genuinely progressive possibilities, its populism requires naming and exposing. The stakes involved in this, particularly for grassroots educational outreach work with youth, need emphasising. For at their worst these new hip hop practices are a vehicle for charlatanry and racism dignified as edutainment, serving to underscore the problematic nature of valorising the figure of the 'organic intellectual'.[4] How, I would ask, are disadvantaged young people liberated by a community activism propounding poorly researched, racially vindicationist ideas on culture, politics and history (see Howe, 1999; Moses, 1999)? In such practices, racial vindication's therapeutic intent and educational content are inversely related (Nolan, 1999). A further consequence of this brand of intellectual certitude and political parochialism is a striking lack of curiosity amongst its organic intellectuals about the politics and institutional history of the social, educational and cultural policy that undergirds their practice. If as Pardue (2004) says such freelance organic intellectuals are driven by the need to find 'employment channels' then perhaps this myopia is also a convenience. This is not to suggest that my informants are guilty of bad-faith but only to underscore the

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[4] In other parts of this thesis I use the less familiar term 'movement intellectuals'. In practice, I use the two terms fairly interchangeably. 'Movement intellectuals', however, is useful for underscoring the idea of a certain activism and connection to a recognisable politicised formation. See Eyerman (2004).

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complexly enmeshed nature of the cultural practices and social structures in this study. These are issues and questions to which I will return in the conclusion.

The thesis is divided as follows. Building on the evolution of the conceptual approach to the topic of the study described above, chapter 2 broadly outlines its methodology before discussing the specific research methods used. Chapter 3 provides a summary and analysis of the literature on hip hop versus rap. It begins by locating hip hop versus rap in arguments for hip hop to be considered as a culture - in opposition to its reduction to one of its aesthetic forms, rap. It discusses the efforts of self-identified (post)hip hop activists to elaborate a counter-public sphere of edutainment. It looks at how hip hop versus rap in one of its articulations is a vehicle for Afrocentric ideas of cultural re-centering and cultural property. It explores the profane beginnings of hip hop and considers perspectives that question settled notions of hip hop authenticity. It concludes with a consideration of how hip hop versus rap positions itself and is potentially positioned in relation to municipal spaces. Chapter's 4-7 are based on data from the study. Chapter 4 explores neo-traditional efforts to present hip hop and rap didactically as metaphysically divisible and to use this as a way of defending and defining a black 'hip hop family' and its borders. It examines the investing of hip hop culture and rap music by hip hop educators with racialised properties of consciousness, spirituality and moral intention. Chapter 5 is a cultural biography of a black hip hop artist and educator who defines his practice in antithetical terms to those of the previous chapter. It assesses the relative influence of acculturation and initiation into hip hop culture in the decision to use hip hop educationally with disadvantaged youth. It considers hip hop both as a radical aesthetic and as a vehicle for personal development. In light of where these possibilities diverge, it examines where personal development and the therapeutic imperatives of state control of youth potentially converge. Chapter 6 develops the theme of hip hop education and personal development work with youth. It shows the articulating of hip hop versus rap as 'hip hop versus grime music'. It explores pedagogic efforts to counter the evidence of poor socialisation as found in libidinous emcee flow through the latter's schooling and channelling. It considers how municipal cooptation refracts both routine hip hop themes and wider social and political forces. Chapter 7 picks up on questions of hip hop culture's racial and cultural composition -

the maintenance and expansion of its borders both symbolic and social. It examines how hip hop theatre provides an arena for reckoning with the cultural politics of white middle-class participation in a now planetary hip hop culture. Chapter 8 summarises the findings and its thesis. It considers the various possibilities the new hip hop practices from the fieldwork make available. It expands upon one particular model of edutainment through an interpretation of a spoken-word poetry performance commenting on hip hop versus rap themes. It considers the implications of this model for new hip hop practices and suggests some alternatives.

CHAPTER TWO

Researching New Hip Hop Practices: Iterative Journey and Methodology

Methodological Position of the Study

The aim of the data gathering and analysis carried out for this thesis was to create 'new and theoretically expressed understandings' of new hip hop practices (Strauss and Corbin, in, O'Reilly, 2009: 94). From the outset I was concerned with doing ethnographic research that would lead to findings combining descriptive richness and theoretical rigor (Seale, 2000). In the iterative-inductive approach taken by grounded theory (O'Reilly, 2005/2009), theory and data are interdependent. The theoretical insights arrived at in this thesis are hopefully exemplified 'with sufficient instances of data so that theoretical statements become convincing, because they are understood to be linked with life-experiences that everyone can recognize' (Seale, 2000: 88; see Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 166). Theory, whether acknowledged explicitly or not, is constructed by the researcher at every step of the way through a dynamic, often subliminal relationship with multiple processes centred on, but not limited to, ethnographic data. A reflexive awareness of this in the context of an interpretive, qualitative project might have little to offer research 'validity' or 'representativeness' (Plummer, 2005; Seale, 2000). It is nonetheless critical to the production of a minimally 'credible' and 'plausible' research study (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Kathy Charmaz, in a departure from the table-rasa grounds of classic grounded theory, is adamant that a researcher's ideas, knowledge and experience - even their presuppositions - are not an impediment to the inductive generation of theory from data. She argues that 'guiding interests, sensitizing concepts, and disciplinary perspectives often provide us with such points of departure for developing, rather than limiting, our ideas. Then we develop specific concepts by studying the data and examining our ideas through successive levels of analysis' (Charmaz, 2006: 17). In this elaboration of a grounded approach, theory generation begins prior to explicit data gathering and potentially contributes greatly to a more 'situated' study (see Charmaz, 2009; Silverman, 2005). So this might include reflecting on past knowledge, biographical experiences and reading during the gestation of ideas for a project; devising theoretical questions that help clarify initial research problems; making sampling decisions; choosing and finding research sites; gaining access to these sites. Even during the preparation stages of a research project theory generation is taking place. But in a grounded approach this is as much about revising and re-plotting the research itinerary and posing new questions as bolstering knowledge of a topic. By definition, the messy process of coaxing tentative abstracted conceptions into more rounded theoretical understandings anchored in something concrete requires that as many of these emerging routes are followed and explored in the field as is practicable. As Clive Seale writes 'It is clear that grounded theorizing, by the very fact of its being 'grounded', involves a kind of 'testing' of researchers' ideas in data' (Seale, 2000: 98).

Such 'testing' or theoretical reflexivity has, in practical terms, for me involved constant interpretation and analysis of fieldwork data; keeping field notes; taking photos; making field and interview recordings; transcribing, sorting, analysing and coding data; assembling and examining field artefacts; having conversations with colleagues and supervisors; dealing with the practical problems and conceptual cul-de-sacs every research project encounters at some stage. Neither of the above inventories is exhaustive. But their inclusivity would appear to suggest virtually everything experienced by a researcher before, during, and whilst writing a piece of ethnography has some bearing on the generation of theory. This is an idea of theory not only grounded in data but in 'the work of the analysts themselves' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 167). Perhaps the over-determination of theory implied

here is merely a truism, and I would be the first to say some contributions to my project have been more significant than others. And yet, the experience of developing a theory of hip hop versus rap and its new hip hop practices iteratively makes actually distinguishing these different levels quite difficult in practice. That a plethora of earlier and later insights have eddied, flowed, and run into each other over the long course of my interest in this topic rather confirms this pragmatic yet elusive sense of over-determination.

Charmaz underscores what she regards as the potentially dynamic interplay between theory, data gathering, and prior experience: 'Clues about the form and content of theorizing reside within data-gathering methods – and the researcher's experiences' (Charmaz, 2009: 52). Karen O'Reilly echoes the role of the researcher's biography in a makeshift, processual construction of theory: 'The discovery of grounded theory results from an interplay between the researchers and the data, where the researcher is not afraid to draw on his or her own experiences' (O'Reilly, 2009: 94). I have already indicated that I have taken a heuristic approach to developing the central concepts of this thesis, derived as much by accident and serendipity as by meticulous design. In the previous chapter, I discussed the emergence of the study, providing an account of the long pre-fieldwork incubation of my thinking about new hip hop practices and some of the factors – professional, biographical and research based - which helped orientate its conceptual evolution. Charmaz argues why she believes long and direct prior experience of a topic area can be highly beneficial to the subsequent development of theory through fieldwork.

> Rather than denying our pasts and removing ourselves from theoretical conversations of the present, we need to scrutinize how our experiences and disciplinary ideas have influenced us and what we find in the empirical world. We can construct fresh interpretations about the world without ignoring earlier knowledge. Granted, it means balancing openness to the empirical world, conceptual innovation about it, *and* acknowledgement of scholarly literatures. Building inductive analyses precludes merely applying extant ideas.

(Charmaz, 2009: 50)

Referring back to the pre-history of her research into terminally ill patients, she also states: 'By drawing on my past, I better understand their present. Did my past preconceive what I saw and heard? Not exactly. I still brought sociological questions to the data and let fresh theoretical understandings of them emerge, but my background sensitized me to my

participants experiences in ways that other social scientists might not share' (Charmaz, 2009: 52-53). However, Les Back's warning that over-familiarity with a topic area can result in autobiographical self-absorption and complacency bears emphasising. At its worst grounding a project in 'insider' knowledge can mean that

> Autobiographical experience becomes the only necessary source needed to think with and write with. Listening to others becomes irrelevant because he or she already knows the culture from the inside and paradoxically the accounts of the people being listened to are muted.

> (Back, 2004: 210)

Aiming for adequacy at the level of meaning and explanation – rich description and theory – probably remains the best proof against the 'guiding interests' and 'sensitizing concepts' of prior experience eclipsing the data and leading to solipsistic work. If brought into a fruitful confrontation with the experiences of 'others', far from obscuring, the researcher's experiences should light the way to some unfamiliar theoretical pathways and prospects. In what follows, I sincerely hope I have managed to draw on my own prior knowledge and experience of hip hop culture in ways that honour this heuristic ideal.

I have set out a deliberately loose understanding of grounded theorizing here, preferring to see it as a 'general set of precepts and perspectives' rather than as a rigid 'set of formulae and goals' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 166).[5] I strongly endorse the methodological pragmatism of Hammersley and Atkinson which favours choices based on the usefulness of the 'concepts' and forms of 'analysis' offered by a particular approach rather than proofs of strict adherence to a single 'model or system' (168). For example, as these authors point out, grounded theory is historically associated with 'pragmatist symbolic interractionism' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 166). My thesis, however, employs an iterative-inductive grounded approach within a range of ethnographic interactions, cultural representational forms and levels of analysis. Theory is applied here within, and derived from, field observations, participant observations, interview narratives, and biographical narratives. But the theory is also grounded in an engagement with written and performed examples of

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[5] I do not, for example, make a fetish in my fieldwork of 'constant comparison' nor 'theoretical saturation' (see Seal, 2000: 92-97) but I have coded and analysed my data (see later in the chapter) in a manner broadly consonant with grounded theory principles. I have also attempted to employ where possible theoretical sampling (see Charmaz, 2006).

hip hop poetry. My 'close readings' of the social character of poetic texts have sought at once to pay careful attention to literary and cultural performance and forms, figurative strategies, and discursive constructions (see Alexander, 2003).

Entering the field of hip hop versus rap

What began with an explicitly politicised unease with the municipal capture or sequestering of young people's expression using hip hop eventually became an ethnographic study of the efforts of artistic practitioners and activists to elaborate a counter public sphere or movement through new hip hop practices. The hip hop culture I explore in this thesis is thus not one of emcee crews, B-Boys, hip hop jams and raves, or graffiti writers working the subterranean possibilities of the urban night (although it does spill out onto the street!). The 'field' of my study is the consciously 'mature' hip hop (see Chang, 2006) of 'the hip hop generation' (Kitwana, 2002); active 'grown up' participants and aficionados, many of whom were born between 1965 and 1984. It is a milieu of community level action, outreach, and artistic, educational and institutional partnerships, alliances and encounters (Ards, 2004). In terms of its settings, this is a hip hop of the lecture hall, meeting room, school classroom, youth-club, rehearsal space, and public theatre. As a 'post-hip hop' of edutainment it is comprised of lectures, writing and performance workshops, spoken-word and 'slam' gigs, theatrical devising, and public performance in theatre venues (Asante JR., 2008). The data reflects the operational, spatial and disciplinary diversity of this milieu. The majority of the fieldwork was conducted in London in 2006, and then from 2008 to 2009. I made two short revisits to the field in late 2009 and early 2010.

Interviews alone are of restricted value for researchers wanting animate details of the myriad processes - relationships, environments, idioms, and incidental details of behaviour and conversation – that go into the construction by participants of their everyday social worlds (see Duneier, 2001; Silverman, 2005). I therefore used a combination of qualitative field methods. Observing and participating in a range of educational sessions, for example, was central to my coming to an understanding of how the young people who enter the ambit of post-hip hop culture through education behave and interact around the often explicit intra-cultural politics of hip hop versus rap. Moreover, this allowed a privileged vantage-point from which to examine the forms of creativity and the nature of the

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expressions that were being elicited by hip hop educators. Participating in a hip hop theatre workshop where I had to act, dance and rap allowed me to temporarily assume the position of a hip hop practitioner. Here I was particularly fortunate as a white researcher of hip hop culture to be able to contribute to the creation and public performance of a theatrical work dealing with the subject of white people's involvement in hip hop culture. In order to gain the subjective accounts and critical commentary of the hip hop artists, workshop leaders and workshop participants, I conducted in-depth interviews, and, with young people, focus group interviews. I also used a cultural biographical interviewing approach with key informats to explore some antecedent and developmental factors in how they were located in hip hop culture (see Chamberlayne et al, 2000). Crucially, I made recordings of public recitations of rap lyrics, and assembled written rap poems from the lectures and workshops for later analysis. The examples of these I include in the findings are ones which I believe offer an artistic commentary on central hip hop versus rap themes. The purposes of validity are best served by using more than one method of investigation; checking the results of different methods used on a subject against each other. The combination of data in this thesis, which includes field observations, interview narratives and lyrical analysis, should contribute to the validity of the findings with respect to triangulation (see Silverman, 2005).

As I have already indicated it was my reading and early fieldwork that confirmed what had hitherto been only an inchoate sense that behind the new hip hop practices I was witnessing professionally was an identifiable constellation of self-styled 'raptivists', spoken-word artists, hip hop educators, and hip hop theatre practitioners. Karen O'Reilly speaks of the way in which a sample can emerge whilst a researcher is in the field. A sample can form through an emerging awareness on the part of the researcher of 'the categories of the researched', the 'ways the group divides itself up' (O'Reilly, 2005: 40). What was quickly evident was how the socially ameliorative aspirations of the self-styled raptivist were usually linked to a concern with hip hop's cultural authenticity, credibility and legitimacy. This alone served to group the actors, at least symbolically, as a loose collectivity or movement; parts of an increasingly global post-hip hop culture (see Basu and Lemelle, 2006; Chang, 2006). Likewise, this 'theoretical sample' (O'Reilly, 2005) was collectively linked, imaginatively and ethically, in its opposition to hip hop's purported deformation in word,

deed and symbol as mere 'rap' (see Ards, 2004; Kitwana, 2002/2004). Whilst this is a multicultural milieu, the majority, but not all of my key informants, are black. Indeed, the new hip hop practices I discuss in my findings demonstrate a reflexive preoccupation, shared by black and white protagonists, with the legitimate social, cultural and racial composition of hip hop culture and the location of its borders. Hence, the multiculture character of hip hop versus rap is in fact a key point of contention and debate in this study.

A further important point about this sample: London's post-hip hop scene is highly networked and entrepreneurial. It involves a complex web of commissions, free-lance employment and short-term contracts, artistic occupancies, and relationships with a host of cultural and educational institutions and sources of governmental and third-sector funding. Not surprisingly many of my informants are acquainted with each other either personally or by reputation. Some are close personal friends, and artistic and educational collaborations between people I met during different phases of the fieldwork were commonplace. Indeed, it was evident that the 'employment channels' Pardue (2004) speaks of were heavily dependent on informal, convivial networks supported by mobile communications, online networking and blogging. The various work-related meeting points, plus a night-time milieu of hip hop jams, spoken-word events and clubs, made possible the face-to-face exchange of information about work opportunities and new funding streams, and presented real-time opportunities for collaborative planning. The following extract from my fieldwork notes should give a sense of what I am speaking of:

> Attending the lectures I regularly have fleeting encounters with a variety of black men and women mostly in their mid twenties to late thirties who work freelance as consultants, trainers, artist/teachers and social entrepreneurs, and all of whom readily identify themselves as progressive exponents of hip hop culture or the 'hip hop generation'. I speak to people running artist agencies, doing events management, music publishing and production, web and graphic design. I learn that these people, often brandishing business cards and clearly intent on networking and expanding their contacts, are regularly employed by local authorities and charities to run community based workshops and do educational outreach. The pretty universal enthusiasm and interest with which my research is greeted seems to owe much to a certain entrepreneurial openness to any possible opportunity, particularly those which might offer the prospect of putting one's own work on the map. Research seems typically to be seen in instrumentalist terms as publicity and promotion. But I have no doubt that the zeal extended to the person who can 'spread the message' is not purely self-interested. Each conveys positivity and an interest in my research, frequently urging me with a certain amused indulgence, perhaps honed in personal development training

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seminars, to distil the aims of my research into some sort of pithy mission. A 'can do' attitude is mandatory, coupled with a certain restlessness and short attention-span revealed in lots of earnest nodding, stolen glances over the shoulder or down at the mobile phone and a need to keep moving around – working the room – so as to get to the next conversational hub. Each person is developing 'projects' involving young people and exploring new 'ideas'; they are in 'negotiation' with 'partners' and looking at various 'options'. This modus-operandi attests to a veritable 'grown up' (post)hip hop cottage industry.

One of the basic routes into a research project is to find an activity or area located in or around one's own experience and existing interests. As already indicated in my discussions of grounded theorizing and hip hop in youth work, my wanting to research new hip hop practices was consequent on experiences in my cultural and professional biography. This approach, as Clinton Sanders puts it, has certain distinct practical advantages: 'Here access is not a problem, some measure of rapport has been established, and he or she has already "learned the ropes"…that in a major way, shape the collective action within the setting' (Sanders, 2009: 63). The individuals and groups behind these new hip hop practices were thus, from the outset, relatively easily accessible to me as a researcher. I had a long-standing connection with people linked through music making, DJing, musical production, arts education and poetry writing to the generationally older parts of London's hip hop scene. I was also connected to the world of hip hop workshops through my professional youth work and through contacts in the theatre, arts education, and arts administration. It has to be said, my years of emceeing in clubs and at various jams and gigs with close musical collaborators, and doing bits of recording, were largely confined to the years between 1982 and 1993. My past involvement in hip hop was closely linked to moving in a certain post-London punk milieu of West-End club nights, East-End warehouse parties, and musical jams. Having been active on this scene during UK hip hop's infancy I was able as an ethnographer to trade on a sort of honorary older 'hip hop head' status and use my continued proximity to certain people to ease access and quickly gain the trust of some of the hip hop practitioners whose work I was researching. Fairly standard in ethnography, I was relying upon a combination of 'convenience', 'snowball' and 'theoretical' sampling' (see Bryman, 2004: 304; O'Reilly, 2005: 39-41; Polsky, 1998: 124). Based on what I already knew and could learn from the internet, I drew up a list of arts educational organisations working with or directly employing hip hop artists in an outreach capacity. There being so much activity in London involving new hip hop practices I was in the end only able to research a fraction of

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the projects I was eventually given access to. My fieldwork choices were partly dictated by practical and situational exigencies but as far as possible guided by theoretical imperatives. It was always my intention to cover a spectrum of new hip hop practices including educational and cross-arts experiments with hip hop. It was important, for instance, to explore the uses of hip hop in both formal and informal educational contexts.

Glaser and Straus maintain that 'the basic question in theoretical sampling…is: *what* groups or subgroups does one turn to next in data collection? And for what theoretical purpose?' (in Seale, 2000: 92). My fieldwork began with an in-depth biographical study of a hip hop artist and educator, asking what makes such a person decide to combine their own artistic work with running community based educational workshops. This helped to clarify a lot of theoretical ground particularly related to the emergence of a spoken-word poetry scene in the early 1990s around which many self-proclaimed hip hop heads clustered. Importantly, the latter was a key constituent of a nascent post-hip hop culture self-consciously taking the cultural activism of earlier black arts movements as its model (see Fisher, 2004; Kitwana, 2004). This contributed greatly to a burgeoning awareness on my part of the cultural regeneration themes of hip hop versus rap. The part of my fieldwork that examined the educational outreach of a 'slam poet' involved gaining access to her work through a high profile, sponsoring literary organisation. The fieldwork for this took me into a number of secondary schools in three inner-London boroughs to the North and East of the city, and involved the participation of mixed sex school children in years eight and nine (age 13-14). Scanning events organized for Black History Month I chanced upon a series of weekly public lectures on hip hop. These open access talks took place in a Central London municipal hall and a university lecture theatre in South London, respectively, and explicitly constructed hip hop versus rap as a battle between sacred and profane. I became an attendee at the lectures and recorded my impressions and made notes, taking every opportunity to engage the speakers, organizers, and other members of the audience in conversation. The social enterprise behind the lectures in South London on 'hip hop history' had organised a book launch for one of their own hip hop authors, in combination with an exhibition of early UK hip hop club flyers. It was whilst attending this event that I met a self-declared hip hop educator who invited me to observe some emcee workshops he was running at a North

London youth club with young people 'at-risk' between the ages of nine and eighteen. Perhaps a year before first embarking on my fieldwork I became aware of the work of the hip hop theatre organisation whose workshop I later participated in. This was through attending a theatre production of theirs in London. Much later, I made contact with the administrator and was invited to participate in one of their workshops. In doing so, I was given access to other established hip hop practitioners independently engaged in their own experiments with hip hop and theatre.

Listening, observing and reading new hip hop practices

The 'insider/outsider' (Walsh, 2004) participant observer will attempt to gain intimate access to an identified social setting by being open from the outset about their aims and intentions. Wherever I was based I attempted in my fieldwork to be as open as possible about what I was doing and why I was doing it, and to take time to explain how the data I was gathering would be used. As somebody who had worked professionally as a youth worker and more latterly as a university lecturer I was comfortable in workshop and classroom situations. Moreover, I had many years earlier also trained and worked professionally as an actor. This meant my direct participation in the creation of a theatre show also perhaps posed less of a challenge than might otherwise have been the case. In other words, the lecture hall, meeting room, school classroom, youth-club, rehearsal space, and public theatre were all public spaces with which I was comfortable and familiar professionally. Other than at points in the lectures and talks, I made no effort whatsoever to play down my presence as a researcher or to slink into the background.

These were all milieus where encounter, dialogue and shared tasks are routine, and 'outsiders' regularly visit and solicit for information; where time limits and deadlines for getting work completed are a constant. Some of the exigencies and imperatives that are cultural norms in these institutions served therefore to minimize the obtrusive potential of my presence as a researcher. This also meant that what felt the most natural thing to do was to be as involved as possible and to make little effort to disguise my curiosity. I also believed such openness was necessary for ethical reasons. For example, young people in both the youth club and school classrooms were sometimes reluctant to engage with me. There could be uneasiness at my presence as a researcher and sometime co-facilitator. I

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came to attribute this largely to the ambivalent relationship these young people had with the whole business of having their informal creativity elicited and subjected to the public gaze of adults they were still in the process of forming a relationship of trust with. On the one hand, these were young people often only too eager to have an audience for their creative expression. They were hungry for public recognition and approval. On the other, shyness and a fear of looking foolish combined with a certain wariness and awkwardness as they attempted to navigate the ethical parameters of the workshop and its rules governing acceptable expression. It was both their emceeing skills and their voice as particular types of young people that were being elicited. But to avoid transgressing the ethical bounds of the workshop some were required to cultivate a vigilant, reflexive sense of social context and appropriateness. It was a stated expectation of these workshops that participants strive to filter out any idioms and content violating not only mainstream standards of morality but those of 'conscious' hip hop culture. Hence, during some moments in my fieldwork I was burdened with a sense of my own role as ethnographer merging with both the explicit remedial aims of the workshops and their implicit surveillance function. Were the young people who did not want me to observe them, hear them, or read their lyrics seeking to elude what they perceived as my efforts to render legible, to make available for pedagogic scrutiny, their subjectivities (see Willis, 2006)? I sought therefore to be alert to such cues and to respect as far as possible the latter's right to withdraw from 'view' without forgetting that I was in situ precisely to arrive at a more informed understanding of hip hop pedagogy.

When I first arrived at the 'The Hip Hop History Lectures' in South London I made it my business to speak to the organisers as soon as possible, to let them know why I was there, to explain the aims of my project, and my institutional affiliation. However, because these were public lectures which I had assumed would be attended by journalists I had opted to use my audio recorder without first seeking consent. It was some weeks into the lectures when I was asked by one of the organisers in the middle of somebody's talk to switch off my recorder. I did so and apologized at the end. However, I was one of only two regular white attendees in the audience and had a sense that my presence had aroused at least mild curiosity verging possibly on suspicion. These lectures it transpired had been put on by an Afrocentric social enterprise, and some of the content from the stage had distinct black

supremacist overtones (see chapter three). I was a white researcher observing a black educational project which it was evident framed hip hop versus rap in racialogical terms. This was only obliquely implied by the title of the lectures: 'Hip Hop History', so was something I learnt only after first attending.

Ned Polsky writes that 'Successful field research depends on the investigator's trained abilities to look at people, listen to them, think and feel with them, talk with them rather than at them' (Polsky, 1998: 119). He rejects the intrinsic importance to this endeavor of 'some impersonal apparatus such as a camera or tape recorder or questionnaire' (ibid). Indeed, speaking in the context of field-work with criminals, he believes such apparatus a positive impediment to good ethnography. I made extensive use of audio-tape recording for the fieldwork and took hundreds of photos as an aide-memoire (see Duneier, 2001: 341-342). Apart from in the theatre workshop where I was aiming to become a full member of the ensemble so decided to have about me as little research paraphernalia as possible. I hope in general that I was able to honour Polsky's simple but profound insight into the essentials of good ethnographic fieldwork. However, as I have indicated, the places my research took me into might have been a 'natural environment' for hip hop practitioners at work but not necessarily the young people who came into their orbit. Indeed, this point is underlined with respect to the institutional eliciting of young people's emcee skills discussed in chapter six of this thesis. In all the research sites, therefore, other than the theatre workshop, I carried a tape recorder in a small bag at hip height attached to my shoulder and recorded almost constantly, my camera slung round my wrist with the shutter permanently open. Having told or reminded informants at the beginning of a particular session that I would be recording and taking photos I was then be able to move amongst them at will for the full duration picking up ad-hoc conversations, encounters, and incidental comments, photographing individuals and groups. Assessing the possibility that the presence of a tape recorder could prove obtrusive in a research setting, Mitch Duneier (2001) provides a useful rebuttal for this idea from sociologist Howard Becker. According to Becker, the complex array of social pressures and influences within almost any field setting will ultimately work to override the awkward presence of a tape recorder and thereby neutralize its potential threat.

Where I was based in school classrooms it was my role to actively support the creative writing process. These workshops were at once structured and informal, noisy and focused, owing to the irreverent but driven facilitation style of their leader. Being on hand as her assistant to offer advice and support in writing poems and emcee lyrics gave me license to both engage young people in impromptu conversations on the creative process and their relationship to hip hop, and to note, examine and obtain samples of the work they were creating. I was able to closely observe the interactions of the workshop leader with the young people and to join in these exchanges. The audio recordings from all of the sessions I took part in throughout the fieldwork were inevitably of variable quality due to acoustics, numbers of people, proximity and levels of noise. However, they were often useful to support, augment, or correct the field-work notes that I had made at the end of each session. Moreover, some of what proved to be the most salient conversational exchanges between informants, particularly during the lectures and in the school classrooms, were recorded in this ad-hoc way. Not discounting interactive or 'reflexive' effects, nor overlooking their performative character, these recordings supplied me with comparatively unguarded assertions, disclosures, banter, argot, idiomatic constructions, personal anecdotes, conjecture and opinion that no focus-group or interview could have. Duneier points out that 'The meanings of a culture are embodied, in part, in its language, which cannot be grasped by an outsider without attention to the choice and order of the words and sentences' (Duneier, 2001: 339).

The question of how to eliminate reflexive influences which may bias the study is a profoundly difficult one in qualitative research such as this. But as Ken Plummer argues, the risk of reflexive interactions and informant misinformation can never be fully eliminated from research whose 'goal' is to draw up an account of 'a vocabulary of motive' (Plummer, 2005: 158 – 159). However, alertness and honesty about the manner in which a study's truth has been 'assembled' from inevitably fallible 'variables' is vital to its credibility (ibid: 157). Indeed, it was these fragments and contingent openings that arguably marked the epistemological limits of some of my interview data. Although, as I discuss below, for all their moments of illumination the serendipitous exchanges encountered in the field as a participant observer were still not able to supply me with the more substantial 'cultural'

narratives of the biographical interviews I conducted. Recording in this way, however, also meant I was able to obtain a verbatim audio record of public performances of rap emceeing that could later be transcribed and analysed. This was particularly useful at the hip hop talks and lectures where from-time-to-time a speaker would recite a spoken-word poem or rap to underscore a didactic point, or to provide a commentary on the themes of the lecture, in the process modeling hip hop edutainment.[6] What I also found was that many of the young people participating in both the youth club and school workshops were only too happy for me to record their rap performances or to photograph their original pieces of writing. The benefits of this were twofold: at times it allowed me to enter into a 'call and response' relation where I offered my own rapped renditions of their or my lyrics. For me, this was not about trying to get on the young people's level but was about taking their creative production seriously. In the comparatively brief time I had with them I needed to establish some basic trust. Showing a willingness to make myself vulnerable by performing their lyrics was a really effective way of doing this whilst at the same time providing some validation of their creative efforts. It also meant, importantly, I was able to obtain a record of the styles of young people's emcee vocal delivery, in conjunction with an orthographic record of their lyric writing (see Gordon, 2005: 378-379). Being able to return to the sonic rapped performance with its peculiar rhythmic 'flow', accent, tonal shadings, and cadences was important for being able to culturally situate some of the lyrical examples at the stage of data analysis. Having a graphic record of the handwriting, spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, and stanzaic form of the poems and rap lyrics from the field, crucially allowed me to make inferences in light of the institutional circumstances of their production. The rap poems I offer an interpretation of in chapter seven from the hip hop theatre workshop (one of which is my own) were written by individual performers during the devising of a theatrical sketch that deployed a largely rap libretto. These poems, essentially dramatic monologues, constitute pivotal moments in the narrative arc of the piece. So where in much of the fieldwork I was noting, collecting and recording lyrics here I was more-or-less fully immersed in their creation, collaboration, and performance. I was

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[6] The conclusion to this thesis provides an example from the 'Hip Hip History' lectures of this form of poetic meta-narrative with my interpretation and analysis.

able to reconstruct and analyse this dramatic narrative by obtaining copies of the poems from their authors and by using my field notes.

One of the key interview methods I used in this study was the life-history or biographical approach. Because of wanting to better understand the vernacular history of new hip hop practices it was necessary to augment and calibrate what could be gleaned from ethnographic observation with a personal testimony of the 'agential enterprises' or 'projects' of particular hip hop practitioners (Archer, 2003: 6). As Michael Rustin (2000) says, where sociology has traditionally been interested in subjectivity and personal meaning this has normally been at the level of the group and has centred on the inter-subjective and collective modes of meaning making. An individual focus reflects a sociological interest in how individual agents reflexively mediate their environment and social structures (Bauman, 2003; Giddens, 2004; Rustin, 2000). In these interviews what I was primarily setting out to explore was 'a vocabulary of motive' for the self-described life projects of key individuals (Plummer, 2005: 158-159).[7] This is related to the critically realist insight that the complexity of phenomena is not a valid reason to abandon efforts to understand it but rather dictates that the process of reaching understanding will be elusive and necessarily incomplete (Graeber, 2001: 267-268). As Craib puts it, 'Theory identifies real but unobservable social structures, the nature of which explains what we can observe' (Craib, 1992: 153). The biographical approach I used in parts of this thesis is premised upon the insight that a person possesses an ontologically substantial self, emergent through and mediated by, though not reducible to, its social environment (Archer, 2003; Ryle and Soper, 2002). Invoking the German Romantic concept of *bildung*, the idea of biographical *becoming* involves a dynamic process of acculturation and active agency. My pivotal concerns were with grasping how an individual had come to be involved with hip hop, how they understood their role in hip hop culture, and what they now wanted to do with hip hop and why. I was interested how they as 'movement intellectuals' (Eyerman, 2004) theorised 'new hip hop practices'. The words of my informants in this thesis are therefore at one level treated 'naturalistically', as a 'resource' for making sense of conscious purposes (Byrne, 2004: 182 – 183). However, as I discuss below in the section on data analysis, the social and

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[7] I explain this term more fully below.

cultural nature of language and communication also ensures the fallibility of any actor's self described project. Not only do individuals constantly act on faulty, partial knowledge, the linguistic codes and categories they use to describe their projects come from what is culturally available, and this in turn is subject to broader social constraints - as well as enablements (Archer, 2003). Hence, I have also sought in these interviews for discursive repertoires that evidence the inscription of cultural scripts located beyond the field of vision. This ultimately means treating the words of informants both as a 'resource' for knowledge and a 'topic' of knowledge (Gidley, 2004; Plummer, 2005).

The interviews were conducted in a variety of venues including cafes, parks, offices, art-galleries and informant's homes. The interviews were in-depth, deliberately meandering, and lasted usually between one and an half and three hours. For each interview I prepared a series of questions but was happy to detour and follow the extemporary rhythms of natural conversation. My informants often spoke for long stretches without interruption as they recounted a key episode from their biographies, gave their rendition of hip hop culture's beginnings, interpreted hip hop's present-day cultural politics, or explained the evolution of their own artistic craft and/or teaching techniques. Throughout these interviews I frequently struggled with the urge to engage my informants in a political debate about one or other of these things. I felt the impulse to argue, contradict, correct and expound my own pet theories on hip hop. For the most part I was able to contain these urges - but listening to my interviews during transcribing I was struck how at points I had interpolated and expanded a theme when it would possibly have been better to allow my informants more time to ruminate and expand in their own terms (see Polsky, 1998: 119-120). But there were also moments when the racialised cultural politics of hip hop versus rap would briefly erupt to the surface during a conversation. A few times I was unable to conceal my frustration with black male informants who had refused to condemn racialist Afrocentric explanations of hip hop as the cultural product and exclusive property of black African people. One time this was thrown back at me as an expression of my white academic privilege: 'If we're deciding what the reaction should be it might help to be in the position of the person who's experiencing it.' Another black male informant had professed his keen admiration to me for the work of black American hip hop educator and author

Black Dot. In his book of 2005, *Hip Hop Decoded*, Black Dot speaks of how the same white/grey 'evil ones' who were jealous of ancient Egypt's achievements, and therefore set out to steal and divert its civilization, introduced gangsta rap much later in 1989 in a bid to destroy 'real' hip hop. I put it to my informant that Black Dot's rank racialist thinking, his anti-rational exalting in superstition, and reliance on conspiracy theory, invalidated his claims to be taken seriously as an educator. I asked:

> 'What about the racialism though, and the anti-semitism?'
>
> V: 'I'm wary when people use the term racism in relation to black people.'
>
> Patrick: 'Not racism; racialism. I'm talking about seeing things in terms of, say, 'black thought', or an essentially white or black way of looking at things - that's what I mean by racialism.'
>
> V: 'I think it's pivotal because that's what hip hop emerged from. It was a Hispanic African American culture, and I think, again, it doesn't get recognition. For example, if you go to certain concerts now – this is the interesting thing – you don't see that many black folk in the concerts in Britain. That's really interesting for me. You don't see no black people in the house; I'm not saying that's a good or bad thing but it's interesting. We had that [culture] but we never created that because we wanted to, we had no choice. There was no alternative. So when someone wants to create that now to explore certain issues people have issues with it – 'you can't do that its separatism dddddd'. But I'm simply sayin that 'you know what? There's a purpose for it.' It's not where I'm coming from but I dip in and out of the black separatism as I dip in and out of the mainstream, that's how I do. I'm not on the black separatist tip.'

These exchanges were fairly mild and never became too ill-humoured. However, one time around the 'Hip Hop History Lectures' a speaker I was in conversation with started to propound black supremacist ideas. When I responded by suggesting that some of what he was calling 'research' touching on questions of melanin and creative ability would not satisfy any standards of proof that I was familiar with he rounded on me angrily, declaring that the most appropriate response to my 'white' impertinence would be to say 'get on your knees and kiss your father's ring'. I provide these examples only to demonstrate some of the stress-points of being a white researcher of hip hop culture seeking to proceed with cultural sensitivity and keen to avoid abusing my white privilege, but also being politically and ethically nettled by the racial absolutism and obscurantism of certain articulations of hip hop versus rap discourse (see Ware and Back, 2002). It was during such moments when the distinction between 'topic' and 'resource' in the words of some of my informants would for me start to collapse. Moreover, I know that I speak here about these black men as a white

male middle-class researcher who enjoys all the many taken-for-granted benefits that flow from 'the possessive investment in whiteness' (Lipsitz, 2006). I am aware of the utter naivety of believing for one moment that either our testy interactions or my writing can conveniently step outside a long history of white supremacism (Bourgois, 2003; Robinson, 2000). But nor do I see anything progressive in maintaining silence over efforts to (re)claim hip hop for a politics whose only answer to racist history is to retreat to the sour consolations of a racialised 'binomial logic' (Back, 2002; Gilroy, 2004a).

Analysing hip hop versus rap

Taking Charmaz's dictum as its model, this study has 'aimed for a coherent analytic story without sacrificing the richness and diversity of my participants' lives' (Charmaz, 2009: 59). The findings in this thesis essentially deal with three forms of fieldwork data: field observations; interview narratives; rap poetry/lyrics. The structure of the thesis in terms of its chapters largely follows the different types of fields I entered and the types of activity occurring in those fields - other than chapter five which is a cultural biography of a single informant. So, for example, chapter four deals with hip hop lectures and talks, and chapter six, hip hop education in schools and youth clubs. Hence the basic grouping of data was dictated from the beginning by this structure but arriving at the eventual theoretical and thematic shape of each chapter – e.g., an analytic grouping - was an iterative-inductive process (see Charmaz, 2006; Denscombe, 2007:287-288). However, the different sorts of data, e.g. field observations; interview narratives; rap poetry/lyrics, were sifted, sorted, and reduced for coding and analysis conceptually rather than formally or according to narrative arc. So sections of interview narrative, field observation vignettes, and whole poems or parts of, were grouped and analysed together conceptually as aspects of closely related coded themes, eventually composing a section of a chapter (see Emerson et al, 1995: 143-162). In grounded theorizing coding aids in the quest to find the implicit meanings in the data and enables conceptual comparison across the different levels and types of material (Charmaz, 2009: 56). What guided the coding decisions leading to how the chapters have been divided thematically was evidence from the data of common preoccupations and cultural repertoires in the actions and verbal, artistic, and written expressions of informants. Whether these themes are properly representative of 'emic' 'motives and intentions'

(Macdonald, 2002: 14; see Emerson et al, 1995: 108-109) or serve rather as evidence of the 'interpretational privilege' of the researcher, I leave to the reader to decide. Participant observation, with its commitment to enter the social field and observe the actions and relations therein, traditionally leans towards the concept of 'naturally occurring talk'. In this naturalistic paradigm the actor's meanings take precedence in the interpretation of data (Silverman, 2005: 38-39). However, taken too far such naturalism can encourage the 'ethnographic fallacy' (see Duneier, 2001: 343) in which too reverential an attitude to personal agency, meaning, and the concrete details of social life can end up ignoring hidden structures and constraints, not to mention the actions performed in speech. As Duneier says:

> One of the greatest strengths of first-hand observation is also its greatest weakness. Through a careful involvement in people's lives, we can get a fix on how their world works and how they see it. But the details can be misleading if they distract us from the forces that are less visible to the people we observe but which influence and sustain the behaviors.

(Duneier, 2001: 10)

Moreover, when it comes to analysing artistic texts this fallacious tendency has its aesthetic correspondent. The 'intentional fallacy' (see Mayo, 1974) is where the audience treats the art-work as a non-mediated, direct expression of the intentions, ideas and feelings of its creator. Silverman explains that words 'do not simply describe a state of affairs but perform an action'; words and speech are 'performative' (Silverman, 2005: 178). If the social categories and norms used by actors 'are constructed, made factual, and justified in talk', then such talk is imprinted with powerful social desires - the contingencies of the speech situation - but also the linguistic and cultural codes different actors are constrained to use (Archer, 2003). However, there is nothing to say a methodological pragmatism cannot marry naturalism's commitment to spatial and temporal immersion and relationship building with a theoretically informed awareness of the presence of broader social forces and structures and normalized cultural scripts (see Graeber, 2004). But as Jeffrey Alexander avers, in works of cultural sociology

> These contexts are treated...not as forces unto themselves that ultimately determine the content and significance of cultural texts; rather, they are seen as institutions and processes that refract cultural texts in a meaningful way. They are arenas in which cultural forces

combine or clash with material conditions and rational interests to produce particular outcomes.

(Alexander, 2003: 26)

This injunction well encapsulates the position I arrived at during the iterative journey toward hip hop versus rap detailed above. In the urban ethnography of Bourgois (2003) and Duneier (2001) who deal with crack dealing and addiction and street homelessness respectively, each acknowledge the critical dimension of 'oral performance' in the conversations, snatched exchanges and verbal fusillade they are privy to in the field (Bourgois, 2003: 354). How I have sought to approach the analysis of the data therefore is to indicate how communication is complicated in the sense that personal, sincere expressions be they a part of 'naturally occurring conversations' or be they crafted artistic utterances are at once private and public; at once cultural and social. An analysis of such speech can elicit at once illuminating insights into the subject at hand and the disposition of speakers. Hence, in this sense as well as relying on the cultural expertise of the 'organic' or 'movement intellectuals' in this study to elucidate the cultural politics of 'new hip hop practices', I treat their texts as conversations and conversations as texts. Each is a different modality and temporality of communication, but both draw from cultural repertoires returned to repeatedly during symbolic action and description. This repertoire Kenneth Burke (in Gusfield, 1989: 11) terms a 'vocabulary of motive'; the culturally specific descriptive lexicon used differently by different actors to make their actions 'understandable to them and others' (ibid). For example, at both a formal and a rhetorical level the rap lyrics in this study are self-consciously 'convention defying' with respect to bookish forms of literacy, narrative, and deliberative speech. If not always necessarily so convention defying in their imaginative and ethical content (see Gordon, 2005: 377). An analysis therefore of 'the orthography of hip hop' lyrics in the context of school serves to underscore an ambiguous relationship between their youthful scribes and 'a system of rules in relation to which black, brown, and beige youth have often been politically and pedagogically constructed as illiterate' (ibid: 379). Moreover, the meta-commentary and the 'confessional' are constitutive of the edutainment lexicon of hip hop versus rap.[8] Thus,

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[8] See chapter six.

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the analytic status of the rap lyrics in this study runs from sources of cultural political elucidation, through debate and propaganda, to imaginative reconstruction.

I now turn to the theoretical and exegetical groundwork of the intra-cultural politics that is hip hop versus rap.

CHAPTER THREE:

Hip Hop versus Rap: Discursive Formation and Counter-Public Sphere

> The line dividing the sacred from the profane must be drawn and redrawn time and time again; this demarcation must retain its vitality or all is lost.

> (Alexander, 2003: 115)

> 'So my lyrics flow different than a hip-hop be bop...'[9]

Introduction: hip hop as culture and counter-discourse

All writers on hip hop pay homage to its creative birth in the 'urban entropy' (Gilroy, 2006: 255) of New York's South Bronx in the 1970s. Mark Anthony Neal maintains that 'hip-hop may represent the last black popular form to be wholly derived from the experience and texts of the black urban landscape' (Neal, 2004: 363; see also Gordon, 2005: 380-381). Hip hop was the *bricolage* culture of 'survival' (Dyson, 2007: 75; see Back, 1999) of impoverished Black Americans, African-Caribbeans and Hispanic youth (Chang, 2007; Flores, 1994). The words *bricolage* and survival and the nature of their historically specific conjunction in hip hop are critically important here. First, hip hop's early multi-modal expressive repertoire is the outcome of improvisatory fashioning. Second, early hip hop needs to be understood as a culture in the anthropological sense (Chang, 2007).[10] Third, hip hop culture emerges amid, and in response to, conditions of social deprivation and injustice. As Michael Eric Dyson puts it: 'Hip hop took root in a culture of hardship' (Dyson, 2007: 72; see Marable, 2003: 263). In sum, this produces an account of hip hop at its point of initial

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[9] X-Clan, 'Raise the Flag'.

[10] Although Robin D.G. Kelley (1997: 16-42) offers a persuasive broadside against the exoticising and homogenizing tendencies of academic reports on this 'ghetto' culture based on the ethnographic gaze.

emergence as demonstrably creative; a *culture* and not just an expressive *genre* or aesthetic artifact, oppositional to social privilege and symbolically resistive to political authority. Manning Marable's words typify this understanding of hip hop's primal scene: 'In the 1970s, the four core elements of hip hop were developed…All were creative expressions of an underground, rebellious culture that was directly and fundamentally at odds with the "mainstream"' (Marable, 2003: 264; see also Dyson, 2007: 71-75).[11] Although Marable (2003) and Dyson (2007) look to the lyrics of a few early hip hop artists and the community youth organizing of Afrikaa Bambaata as evidence of an embryonic political consciousness, Neal is more circumspect in his assessment:

> Though [early] hip-hop represented an art form that countered mainstream sensibilities and clearly could be construed as a mode of social resistance, in and of itself, it was not invested with political dimensions…At best hip-hop represented a distinct mode of youthful expression primed to serve as a conduit for political discourse as it coincided with the sensibilities of black youth.[12]

<div align="right">(Neal, 2004: 377-378)</div>

Nonetheless, Neal still attests to early hip hop's inherent countercultural tendencies, and maintains that black youth have fashioned through it a ready 'conduit for political discourse'. Furthermore, as Dyson puts it: 'politics is not only what we hear in hip hop lyrics…it's also in the aesthetic and technical forms that derive from the cultural and intellectual imperatives of restless black innovation' (Dyson, 2007: 75; see also Gilroy, 2006). My quite simple contention is that early hip hop as a (counter) culture with incipient social transformative promise has become an almost utopian point of reference in many recent evaluations of contemporary hip hop (see Asante JR., 2008; Dyson, 2007; Marable, 2003; Black Dot, 2005; Simons, 2006). That the ever elusive, never quite fulfilled promise of hip hop (see Henderson, 1996) – the fully fledged creation of an autonomous counter-public sphere – is forever referenced to this Ur moment. The 'conduit for political discourse' has been a constant in hip hop's thirty odd year existence (Morgan, 2009). But alongside it mutant rhizomatic strands have progressively worked themselves free – or been cut loose – from the culture and have simply come to be known as the musical genre 'rap'. Worse,

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[11] For film treatments of early hip hop culture that broadly agree with this perspective see Charlie Ahearn's 1982 (2007) fictional *Wild Style*; and Tony Silver's (2007) 1983 documentary on New York graffiti writers *Style Wars*. The second of these is somewhat less prone to the romantic mythmaking (for all its virtues) of the first.
[12] There are perhaps some resonances here with conclusions drawn by CCCS thinkers in the 1970s as to the ultimate political significance of post-war British youth subcultures. See Hall and Jefferson (2004).

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these mutants have invaded the public imagination to such an extent that rap - in a development with Oedipal overtones - has become a synecdoche for hip hop (Black Dot, 2005; Simons, 2006). Gwendolyn D. Pough, writing on hip hop's 'seeds and legacies', claims that this reduction serves utterly to mask the grassroots hip hop cultural nexus and its powerfully pervasive collective ethos: 'this movement called Hip-Hop cannot, and should not, be reduced to the music that comes out of it. Rap is a part of Hip-Hop, yes, but only a part. Hip-Hop is a state of mind; a way of living and being that expands further than what kind of music one listens to' (Pough, 2004: 284). Some go further than this to suggest that *rap* is expropriated cultural goods, the theft of cultural copyright (Black Dot, 2005; Simons, 2006). The *locus classicus* of this supposed theft is the sub-genre of rap that came to be known in the early 1990s as 'gangsta rap' and which went on to achieve enormous popular commercial success whilst courting immense controversy (Kelley, 1996; Kitwana, 1994; Lipsitz, 2007). Closely drilled by commercially and racially exogenous interests, refined, homogenized, marketed and tricked out with the correct accoutrements, gangsta rap and its later derivations, according to this view, is *minstrelsy*, a hormone injected pantomime of hip hop adapted to jaded and cynical palates (Kitwana, 1994; Kitwana, 2002).[13] It is the musical and stylistic fodder of those who take a relish in mostly black-skinned apostrophes to, and enactments of, a nihilistic hyper –visceral lifestyle (Asante JR., 2008). The most popular localized variant of this is UK grime, a further *glocal* rhizomatic development in hip hop (see Basu and Lemelle, 2006) which shares the 'thug' cosmology of gangsta rap if not necessarily the commercialism. Working to the emcee/DJ template it incorporates indigenous dance music elements that include Jungle, dancehall and garage (see Gidley, 2007; Goodman, 2010; Reynolds, 2007/2009).[14]

In this chapter I discuss works that seek to contribute to a countervailing progressive movement against the dominance of commercial and nihilistic rap music. These writings excavate hip hop's cultural political history and formation, describing and prescribing its edutainment and pedagogic value and marking out the contours of a hip hop counter-public

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[13] Spike Lee's 2000 movie *Bamboozled,* which directly addresses this charge of minstrelsy, is one example of a high profile intervention into a long-standing debate over culture, racial identity, and political responsibility, particularly among African Americans, that has divided both critics and defenders of hip hop (see Lhamon,1998).

[14] See chapter six of this thesis.

sphere, a post-hip hop culture. I show how hip hop versus rap includes a prominent neo-traditional element that goes beyond an ethical recoiling at the nihilistic content of rap lyrics and the bad example set to young people by certain rap artists. I thus look at how such Afrocentric 'movement intellectuals' seek to locate hip hop's innate progressive capacity as a black vernacular aesthetic in a culturally and racially specific history and identity; and how this simultaneously involves a 'bio-politics' of 'right living'; a certain reductive functionalism; and a racialised topography of group membership. I lastly seek to interrogate some of these claims through a consideration of hip hop's profane beginnings, drawing in critical perspectives on hip hop which disrupt the dichotomous foundations of hip hop versus rap by laying emphasis on its cultural complexity and contradictoriness.

Positive consciousness: hip hop as edutainment

The idea of certain types of rap music, such as pop rap, gangsta and grime, as in decisive ways a corruption of an authentic hip hop culture has been theorized along explicitly normative lines. In this variant of hip hop versus rap discourse it is the ethical value of artistic expression and its content linked to the action and personal conduct of artists that is the chief focus of evaluation (see Dyson, 2007; Kitwana, 2002; Marable, 2003). The opposition thus takes the form of an ethical – even political - fissure running right the way through hip hop culture. Ranked on one side are hip hop's better angels: its socially constructive elements whose messages are 'positive', whose utterances are 'conscious', whose conduct is 'mature', responsible and community minded. On the other side are hip hop's antisocial devils: spreading negativity, lacking self-awareness, egregious and individualistic in their personal conduct.[15] Black American historian Manning Marable

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[15] Although it is important to note that the role played by notions of authenticity is complex in this normative opposition. For a start, hip hop, like earlier and later youth subcultures, is birthed in social antagonism. Its particular forms of carnival, symbolic resistance and creative expression, being in decisive ways a negation of negative circumstances, are constructive in the sense of using what is to hand for pleasure and collective exchange. But whether they are 'positive' in any programmatic sense of consciously spreading a positive message or putting one's creativity to socially constructive uses is another matter. I return to this question further on this chapter. Authenticity, moreover, where hip hop culture is concerned, has perhaps more therefore to do with matters of social location, proximity, and modes and levels of communication and exchange than with the content of one's message or even the ethical character of one's conduct (see Perry, 2004: 202-203). For example, commercially successful rappers with mainstream acceptance may well articulate 'positive' messages in their lyrics, do good and philanthropic works at a community level, but live and operate at some remove from hip hoppers who retain a commitment to the 'underground' (see Kitwana, 2002: 155).

frames this in terms of an intra-cultural conflict (see Gilroy, 2004a), in light of rap, where the outcome of positive and negative forces pitted against each other has important political ramifications:

> There has always been a fundamental struggle for the "soul" of hip hop culture, represented by the deep tension between politically conscious and "positivity" rap artists and the powerful and reactionary impulses toward misogyny, homophobia, corporate greed, and crude commodification.[16]

(Marable, 2003: 259-260)

Although versions of this agonistic are differently ideologically calibrated, not to say subtly shaded (see Allen JR., 1996), the epithet 'conscious' serves as a more-or-less consistent honorific conferred on artists with their feet allegedly planted on the 'positive' side of the line. Dyson's succinct definition of 'conscious' rap as: 'rap that is socially aware and consciously connected to historic patterns of political protest and aligned with progressive forces of social critique' (Dyson, 2007: 64), provides a representative formulation. Lewis Gordon (2005) sees many black, Latino and white adherents of hip hop as essentially 'performing' a metonymic idea of 'blackness' which, exalting in 'adolescence' and immaturity, masks and ultimately reduces the complex range and depth of black identities, re-capitulating age-old white racist libels (see Allen JR., 1996:183-184). For Gordon, the conjunction of hip hop's profanely postmodern form with the kinds of social opportunities and identities capitalist society makes available to working-class black youth give to its keynote immaturity an almost grim necessity (Gordon, 2005: 380; see Neal, 2004). However, whilst Gordon does not contrast this hip hop mainstream to a 'conscious' minority, he does nonetheless identify a roster of hip hop artists, such as Angie Stone, Mos Def and The Roots, who he believes manifest a level of seriousness, subtlety and reflexivity in their lyrics which mark a significant move away from 'performances of blackness', and whose work resonates with audacious black aesthetic traditions unburdened by hip hop's youth cultural baggage (see Gilroy, 2002: 87).

The majority of contributors to debates over consciousness in hip hop are speaking to the historically specific and nationally local context of contemporary black American cultural

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[16] This particular opposition is taken up in chapter six where I report upon efforts by hip hop educators to develop the ethical content of the lyrics of young grime emcees.

political struggles (see particularly Allen JR., 1996; Ards, 2004; Asante JR., 2008; Dyson, 2007; Gilroy, 2004b; Harrison, 2009; Kitwana, 2002; Marable, 2003; Morgan, 2009). Indeed, the seriousness with which these writers treat the topic of positive 'consciousness' in hip hop (and its antonym) is testament to the pivotal though often vexed role played by cultural expression, production and consumption in successive 'Black Atlantic' diaspora political struggles (see Cruse, 2005; Gilroy, 2002; Kelley, 2002; Moses, 1999; Robinson, 2000). Political change involves at once the elaboration of counter-hegemonic *ideas* and *practices*. It implies the malleability of subjectivity with respect to mobilizing individuals and building collective alliances (Friere, 1996; Giroux, 2006; Gramsci, 2005). Cultural expressions are both *product of* and *productive of* political change. With hip hop in mind, Marable thus states that: 'To transform an oppressed community's political behavior, one must first begin with the reconstruction of both cultural and civic imagination' (Marable, 2003: 262). Marable is evidently drawing attention here to the pedagogic capacity of culture rather than to its ostensibly affective, visceral, hedonic and aesthetic dimensions, even if in practice, as explored further on, these are inseparable (see Shusterman, 1991). What he and others are claiming is that hip hop can play a significant role in social 'reconstruction' by raising consciousness through *edutainment* (Allen JR., 1996). Marable gives the example of Malcolm X's rhetorical potency which changed 'how black people thought about themselves as "racial subjects"' (Marable, 2003: 262). For Marable the 'struggle' he refers to for hip hop's 'soul' is thus pedagogic in nature and bears directly on the possibilities for a new revolutionary black political movement, hence the title of his chapter: 'The Hip Hop Revolution' (ibid: 262; see Ards, 2004; Asante JR., 2008; Kitwana, 2002). With similar concerns in mind Bakari Kitwana (2002) devotes a book length study to the political attitudes and organisational potential of black Americans born between 1965 and 1984 who he terms 'the hip hop generation'. In a slightly less programmatic key Neal (2002) provides a contemporaneous assessment focusing on the aesthetic politics – principally related to hip hop culture - of those he calls 'post-soul babies', the generation which comes of age during the downturn of civil rights/black power. Chang (2006) meanwhile has produced an edited collection on recent innovative developments in a now 'mature' hip hop culture; ones that operate at the interface of a variety of art-forms and cultural practices, such as theatre, literature, photography and graphic design, and which, troubling hip hop's borders,

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instantiate new alliances and institutional fields of action.[17] For each of these writers the complex dynamics of recent demographic developments and the forms of cultural activity and consciousness they have spawned is of potentially revolutionary significance. Each is a clarion call intended to draw attention to the equivocal state of hip hop. Insurgent cultural potentialities and experimentation vie with formulaic and packaged entertainment and/or pacifying caricatures of blackness (see also Ards, 2004; Asante JR., 2008).

Thus, a number of writers on hip hop (Allen JR., 1996; Ards, 2004; Asante JR., 2008; Dyson, 2007; Marable, 2003; Henderson, 1996; Kitwana, 2002) lay great emphasis on the positive relationship between 'conscious' expression at the level of artistic content, edutainment, and novel forms of progressive social organizing and political activism. These writings do not merely report upon this cultural politics but are modest forms of intervention in their own right. Ernest Allen JR. speaks, for example, of 'efforts' by a small segment of US rappers during the early 1990s 'to instil a sense of optimism and resistance in the minds and actions of black youth' living in 'predatory and oppressive' social conditions (Allen JR., 1996: 160).[18] For critics who rally around the idea of hip hop edutainment the ultimate value of 'efforts' such as these is indexed largely to their lyrical content. The choice of themes, the nature of the message, the use of language and symbols, are all potential points of controversy and ethical contestation, all semantic evidence for arbitrating consciousness. Dyson suggests that what signally distinguishes conscious rappers from their irresponsible confreres is the fact that the former ethically self-censor and this enables them to speak with conviction and clarity about subjects that matter politically:

> Contemporary conscious rappers are lauded as much for what they *don't* say as for what they spit on record. They don't brag about exorbitant jewellery, excessive women, or expensive automobiles. Conscious rappers *do* talk about racial injustice, police brutality, over-incarceration, political prisoners, rampant poverty, radical educational inequality and more.
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> (Dyson, 2007: 66)

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[17] See, for example, the hip hop literary journal *The Bronx Biannual* (Marshall Lewis, 2007), described on its blurb as 'the most important literary journal in hip-hop America'.
[18] The period from 1987-1993 is frequently referred to as hip hop's 'golden-age'. A high water mark in terms of invention and creativity in rap and a period in which 'conscious rap' rose to brief prominence through groups like Brand Nubians, Public Enemy, X-Clan, Poor Righteous Teachers, Paris and Gang-Starr. See Dyson (2007: 64-66).

Marable discerns plentiful evidence of this tendency in hip hop history. He offers a roll-call of artists who in their lyrical content represent the 'socially conscious current' in hip hop dating back to Grandmaster Flash's 1982, 'The Message' (Marable, 2003: 264-269).[19] Kitwana is unequivocal in regarding the issue of 'social responsibility' in lyrical production as vital to a politically radical hip hop (Kitwana, 2002: 213). Like Marable's, his argument is situated within a broader consideration of concrete and practical ways in which hip hop culture could go beyond edutainment and serve as the organising centre for a progressive black American social movement (ibid: 145-173). For Kitwana the degree and extent of negative lyrical content in rap music – sexism and misogyny (ibid: 87) and 'street culture and prison culture' (ibid: 213) - is a measure of both the difficulty and the necessity of the task of such organizing (ibid: 87). The issue is one ultimately of 'hip-hop's responsibility to Black cultural integrity', requiring 'a united front' to 'challenge the rap industry' and artists to 'raise the bar on lyrical content', so as 'to make socially responsible lyrics as pervasive in hip-hop as those that advance stereotypes' (ibid: 213). Hip hop, according to this line of argument, can alternatively develop self-awareness or demoralize; can foster the consciousness for revolutionary transformation or can prey upon and inflame narcissistic, competitive and atavistic tendencies.

Hip Hop, (counter) cultural activism and the pedagogic

In her discussion of nascent hip hop activism, Angela Ards quotes 1960s black American poet Mari Evans' acid assessment of modern-day hip hoppers: 'the work of contemporary artists is "an expression of self rather than community"' (Ards, 2004: 316). Such a view

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[19] See, Brother D and the Collective Effort's 1980 agit-prop single, 'How We Gonna Make the Black Nation Rise?', which taxes fellow rappers to 'agitate, educate, organise', suggesting that the hedonistic spirit of most rap music is a form of false consciousness entirely in tune with Reagan's emerging political programme to finally finish off the social gains of the 1960s. Significantly, time and again it is Grandmaster Flash's 1982 single 'The Message' that is – as here - cited as the lodestar of conscious rap rather than the more obscure and earlier Brother D record. As Jeff Chang shows, however, the circumstances surrounding the production and release of 'The Message' rather demolish the notion of a groundswell of political consciousness at the time either amongst rap artists or their fans. Chang reports that Flash and most of his crew were completely hostile to the idea of recording and putting out something with such bleak social content and such a downbeat groove (Chang, 2007: 178-179). This is to the extent that only Mel was actually involved in the studio recording and that it was only contractual obligations that compelled Flash and the Five to reluctantly appear – lip synched – on the video for the single. Needless to say, once the single achieved worldwide commercial success a revisionist spin was put on things. That the latter has so worked its way into standard accounts – including Marable's - according 'The Message' and its putative creators almost mythic status, underlines the way that hip hop history– not least by hip hop artists themselves - is often made to serve propagandistic or therapeutic ends.

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typifies the hastily dismissive attitude of some former participants in the civil-rights/black power movements towards a culture they see as riddled with the gross effects of neo-liberal counter-revolution (see Harvey, 2007): a decline amongst young black people into neo-archaic sexual attitudes, celebrations of adolescent irresponsibility, and a-political, nihilistic individualism (see Kitwana, 2002; Gilroy, 2004a; Gordon, 2005; Neal, 2002). It is against this globalising negative view of hip hop that a number of sympathetic, yet critical commentators, many of whom – but not all - class themselves as members of the hip hop generation, seek to contrive a more calibrated charge sheet. Marable speaks of how hip hop forged its authentic progressive spirit in a crucible of suffering. Its 'cultural forms' were shaped amid the 'economic and political turmoil' of 1970s New York (Marable, 2003: 263; see Chang, 2007; Harvey, 2007: 44-48). Tricia Rose has claimed that the 'group affiliation and support system' provided by the early hip hop crews had the capacity to 'serve as the basis for new social movements' (Rose, 1994: 34; see Ards, 2004, 314/316; Cross, 1993: 118; Toop, 2004, 234-235). Ards describes an emerging 'underground' hip hop movement reviving this spirit; one that is helping to usher in 'a prepolitical phase of consciousness building' among the disempowered 'integral to organizing' (Ards, 2004: 316). Marable thus discusses a wave of civil society initiatives and coalitions – 'grassroots political trends' - organized by influential hip hoppers, such as Chuck D of Public Enemy and LL Cool J (Marable, 2003: 256-262). These grassroots political trends have dealt with, amongst other things, 'Voter registration', educational outreach for young people's civic engagement, anti-drug campaigns, 'community organizing', and 'fostering youth leaders' (ibid: 58; see also Kitwana, 2002: 175-177). Marable confidently asserts that the 'hip hop generation' in word and deed is developing the consciousness to fill the political vacuum created by the failures of leadership of older civil-rights and black-power activists long become institutionalized and culturally ossified (Marable, 2003: 261-262).

According to Kitwana (2004), a key element of the supposed recent political coming of age of hip hop has been the development since the early 1990s of a self-consciously poetic off-shoot of rap: 'spoken word', 'slam', street poetry or simply rap poetry (Ards, 2004; Beach, 1999; Damon, 1998; Fisher, 2004; Jocson, 2006). The defining features of spoken word are its populist commitment to live performance, and often raw, politicised, yet humorous,

poetic expressions of bewilderment and anger toward topical and historical issues of social injustice and questions of cultural identity. In terms of its formal and aesthetic features, spoken word and rap poetry predominantly draws upon a range of Black American vernacular oral styles and traditions (Jocson, 2006: 235-236). These include the rhymes and rhythms of rap and the syncopated jazz scansion and speech-based 'projective' verse of sixties Black Arts poetry (Thomas, 1998: 308; see also Smitherman, 1997; Fisher, 2004).[20] The main two live performance mediums for this new artistic movement are the 'slam' poetry event and the 'open mic' session/reading (Beach, 1999; Damon, 1998; Somers-Willet, 2001).[21]

Molefi Asante JR (2008) has dubbed the politically conscious cultural formation that has arisen in the wake of spoken-word's emergence the 'post-hip hop generation' (see also Perry, 2004: 202).[22] As oral poetic forms whose 'page' is the public space, rap and spoken-word poetry supposedly represent a properly democratic form of public address. According to Imani Perry this emerging formation along with cross-art experiments involving theatre (see Chang, 2006; Marshall Lewis, 2007) marks a *potential* shift away from the dominance of capitalist 'repetition' in hip hop and a return to its locally based convivial 'compositional framework' (Perry, 2004: 203). Beach claims that 'slams and open readings provided disempowered groups with a social forum both for political venting and for creative display' (Beach, 1999; 35; see Fisher 2004, 301; Jocson 2006, 236). This is frequently presented as being in contrast to an exclusivist, antediluvian literary scene of private contemplation and

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[20] See chapter five which is a biographical study of an established figure on the British spoken-word scene: a published poet, rapper and educator. Taking as my starting point Stovall's (2006: 79) claim that 'teaching is the natural outgrowth' of the rap poet's work as an artist, writer and performer, I explore what this means in practice through the optic of cultural biography.

[21] At a poetry slam artists 'battle' with each other during short assigned slots in which they perform their poems for an audience and panel of judges. Deliberately populist and as far away from the fusty image of tweedy poetry readings as possible, poetry slams are now a global phenomenon and have become particularly popular as a means of igniting school children's interest in poetry. Chapter six of this thesis reports on some of this work in East End secondary schools. However, slams are a fairly minor phenomenon in the UK and mainly run within youth settings for educational purposes. 'Open mic' sessions/readings, on the other hand, are the real artistic mainstay of the spoken word scene, and whilst by no means sedate affairs, eschew the competitive element of slam events. At an open 'mic night' 'performers usually sign a sign-in list and perform in the order of the sign-in sheet for an audience' (Stovall 2006, 80). On the origins of slam poetry and the spoken word scene, see Damon (1998) and Somers-Willet (2001). See, particularly, Paul Devlin's (nd) documentary film *Slam Nation* which follows a national competition between regional slam teams, one of which prominently includes spoken-word/'post-hip hop' iconic figure Saul Williams.

[22] See the conclusion to this thesis in which I analyse a spoken-word treatment of this cultural emergence by a self-proclaimed hip hop activist and educator who also features in chapter four.

disembodied modes of expression (Baker JR., 1990, 181; Damon 1998, 326; Jocson 2006, 233/236). A further defining countercultural feature of spoken word, according to Maria Damon, is its commitment to free and open access for poets and audiences alike enabled by the use of 'relatively democratised spaces' for performance such as 'bars' and 'clubs' (Damon, 1998: 332). As part of an emergent multicultural, 'public' poetics, spoken word, in Beach's view, is exemplary of 'culturally excluded practices with significant avant-garde, communitarian and pedagogical potential' (Beach, 1999: 35; see Jocson, 2006; Kitwana, 2004; Stovall, 2006).

Hence, Kitwana is moved to proclaim that 'the underground element of hip-hop's cultural movement...is feeding into the spoken word movement' and 'both are fuelling the emerging political movement' (Kitwana, 2004: 116; see Stovall, 2006: 76). Fisher points to spoken word and hip-hop artists 'organizing spaces separate and distinct from formal institutions' (Fisher, 2004: 308). She claims that 'the new literate and literary' of 'African descent' are creating their own 'institutions for holding forums and exchanging ideas; cafes have been transformed into literary salons and bookstores into educational centres' (Fisher, ibid: 292; see also Jocson, 2006: 236). Ards similarly writes of hip hop artists assuming responsibility for the development of 'companies, curriculums and performance spaces to institutionalise hip-hop' (Ards, 2004: 316). Hence, set upon a more communitarian path, and finally acknowledging its proper place in an older black American tradition of civic consciousness raising and activism (Smitherman, 1973; Fisher, 2004; Neal, 2004), hip-hop is being reclaimed from its more commercial, hedonistic and nihilistic elements 'as a tool for liberation' (Ards, 2004: 316). However, of chief significance for my fieldwork is the way in which this 'post-hip hop' countercultural (re)positioning inscribes a commitment to the activist pedagogic uses of spoken-word and rap and efforts to secure its recognition in mainstream educational spaces. If spoken-word, as a consequence of its social and aesthetic marginality, embodies a 'contrarian legacy' (Beach, 1999: 35) with respect to reputable literary institutions, a number of studies on hip hop pedagogy make similar claims regarding its democratizing imperative in relation to mainstream schooling.[23] Mahiri and

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[23] A broad sample of these would include Belle (2003); Bennett (2003); Christen (2003); Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2005); Green (2001); Hall (2007); Hoyler and Mager (2005); Huq (2006/2007); Jocson (2006); Lamont-Hill (2009); Mahiri and Sablo (1996); Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002); Pardue (2007); Pennycook (2005);

Sablo, for example, discern a disconnect between the rich and varied array of oral and written practices African American youth voluntarily deploy outside the school setting and that which mainstream education expects such students to be able to perform with written language in the classroom (Mahiri and Sablo, 1996: 176). Jocson's term for this is 'the literacy gap' (Jocson, 2006: 254). She thus declares that

> To improve learning and teaching practices in urban multicultural settings, educators and researchers must take into account the current (re)emerging phenomenon in poetry, spoken word, and slam competitions in broadening definitions of literacy. We must consider how these cultural forms, as part of a larger hip hop culture, together shape students experiences in and out of school.

(ibid: 253)

These studies emphasize the way in which the inclusion of hip hop in the classroom as a cultural pedagogy 'from below' can serve not only to validate and foster a critical awareness of denigrated identities and cultural practices but in so doing to reverse the terms in which many socially disadvantaged students have traditionally experienced the school curriculum both as an irrelevance and as a culturally alien episteme illegitimately imposed 'from above' (Baker JR., 1990; Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 2005). Hence, Huston Baker JR. calls on schools, in the light of hip hop's popularity, to institute a 'relational pedagogy' able to 'acknowledge and learn the traditions and rhythms' of black urban youth (Baker JR., 1990: 176; see also Lionel-Smith, 1991; Stovall, 2006).

Edutainment so conceived goes somewhat beyond concerns with the ethical content of the rap lyrics of recording artists to become a grassroots face-to-face didactic encounter, part of an effort to establish an alternative public sphere (see Chang, 2006). As Perry conceives this, 'Underground artists are those not defined by the co-opting frame of mass cultural production, but who see as their primary frame of reference the hip hop community' (Perry, 2004: 202). Indeed, as I shall show in subsequent chapters, these grassroots and didactic spaces of encounter are simultaneously seen as: extending cultural validation and recognition in Baker JR's terms, places for artistic and personal experimentation (see Morgan, 2009), and the opening up of new fronts in the war against negative rap.

Stovall (2006). If there is a theme that unites the majority of these studies it is that hip hop pedagogy represents a 'penetration' of hegemonic spaces and institutions 'from below'; a 'storming of the gates of the citadel'. See my concluding remarks to the present chapter. See, in particular, chapters five and six of this thesis which each deal specifically with hip hop pedagogy.

Some, however, in the teeth of negative assessments of hip hop made from both political left and right, are keen to locate this pedagogic capacity in specifically African cultural elements creatively re-worked in successive black diaspora vernacular cultures (Gilroy, 2000). Indeed, behind many calls for hip hop to show a more socially constructive face and to become the culture it was always meant to be is also a view that its deformation into mere rap has served to obscure the fact that on close examination its peculiar aesthetic is precisely grounded in the didactic and socially functional. These are the overlooked vernacular currents within hip hop culture that have had an active if not always high profile presence from its very beginnings (Dyson, 171-175; Marable, 2003: 263). Baker JR., for example, maintains that, despite its 'self-aggrandizement and epic boasting', rap has always been characterised by an 'insistent element of didacticism, polemical challenge, and ethical caution' (Baker JR., 1990: 183; see Back, 1999: 194). Hip hop, it is claimed, manifests *functionally communicative* currents that run through all of these cultures, its consciousness raising potential built into the forms of social encounter, proximity, symbolism and exchange produced in the rap emcee performance (Gilroy, 2000; Gates JR., 1989). What Gilroy identifies as the 'centrality of performance rather than text' within the arts of the black diaspora has its deeper roots in the informational role played by *griots* (storytellers) and musicians in the social life of pre-middle passage West African village life (Gilroy, 2000: 313; see Thomas, 1998). Purposefully communicative and pedagogic and valorising presence, oral forms in black cultural expressivity have traditionally acted as both vehicle and tenor in the business of raising consciousness (Cross, 1993: 3; Perry, 2004: 30-33). Kristin M. Langellier argues that there is something intrinsic to public performance that means 'a text' when spoken 'acquires sociocultural dimensions beyond its formal features' (cited in Thomas, 1998: 321). All the elements of context - people, place, time, events – ensure performed texts emerge through a socially dynamic interpretative process (Smitherman, 1973; Shusterman, 1991; Fisher, 2004). Gilroy terms this intersubjective phenomenon 'antiphony' (call and response) (Gilroy, 2002: 78-79), Smitherman talks of the 'two-way street' nature of 'Black communicative performance' (Smitherman, 1973: 263; see also Fisher, 2004: 305; Perry, 2004: 34).

Hence, when commentators such as Dyson (2004) and Smitherman (1997) declare that the modern-day rapper or emcee is an 'urban' or 'postmodern' *griot*, they are not speaking merely figuratively.[24] Richard Shusterman argues that in hip hop's 'pragmatic' aesthetics the separate spheres of aesthetics (feeling), knowledge (the cognitive) and action (the practical) are effectively dissolved (Shusterman, 1991: 625-626).[25] For Shusterman key inheritances from hip hop's cultural antecedents: a complex interplay between vernacular form, political content and political symbolism, ensure its resistance to incorporation by the high modern, post Kantian ideal of aesthetic autonomy (ibid.: 621). The form and content of rap poetry 'highlights social function, process and embodied experience' in a 'non compartmentalized aesthetics' that unites 'the aesthetic and the cognitive, but equally stresses that practical functionality can form part of artistic meaning and value' (ibid: 626). For Shusterman the aesthetics produced out of the collision between antiphonic African culture and racialised American history make edutainment intrinsic to hip hop. Where rappers are concerned: 'their role as artists and poets is inseparable from their role as insightful inquirers into reality and teachers of truth' (ibid: 625).

Hip hop and (Afro) consciousness

What Perry calls the 'confluence of art and identity' in hip hop, can also be understood in far more overtly racialised terms (Perry, 2004: 39). 'Consciousness', in some hip hop versus rap discourses, refers centrally to questions of racial consciousness and an intra-politics of racialized identity (Gilroy, 2004a; Gilroy, 2004b). Hip hop was birthed in racial injustice, its origins in the autonomous activities of working-class black and Brown North American youth. Gangsta rap and it offshoots represents both cultural cooptation and economic expropriation (see Kitwana, 1994). In its more nationalistic version this is nothing short of theft of cultural copyright by racially and culturally exogenous forces and interests, a libel on racial pride and a willful corrupting of black youth (see Black Dot, 2005; Henderson, 1996; Simons, 2008). Hip hop by rights belongs to the racial community that invented it – the 'hip hop nation' (see Taylor, 2005). For those so minded 'the concept of membership is

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[24] Indeed, pedagogy as a trope is not uncommon in the emcee aliases employed by rappers. For example, rap group Poor Righteous Teachers and the late 'Guru' from the group Gang-Starr.
[25] See Eagleton (2001) for a detailed discussion on Kantian aesthetics and their modern day legacy in the contemporary relationship between culture and politics.

important for maintaining the racial and cultural identity of hip hop' (Perry, 2004: 56). Hip hop's proper cultural function is to advance the unity and integrity of that community (Decker, 1994; Henderson, 1996). In this Afrocentric nationalistic account, authentic hip hop culture is as much if not more about an ethical agonistics of return, reconstruction, regeneration and conservation (see Decker, 1994; Noble, 2005) as it is about valorizing an existing or emerging 'underground' counter-public.[26]

The historic thesis of African cultural continuity is in itself uncontroversial (see Gates, 1989; Levene, 2007; Mintz and Price, 1992). That is, hip hop culture has its roots in, and continues to display key features of historic black American vernacular cultural forms traceable in many of their particulars to African life prior to the Atlantic slave-trade (Levene, 2007). Afrocentric pedagogic treatments of hip hop history, however, go far beyond careful archeological excavation work and genealogies of hip hop's cultural ancestry and pre-history, or examination of survivals (see Black Dot, 2005). Afrocentrism and related black nationalisms have a very specific ethical and political project: the spiritual and practical regeneration and emancipation of African diasporic people via a symbolic and existential return to what has been repressed and disfigured by contact with white European cultures and peoples (see Asante, 2007; Howe, 1999; Moses, 1999). Gilroy (2004b: 88) speaks of this as a nationalism of the mind, 'stubbornly focused around the reconstitution of individual consciousness rather than around the reconstruction of the black nation in exile or elsewhere.' In terms of black vernacular expression such a perspective leads to strenuous efforts to recover the temporality of cultural resistance in its moment of pure negation and to seek at once to conserve and reanimate this moment. As Perry puts it:

> The romantic past as it exists in hip hop is not limited to the civil rights movement or black power era; it might also refer to an Afrocentric pre-enslavement vision of a healthy and essentialised blackness posed in contrast to present dynamics.

(Perry, 2004: 56)

The actual variety and range of cultural forms such resistance has taken throughout the history of African diasporic exile and racial subordination is epiphenomenal. It is their immutable, primordial pan-African being - 'from orature to dance' - that is decisive

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[26] I address this issue in the next chapter.

(Henderson, 1996: 314). Henderson (1996) speaks of identifying, extracting and preserving the primordial essence of black creative expression so as to be able to vivify, empower and mobilize black people.[27] This is the basic cultural political aim of Afrocentrist pedagogy. Writing of the potential of hip hop to serve in this cause Henderson says, 'This Afrocentrism could then infuse the best image and interests of Black peoples into the popular culture and allow it to fuse into a liberating national culture' (Henderson, 1996: 314-315).

If heteronymous forces bear a large share of the responsibility for hip hop's de-centering then the audit and critique which some are claiming the necessary precondition for its re-centering must be carried out internally by those who in the process of raising the alarm have logically appointed themselves the guardians and custodians of the hip hop community. These are the so-called 'raptivists', 'edutainers' and hip hop teachers (see Black Dot, 2005; Simons, 2006; Swiss, 2008). The organic, or 'movement' intellectuals (see Eyerman, 2004: 62-63) of hip hop's so-called 'fifth element': 'knowledge'. Mediators between cultural and political spheres, their role is to articulate and translate ideas for the groups they claim to represent. This talk of reclamation frequently comes in the form of both academic (Asante, 2007; Henderson, 1996) and 'samizdat' publishing (Black Dot, 2005; Simons, 2006; Swiss, 2008) as well as web blogging, and has its complementary activist component in neighborhood level community organizing and educational outreach (see Asante JR., 2008). Whether samizdat or academic, such publishing provides its activist counterpart with an intellectual idiom, its factual ammunition and philosophical foundations.[28] The writing I refer to here includes specific propagandistic pronouncements on hip hop, but more generally, takes the form of revisionist historiographies of African civilizations and cultural life both ancient and pre-colonial (see Howe, 1999; Moses, 1999). In addition, there is also a class of programmatic works, often accompanied by a web

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[27] Primordialism involves the 'claim that presently observable beliefs, practices or identities derive by long, unbroken continuity from an ancient past' (Howe, 1999: 232). What complicates this is the casual manner in which all sorts of critics refer to emcees as 'griots' and graffiti as 'hieroglyphics'. Is this primordialism in Howe's terms? In truth it is not always clear to what extent these commentators are staking primordial claims to the modern-day practices of rapping and graffiti writing and to what extent they are merely registering notable historical resonances. Or whether indeed in their writing they are paying homage to the hyperbolic self-descriptions of hip hop artists themselves, deliberately infecting their scholarly discourse with items from hip hop's figurative lexicon.

[28] Indeed, Afrocentric hip hop education and samizdat publishing can be complementary activities, as in the work of Black Dot (2005) in the USA and Paul Simons (2006) in the UK.

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presence, dedicated to Afrocentric modes of self-improvement and incorporating eclectic New Age recipes for spiritual and physical healing (see Noble, 2005). In the main these are samizdat writings.[29] Their prescriptions for liberated cultural expression sometimes combine with millenarian panegyrics to black racial superiority and protective warnings of the multiple threats posed by Western government supported conspiratorial organs of white supremacy past and present. Some instances of this latter category deal directly with hip hop. Paul Simons, for example, writes:

> The real Hip-Hop unites and expands Universal Love, whilst on the contrary modern Rap disunites us – it has us fighting each other over frivolous and materialistic things. Is this by design of the adversary, since he creates and promotes adversity?[30]

(Simons, 2006: 67)

The Afrocentric variety of hip hop versus rap discourse, with its appeal to a racially defined community, presents itself as an avowedly auto-critique; carrying an abiding sense of a putting of one's own house in order. The conflict, at least to those who would claim to represent the 'real' hip hop, clearly signifies a 'community' divided and under threat from a broad but identifiable 'adversary'.[31] The community thus needs to undergo a process of purification and reckoning; the lines of battle are starkly drawn. There are the self-designated 'respectable' and 'disciplined', family orientated working and middle-class black hip hoppers who claim to cleave to authentic (African) communitarian values, on the one hand (Gilroy, 2004b: 89). On the other, a common sense category of persons whose misdemeanours are so glaring, so self-evident, as to rule out any need to call them in person to the tribunal to give testimony. Everyone knows who they are and what they are representing (Judy, 2004). These are the nihilistic black underclass producers and consumers of rap – with their multi-cultural epigones - who dedicate themselves to immediate sensuous gratification, material baubles, and the visceral pleasures of substance abuse, sexual promiscuity and violence (Simons, 2006: 64; see Judy, 2004). For

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[29] See footnote 47 in chapter four of this thesis which describes the work of TamaRe House, a London based Afrocentric social enterprise and book publisher, whose series of lectures on hip hop history I report upon.
[30] Compare for instance Black Dot's millenarian warnings of the insidious power of what he calls 'The Matrix', meaning the whole Western cultural and economic system (Black Dot, 2005: 3/13-14). See next chapter.
[31] See the beginning of chapter four where I report upon claims made in public in Afrocentric pedagogic forums that rap is a 'socially destructive force', a 'modern cultural weapon'.

Afrocentric authors, the decisive cultural political question is: what forms of hip hop propagate an identity rooted, or 'centred' in blackness or Africanicity (Asante, 2007; Gilroy, 2004b). In this sense it is a battle over what it means to be black and duties owed to the racial *volk* (Howe, 1999: 106-107; see also Taylor, 2005). What I term a 'neo-traditional' (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2009) hip hop discourse therefore involves both a bio-politics - 'right living' – and a particular topography (Appiah, 1993).[32] Authentic hip hoppers have black skin, racial and cultural consciousness, act with maturity and conscious purpose, and are anti-materialistic (or at least eschew ostentation); they cleave loyally to the hip hop community, 'family' or 'nation' and work actively to police its discursive, symbolic and racial borders (see Black Dot, 2005; Decker, 1994; Swiss, 2008).

But if this particular discursive battle over (*and for*) hip hop raises important questions about socially nihilistic trends in parts of contemporary youth cultures (see Hall, Winlow and Ancrum, 2008) it largely eschews sociological consideration of the intersecting co-effects and subjective meanings of race, class, economics and gender (see Hall and Jefferson, 2006) focusing instead upon a quite different order of variables. For neo-traditional hip hoppers, cultural history, cultural copyright, spiritual and moral development, and race consciousness are the critical factors. This is partly therefore an epistemological matter: how hip hop is interpreted, understood, appreciated and explained (Asante JR., 2008). It is also a political and economic matter – even if not directly addressed in those terms - in so far as it is about

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[32] That is to say, after Terence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawn (2009), 'neo-traditionalism' refers to the tendentious, un-reflexively ideological use of customs, traditions, collective practices and rituals which, regardless of their actual temporal location, level of decline, persistence or adaptation, retain a suasive symbolical and affective association with the historical past. Working with this affective material, neo-traditional narratives produce idealised accounts of supposedly past life-ways to serve the strategic needs of the present. As necessarily imaginative constructs involving a moralised projection through temporal distance, neo-traditional narratives are assembled on a particular utopian template where the past in its exemplariness always sits in judgement on the future. Denied its complexity, elusiveness and actual inscrutability, history is at once mystified and domesticated, shorn of contingency, discontinuity and contradiction. In practice, neo-traditional narratives serve as the glue holding together groups with an ideological or strategic stake in either rejecting modernity and/or appealing to an archaic yet timeless unifying cultural essence. The constituencies they seek to mobilise are primarily those whose circumstances are frequently marked by a strong sense of existential insecurity and disaffection born, variously, of social exclusion, oppression, and cultural fragmentation. See Appiah (1993); Fanon (2001); and Parry (2004).

cultural copyright: who is credited, validated and remunerated for hip hop's invention (Black Dot, 2005). But as I show a little further, it has key ethical and normative dimensions: how and where hip hop is made, who makes it - and for whom; what messages it contains, and which producers and consumers are culturally programmed to 'get it' (Taylor, 2005). These are questions I also explore further in my fieldwork in chapter four.

Hip hop begins: dislocation versus centering

> To work with leftover materials, with the garbage and throwaways of our daily and commonplace existence, is an integral aspect of the tradition of modern art, as if it were a magic reversal of the informal into things of quality through which the artist comes to terms with the world of objects...Thus, the new 'knights of purity' advance into the realm of the present debate waving as flags the fragments of a utopia which they themselves cannot see.[33]

To conceive of black diaspora cultures of resistance in essentially racially organic terms as extending 'from African roots across all diasporic societies' (Howe, 1999: 109) is to produce a static, hermetic notion of culture requiring an ideological suppression of inconvenient evidence to the contrary. Obscured by such racially romantic thinking is the specificity of the social locations, social composition and political systems cultures such as hip hop are embedded within, their various, transversal lines of determination and influence, and the historical changes and discontinuities to which they are a testament. Stephen Howe argues that:

> To see modern Afro-Caribbean, African-American or black British musical forms, culturo-religious assertions such as Rastafarianism, or features of self-presentation such as dress or hairstyle, as manifestations of a continuing, unbroken culture of resistance is not only mistaken but mystificatory. Rather, most of these should be understood as particular cultural movements, the product of very specific circumstances in the recent past, which – in expressing opposition to dominant European-derived conceptions of human capacities (especially Caribbean colonial and later British or American racist ones) – manifest oppositional or counter-assertive modes of self-identification, albeit of a largely symbolic kind.

(Howe, 1999: 109-110)

From the standpoint of African American cultural nationalism, and its revisionary reading of cultural history, such contingency is troubling. The ethical, not to say racial and cultural, plurality of hip hop with its multiple tributary inflows and fusions poses from its outset

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[33] Manfredo Tafuri, In Wild (1998: 6).

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factual threats to any claims to exclusive title deeds (Flores, 1994; Gilroy, 2002; Potter, 1995). In a attempt to deal with this conundrum and to find an affirmative Afrocentric answer Henderson suggests that hip hop is divisible from its very beginnings into those elements infused with a 'nationalist ethos', and those which emanate from elsewhere: the 'diverse aspects of the creative community that had spawned [hip hop]' (Henderson, 1996: 317). The former for Henderson is exemplified in hip hop's aristocracy of Afrikaa Bambaata and Grandmaster Flash. The latter, significantly, are left anonymous, but presumably would include the racially 'diverse' contributors to hip hop's early development, such as the Puerto-Rican and Latino youth who Juan Flores (1994) speaks of as having been largely omitted from hip hop's official annals (see Hoch, 2006: 350-351).

Aside from correctly locating hip hop culture in the long durée of diaspora black vernacular culture, a further strategy for dealing with this anomalous situation is to extract the aforementioned 'nationalist ethos' from hip hop's more profane elements and to trace its descent from the temporally, but only partly geographically, contiguous US Black Arts Movement (Smethurst, 2005), black power and civil rights struggles (see Asante JR., 2008: 75-100). So that early hip hop becomes as it were, in a certain retroactive, overdetermining reading of its family history, a mutant youth wing of these movements at the exact moment of their diminuendo (see Neal, 2004). This arguably tendentious genealogical reconstruction is not restricted to Afrocentric accounts, however (see Gladney, 1995). Marable, for one, traces the birth of rap to the 1970s eponymous album by cultural nationalist Harlem based poetry group The Last Poets (Marable, 2003: 263). Indeed, the 'post-hip hop culture' I refer to above which has been such a driver for hip hop pedagogy draws inspiration from the aesthetic sensibility, political consciousness, activist spirit and autonomous organizing of the 1960s American Black Arts Movement (see Kitwana, 2004: 114; see also Asante JR., 2008; Fisher, 2004). There are indeed obvious continuities between the aforesaid cultural formations: the shared racial origins of many of its members, social and cultural exclusion from mainstream American life, their urban 'ghetto' location, a creative expression involving use of the spoken word with (mostly) black music, a close proximity to everyday black vernacular culture (Gladney, 1995: 291). The discontinuities between these formations, however, with respect to the modes and specific character of

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their respective cultural expressions are, in my view, far more compelling. For one, the Black Nationalism of the 1960s US Black Arts Movement drew to its ranks older generations of artists and activists: from communist intellectuals active in the 1930s, through Be-Bop innovators of the 1940s, to figures from the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s (Thomas, 1998). But most obviously, the Black Arts Movement was precisely that: a conscious, organized cultural-political movement with van-gardiste tendencies and vivified by ideological debate (see Kelley, 2002). It created educational programmes, had identifiable leaders and spokespeople, and had institution building aspirations. Moreover, it forged numerous practical and ideological links to other political organisations and movements (see Kelley, 2002; Smethurst, 2005).

By contrast, hip hop culture from the beginning essentially consisted of congeries of informal subcultural practices by black, brown and white working-class youth, emerging from, and responding to, social conditions of material scarcity, political bad-faith, and cultural exclusion (see Hoch, 2006: 350-351; Chang, 2007: 13-18). Only slowly and unevenly does it knit its various expressive strands into any kind of identifiable formation. Decisive to this, furthermore, is the burgeoning anthropological and journalistic interest shown by key non-participants in what for some time is essentially a localized youth culture restricted to a few of the poorer areas of the New York boroughs (Chang, ibid: 142-146). Indeed, 'Hip Hop' only really begins to acquire any identifiable sense of a self-reflexive cultural unity through the entrepreneurial nous of a few well-connected individuals on the scene who perceive the creative and monetary possibilities presented by bringing together uptown working-class black and brown youth with downtown white bohemian artists, journalists and academics with an interest in youth and folk culture (Chang, ibid: 146-154). Hip hop in its early phase is very much a culture of urban youthful play and makeshift improvisation (Cooper, 2006). The symbolic resources it employs - drawn from what is cheapest and most readily to hand - are bricolage adaptations of existing materials intended for other uses (Rose, 1994). These becomes a means of transgressing constituted spatial and behavioural limits, competing with peers for distinction, and wherever possible securing financial remuneration (Banes, 2004; Chang, 2007; Naar, 2007). According to a number of writers, the process through which hip hop first materializes, historically, is akin to alchemy: 'Worked out on the rusting

urban core' 'stray technological parts' and 'trash heaps' are transformed 'into sources of pleasure and power' (Rose 1994, 22; see also Ards 2004, 312; Potter 1995, 110; 2006, 72). Willis writes that rather than necessarily producing 'different or whole representations', 'symbolic creativity' of the sort exemplified in hip hop culture tends to engender 'eruptions in the very materials in which representations are shaped...refusals, subversions, ironizations of received forms' (Willis, 2006: 78; see Potter 2006: 70-72). Potter maintains that this involved the fashioning of elusive modes of aesthetic practice - an 'underground' political and symbolic economy of 'low frequency' traces, sly allusion and detournement (Potter, 2006: 66).

Whilst the cultural political symbolism and significance of this youth subculture would prove enormous, the expressive materials themselves were a world away from the experiments with modern Jazz, valorizations of African poetic orality, theatre dramaturgy, negritude, third-world Marxism and cultural nationalisms of the Black Arts Movements (see Kalaidjian, 1989; Smethurst, 2005; Thomas, 1998). This latter was a cultural movement in conscious critical dialogue with aesthetic debates within the artistic avant-garde and tuned to the band-width of the broader New Left and its concerns with Third World revolution and emerging social movements around identity (Kelley, 2002: 63-69/136-137). Its relationship to mainstream popular culture – though of course not the black vernacular musical and artistic traditions – was avowedly antagonistic.[34] Potter maintains, however, that 'hip hop is not merely a critique of capitalism; it is a counter-formation that takes up capitalism's gaps and contradictions and creates a whole new mode, a whole new economics' (Potter, 2006: 111). Hip hop culture served to constellate an everyday habitus and aesthetic of working-class urban survival long in evolution (see Cooper, 2006; Chang, 2007). It drew many of the expressive resources for its cultural repertoire of emceeing, DJing, dance and graffiti precisely from contemporary mass popular culture, including recorded popular music, cinema and advertising graphics, comic book characters and icons (Lewinsohn, 2008; Macdonald, 2002; Villalba Lopez, 2007). With respect to the original institutional context of

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[34] Indeed, more purist veterans of the 1960s and 70s civil rights and black power struggles precisely arraign hip hop's 'good-time' hedonism and aesthetic indebtedness to mass culture as evidence of the latter's uncertain relationship to properly countercultural positions (see Ards, 2004; Lipsitz, 2007; Neale, 2004). Which would also help explain the ideological sleight-of-hand required by some 'post hip hoppers' who would trace an unbroken continuum from the Black Arts Movement to hip hop's 'conscious' Ur moment without the inconvenient intrusion of pop superficiality (see Asante JR., 2008 as an articulate example of this).

hip hop's emergence, Baker JR. discerns in its 'syncretic' vernacular 'form' - its irreverent use of technologies and promiscuous referencing of popular culture - the aesthetic legacy of open revolt by poor urban youth against officially sanctioned forms of culture, literacy, and education (Baker JR., 1990: 176; see Back, 1999: 183 – 184; Bartlett, 2004: 400-401; Perry, 2004: 13-14). As Perry says, the 'very roots' of hip hop 'lie in the use of commodity to dislocate commodity' (Perry, 2004: 203). This is: 'DIY music…as a material model…for the de-fetishization of cultural commodities' (Willis, 2006: 78). In hip hop's sonic manipulation of recorded music in the 'community' of live performance, the break, sample, scratch, dub, mix and rap in real time combination represent what Neal calls the 'recovery of commodified black musical texts' (Neal, 2004: 371; see, Bartlett, 2004).[35]

In a specific 1970s context of racialised under-employment this is a profanely materialist praxis incorporating and adapting commodities for 'the labor of creating art in everyday life' (Kelley, 1997: 41). Kelley identifies in hip hop culture the galvanising of small-time entrepreneurship and self-commoditizing attitudes (Kelley, 1997: 75). 'Symbolic creativity' in the form of hip hop works to dissolve the binary of work and play for youth, turning 'a realm of consumption (leisure time/play time) into a site of production', a means of what Kelley calls 'getting paid'.[36] But if the nationalist ethos being claimed here on behalf of hip hop's key personnel is historically problematic with respect to the fact that from the beginning its racial and cultural composition was diverse, so equally are purist efforts to claim a pristine cultural line of descent for its music. Unwittingly exposing the transversal character of its musical development, its crisscrossing and looping lines of influence, Henderson speaks of how hip hop sounds already by the early 1980s were deviating from the mandated black cultural corpus of 'R&B, jazz, funk, reggae' 'to incorporate the flavor of New Wave, Techno, and House music' (Henderson, 1996: 317). Add to this the presence from the beginning of a range of Latin American musical traditions (see Hoch, 2006: 352-

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[35] Potter brings these embryonic hip hop technological practices up to date. '…file sharing, streaming, downloading and home mixing increasingly blurring the boundaries between consumption and production', are coextensive with hip hop's post-black America globally diffuse character (Potter, 2006: 67). See Miller (2004/2008). For a superb introduction to the culture, history and practice of hip hop DJ scratching see Doug Pray's 2002 documentary *Scratch*.

[36] For critiques of the valorising of 'creative consumption' on the grounds that apologists for the latter fail to adequately address either the political economy of consumption or commodity reification, see McGuigan (1992) and Roberts (2006), respectively.

354). Indeed, one of the key pioneers of this rhizomatic tendency was Afrikaa Bambaata himself who reinterpreted the glacial electro avant-pop of German group Kraftwerk for a sonic imaginary of utopian B-Boy space travel (Chang, 2007: 172-173). Hip hop's distinctive aesthetic - contra Afrocentric claims - was 'the art of dislocation not the art of 'centring'' (Perry, 2004: 203).

But if hip hop once offered a sense of community and solidarity for an impoverished and oppressed African American youth (Rose, 1994), then, according to the black cultural nationalist perspective, this was a promise broken, fatally compromised by 'mixed messages' at the level of personal conduct and cultural expression. Henderson states that with hip hop 'Positive consciousnesses and 'political activism' were uttered in almost the same breath as 'sexism, lumpen glorification' and hypocrisy (Henderson, 1996: 336). He depicts this as a contradictory and psychically painful splitting of consciousness resulting in the latter's muting (see Asante, 2007: 80). Howe sees in this purist denial of contradiction, one of the hallmarks of Afrocentrism, traces of a vulgarized or bowdlerized form of negritude (Howe, 1999: 27). What in the works of poetic modernists such as Aime Cesaire and Leopold Senghor is conceptually ambiguous by design, metaphoric and centred largely on the domain of aesthetics and cultural sensibility, gets reified in Afrocentrism, finding its dogmatic, anti-intellectual concomitant in 'a rigidly functionalist notion of the committed role of artistic, cultural and intellectual creation' (ibid: 27; see Lionel-Smith, 1991). For illustration, Howe quotes black nationalist Ron Karenga's '1968 call for black art to 'expose the enemy, praise the people, and support the revolution'' (Howe, 1999: 27). If Henderson's (1996) approach has obvious programmatic intentions in terms of divesting hip hop of all of its inessential and self-defeating trivialities and crudities (the better to serve the cause of 'a nationalism of the mind') this evidently involves the staging of intra-racial divisions. This is about revolutionary blacks versus those who consciously or inadvertently model themselves on whites (Howe, 1999: 106-107).[37] Howe cites the work of Philip Brian

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[37] The accusation by hip hop educators that certain behavior and attitudes are a resiling from blackness I examine in the next chapter. As 'conscious' hip hop group X-Clan state the matter in their 1992 song 'Raise the Flag':

Think before you step before the rebel, silly mortal, you
Wearin Mother's tags, and you don't know what they mean
All you are concerned with is greedy man's green

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Harper on the 1960s Black Arts Movement in this regard. Harper, in his rhetoric analysis of Black Arts poetry, discerns this same intra-racial drama, concluding that 'The violent rhetoric of the Black Arts poetry is designed to 'quell...ambivalence' about identity and purpose, not in fact to call to any purposive action. It not only stresses intra-racial divisions but 'itself actually serves to produce such divisions' (ibid: 107).

But if the rhetoric of Afrocentric cultural criticism is nihilistically divisive, its neo-traditional functionalism is also culturally reductive and artistically restrictive (see Beach, 1999; 108; Lionel Smith, 1991: 96). Mackey speaks of how the suturing of black artists to their cultural identities in everything they create sets limits on expression whites are ironically un-bound by. In re-claiming black formal invention from its reduction to biographical content he poses a polemical opposition between other as *noun* and other as *verb*:

> We need more than content analyses based on assumptions of representationality...black writers tend to be read racially, primarily at the content level. The noun level, as responding to racism, representing "the black experience." That black writers have been experimentally and innovatively engaged with the medium, addressing issues of form as well as well as issues of content, tends to be ignored. The ability to impact upon and to influence the course of the medium, to move the medium, entails an order of animacy granted only to whites when it comes to writing...we must...confront `the neotraditionalism that has taken hold of late with a counter-tradition of marronage, divergence, flight, fugitive tilt.

(Mackey, 1992: 68)

Questioning authenticity: tolerating impurities

To register title deeds for hip hop means to directly engage the battle *hip hop versus rap*. It means to valorize – lionize even - particular individuals and their expressions, whilst at the same time seeking to absorb and to rehabilitate, or alternatively to banish, its corrupted constituencies and polluted expressions; to insist on the right to apply neo-traditional criteria of membership for hip hop culture and, crucially, to hold hip hoppers to Afrocentric standards of conduct. This obviously involves a highly ideological, dichotomous view of *actually existing hip hop*. Moreover, in the critical tendency represented by Dyson, Kitwana

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Sportin your medallions, cause they matchin with your outfit
Your posse's wearin it, man, that's so illegit
Without definition you represent the fraudulent
Blessed with blackness, but now you're just doggin it [...]

and Marable, being 'aligned with progressive forces of social critique' does not usually equate to actual occupancy of a socially and culturally marginal position or a genuinely radical alternative to what Perry refers to as hip hop's mode of 'capitalist repetition' (Perry, 2004: 202). Social critique, lyrical consciousness and even activism are not the same as the devising of a new 'local' 'compositional framework' (ibid: 202-203). For this would serve to elaborate a genuine alternative to 'capitalist repetition' (see Morgan, 2009: 173-174): social relations, modes of cultural production, and forms of socio-economic exchange, for example, that destabilise the reign of the commodity and hail its replacement with something akin to the gift (see Graeber, 2004). In the more liberal/social democratic variants of hip hop versus rap, 'consciousness', however, is largely a matter of a) rap lyrics that meet the criteria of 'edutainment' in the sense described by Dyson: 'socially aware and consciously connected to historic patterns of political protest', and b) doing philanthropic works on behalf of the hip hop community (Kitwana, 2002: 155). So in many ways being highly commercially successful – in the words of Kitwana no longer 'in the trenches day-to-day' (Kitwana, 2002: 155) - is a positive boon to conscious hip hop so understood. Indeed, such success brings enormous potential popular and political influence and reach at a mainstream level. It allows the exploiting of celebrity adulation to get the ear of youth. It provides a highly visible platform and mass channels for the dissemination of positive messages, as well as the large-scale financial means to sponsor and co-opt initiatives (Kitwana, 2002:175-178; Marable, 2003: 256-262). The conscious hip hopper made good who has not forgotten their roots and the situation of their 'community' is exemplary: a positive role model for industriousness, application, education, humility, and proper conduct. They are proof of what agency can achieve over structure. As such, they are inherently ambiguous figures who arguably, from the opening bars of their flow, may well legitimize the very economic system their social critique is ostensibly exposing (see Allen JR., 1996).

There are, however, commentators on hip hop culture who are eager to interrogate and critically expose each of these forms of reduction. For these writers, viewing hip hop through the narrow optic of neo-traditional cultural nationalism - or even the more culturally plural ethics of Marable, Kitwana, and Dyson - not only risks chauvinism but its

purism constitutes a revisionist denial of hip hop's aesthetically profane character, its primary heterogeneity (see Allen, JR., 1996; Gilroy, 2002; Gilroy, 2004b; Perry, 2004; Potter, 1996). Addressing themselves to some of the normative concerns voiced by cultural nationalists but reaching radically different conclusions, these writers resile from the annexing of hip hop culture to the project of creating particularistic solidarities based on primordial, absolutist ideas of racial consciousness. They are aware of the complex imbrications of commodity culture and the forms of creative bricolage and improvisation characteristic of hip hop from its very beginnings. They also know that the complex nature of hegemonic penetrations (Ortner, 2006: 52) at the level of lyrics and conduct with respect to the concrete particularities of reception and social situation complicate ethically purist and naïve valorizations of hip hop's oppositional promise. By contrast, they each in their own way argue that hip hop culture has always offered the symbolic materials for a far more profane, makeshift, processual mode of consciousness, and, correspondingly, for shifting, transversal alliances and solidarities across lines of class, race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality (Gilroy, 2004b). Perry writes that

> In the world of hip hop holy and well-behaved gestures sit next to the rough and funky. Violence, sexuality, spirituality, viciousness, love, and countless other emotions and ideas all form part of the discursive space.

<div align="right">(Perry, 2004: 6)</div>

She goes on: 'Ideologically, hip hop allows for open discourse. Anything might be said, or, for that matter, contradicted' (Ibid: 5-6). This 'ideological democracy' is inimical to hip hop achieving, in the social movement terms discussed by Marable (2003) and Kitwana (2002), 'a coherent political framework' (Perry, 2004: 6-7). Indeed, for Perry, it is the very difficulty in separating the sacred and profane in hip hop which she regards as one of its most important political achievements in terms of post-civil-rights black cultural politics (ibid: 42; see Neal, 2002). She declares that 'The ideological reunion of the clean and dirty...constitutes a kind of black liberation' (Perry, 2004: 42). In John Roberts and Dave Beech's (2002) terms hip hop is a 'philistine aesthetic' that not only 'tolerates impurities' but actively thrives on them. This is a vernacular, remember, distinguished by its inverting of standard usages of good and bad, so that 'ill' and 'sick' are appreciative epithets. In the preceding hip hop v rap discourses it is precisely a failure to tolerate impurities or to analytically grasp the

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contradictions that frequently inhere within the work of a single artist (see Perry, 2004: 6) that contribute to a critical tendency to seek only the redemptive and the positive and to produce, reciprocally, reductive accounts of consciousness. Paul Gilroy, writing in the early nineteen nineties, regards the ostensible cleavage between a conscious Afrocentric nation hip hop and a nihilistic gangsta rap as a type of fratricidal squabbling revelling in and making booty from the 'narcissism of small differences' (Gilroy, 2004b: 91-92). 'East-coast versus west-coast', on the one hand, and an Afrocentric appeal to the trope of family as a way to 'collapse intraracial differences', on the other. For Gilroy the latter - an attempt 'to interpret the crisis of black politics and social life as a crisis solely of black masculinity' - is a displacement, an ideological reduction (ibid: 92). Against this sacralising, conservative construction he sets a defiantly diffuse fraternal figure, embodied in the 'nonfamilial community' depicted in Isaac Julien's film of youthful sexual and racial experimentation, *Young Soul Rebels.* This, Gilroy writes, is:

> A kind of surrogate, joyfully disorganic, and synthetic kin group [which] constitutes itself slowly and tentatively – in and around desire, through music, affirmation, celebration, and play.

> (ibid: 92)

Gilroy is touching here on vexed questions concerning the basis of social solidarity and shared cultural identity. But if the cultural group can tolerate impurities – indeed can augur utopian possibilities by their presence - so too can the aesthetic forms it affiliates around, even where these inadvertently confound or annex ethics and aesthetics. For example, hip hop music of consummate beats and poetry may well be a vehicle for disturbing content and destructive messages (see Kelley, 1996). The reverse, however, may also be true: hip hop music of wholesome content and uplifting message grafted onto lousy aesthetics. As Perry puts it, hip hop is no less immune to the 'tension between ideology and art' than any other form of art (Perry, 2004: 41). She writes:

> Many people who are supportive of rap with good intentions, make the mistake, in response to attacks on the music, of arguing that there is good and bad rap, thereby categorizing quality according to politics, such that the positive political message becomes construed as "good music". However, the correlation of artistic quality and politics does not hold within hip hop anymore than it would in another art form.

> (Ibid: 40)

It is precisely this 'tension between ideology and art', and I would add culture, that my fieldwork explores. Owing to its multi-modal, bricolage and sampling aesthetic, and 'open discourse', hip hop culture has always ensured a certain ease of access – despite the presence of racial gatekeepers.[38] Politics and ideology in hip hop, correspondingly, are not merely a function of intentional content but rather a manifestation - or effect - of how artists choose, or rather feel constrained, to position themselves through rhetorical, lexical, and grammatical means as subjects in relation to complex politics of race, class, gender and culture (see Gilroy, 2002; Perry, 2004). Skill and diligent application in the learning of its aesthetics and operational norms are far more decisive to its cultural politics, however, than an evolved ethical sensibility or highly developed intellect (see Kelley, 1996). For example, being 'black and 'in your face''; black and verbally dextrous and tricky; black and 'fearless and unruly' in hip hop are, according to Perry, political postures and articulations no less than what is contained within conscious lyrical content or agit-prop (Perry, 2004: 29). What this situation confers on black hip hop artists specifically is the 'critical gaze provided by [outcast] otherness – as theorized in Du-Boisian second-sight' (ibid: 32). Hence, in its 'situationally black' articulations hip hop

> Is the music that incites fear in the hearts of the arbiters of respectability. These arbiters are not only white but black as well, and the divide between sacred and profane, the politics of respectability and ostentatious blackness, is well depicted through the vocal criticisms that rap has received from black religious figures and members of the black civil-rights establishment.

(Ibid: 29)

Rat Judy claims, further, that those who offer critiques of the subject of hard-core rap – the a-moral 'bad nigga - in the cause of an anti-capitalist black communitarian politics (see Dyson, 2007; and Marable, 2003), are trapped in a post-enlightenment ontology where all resistance leads irrevocably to the liberal humanist sovereign subject of self-knowledge (Judy, 2004: 108). For Judy the invocation of 'post-bellum' notions of community 'self-determination' and 'self-government' are reliant on this unified authentic subject (ibid: 109/115). The range of identities hip hop makes available, however: gangster, grime thug, white 'backpacker', conscious Afrocentric, respectively, reflect strategies of self-projection that are more culturally and ideologically layered than the Manichean division of sacred and

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[38] These are issues I examine in chapter seven which deals with hip hop theatre.

profane allows. Being perceived as a thug and threatening, or as natural and proud of one's given beauty (see Noble, 2005) are each in their own way a form of bio-politics (Gilroy, 2004a). Afrocentrists are, for example, in the words of Charles Johnson, consciously 'reversing the negative meaning of the black body' (in Perry, 2004: 41). Contrarily, 'there are a variety of reasons why a listener might enjoy a song littered with violence and viciousness', and which moralised imprecation is unlikely to detect (ibid: 42). The concrete, affective situations of cultural reception and affiliation, respectively, resist prognostication, consisting as they do of too many variables. Indeed, it is the very complexity of the situation of cultural production and reception which makes even the most disturbing hip hop a legitimate, indeed necessary, subject for analysis in an educational context. It is also why ethnographers who conduct fieldwork around hip hop culture need, in the words of Jeff Ferrell (1996), to 'look up and down' at once. To *attempt* immersion in real-life, real time dynamics of a situation whilst interrogating social structures possibly obscured within the immediate horizon. Perry, in calling for a more supple discourse hermeneutics where hip hop is concerned, thus makes an analogy between morally troubling hip hop texts and that 'canonical' literature which inscribes bigoted attitudes within aesthetically rich and dense writing (Perry, 2004: 42; see Ryle and Soper, 2002). In such an anti-reductive reading practice 'we should extend the open discourse already extant within hip hop to our conversation about hip hop' (Perry, 2004: 42).

Hence, to make a stark opposition between 'issues' based expression and 'escapist' expression as hip hop versus rap discourses are wont to do is to miss Perry's crucial observation that it is 'because of the look from outside [hip hop culture]...but also due to perspectives within the music' that this art is political (Perry, 2004: 28). The politics of race ensures that the politics of rap music 'traverses' its manifest ideological perspectives and representations. Romantic and idealized accounts of black vernacular culture routinely trace an unbroken lineage of Afro brilliance from Egyptian times through West African griots to resistance by slaves and black power aesthetics (see Moses, 1999). But as hip hop amply demonstrates black vernacular aesthetics have been embraced and valorised throughout history far beyond their 'communities of practice' or sites of resistance (see Basu and Lemelle, 2006). Black bodies and groups vilified, reviled, scapegoated, oppressed and

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annihilated all the while (Eyerman, 2004; Lhamon Jr., 1998). It is this phenomenon of racialised ambivalence: 'America's love-hate relationship with' hip hop that 'makes hip hop music black American' (Perry, 2004: 27).[39] In other words, hip hop is eminently a product of the socio-historical circumstances of its birthplace and emergence not of some primordial unchanging African essence (see Mintz and Price, 1992). Hip hop, reciprocally, adapts and hybridizes – indeed has globalized – in response to changing socio-political circumstances and aesthetics which it in turn contributes to. The small measure of expressive autonomy hip hop has helped some of the 'wretched of the earth' to achieve for themselves (see Basu and Lemelle, 2006; Pennycook, 2005; Wright, 2000) is no small consequence of its global commercial expansion during the last twenty or so years (Gilroy, 2006A). Hip hop's 'transcultural flows', its adoption 'into local contexts' works as 'a dialectical process of cultural negotiation' at the point of reception between actual and imputed origins, 'regional concerns' and aesthetic traditions (Pennycook, 2005: 31; see also Henley, 2003: 18; Huq, 2006: 110; Pardue, 2007: 675).

To attempt to place a caesura betwixt and between its pure essence and corrupted derivatives and rhyzomatic growths thus marks a historical revision of hip hop. The spirit of antiphony that Gilroy (2002) speaks of is in evidence throughout the myriad 'intermezzo' blending and Creolizations of hip hop and other musical forms from reggae, R 'n B and electronic dance, through heavy-metal, punk, and myriad global folk genres (see Back, 1999; Hutnyk, 2000). Hip hop – with its semiotic quilting, textual citations and use of sampling - is radically intertextual. It is diachronic and synchronic; relying at once on previous, remembered musical texts and those developing in tandem. From this angle the hip hop aesthetic and Afrocentric neo-traditionalism are oxymoronic. To attempt to locate and ossify an essential hip hop is, at one level, against hip hop's spirit. It is historically, socially and aesthetically illiterate. But as Hoch (2006) astutely observes the internecine wrangling which pits 'positive' against 'negative', 'conscious' against 'gangsta', is actually a component of 'hip-hop's battle aesthetic' - an aspect of its antiphonic character. From the start each of its four elements has centrally involved competitive gaming. As Hoch writes 'This constant

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[39] In chapter seven where I explore the artistic role of white middle-class males in hip hop I return to this difficult question of cultural ownership and property rights, e.g. whether it was ever legitimate to state baldly that hip hop is black American music in the sense that this confers essential cultural deeds of title.

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infighting in hip-hop goes beyond the inside/outside the system dialectic, and the capitalist/socialist, blinger/righteous dialectic. The reason for this is hip-hop's battle aesthetic' (ibid: 361). He argues that in order to pass onto the next – properly grown-up - stage in its evolutionary course hip hop will have to somehow transcend this battle aesthetic which he regards, for all its creative energy, as ultimately a cultural dead-end. According to Hoch, if the hip hop generation is to achieve the necessary unity to intelligently marshal its vast resources to the full benefits of its membership it must overcome its dysfunctional addiction to the purist insistence on a singular version prevailing as the true and authentic spirit of the culture (ibid: 362).

Yet, as Perry (2004) rightly declares, hip hop is an 'ideological democracy'. Neo-traditionalism and its converse are, ironically, necessary to hip hop's cultural-political Babel. Indeed, lyrical meta-commentary and glosses which prescribe an authentic hip hop topography and bio-politics, and as such are guilty of the 'empathic' (Perry, 2004: 49), the 'intentional' and the 'affective' fallacy (Mayo, 1974: 53), are all part of hip hop's heterogeneous cosmology. The global expansion and thence local adaptation of the hip hop brand has in significant part been consequent on the noisy and contradictory efforts of neo-traditionalist artists and commentators, political moral-entrepreneurs and media conglomerates, to construct an authentic version of hip hop and aggressively promote it (see Foreman, 2002). As Stuart Hall writes:

> By definition black popular culture is a contradictory space. It is a sight of strategic contestation. But it can never be simplified or explained in terms of simple binary oppositions that are still habitually used to map it out: high and low; resistance versus incorporation; opposition versus homogenization. There are always positions to be won in popular culture, but no struggle can capture popular culture itself for our side or theirs.

(Hall, 2005: 470)

The relationship between commercial culture and the sometimes counter-formative politics of global youth subcultures is thus complex, polyvalent and multi-linear (Giroux, 2006; Huq, 2006; Marchart, 2003; Pardue, 2007; Willis, 2006). For example, as Duncan-Andrade and Morrell observe, it is precisely as a *rebel* cultural expression that hip hop 'may be lubricating the very system that it seeks to condemn...It may exist as an expression of oppositional politics that produces certain political and cultural effects in a form that is of financial

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benefit to the dominant culture' (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 2005: 290; see also Clarke 2003; McGuigan, 2010). Reporting in the early 1980s on the emergence of 'break-dancing' Banes provides an iconic image of Ur hip hop transgression that has been endlessly recycled in a variety of media in the decades since:

> Just as graffiti writers mark off city territory and lay title to it with their tags, breakers claim space by tracing symbols on the streets with their dancing and penetrating public space with their ghetto blasters. To write on subway trains, to strike obscene poses, to wear torn clothing, to scratch records, to talk in secret codes, and to sing one's sexual exploits and other praises are transgressive acts.

(Banes, 2004: 18)

As Forman recognises, a 'historical grounding in the authority of the street' 'as a physical locus' has 'over time…been mediated by the conceptual, symbolic, and mythical construct of *the street*' in the commercial marketing of a hip hop sensibility and romantic narrative of authentic origins (Forman, 2002:83-84; see Potter, 1995: 120-123). Whether this form of incorporation, albeit one hip hop artists have been fully complicit in, represents a radical attenuation of the possibilities of the street as actual 'physical locus' of acting without permission (see Ferrell, 2001: 27), particularly in an era of massively increased surveillance, policing and privatisation of public space, is an important question for researchers (see Kelley, 1997: 50-53).[40] Illegal work by the more accomplished graffiti writers/artists, always as Stallabrass understood a form of self-advertising, is now a graphic calling-card or shop-window to galleries and auction-houses (Stallabrass, 1996: 136-137). This works precisely through a nostalgic 'mythical construct of *the street*' which – with its attendant primitivist connotations of 'outsider art' (Kelley, 1997: 84) - confers a vestigial edgy legitimacy which when commercially expedient will enhance market value (see ibid, 60-64; Macdonald 2002).[41] Moreover, the trend for 'guerrilla advertising' and viral marketing seeks precisely to trade on a simulacrum of street-level anarchistic 'illegalism' and gift exchange (see Alvelos, 2004). Perry speaks in analogous terms of the hip hop 'compositional framework' of 'local participation' and 'collective creation' – live deejaying, scratching, repeated breaks, emcee rhyming – having been artfully reproduced and marketed in a mass hip hop product

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[40] I briefly touch on this towards the end of chapter six.
[41] The Bristol street-artist Banksy is the most obvious and high profile example of this recent trend or fad. See the DVD *Street Art Painting the City: London Paris Madrid*, London: Tate Media.

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to create a simulacrum of the 'local' (Perry, 2004: 201). This is 'an insidious form of capitalism's repetition' through a globally diffused 'sounds of the party' (ibid).

Commercial diffusion and incorporation might thus seem to have marked the limit of hip hop's disruptive agency some time ago (see Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 2005). Some maintain, however, that such a view betrays a historical and sociological myopia (Potter, 1995/2006). Commodification, as always, serves to replenish, and indeed potentially expand, the symbolic stock on which hip hop depends (Willis, 1990; Kelley, 1997). Recall Perry's remark that hip hop involves 'the use of commodity to dislocate commodity'. As Berardi puts it, in the context of present day political struggle, 'The limit is a condition for potency'; it is 'not reducible to any historical synthesis' and 'cannot be exhausted'; it is productive of 'transversal flow of imagination' (Berardi, 2009: 119-120). Rose (1994: 85), Perry (2004: 113-115) and Neal (2004: 372) each note that if hip hop has any enduring transgressive value at a symbolic, aesthetic, legal and institutional level then this continues to reside in its technologically renewable irreverent aesthetic of creative plunder, improvisation and adaptation (see Miller, 2004/2008). Just like the advertising and marketing which co-opts its rebel flavours modern day hip hop with its file sharing, streaming, downloading and home mixing scrambles received notions of 'artistic originality', 'historical memory', 'legal property' and 'technological innovation'.

As Potter wryly observes, hip hop is daily commodified, 'recycled…into breakfast-cereal ditties and public service announcements' (Potter, 1995: 108). Yet, as he points out, there is no reason to suppose an astute DJ would not wish equally to sample this same material in a simultaneous reversal and recursion of signification (see Potter, 2006). As he puts it, 'Hip-hop, just as it always has, discovers its future in the fragments of its own past, cannibalizing its own parts' (ibid: 72). Potter contends, moreover, that with hip hop's impure origins in bricolage, being rendered as commodity 'does not interrupt but in a crucial sense fuels its own appropriative resistance' (Potter, 1995: 110). He makes a further important point about the complex ongoing composition and recomposition of African-American identity, claiming that 'authenticity and constructivism are not antagonistic but mutually resonant' (ibid: 121; see Gilroy, 2002). Gilroy hails the 'joyously artificial reconstruction of the instability of lived, profane racial identity' consequent on hip hop's 1970s Bronx emergence (Gilroy, 2002: 104;

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see Perry, 2004: 114; Weheliye, 2005: 148). Hip hop versus rap might well denounce and countermand, whilst practically fostering, this 'contradictory space' - and there is some evidence for this in the fieldwork this thesis reports upon. However, its signature discourse of incorporation and commodification can just as easily, due to its tendency to petrify both ethical behaviour and racial essences, get accommodated to mainstream political frameworks as those which are ostensibly oppositional or counter-cultural, and this I explore in some detail in chapters that follow.

Conclusion: pedagogy and policy in the hip hop counter-public sphere

In this chapter I have examined writings that deal in some way with an agonistic discursive formation I term hip hop versus rap. The essential idea behind this formation is that a caesura – both for the purposes of ideological deliberation and practical cultural politics – can be placed between a socially constructive hip hop culture, on the one side, and a socially destructive rap music, on the other. Certain types of rap music, such as pop rap, gangsta and grime are seen as betraying the once progressive DIY grassroots spirit of hip hop culture; and thus as in decisive ways a corruption of its authentic cultural DNA - with disastrous social consequences, particularly for black youth. As I have said, the opposition is conceived of as an ethical – even political - fissure running right the way through hip hop culture, with endogenous and exogenous actors and forces that are deemed liable needing to be brought before a discursive tribunal.

What all of the studies demonstrate fairly conclusively is that hip hop culture, in light of its progressive – and indeed purportedly regressive - developments, alliances and mutations, is now regarded by a variety of intellectuals and activists as available for mobilizing at a grassroots cultural and educational level as part of an alternative public sphere. Edutainment is seen at one level in many of these writings as a normative matter of bringing pressure to bear on rap artists to 'raise the bar' where their lyrical content and conduct are concerned. Artists in the public eye must be 'role-models' to young people and take a fraternal, principled stance for the sake of their 'community' whatever the financial inducements to do otherwise. At another level it is about programmatic calls for educational outreach and community activism to simultaneously enact and raise consciousness of the socially functional in hip hop traceable to its foundations in oral

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vernacular cultures. The coextensive nature of hip hop's politics, ethics and aesthetics –
despite the best efforts of expropriating interests - seals its communicative 'functionality'.
Some are also seen in writings dealt with in this chapter advancing title deeds to hip hop
culture. In the declamatory process of reclaiming hip hop from racially alien interests young
black people under the spell of rap music are to be brought back within its fraternal fold
through grassroots activism so as to be initiated in a bio-politics of 'right living'. For others,
in the face of homogenizing 'capitalist repetition', it is about efforts to honour a 'local' but
cosmopolitan idea of face-to-face sensuous antiphonic encounter. Here hip hop's discursive
and cultural openness, its highly permeable modern character, is attested to by its profanely
fragmentary, bricolage aesthetic. What many of these writings share, regardless of
ideological differences, is a combative, activist commitment to mount a rearguard against
the losses to a culture wrought by the dominant forms of contemporary rap music and their
accompanying paraphernalia.

These critical interventions variously describe, prescribe and theorise upon ways of
returning hip hop to its more authentic sources, and/or conjecturing alternatives to
hegemonic cultural arrangements. In so doing they clearly attest to the steady evolution of
the cultural, institutional and policy context over the last decade or so with respect to
community based hip hop outreach and artistic workshops (see Chang, 2006). Emcees,
spoken-word artists, dancers, DJs and hip hop dancers, collaborating on cross-arts projects
with public and charitable funding and going into schools, youth centres, and prisons to
deliver educational workshops (Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Stevenson, 2004). As I have indicated
the discursive formation hip hop versus rap provides the ideological impetus for a self-
conscious counter public sphere of 'mature' community level action. This is a cultural praxis
of interaction and alliances, institution building, aesthetic revivals, re-workings and cross-
disciplinary encounters. It also explicitly supplies, as I show in the chapters that follow, key
aspects of the didactic, ethical and aesthetic content of such work.

What the studies in this chapter demonstrated, but did not explicitly address in these terms,
was that there are obviously patents tensions between more inclusive versions of hip hop
versus rap prepared to tolerate, or even openly embrace, ethical, aesthetic and racial
impurity and neo-traditional versions for whom it is imperative to define in advance the

ideal composition of, and membership criteria for, a racialised hip hop 'family' (Swiss, 2008) or 'community'. This question of hip hop cultural topography and racial family composition forms the central focus of the next chapter and in a whole different inflection that of chapter seven where I look at the place of white identity in a (post)hip hop culture. Further, hip hop versus rap, both in more culturally liberal and conservative versions, depends on a historically revisionist reading of hip hop culture. Thus, the battles for individual distinction through acts of small-time criminality, the role of mass popular culture and commodities in the hip hop aesthetic, cross-fertilizations with different social sectors, and efforts to 'get paid', all tend to get downplayed. What this revisionism produces is a somewhat idealistic account of individual 'consciousness' and a corresponding lionizing of exemplary artistic individuals. This in turn manifests a crudely ideological textual practice based, in the words of Mackey (1992), 'on assumptions of representationality'. It is one which ignores the 'tension between ideology and art', guilty in the process of intentional and affective fallacies. These particular cultural myopias and aporias as they find their way into a therapeutic approach to hip hop pedagogy and outreach are areas that my fieldwork probes into and explores in subsequent chapters.

Finally, much of the hip hop versus rap literature conceives of this alternative public sphere as a means by which socially marginalised actors seek to culturally re-structure historically exclusionary practices, enclaves and institutions along more democratic and egalitarian lines. That is to say a penetrative agency 'from below', one which sets out to expand hip hop culture beyond the ghetto of popular youth and street culture through collaboration with the municipal authorities. However, there is little consideration given to how such collaborations with state, charity, and municipal authorities might expand the scope of governmental rationality through tolerance and sponsorship of methods and modes which if never completely autonomous are at least at times symbolically refractory to constituted authority (see Huq, 2006/2007; and Pardue, 2004). In other words, most studies to date dealing with the alternative public sphere created by hip hop versus rap give little consideration to the role of a penetrative agency 'from above'. This therefore leaves unaddressed the question of whether and how seemingly divergent cultural political imperatives – the declared insurgent intentions of hip hop activists and the regulatory

concerns of policy makers - can converge in hip hop versus rap, and if so what this phenomenon might be symptomatic of in broader structural terms (see Brown, 2005). Indeed, I argue in my analysis further on of spoken and written hip hop texts produced in community based hip hop poetry workshops that the marked presence of a 'tension between ideology and art' brings to light a complex therapeutic conundrum that requires carefully unpacking (see Mirza, 2005). These are some of the nodal points I explore in the chapters that now follow through interaction, observation and conversation with hip hop artists and educators and the people participating in their workshops.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Tending the Conscious Hip Hop Family

> Try not to allow the mind control programme of the Matrix to tell you that if the story doesn't have "proof", references, sources, or quotes that it's slander or has no validity. That's just a box they have set up to keep you thinking within it and to keep you focused on using recycled thoughts and ideas, as opposed to trying to think outside of the box in pursuit of an original thought. Truth is something you can feel in your heart, even if you can't prove it.

(Black Dot, 2005: 2)

Introduction: rap is a modern cultural weapon

I begin this chapter with an extract from my field work notes:[42]

> It is a Friday evening in early October and I and my twelve year-old son take our seats in a large sparsely occupied municipal chamber in central London to a harsh, percussive report of hip hop and grime emceeing. We two are the only non black people amongst either audience or organisers. After about fifteen minutes the music is suddenly cut off and a middle-aged man with greying short Afro takes to the stage, lifts the microphone, and addresses us. He welcomes us and explains why this public talk has been put on as part of Black History Month and what its significance is. Small in stature, very casually dressed and warmly smiling, he has the directness, weary demeanour and gentle authority of a community elder. His slightly accentuated patois announces to the group of mostly strangers his and their common cultural heritage and interests. But there is also something political and embattled about his earnest tone and vocal cadences. The blurb for the event makes this explicit:

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[42] The event is: ''Heated Exchanges!' Hip Hop VS Rap', a talk put on for Black History Month by Dalston based Centerprise Literature Development and Camden council at the Camden Centre, Euston Road, October 2008.

A contemporary analysis of hip hop and rap music and its links to black history led by Wayne B Chandler. Rap music - a socially destructive force? Hip Hop - the real voice of youth? Chandler will argue that rap is a modern cultural weapon used to weaken the inner spiritual force of black youths and keep violence common in the global black community.

Before thanking partnership organisations and all the people who have lent help, he launches into a brief sermon on the importance of the need to debate hip hop vs rap. The gist of his speech, delivered with emotion and moral seriousness, is: 'what are we the community going to do about what is happening to our youth [meaning black youth] and who and what is influencing them'. His passion is appreciatively received by the small audience of about a dozen, who murmur and nod assent. There is a kind of familiar ritual feel to this simmering 'call and response'. We could be in a small Pentecostal church service or in a community meeting convened to address some sort of local crisis. His is essentially a warm-up act, however, for the bracing motion that will be repeatedly put forward over the course of the evening: '*we* the community must do something about what others are forcing upon *our* children with *our* active collusion'. His words indicate that 'hip hop vs rap' is meant as a provocation, a wake-up call to the community. It is intended to prompt introspection, dialogue and decisive action but most of all solidarity.

Over the coming weeks as autumn turns into winter and Black History Month completes its allotted slot like a decorous window in an advent calendar I will observe a number of such public wake-up calls by 'movement intellectuals' (Eyerman, 2004): Chandler, BP, Khonsu, Tuggs, Swiss and Asante JR., individuals whose public words this chapter deals with. Both the rhetorical force of the 'Hip Hop v Rap' statement and its choice of tropes – 'cultural weapon', 'inner spiritual force', 'black youth' – make it an archetype of the socially functional and committed in conscious hip hop (Dyson, 2007). In the previous chapter I argued that the discourse of hip hop versus rap was founded on the perception of an ethical fissure running through hip hop culture and its history. I showed how this was decisively bound up with a belief amongst commentators that widespread ignorance of the functionally communicative nucleus hip hop retains from pre-slavery Africa has contributed to its long-standing reduction to a single one of its elements, rap emceeing. I argued that in light of this, certain commentators were pursuing an agenda to correct the historical record. So that hip hop would now be understood as a *culture*, and one, moreover, with unrealised social promise; and rap, despite, or even because of, its global commercial success, as merely a subsidiary *musical genre*. In this chapter I explore how the conviction that hip hop and rap are metaphysically divisible serves as the organising frame for the educational work of some black hip hop activists. I trace ways in which hip hop culture and rap music get

invested with particular properties of consciousness, spirituality and moral intention. I present this as a process of simultaneously *inducing* a conscious, racialised hip hop community or family (Swiss, 2008) and *educing* outcast black youth perceived as being under the spell of negative rap.

Hip hop consciousness: Afrocentricity and identity

The substance of the allegation above is that sinister powers are at work deploying cultural materials to enervate and demoralise the global black community and its youth; that rap is a fifth columnist presence in these communities wreaking havoc and throttling its 'real voice': hip hop (see Kitwana, 1994). Burke observes that 'Different frameworks of interpretations will lead to different conclusions as to what reality is' (Burke, 1989: 11). As Alexander puts it, a culturally attuned enquiry into reality involves making an attempt 'to uncover the impact of meaning on social life and identity formation' (Alexander, 2003: 20). The rhetoric of rap as 'modern cultural weapon' might seem to imply that the particular 'framework of interpretation' here is a kind of sociological reductionism. That is, one where culture is seen essentially 'as the product of sponsoring institutions, elites or interests. The quest for profit, power, prestige, or ideological control sits at the core of cultural production. Reception meanwhile is relentlessly determined by social location' (*ibid*: 20). As I seek to demonstrate, however, the problem of rap music and black youth is being viewed by the speakers in these talks through the other end of the telescope: for the most part *being* does not determine consciousness, quite the reverse. The terms of the conflict framing this chapter, at least as understood by its subjects, are as much if not more to do with antithetical cosmologies as structural matters of a-symmetric social power. For the speakers below the conflict is between the cultural hegemony of commercial rap and the authenticity of hip hop culture (see Simons, 2006: 67). To borrow the words of Sherry B Ortner, the subjects of this chapter believe that too many black youth 'accept the representations that underwrite their own domination'. Those who would save them, therefore, are seeking to 'preserve alternative "authentic" traditions of belief and value that allow them to see through those representations' (Ortner, 2006: 52; see Perry, 2004: 49). As one of the speakers Chandler says:

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> One [hip hop culture] spoke to a much higher moral purpose and direction and the
> other [rap music] spoke to this like really debased and degenerate direction. So after
> that I did some research and it led me to the world of hip hop. And in looking at it now
> I began to see that hip hop and what is now referred to as pop rap, commercial rap are
> two different, totally different expressions [...] Pop rap is not the same as hip hop, pop
> rap is basically one aspect, its one aspect separated from a consciousness, and
> bastardised and commercialized by the music industry.

So what specifically is the 'higher moral purpose and direction' Chandler speaks of? In the
Afrocentric ideological and cosmological framework of the talks and lectures I attended,
consciousness was essentially figured as a set of cognitive, intellectual and spiritual
attributes: knowledge of culture, knowledge of race, knowledge of socio-historical situation
and knowledge of self. In the previous chapter I spoke of how consciousness in Afrocentric
thought is regarded as a matter of psychological disinvestment, knowledge acquisition and
preservation (see Howe, 1999; Moses, 1999; Noble, 2005). I described how consciousness
so conceived involves an existential, cultural and racial re-centring where heretofore
scattered subjects are returned and restored to a pristine historically occluded primordial
racial identity (Asante, 2007; Gilroy, 2004b: 88).[43] As Denise Noble puts it, this 'requires the
recovering and recentring [*sic*] of the true African personality though the process of moral,
historical and psychic re-education and transformation in which the African rejects the
impositions of Western 'Black' subjectifications and identities' (Noble, 2005: 137). Gilroy's
term for this is 'ontological essentialism' (Gilroy, 2002: 31-33).[44]

In practice, the 'cultural insiderism' (Gilroy, 2002: 3; see Perry, 2004: 56) which was such a
hallmark of these talks meant that neither speaker nor audience ever really felt obliged to
enunciate a coherent programmatic definition of consciousness or conscious. The noun
consciousness and the adjective *conscious* were used for, and applied freely to, real and

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[43] Howe explains that primordialism involves the 'claim that presently observable beliefs, practices or identities
derive by long, unbroken continuity from an ancient past' (Howe, 1999: 232).

[44] It is this 'ontological essentialism' which provides the racialised philosophical foundations for the cultural
leadership offered by the 'movement intellectuals' in this chapter. In the words of Gilroy, 'This perspective sees
the black intellectual and artist as a leader. Where it pronounces on cultural matters, it is often allied to a realist
approach to aesthetic values that minimises the substantive political and philosophical issues involved in the
processes of artistic representation. Its absolutist conception of ethnic cultures can be identified by the way in
which it registers incomprehending disappointment with the actual cultural choices and patterns of the mass of
black people. It has little to say about the profane, contaminated world of black popular culture and looks
instead for an artistic practice that can disabuse the mass of black people of the illusions into which they have
been seduced by their condition of exile and unthinking consumption of inappropriate cultural objects like the
wrong hair care products, pop music, and western clothing. The community is felt to be on the wrong road, and
it the intellectual's job to give them a new direction, firstly by recovering and then by donating the racial
awareness that the masses seem to lack' (Gilroy, 2002: 31-32).

notional individuals and cultural expressions always with the assumption that everyone present – or rather those that ought to - understood the terms of reference even when such talk entered knowingly esoteric terrain. However, I was able to ascertain a certain implicit economy of consciousness in these talks: consciousness was sometimes measurable by degrees, sometimes absolute. It could be a mental state approximating the summit of spirituality and wisdom, and thus either higher or lower, or alternatively - and more commonly - an absent or present state of being, hard to win and easy to lose (Simons, 2006). What is ethically 'positive', in terms of Judaeo-Christian morality, is 'conscious', has consciousness, and what is correspondingly ethically 'negative' constitutes both the absence of consciousness and a threat to its possible future existence. Afrocentric consciousness at its most idealised combines the Socratic and the priestly (Asante, 2007). It connotes introspection, learning, spiritual purity, even powers of healing and divination, in conjunction with a capacity and calling to pass on these things to others as teacher (Simons, 2006). It is also a heightened awareness and hyper-vigilance; a disenchanted realism verging on paranoia: the band Public Enemy reminding everyone what time it is. This normative viewpoint gives, *at least ostensibly*, no quarter to relativist equivocation: it is not a case of different but equal types of consciousness; there is simply either true 'consciousness' or its absence (Asante, 2007; Howe, 1999).

In the 'Hip Hop v Rap' talk Asante JR. offered a suggestive metaphor for the relationship between cultural retentions and racial consciousness - what Gilroy calls 'tradition as invariant repetition' (Gilroy, 2002: x): 'There's a proverb that says y'know that 'even in a foreign habitat a snail never loses his shell', right so we always keep that shell, African retentions everywhere we go; we have positive African retentions'. In a similar vein Asante JR.'s fellow speaker, Chandler figured cultural retentions in terms of heredity. The homology he perceives between hip hop and jazz – he uses the terms 'synchronicity' and 'fusion' - stems from a 'genetic theme musically that runs through both of them that connects back to the motherland.' What is being addressed in these words is a re-centring of racial subjects *and* cultural expression. This double move is reflexive and mutually reinforcing. Hip hop is being operationalised to culturally re-centre black youth: 'the true voice of youth'; 'a snail never loses its shell'. But this very process proceeds in turn through

hip hop's discursive re-centring in primordial cultural inheritances – the 'genetic theme' - and its corresponding disinvestment from its commercial bowdlerization as rap (see Decker, 1994; Henderson, 1996). A culture and its putative subjects are each in the process here of being regenerated through their simultaneous positing. Svetlana Boym offers a way of thinking about this mobilising of the past for instrumental uses in the present:

> Nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective. Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future. Consideration of the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales.

> (Boym, 2001: XVI)

So, for example, a repeated claim in each of these set of talks was that the reduction of hip hop to rap serves to erase from the historical record the fact that what initially makes it a *culture* –as opposed to merely a loosely related set of aesthetic practices and genres, or a youth culture – is the conscious addition of an organising reflexive element, knowledge (Asante JR., 2008; Chang, 2007). Khonsu insists that one man – founder of the hip hop 'Zulu Nation' - was singlehandedly responsible for conjuring a nascent youth subculture into something more artistically, spiritually and politically wide-ranging by revealing its essentially African nature:

> Why, why do we say knowledge of self? First of all who created these five principals, these five elements of hip hop? It was a man called Afrikaa Bambaata who is the godfather of hip hop. And what he said is that without the five elements hip hop is pretty much like walking with one leg. At the moment we have one element of hip hop that's dominating everything, it's called rap.

It is hip hop's fabled foundational epistemology – 'hip hop is a state of mind' as Chuck D (2008) of Public Enemy writes - which makes it both a suitable vehicle and a candidate for Afrocentric 're-education and transformation'. It bears emphasising that regardless of any implied claims here to the contrary, this pedagogy of cultural retrieval, as Howe points out, 'is not a historical or sociological hypothesis, but a normative assertion' (Howe, 1999: 233). In the 'Hip v Rap' debate Asante JR. states that:

> There's a fifth element [in hip hop] that's really, really, really important, and I think this element is what connects hip hop to the long long tradition of emancipatory creativity all over the world [...] the fifth element is called 'building', what we call knowledge, wisdom and understanding. This is the most crucial element [...] the fifth element is what grounded early - y'know when we listen to Public Enemy or

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> KRS1 or listen to the old skool, I guess it's old skool now, er, hip hop has seen to be grounded in something deeper than - that's going back to that fifth element. So I think it's important to always remember the fifth element, because the fifth element has the force that's the mandatory basic position of black art, that really goes, y'know, its starts with the beginning of time and through all our struggles here in Americas and in England, urm, it's been manifested in different ways.

Asante JR. is ostensibly affirming the historical African roots of hip hop. But he is chiefly doing so in order to make a particular 'normative assertion': to aver that it is from Africa that hip hop derives its mythic – and essentially righteous - consciousness. Hip hop is thus 'connected to a long tradition of emancipatory creativity'; it is 'grounded in something deeper' than the modern-day commercial music industry which produces rap music; it is invariant and archaic, the 'mandatory position of [true] black art', starting at 'the beginning of time' (see Gilroy, 2002: 34). The idea of knowledge as hip hop's fifth element is a key item in the 'vocabulary of motive' used by each speaker to both validate hip hop and affirm his own role in it. Indeed, Asante JR. offers an etymological break-down of the onomatopoeic noun/verb compound 'hip hop'. In tracing its root in the West African language of Wolof and Old English, respectively, Asante JR. suggests that this designation, no mere serendipity, confirms the foundational importance of consciousness and ethics amongst hip hop's pioneers:

> Well we can look at hip hop itself linguistically and anthropologically and see the [African] retentions. So we take the word 'hip', right, hip comes from the Wolof word 'hipi' which is a verb that means to open one's eyes and see. Okay, so, hip is a term of enlightenment [audience member calls out 'word', meaning *truth*] right now we take 'hop' coming from the Old English which means to 'spring forward into action'. So what we have with hip hop is 'enlightened action.

If this is the definitive interpretation of the term, any deviation from 'enlightened action' by those who designate their expressions hip hop infringes trade description. Those who describe what they do as hip hop whose actions are anything less than enlightened are simply guilty of misappropriating the term, according to Asante JR.. By implication then, consciousness, in the sense of being culturally centred, is the possession of *some* people but not others; it vivifies *some* cultural expressions and not others. Attribution, in this regard – specifying *who* is conscious and *what* is conscious - goes to the core of hip hop versus rap. Writing in a collection that deals with the relationship between hip hop and philosophy, Taylor (2005) regards of this as a *fait accompli* for American blacks of a certain generation

(see Kitwana, 2002). He speaks of how a primordial notion of being centred in culture socially positions those who like him might enjoy hip hop but see it as only one part of their social and cultural identity: 'If Culture is something all communities produce, then my detachment from hip-hop culture means I'm detached from the hip-hop community'. By contrast, Chandler, the key speaker at 'Hip Hop v Rap', is categorical as to the stakes involved for black youth and the global black community of being detached from the ancestral sources of a *centred* cultural and racial identity:

> If young people can place black culture, ground themselves in it and feel compelled to continue the legacies then they are our futures. But if they turn their backs on the blackness that they have been gifted as the followers of others, if they do nothing but game in self-congratulatory territories and imagine they are any threat to the society simply by talking negative then they are not our future, they are our fate.

Topographies of the hip hop family

The verbs 'place', 'ground', 'turn', 'game', 'continue', 'imagine' all indicate - in addition to topographical associations - a mode of consciousness to be *achieved*; one based on voluntarist ideas of surrender, sacrifice and duty; the assuming of full responsibility for one's racial identity – 'blackness', conduct and the fate of one's community or 'family' (Gilroy, 2004b).[45] This includes patrolling its borders: repelling outsiders or cultural traitors and, crucially, re-admitting outcasts: those that 'game in self-congratulatory territories'. Steven Connor provides an apt summary of the species of postmodern nostalgia this particular concern with boundaries is representative of:

> This difficulty often plays itself through in postmodern cultural theory in metaphorical-topographical terms of space and territory, in the imagery of centre and margin, inside and outside, position and boundary. This system of metaphors can conjure up an oddly antique-seeming map of the world and global political

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[45] The 'hip hop community' is often interchangeable with the idea of a 'family', with all the essentialist overtones of biological inheritance, genealogy and genetic survival this implies (see Alim, 2006; Asante JR., 2007; Swiss, 2008)). In most – mainly US - usages I have encountered, the hip hop community is a synonym for a constituent part of the wider black community whose racial origins are African (see Taylor, 2005). Hip hop culture by extension is the culture of this racial community. This does not arise, however, from an understanding of culture furnished by critical race theory where 'race' is a social construct whose devastating effects, pervasiveness and stubborn endurance demand it be given a pre-eminence in one's categories of determination. Rather, race is an empirical fact: one's origins and destination. Those who by virtue of phenotype will always be non-members of the racialised community are thereby biologically debarred from enjoying a genuine understanding and appreciation of, let alone ability to master, the culture (Black Dot, 2005). At best they may be tolerated as genuine in their enthusiasm and have associate status extended to them by the more liberal members of the self-described hip hop community or family.

relations, when struggles for power and conquest could be represented in much more reassuringly visible terms; *here* is power, *there* is exploitation and resistance. In their mimicking of this easy but vanished territorialization of power relationships, these metaphors also seem to embody a nostalgia for what has been lost with that sort of map of the world.

<div align="right">(Connor, 1997: 254)</div>

Gilroy may be correct in observing that amid modern day social and cultural fragmentation an 'invariant racial identity', that is, 'Identity...understood as sameness', can seem to provide a reassuring existential anchor (Gilroy, 2004a: 211). But abstract consciousness of racial heredity and descent on its own is inadequate for the securing of psychic territory. The attributes that go to make up a *conscious* identity require meticulous fashioning and maintaining in action with and through the hip hop community (Alexander, 2003; Alexander et al, 2004; Blumer, 1998; Rojek, 2007). However, as Bauman and May are at pains to stress so much of this is tacit and unspoken:

> Belonging to a community is at its strongest and most secure when we believe we have not chosen it on purpose and that we have done nothing to make it exist, and so can do nothing to transform it through our actions.

<div align="right">(Bauman and May, 2006: 44)</div>

For this reason the 'images and postulates' of a community 'are never written down in a formal code or turned into objects of conscious effort aimed at *demarcation* and *maintenance*' (see also Perry, 2004: 56). The Hip Hop History lectures afforded the discursive enactment of hip hop versus rap as a family drama (Gilroy, 2004a; 2004b). For one, the talks created a cultural insider forum for reformed and reforming elders - 'road man' intellectuals. These were in effect male role models whose consciousness has purportedly been shaped by hip hop. Able to also draw experientially upon the stock of social pathology Chandler alludes to, they were intent on employing knowledge and experience didactically for the reintegration of prodigal *youngers* into the fold of respectable 'blackness' (Gilroy, 2004a). Consciousness and a capacity for 'enlightened action' were essentially figured as the fruits of an auto-didactic learning and personal regeneration. Khonsu and Tuggs, for instance, each spoke at length of being inspired to voluntary informal study as teenagers by the didactic urgings contained in the lyrics of Public Enemy and KRS1. In the absence of institutionalised alternatives, hip hop had served

as an educational portal to black history and black social movements (Dimitriadis, 2001). Khonsu depicts this as a form of hip hop literacy:

> Y'know, erm, with the likes of Public Enemy and KRS 1 and, erm, Brand Nubians, they were telling us to read and they were informin us about what was goin on in the world. So, y'know, the emcees it was a remit to study and to be aware so that you can put your information out there. So, y'know, at the age of nineteen when I started I was very clued up of what was goin on and it was comin through from the words and the lyrics. [...] I was studying I was writing down Public Enemy's lyrics, studying it, listening to it, y'know just referencing there there what they was saying and cross-referencing books, cross-referencing historical events. I was like all up in the library – so Public Enemy was the biggest thing, y'know, for me.

Tuggs describes his initiation into hip hop culture in similarly earnest terms as an education in black militancy, organisation and critical intelligence. He says:

> So that began my education...And, erm, I just started getting all of their [Public Enemy's] albums, and they would say names in their albums, they were mentioning people that I'd wanna research. So I started researching about the civil-rights era, about Martin Luther King, about Malcolm X, about the Nation of Islam, about the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People] Just to find out more about what bought these people to where they are right now. So these two groups [Public Enemy and KRS1] were probably the most influential groups with regards to politicising hip hop and making it have a stronger social-political message. They weren't the first [referring to Gil Scott Heron and The Last Poets et al] but they put the stamp upon it.

In addition to 'studying and writing down' lyrics, 'researching' and 'cross-referencing' historical 'events' and organisations, becoming a road man intellectual was figured as dependent upon a certain therapeutic mode of redemptive self-making (Noble, 2005; McGee, 2005; Rose, 1999). Asante JR., maintains that in deprived communities it is older hustlers who often have the ear of youth. In this regard, one speaker, BP, turned to the younger members of his audience and assured them: 'I don't come from school like the LCC [London College of Communication]; I come from the school of life'. The 'road man intellectual' of these talks is akin in many ways to the social survivor as missionary public speaker. They are the 'outreach' person who deploys past negative life experiences in an exemplary, inspirational, or motivational fashion to become a role model for others, particularly younger people (McGee, 2005; Swiss, 2008). Tuggs thus enthusiastically declares to the assembled youth that Malcolm X is the figure who in his damascene conversion from hustler to political leader most embodies the quintessence of 'road man' intellect and pedagogy:

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[Laughing and adopting a more pronounced black London patois] You ever in any kind of trouble the best man to have by your side is a 'road' man, because a road man don't care, yeah? And imagine havin that road man's spirit in a man that was educated. He didn't care what they thought and 'I'm gonna say what needs to be said for the benefit of my people', now that's like seein Superman literally fly off, flyin from the sky down to your feet. That's what Malcolm X was to the young people, that's why his legacy is still so far reachin. He was sayin stuff that no one had ever heard before.

All of the speakers in subtly different ways were trading in a variety of this kind of 'prodigal son' cultural capital. A patent example was in the talk MC Swiss, ex of So-Solid Crew, gave to plug his recently published personal development book for young people, *Spot the Difference*. Chronicling a personal journey from moral turpitude to self-knowledge Swiss was seeking to make amends by steering 'grime' youth away from negativity and toward a path of 'enlightened action':

So myself as an emcee that's been though a journey of being on the streets sellin drugs, y'know, all types of drugs. Smokin drugs myself, dumbin myself down. May have portrayed myself sometimes in the wrong way on TV. I've been through a lot of experiences and I don't want to see the next generation go through the same thing. So I've taken my time out to write this book called *Spot the Difference* whereby if the young people can implement in their lives what's in the book – people will be able to 'spot the difference' in them. We'll all be able to 'spot the difference' in them, y'know.

An important thematic thread here is the idea of wisdom in the road man intellectual as requiring proof of personal sacrifice, seriousness and diligence: 'I've taken my time out to write this book'. With similar intent BP reproves his youthful audience: 'I'd like to see you pick up a pen and paper; I don't necessarily do this for ego'. An echo of Swiss who instructs the young reader near the beginning of his book: 'This book is a study book, so have a dictionary with you if possible' (Swiss, 2008: 3).

In exchanges between speakers and audience members the trope of the hip hop family depended heavily also upon a topography of inside and outside, of initiate and non-initiate (Appiah, 1993; Gilroy, 2004b). On the one hand, this was verbally enacted in exchanges between speakers and audience members where internationally renowned hip hop artists were designated either as close family members, e.g. Jay Z, Naz, Tupac Shakur, Public

Enemy, or as the estranged and outcast, e.g. 50 Cent and Lil Wayne.[46] On the other, it involved giving proof of the speaker's own consciousness by demonstrating an awareness of the hidden messages encoded in conscious lyrics. At certain points an insider code of short-hand terms, knowing phrases, tones of voice and tacit gestures would briefly erupt and annex the space, so that it often felt as if I was eavesdropping on an animated exchange at someone else's social event where a close acquaintance or family member was the topic of conversation. It is important at this stage to underline, however, Gusfield's point about the 'rhetorical element in institutional procedures' (Gusfield, 1989: 19-20). That is, how persuasive human action not only operates at a micro-level of interaction, symbol and affect but has a presence in the conduct of institutions. These latter, moreover, mobilise 'public acts and artefacts [which] serve to persuade audiences that legal, political and social institutions have a particular character.' These talks and lectures had been organised by specific cultural organisations pressing a discernible social and political agenda served by notions of a hip hop community or family.[47] The yardstick used to invoke and judge kinship in this family - including the place of internationally famous artists - was (predictably) whether or not a rap emcee is or has ever been 'conscious' (Alim, 2007). The next question was the extent to which the political and spiritual content of an artist's rap lyrics and public and private conduct form a congruent whole. Discussion shifted continuously between often unambiguous praise for a particular artist's aesthetic abilities - their rhythmic 'flow', clever lyrics, word-play, and 'beats' - and knowing evaluations of their ethical conduct and

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[46] Howe maintains that the positing of 'internally homogeneous 'African' ways of knowing and feeling about the world' demands the excluding on ideological grounds of certain Africans who fail in this regard: 'Even those who *are* apparently in-group members, by birth, ancestry or pigmentation, can be excluded from it on ideological grounds if they fail to accept the ideology's doctrines; for such failure can be attributed, quite simply, to brainwashing by the dominant Eurocentric culture. Thus the belief system is insulated from the possibility of critique or falsification' (Howe (1999: 2). See also Taylor (2005).

[47] For example, the organisation responsible for putting on 'The Hip Hop History Lectures' at the London College of Communications is TamaRe House Associates. TameRe House is a small Afrocentric community/social enterprise with a book publishing arm. In addition, it also 'organise[s] business concepts, workshops, and training seminars' and 'assist[s] with Fundraising'. It describe itself on its website as: 'A Community based Organisation, which is established for the purpose of engaging in a multiple of Educational and Business development projects that serve the cultural preservation of local communities.' A sample of some of the book titles TameRe Hous publishes should indicate the personal and cultural development focus of its work: Paul Simons, *Urban Cries, Volume 1: Communicating with God through Music and Performing Arts and the Implications of the Hip Hop Culture,* Paul Simons, *Mystical and Magical Paths of Self and Not-Self;* Swiss, *Spot the Difference: Raising your Game to Reach your Full Potential;* Helen Adom, *Nubian Minds: An Afrocentric View on Psychoanalysis.;* Maurisha Skyers, *She who feels...Knows, A Journey into Self Awareness.*

any services rendered, or not, to the black community. For example, a conversation starts between one of the speakers, Tuggs, and some audience members on US rapper Jay Z, who has just appeared in a television programme about his life:

> Tuggs: I really started re-evaluating him and his life, erm, y'see that [television] programme last week on Jay Z? Yeah, do y'know what? I ain t gonna lie man, I aint gonna lie and I know *conscious* heads may disagree but y'now what when it came to it: *respect*.

> First audience member (cutting in): I think he may just be turning over a new leaf but I can't really accept a man who has made so many attacks against other rappers, like Nas, what he did to Nas' ex, Biggy and all them kind of things.

> Second audience member (cutting in): He's actually been on television and dealt with that.

> First audience member: I saw that as a sign of Jay Z's weakness. He has an immense ability to do the numbers like P-Diddy, Master P and so on, he has a great ability, but that showed me he had weakness in his youth, which even as a forty year old man you're not going to overcome and deal with. But he's trying to make amends so I respect him for that.

This type of exchange with its tacit knowledge and cultural references, qualifications, equivocations and rationalisations made plain a palpable emotional bond amongst speakers and many in the audience to the lyrics, pronouncements and biographies of the artists under discussion. Jointly they would speculate on the motives behind a particular act or change in artistic direction with the kind of amusement, exasperation and knowing indulgence usually reserved for an intimate. It was striking how seriously the participants took such conversation. There was a powerful sense of cultural and affective threads connecting their own lives to those of black artists, entrepreneurs and activists on the other side of the Atlantic. Tuggs and Khonsu jointly pronounce on Jay Z:

> Tuggs: Jay Z – I've had a very interesting relationship with Jay Z. When he first came out with *Reasonable Doubt* I thought that was an amazing album, amazing. But then he started on his whole bling thing for like a whole heap of years, a whole heap of years and. Erm, I was judging him – I aint gonna lie – I was judging him as an as an artist and for the potential that he possessed. When he did that parties, misogyny etc etc I really wasn't on it at all, right?

> Khonsu (cutting in): Yes, just wanted to add that erm Jay Z started off as a conscious rapper [Tuggs responds: 'for real']. He was part of, erm, he was raised by Jazzo? Jazzo was Afrocentric to the bone and and Jay Z was a speed rapper so when he just started he was just talkin about culture, and somewhere along the line he is where he's at and he's still making, erm, great moves out there for

hip hop - but y'know he's just not on that anymore, y'know? But erm erm just like I was sayin hip hop's going through its adolescence right now, Jay Z's maturin now so – so who knows what he'll produce in the future based on him aging and maturin and becoming more wise.

This discussion of Jay Z demonstrates that the acquisition of great material wealth was not necessarily regarded as increasing remoteness from the grassroots hip hop family or making an artist less 'conscious'. So-called 'playa hating' was not on conspicuous display. Commercially successful artists who retained a level of consciousness in their work were not necessarily 'sell-outs' but those who had blazed a trail for others to follow. With such success, however, comes the moral responsibility to act as a good role model and to put wealth to progressive uses. Hence, the trope of family/community requires a certain finessing of the economic inequality multi-millionaire rap artists arguably symbolise. For example, Tuggs with the aid of an audience member gives a positive gloss to some lyrical bars of Jay Z's where the latter makes direct reference to his own trajectory from conscious but poor rapper to commercially successful product:

Tuggs: And he was sayin, erm: 'Lyrically I'm like Talib Kweli/I used to rap like Common Sense but then I made six mill and haven't rapped like Common since'. [48]

First audience member (cutting in): 'Basically it makes sense – there's money over there...but if you get the money then you can do what you want and that's the essence of that lyric'.

Tuggs (giving his assent to this interpretation): He [Jay Z] says 'I can't help the poor if I'm one of them'.

If publicly deliberating over the consciousness of artists, then, facilitates a shared meaning and imaginative sense of community, how further to define the symbolic parameters of the hip hop family? *Conscious artists*, according to these speakers, deliberately place coded messages in hip hop lyrics that only the *conscious* are capable of discovering and deciphering.[49] The song made famous by Billie Holliday, 'Strange Fruit', for example, was hailed as representative of the primordial metaphoric tendency in black musical art lately developed by hip hop (see Perry, 2004: 50-51). Khonsu states:

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[48] A US recording artist who is frequently hailed as the epitome of the conscious rap emcee (see Dyson, 2007).
[49] The idea of codedness, indecipherability, and the semiotic exclusion of cultural outsiders is formative to the subcultural claims of hip hop culture. It is commonly invoked in explanations of hip hop graffiti writing (see Keith, 2005; and Macdonald, 2002).

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> That just shows you, erm, the codedness in hip hop. Now you might say 'okay I wanna research 'Strange Fruit''. Then you research the lyrics of 'Strange Fruit' and you listen to the song of 'Strange Fruit' and it will take you on a whole different tangent and basically that's what hip hop does, it does it all the time. A lot of the songs you are listening to if you really look into it it's takin you somewhere else to reference something else, and its communicatin a message.[50]

Declarations such as these, which assert at once the opacity of hip hop texts and how they are portals to knowledge (see Bartlett, 2004: 394; Kelley, 1997: 37; Rose, 1994: 99-100) serve also to impart to their audience the qualities required to decipher them. Underscoring the simultaneous readability and refractory nature of hip hop texts is thus a further pedagogic means of *inducing* the conscious hip hop family whilst *educing* the black youth to be brought within its fold. Here the cultural topography is one of sect initiates versus those on the outside. In response to a rap performed by Swiss at the end of the latter's talk, Khonsu comments:

> One thing that hip hop does is erm – you can listen to hip hop on one level where it just sounds good, nice lyrics, or another level where you hear it as a metaphor, there's a lot of metaphors in hip hop. Now Swiss just gave you a good example 'I will reverse you back the essence'. So he's going into esoterics now, like quantum physics, y'know? You can you can break it down deep. Yeah I know Swiss is a deep brother.

Is auto-didactic learning, however, a satisfactory prerequisite for being attuned to such embedded meaning? The strand of Afrocentric millenarianism behind ideas of 'intellect', 'essence' and going 'deep' suggest, perhaps, the limits of an egalitarian purposeful learning. Consciousness, according to Khonsu, has 'esoteric' dimensions. Implying it is conferred only upon an elect few: some people have been blessed with consciousness but not others. Toward the end of the 'Hip Hop v Rap' debate a woman in the audience makes a declaration precisely to this effect:

> I have a question in mind about consciousness within us as people. It seems to me that people are either conscious or they are not and either it's in you or it isn't. It

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[50] The problem with this analysis is that Holliday – in common with most Jazz singers of her time - was not the author of the song with which she was most associated. The song actually had its foundation in a moment of interracial solidarity. 'Strange Fruit' started out life as a poem, written in 1936, by a white left-wing Jewish teacher from the Bronx, Abel Meeropol. It was first published in a trade union magazine, *The New York Teacher*. Meeropol was moved to write 'Strange Fruit' after having seen Lawrence Beitler's photograph of the lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abraham Smith in Marion, Indiana, in August 1930. It was only after Meeropol's poem, published under the pen-name, Lewis Allan, was put to music that it actually came to Billy Holliday's attention. She first performed it in 1939 in a New York club, Cafe Society, considered in that pre-civil rights time a relative oasis of racial harmony. See Mangolick (2001).

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can't be given to you from outside. I just wondered what your opinion was on whether you can actually develop a young black person's consciousness from outside or whether it's either in them or it's not.

In a brief discussion of the Harlem Renaissance, Tuggs mentions rap emcee Nas' referencing Langston Hughes on the album *Hip Hop is Dead*. As if speaking of a sacred text that reveals its meaning only to the chosen few he describes the reception of these lyrics: 'those who would know know and those who don't don't'. Khonsu qualifies this by explaining that it is 'a tradition [that] goes way back thousands of years', involving 'paraphrasing' and 'double meanings'. There are 'different levels, depending on your intellect you can read into what's communicated'. The lauding of metaphor, allegory, code and intertextuality in hip hop lyrics privileges a particular kind of reading and listening: the exegesis of hidden messages lighting the way to transcendental truth and clandestine knowledge. Howe quotes Gerald Early's observation that Afrocentric scholasticism seeks to 'wed knowledge and ideology' (Howe, 1999: 6). It is this, I contend, that partly explains the kind of 'hermeneutical ardour' displayed in these exchanges. An audience member, whose voice has been the most audible in the contributions from the floor, picks up on the suggestion from Khonsu and Tuggs that one's 'level of intellect' is all decisive in understanding hip hop lyrics:

> First audience member: What you're saying is correct. You referred earlier [in a poem performed by Tuggs, 'Journey of the Spoken Word'] to hip hop being like a Jedi art which is an unseen art and I think that's what it is because you can hide, decode messages within songs and motivate people to do certain things and think in a certain way as long as they have the right amount of intelligence. Anyone who doesn't have that intelligence is really not of any use or they won't understand it so – as you say it's not merely an art form it's a mind skill.

Like these speakers, Perry draws attention to the refractory element in hip hop language, saying that 'such obfuscation is part of the black oral tradition' (Perry, 2004: 51). The speed, the slang, the insider allusions, all help create a 'frequently inaccessible cultural space' and that this 'difficulty is a cultural and political strategy, as well as an ideological one' (ibid: 50). However, the claims being pressed here for deliberate lyrical obfuscation do not amount to a celebration of what John Keats famously called the 'negative capability' of poetic speech; its shimmering ambiguity and resistance to ultimate understanding. On the contrary, hip hop's linguistic impenetrability is paradoxically given a positivist spin. It is an enigma to be deciphered and laid bare as proof of membership of the elect band of the conscious.

Leaving to one side the issue of tendentious textual interpretation and factual error, not only is it being suggested that a conscious person could apprehend the definitive intentions of a particular author but also the latter's level of spirituality. Hence, there being no tension between ideology and art, the sacred and profane in hip hop can be safely annexed. Perry terms this 'the empathic fallacy'; a belief in the transparent meaningfulness of intentions, ideas and feelings – positive or negative – as these are directly transmitted in acts of communication (Perry, 2004: 49/51).[51]

Metaphor and enigma, however, Tuggs reminds the audience, historically also have a more tangible function in African American vernacular expression (Gates, 1989; Levene, 2007; Mintz and Price, 1992). Metaphor and linguistic concealment were socially vital in black slave communicative practices (Levene, 2007). Gilroy discusses how in the music of new world slaves 'utopian desires...must be invoked by...deliberately opaque means' (Gilroy, 2002: 37). Tuggs thus speaks of the strategy of metaphorically concealing the target of abuse in songs sung by slaves that express social frustration:

> One of the most favoured metaphors that I think existed was, erm, when it seemed as if people were cussing their girlfriends, yeah? They would refer to them as – they'd refer to their girlfriends as mama in the songs, and it'd be like 'er, mama's treatin me so bad, she's treatin me so horrible, she's getting on my nerves, I wanna leave the mama' etc etc. They was actually talkin about the slave master but they didn't want to put the slave master's name in cause they would get beats. So therefore he's replaced that with mama.

In practice, the specific interest being shown in an emcee's use of metaphor in the context of these talks is one part the obsessive attention to detail of the seriously dedicated fan, one part the affirmative myth-making allegories of personal development talk, one part the paranoid sign watching of the sect initiate. The *conscious* 'hip hop head' – already endowed with 'the right amount of intelligence' – plumbs the hallowed, socially functional musical text for the intentional placing of clandestine messages to fellow connoisseurs and initiates: 'those who know know'. Those who do not are 'not of any use'. What may sound elitist, however, is perhaps better understood as self-protective, expressing a fundamentally fragile and embattled sense of social identity. At the Hip Hip History exhibition/book launch I

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[51] I return to this issue of the empathic fallacy in subsequent chapters, as well as to questions concerning the decipherability and transparency of hip hop speech.

entered into conversation with another attendee, 'M'.[52] The latter, black, male, and probably in his late thirties/early forties, referred to a series of esoteric, occult and mystical cosmologies, bodies of knowledge and samizdat Afrocentric texts he had studied as part of a programme of self-education (see Howe, 1999: 63; Moses, 1999; Simons, 2006).[53] With haughty dismissal and barely concealed contempt, M attributed what he evidently regarded as my limited capacity for self understanding or knowledge of world history to the absence of consciousness. Unlike him I had served no intellectual apprenticeship in the incendiary, suppressed literatures of an Afrocentric priestly caste. As a digest of some of these ideas and perspectives our conversational exchange was perhaps a genuine gesture by M towards correcting this state of affairs. However, M also claimed, hinting at the elect nature of his position, that his initiation into 'esoterics' had put him in the possession of dangerous – 'classified' – knowledge of the conspiratorial doings of the globally powerful. With an enigmatic twinkle that made it difficult to know whether he was pulling my leg or being deadly serious, he stated that he had to be careful about what he divulged to me as a researcher. He would tell me certain things and then not long after the CIA might pay me a visit, tell me they had my sister and I would have no choice but to betray him.

Hip hop and rap: 'you receive that energy you become that'

Chandler maintains that 'music is a carrier of consciousness.' Khonsu warns of the equivocal consequences of this: 'be careful of what you listen to because it's intentional'. These talks repeatedly articulated a conspiratorial rhetoric: hip hop is 'a Jedi art', 'a mind skill', and *consciousness* a defence against the subliminal messages and suggestion artfully concealed in lyrics; pace the allusion above to the CIA (Simons, 2006: 63). The perceived need to bring such things to light resonates with Black Dot's comment that his writing is performing a metaphoric murder in the cause of removing the Eurocentric intellectual 'matrix' of civilisation, modernity, aesthetics and progress:

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[52]Apropos an embattled sense of social identity, M [11/11/08] spoke of how Jazz trumpeter Mile Davis played onstage at concerts with his back facing mainly white audiences to make a symbolic point about historical subordination, social exclusion and reparation.

[53] Howe writes of Afrocentric organic intellectuals and their existence outside the academy: 'These men's writings bear all the marks of an autodidact subculture in which huge but indiscriminate erudition, antiquarianism, deep suspicion of all 'established' intellectual authorities, and a strong streak of mystical, occult and eschatological beliefs mingled' (Howe, 1999: 63). All of the speakers in these talks to some extent bore the hallmarks in their speech of the social type described by Howe above.

Remember: I can tell you the truth about Hip Hop, but then I'll have to kill you; not physically, but kill your old way of thinking until you become born again and are able to see the Matrix of Hip Hop for what it really is.

(Black Dot, 2005: 3)

In his millenarian Afrocentric hip hop manifesto, *Hip Hop Decoded*, Black Dot[54] claims that the mainstream prohibition on superstition and magic by Western 'logical and linear' thought is all part of the historically long-standing project to ensure the hegemony of the dominant global regime: 'the matrix'(ibid: 13-14). So that non Western, non-linear cosmologies and their countercultural possibilities are suppressed if not eliminated. He writes:

> This is what the Matrix fears the most, one's ability to believe or have faith that an action, or object or circumstance that is not logically connected to a course of events can influence its outcome. Those who believe in superstitions live on the realm of the illogical and unexplainable, in other words, the magic realm. The key to its effectiveness is ones faith and belief. This is the only thing that can give a superstition true life. The Matrix knows that the only way it can survive and have power over you are your faith and belief in it...and only it, so it has created tons of negative press around superstitions to discredit them[...] The system is set up for logical and linear thoughts and actions. Believe in the unbelievable. Have faith in forces that the Matrix cannot even comprehend. Then sit back and watch as these forces go to work on our behalf to bring the Matrix to an end.

(ibid)

For those who see a concerted ethnocentric conspiracy for domination based on the denigration of other civilisations, their achievements and cosmologies, the New Age deconstruction of scientific rationalism implied here has a potent vindicatory value. The influential US Afrocentric academic Molefi Asante speaks of this as 'soul as method' (see Howe, 1999: 153). If, as his son Asante JR. maintains, hip hop literally translates as 'enlightened action', then the speakers in these talks certainly saw it as their role to enlighten in the manner described by Black Dot, to kill old ways of thinking, or rather to present counter-enlightenment as heterodoxy (Asante, 2007; Howe, 1999; Moses, 1999; Noble, 2005).

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[54] Black Dot was repeatedly referred to by Khonsu in reverent tones, and the audience was urged to obtain his book *Hip Hop Decoded*, which I deduced to be a key source of ideas and inspiration both for the Hip Hop History Lectures and Khonsu's own thinking.

Therefore, in what now follows, I examine a series of statements and presentations which seek to offer proof that the moral and psychological energy and intentions of those who create words and music transmit directly to their audiences via the vibrational frequencies of speech and sound. Reciprocally, that the literal semantic meaning of particular words and phrases produce a palpable, measurable impact – positive or negative - on readers and hearers. Further, that owing to its more elementary nature, analogue musical technology retains the capacity to conduct positive spirituality in recorded sound whereas digital technology eliminates this possibility. In the particular 'vocabulary of meaning' on display here, with its anti-rational epistemology and social functionalism (Asante, 2007; Black Dot, 2005; Noble, 2005; Simons, 2006), the wall between what Burke (1989) refers to as *semantic* and *poetic* meaning is knowingly breached. Here is a demonstration of 'soul as method'.[55] The epistemic divide, however, is already trangressed in this alternative public sphere through the praxis of the road man intellectual, captured in compound terms like 'edutainer' and 'raptivist'. Referring to the findings of an unnamed behavioural researcher, Chandler declares:

> Music when it's heard whether it's negative, destructive, whether it's weakening, whether it's strengthening, it's always on the intention of the person who gave you the music, not the music itself, but the person creating the music. He found that if that individual has a negative, destructive attitude, or their intent is to be negative, or degrading then that is what moves through the musical vibrational tone and is received by the listener.

Chandler's basic thesis is that the semantic content of every word one uses conveys to user and listener either positive or negative energy, the benefits or otherwise accruing to one's use of language depending entirely on the degree of care and consciousness – even vigilance - in its use. He says:

> The word 'try', to *try* to do something is not to do it. It is to *try* to do it. The word presupposes failure. But each time we use one of these words just in conversation it sends a vibrational message [muffled]...everyday conversations to our kids, y'know, um, as parents. The word 'need', the word 'need' takes our power away every time; it robs us of our ability to create. Whenever we use the word 'need' we identify with

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[55] Semantic meaning conventionally resides in the positive sciences and the empirical truths and facts upon which they pronounce and comment, the categories and classifications they erect. Poetic meaning, conversely, is that which has no pretence to semantic factuality but aims – through symbol making and metaphor – at a philosophical truth. Excepting, of course, the language of semantic meaning can also be read as a rhetorical and discursive register where the tone of its language, syntax and lexicon, bolster its claims to semantic authority and hence its relative position in cultural life. See Burke (1989: 87-89/89-91) and Alexander (2003).

fear. The word 'need' prevents us from having; to say that we 'need' something means we don't have it, it's a lack. When identifying a child as 'needy' you have described a very fearful person. So, you look at these terms that you use on a daily basis, and you begin to see the power of words.

Chandler is enunciating quite an extreme form of positive psychology here (McGee, 2005). Its applicability to rap and hip hop lyrics, however, is easily deduced. He is implying that a great deal of rap has the capacity to psychologically debilitate both rapper and listener through its negative lexicon – but, equally, suggesting the personal development potential of lyrics carefully crafted around messages of self-efficacy. This indeed expresses a keynote Afrocentric brand of idealism (Asante, 2007; Simonson, 2006; Swiss, 2008) where thought and ideas alone have the power to alter material reality (Howe, 1999: 236-237). The consciousness and energy in different varieties of hip hop and rap, according to this thesis, will act somatically. Chandler avers that: 'once you begin nodding your head and affirming it you're allowing that energy to penetrate the deepest chambers of your psyche, the deepest aspect of your whole being. You receive that, you become that.'

In their respective sessions, BP and Chandler each presented the same set of research 'results' from a series of experiments with water and sound vibrations conducted by a Japanese doctor of alternative medicine based in the US, Masaru Emoto. Emoto claims to have charted and measured the vibrational frequencies musical sounds and the semantic content of verbal expression transmit to bodies, and to have assessed the consequent impact on bio-systems of energy and to the molecular structure of the body's water content. Vibrational frequencies carried by both sound and the meaning of words and phrases are alleged to change the molecular structure of water and – depending on the ethical content of the message – to produce beautiful crystals or ugly a-symmetric patterns. Chandler showed a series of slides with images taken from Emoto's research, remarking

> Now, this is the water crystal that had the words 'thank-you' projected onto the water; this is what the water will turn into [a nice clear crystal shape]. Now, this is water that had the words 'you make me sick, I will kill you' [messy/dirty image]. Now, think about this, think about what this produces day-in-and-day-out that is filled with derogatory words...completely based on a non-creative spirit based on the science you're listening to. This is what water does in your bodies; this is what it looks like.

Chandler as a monist – he at one point declares 'all is one' - discerns evidence here for the interconnectedness of everything. He contends that with these findings Emoto has

resoundingly proven that – along with heavy-metal, unkind sentiments and messages of ill-will - 'negative', 'pop' or 'commercial' rap is capable of inflicting psycho-biological damage on its listeners at a profoundly systemic level. The issue for hip hop and young people's personal development is not only the psychological importance of a positive lexicon but the potential physical outcomes of a negative one:

> Now, think about our children listening to rap music day-in-and –day-out and think about what the impact of that music through the vibrational frequency has on the water content of your bodies; you're 75% water, 75% living inside us. Water is a carrier of information...it is the best known conductor of information...water possesses the ability to store information that has been impressed upon it for a given period of time. So when you look at that, this is the latest research, scientific research dealing with water and vibrational frequencies. That when water is constantly put upon over a period of time it becomes that, which means that our children literally are being moulded into something other than what they came here as just based on a music that their listening to, the power of rap, commercial rap that they hear over the airwaves, they are literally being transformed through the vibrational frequencies as it impacts the fluid in their bodies.

All this suggests that words (and sounds) are transparent ciphers for unambiguous semantic meanings, that referent and signifier are metaphysically identical (Eagleton, 1996). Moreover, each word (or sound) is suffused with the consciousness and ethics of its author (speaker/writer) at the moment of its conception, and is transported directly, without mediation, into whatever passive 'body' – reader/listener/interlocutor - is waiting to receive it. In addition therefore to affording a glimpse into the spiritual health of the imagination of their creators, musical sounds and lyrics, according to this thesis, are metonymic of the whole moral substance of their material production. The 'positive' or 'negative' energy of a person, group and/or organisation responsible for a particular cultural work will inevitably pervade, even determine, its moral character, deeply affecting its listener.

Taking up this idea of specific musical genres and types of messages transmitting specific effects to specific bodies, Khonsu claimed that there was a direct relation between the intensification of danger and urban violence in modern UK cities and the specific sonic tone and character of the grime music aesthetic and sensibility (see Gidley, 2007; Goodman, 2010; Reynolds, 2007/2009). In this he means not only the *content* of the lyrics but importantly the *speed* and *intensity* of its emcee flow (see chapter six). Comparing this style of emceeing to the UK hip hop of his youth he says that 'Now it's become more an outburst

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of energy for young people, it's a way of expression if certain things are happening'. The 'things' he is referring to are gun and knife crimes and the post-code battles between rival youth gangs which in recent years have received much media attention. He literally believes the London of 2008 to have 'a whole different energy' to that of the late 1980s when he was a youthful emcee, an energy embodied in the indigenous turn hip hop has taken with grime:

> When I hear that I notice that the lyrics are sped up. Y'know if you watch the footage [of 1980s UK hip hop] we were rappin at a certain BPM [beats per minute] and nowadays they've doubled the pace, and for me it's just that intensity that's happenin right now. Y'know it's the outburst is more intense y'know.[56]

MC Swiss speaks of something similar:

> If you look at grime today, grime: who knows about grime? It's like a hybrid of garage and a conglomeration of hip hop, garage and whatever, and a lot of these youths are just – they got so much energy boiled up inside they just wanna let it out. Y'know what I'm sayin? It's really *grime*, that's what it is.

Swiss comically makes a series of rapid grunting rhythmic noises in parody of the manic energy of grime music to illustrate his point. The audience laugh in acknowledgement. He continues: 'y'know what I'm sayin? There's like, so much energy inside; they just need to let it out – y'know?'

Musical technology and consciousness

For the speakers in these talks a keenness to demonstrate how types of energy, consciousness and spirituality are conveyed via the vibrational properties of music, lyrics and sound technology seems to arise from a need to somehow legitimate in more empirical terms an avowedly moral interrogation of rap music. What is interesting is how words like 'science' and 'research' are liberally employed within an implicitly anti-science posture, one where things traditionally treated as threats to scientific validity – subjective feeling, aesthetics, sensibility, spirituality, polemic and affect – are fully embraced, indeed stamped with cultural authority. Underlining the symbolically vacillating nature of this enterprise, and echoing the discursive thread of priestly caste elitism referred to earlier, BP served advance warning to the audience that not everyone will be sufficiently endowed with the

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[56] As Goodman points out, quoting Kodwo Eshun, all electronic beats embody an '"artificial discontinuum" that is driven by the impetus to "design, manufacture, fabricate, synthesize, cut, paste and edit' (Goodman, 2010: 60). This is something 'that abducts bodies, modulating their movements'. This only underlines the problematical nature of a neo-traditional annexing of hip hop.

consciousness to appreciate the *science* he was about to expound: 'I want you to take note of this; this is more for the spiritual people'. Like the other speakers Khonsu flatly rejects the hegemonic epistemic boundary between the spiritual/metaphysical realm and scientific logic and linear rationality (Black Dot, 2005; Simons, 2006). He argues that audio technology itself contains greater or lesser degrees of positive spiritual energy according to the specific nature of the organic materials employed in its manufacture and, equally, the range of sonic options it makes available through its hardware. In a thesis with historical dimensions, he asserts that the decline of conscious hip hop around the mid 1990s and co-extensive developments in mass-market audio-technology are correlated. So for example in the late 1980s three things occur simultaneously within the field of audio technology with allegedly dramatic consequences for the subsequent state of black consciousness: vinyl as a mass market product is phased out, the manufacture of equalisers halted, and CD technology introduced. The fact that all of this coincides with the emergence and aggressive marketing of gangsta rap, the forerunner of nihilistic commercial rap, as well as the laying low of many working-class Black American urban neighbourhoods by crack-cocaine (see Bourgois, 2003) is, according to Khonsu, no mere accident of history. Invoking the importance of analogue audio reproduction in twentieth century black cultural resistance (see Weheliye, 2005), he regards the standard colour of vinyl, black, as pulsing with racialised bio-chemical significance: 'Vinyl is black in colour. Vinyl is like a melanin disk.' A strand of Afrocentric thought holds that the higher concentration in black people of the pigmentation substance melanin is a key source of their creative brilliance and the heightened spirituality they enjoy in comparison to Caucasians (Howe, 1999: 266-269). Although he does not enter into the details of this, Khonsu is suggesting here some sort of racialised homology between the *soul* of many black recording artists and the black carbon pigmentation used to give polyvinyl chloride its shade. The relationship between black carbon and melanin has been pursued on Afrocentric websites, as in the following example:

> It is carbon that gives melanin its blackness. Carbon is the organizing molecule that gives its melanin its structure. It is carbon that gives melanin the ability to absorb energy to bind with other molecules while retaining stability and coherence.[57]

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[57] 'Melanin Wellness Part I: Melanin and Sacred Metals and Stones', from the Afrikan Liberation Institute. Accessed at (on 8th May 2010):
http://www.abibitumikasa.com/forums/afrikan-healing-systems/41504-

However, for Khonsu, the spiritual significance of vinyl is also a component of the fact that a diamond needle – something *natural* - is required to transmit the vibrations from the grooves of the record. Vinyl's passing thus means no further role in recorded sound for a *mineral* whose own purity makes it an ideal conductor of musical spirituality: 'You use a diamond for a needle on vinyl. In essence - natural elements. Vinyl captures accurately the emotions of the recording session...Remember, that diamond is a precious stone. A diamond is for purity.' So the spiritual energy imputed to diamonds combines with the melanin evoked by vinyl's black carbon pigment to create a sound reproduction format receptive to the fine-grain timbre of artistic emotion: 'With vinyl you are getting this purity.' Hence for Khonsu, the 'different ways that sound is manipulated' is decisive for its level of consciousness. CD technology replaces the 'natural' spirituality and energy of the phonograph record with something wholly artificial: 'Now CD is a new technology. What a CD is in essence is...an illusion of music. You're not getting the emotion of the music/the energy...in essence the CD is a synthetic account of what sound is. It's not real sound, it's synthetic sound.' Likewise, the simultaneous decline of sound equalisers has its 'spiritual reason'. Khonsu suggests that the extensive range of options equalisers once made available to recording artists was of concern to audio technology and musical recording industries who by their joint actions demonstrated they were intent on filtering out affective colorations antagonistic to the rationalism and materialism of the dominant powers: 'When you have one hundred options you can capture the emotional/spiritual element.'

In each of these examples, where poetic meanings are given semantic warrant (Burke, 1989), an epistemology and methodology is in use in flagrant violation of mainstream scientific understandings of complex cause, effect, association and correlation (see Howe, 1999: 110-111). In asserting the inseparability of the metaphysical and the empirical in rap's cultural warfare against black youth the speakers are evidently engaged in a cultural warfare of their own. The 'vocabulary of meaning' underwriting the use of the term 'science' therefore needs, in this context, to be understood as at once rhetorical and metaphoric, appropriative and strategic; and within the idiom of Afrocentric hip hop, avowedly cultural.

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melanin-wellness-melanin-sacred-metals-stones.html

A young audience member of about thirteen having just sat through the Masuru Emoto video addressed BP with his tongue firmly in his cheek: 'So if I drink a bottle of water with the word *happy* on it will it make me happy?', to which BP instantly and sincerely responded 'yes it will!' Another youth of about the same age directly piped up: 'But if you start saying 'believe in the power of water' isn't that an un-balance between religion and science?' BP's reply was: 'but religion came before science – that's why this stuff is so deep'. Significantly, not one adult member of an audience of about twenty either came to the young person's support or at any point vocalised scepticism of their own. It was the same during Chandler's presentation.

Conclusion: hypodermic rap versus authentic hip hop

> ...appeals to blood and bone have ultimately proved themselves unreliable and unsuccessful. They privilege biology over belief and promise more sameness than any group's experience can actually sustain. By emphasizing the identity of the victim rather the innate injustices of victimization, movements based solely on identity can encourage each group to seek gains at the expense of others, to settle for placing different faces in high places, rather than using the knowledge that all oppressed groups have about the necessity to challenge *all* exploitation, dehumanization, and injustice.

(Lipsitz, 2007: 192)

The elaboration I have just discussed in this chapter of a set of heterodox propositions held by certain hip hop movement intellectuals clearly represents at one level a sincere desire to deliver a knock-out blow to rap and its debased cosmology. It seeks to offer *evidence* demonstrating beyond dispute that mundane adult disquiet over rap lyrics is based on a profound metaphysical intuition. I posed this as a conflict between the cultural hegemony of commercial rap and the authenticity of hip hop culture. However, as I showed in the previous chapter this opposition is empirically problematic. Not least because the reduction this binary *does* rely upon not only ignores the complexities of culture's reception but attempts to determine its effects in advance by appeals to pseudo-science, New Age spirituality and moral imprecation. The manner in which young people are capable of consuming, producing and exchanging a range of commercial, *gangsta* and nihilistic rap music potentially incorporates a 'mixture of hegemony and authenticity involved in relationships of power', embodying 'both "penetrations" of the dominant culture and limitations on those penetrations' (Ortner, 2006: 52). Kelley (1996), in his treatise on

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gangsta rap, persuasively argues just this. But the 'rhetorical element in institutional procedures' I mentioned earlier should not be overlooked in how this evidence was marshalled organisationally and by who. These talks need to be understood symbolically as a public affirmation through pedagogic display of Afro-centred – *alternative* – knowledge. The rebuttal of the mainstream separation of spirituality and materialism is strategic *and* symbolic; simultaneously *inducing* and *educing* the conscious hip hop family (Black Dot, 2005; Noble, 2005; Simons, 2006; Swiss, 2008).

I've spoken in this chapter about how speakers in these talks conceive of the role of hip hop in recovering a primordial racial and cultural consciousness. How hip hop re-centred becomes traditional and authentic. I've also discussed how this in turn demands the demarcating and patrolling of the affective, ideological and cosmological limits of the hip hop community or family through modes of speech, and how particular cultural figures are anointed with primary responsibility for this. In practice, the cultural aggressor referred to at the beginning – 'rap is a modern cultural weapon' - possesses many of the features of a hypodermic syringe. Asante JR. might well bemoan the fact that where rap is concerned economic power resides firmly with old white male capitalists and not the communities that birth and nurture this form. But he and others in these talks actually figure the problem as primarily one of cultural and racial *alterity* producing *intra-racial division*. The chemical melanin determines character, creativity, emotional life and spirituality. The 'community' is not only grounded in a particular cultural history. The 'community' is mystically grounded in the racial memory and character contained in melanin (see Noble, 2005). It is therefore less that black youth captured by white owned rap music slip the ethical bonds of solidarity with the economically and culturally excluded than that they betray the racialised culture stamped upon them for eternity by their phenotype (Gilroy, 2004a; Gilroy, 2004b). In the absence of the referent Africanicity, blackness for youth located outside the hip hop family is an empty signifier (see Taylor, 2005: 80-86). Hence, the human will and sentiments of one cosmology – the commercial rap industry - are seen in this chapter as literally being injected like donated blood from one being, or host, into another – the global black community. But, in this case, blood whose metaphysical cells intend the receiving body's collapse not

enhanced functioning. Culture has consciousness and is determining of consciousness. This is the racialised axiology of the opposition hip hop versus rap as expressed in these talks.

It is my sincere belief that the racialised communitarian ethos I encountered here not only runs up against the inescapable empirical evidence of hip hop's globally diffuse and culturally plural character, its separatist solutions to black youth's disaffection and social subordination are closed, defensive and inward looking. This cultural nationalism serves only to displace socio-economic deprivation in a *culturalised* politics of uplift and solidarity built on the dubious foundations of racial ancestry, epidermis and phenotype (Gilroy, 2004a). Its embattled politics eschews transversal solidarities and shared interests with others similarly positioned *across* racial, ethnic, and national lines, let alone those of gender, class and sexuality (Howe, 1999: 82-83).[58] Such a prospectus runs entirely counter to the generous and open vision of hip hop offered by Chang (2007) of a plural culture which, notwithstanding the important role of cultural nationalist ideas at various stages of hip hop's development, has, historically, been highly fungible and artistically and socially diverse. The frequent instances of new-age, messianic millenarianism, indiscriminate appeals to pseudo-science, racially supremacist ideas and conspiracy thinking I witnessed during these talks were at once bathetic and verging on the sinister. That such energy by what seemed mostly sane and rational people was being invested in the running of social enterprises, educational workshops, life-coaching seminars and publishing operations devoted to the propagation of mystical and chauvinistic ideas was both difficult to compass and a depressing index of racialised alienation. That all this was being done in the name of (hip hop) education and young black people's consciousness is a matter of profound concern and raises some challenging questions about the ethics and limits of tolerance for this particular variety of obscurantism and its regressive cultural politics (see Gilroy, 2004a).

In the chapter that now follows I shall be exploring the approach taken by another black 'movement intellectual', poet and rapper Roger Robinson, to the use of hip hop for young people's personal development. In a departure from the neo-traditionalist pedagogy I have just been discussing, however, I shall be examining a form of hip hop education claiming to

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[58] See chapter seven of this thesis.

embody a *radically aslant and un-centred* hip hop aesthetic, and to be faithful to a cultural politics based more on egalitarian ideas than particularistic solidarities.

CHAPTER FIVE:

From Periphrasis to Personal Development: A Cultural Biography of a Hip Hop Poet and Teacher

> If the artist is the raised consciousness, then all that he touches, all that
> impinges on his consciousness, must be raised…THE LARGEST WORK OF ART IS
> THE WORLD ITSELF.[59]

Introduction: experience and education

A person who combines writing, performing and teaching poetry is formed by a particular sequence of events and historical circumstances. A primary cultural environment prizing flair in oral and written forms of communication - one that emphasises the social function of literacy and where opportunities for political debate are plentiful - can infuse an individual with a calling to use their creativity and skill to put their own artistic stamp on the world and for the betterment of others. Initiated into a countercultural identity – a hip hop sensibility and aesthetic - such an individual may see it as his or her *political* duty to reclaim poetic expression for the ordinary people to whom it is has historically been denied by the custodians and gate-keepers of high culture. Experience and education may teach that poetry is at best an irrelevance, a lapidary activity for the privileged few, and at worst an arcane object of fear. But hip hop with its irreverent spirit of freestyle, bricolage and antiphony, can teach otherwise.

The person I refer to is Roger Robinson: poet, rapper, singer, writer of fiction, and teacher of poetry, and the subject of this chapter. Trinidadian born, he is black, male, and in his early forties, and now UK based. He was born into a middle class family but brought up in what he describes as a 'ghetto area' of Trinidad's second city, San Fernando. He moved to the UK in his early twenties to study, living in London for a further seventeen years.

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[59] African American poet Amiri Baraka, quoted in Thomas (1998, 311).

In what follows I shall explore from the vantage-point of cultural biography the relationship discussed in chapter three between hip hop, cultural activism and the pedagogic. Roger's starting point for his teaching and outreach is that hip hop culture comes into being as an expression of socially excluded youth seeking ways to publicly declaim, liberate and legitimate their own expressive power. As such its aesthetic, sensibility and ethos are inherently egalitarian, making it a perfect vehicle for educational outreach. In the previous chapter an authentic, culturally (re) centred hip hop was posited in a series of didactic statements by hip hop educators as an antidote to commercial rap music's deadly pathogens (Asante JR., 2008; Kitwana, 1994). This was about suasive efforts to enlighten young people, bring them back within the fold of the racial family, and set them upon a more 'conscious' path: a topography of group membership and a bio-politics of 'right living'. To do this required making an inventory of rap 'representations that underwrite...domination'; listing their effects and demonstrating their alterity with respect to an authentic hip hop culture. In stark contrast to this neo-traditionalist perspective, hip hop's pedagogic capacity derives, in Roger's view, precisely from the fact that hip hop culture at its best is *radically aslant and un-centred*. He states that 'hip hop is an amorphous thing' with 'no one definition of what hip hop is or isn't' (see Hall, 2005). This cultural indeterminacy, recalling what Perry says about hip hop being an 'open discourse' (Perry, 2004: 5), means that efforts to petrify it will be confounded by new mutations and rhyzomatic shoots (Back, 1999: 184-185). As such, it refuses, according to Roger, the settled hierarchy of high and low culture (see Chang, 2006). He believes, moreover, that those who would reify an authentic hip hop identity betray an original spirit of cultural transgression which lives on in innovative communicative practices embracing freestyle and sampling. Stuart Hall speaks of the late twentieth century 'black experience as a *diaspora* experience' conferring a form of subjectivity on individuals characterised by 'unsettling, recombination, hybridization and 'cut-and-mix'' (Hall, 1992: 258). From sartorial style to poetics, Roger's own identity and practice as an artist and a teacher is infused, so he claims, with this 'open discourse' of 'recombination'. He thus speaks of experiencing hip hop as an aesthetic, a sensibility, and an ethics where things are looked at and expressed obliquely. 'Periphrasis' is the emblematic figure he gives to this form of consciousness. As Gordon describes it, 'the grammar of hip hop embodiment is always slightly off; everything, from how one stands to

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the clothing one wears, is a celebration of the idiosyncratic, the offbeat, and the polyvalent' (Gordon, 2005: 379).

Roger states that 'the status-quo of poetry loves to make it complex...they don't want everyone doing it. And it still pervades everything. It pervades the Poetry Society, the Poetry Book Society, it pervade the Poet Laureate, absolute bullshit'. Hard and fast distinctions between rap and poetry, moreover, express the continued determination of cultural gatekeepers to maintain the hegemony of a white bourgeois poetry establishment. Hence, Roger's declared mission, in his writing, recording, performance and outreach, is to rudely knock poetry off the pedestal upon which it has been mouldering into irrelevance. He asks: 'how come we don't have working class poets and a working class poet's movement in this country?' His most cherished desire, he says, is to 'start a revolution of black, Asian and working class young writers'. For Roger, hip hop means believing that with the right support anyone can be an artist. It is thus Roger's conviction that educational democracy is best served by places of education flexibly accommodating the vernacular cultures, idioms and linguistic repertoires of black, working-class and ethnic minority youth, and then using these as a bridge to other forms of poetry and literature (see Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, 2005; Baker, 1990). Roger regards his own teaching of rap and poetry in schools as a way of simultaneously validating, enlarging and liberating the linguistic codes youth arrive with at the school-gates. Hence, by his own lights, as I explore further on, in a context of educational disaffection and social exclusion this is as much – if not more - about doing personal development work with young people as it is about battering at the gates of cultural elites and driving forward 'a working class poet's movement'.

In this cultural biography, I shall be analysing the factors that have motivated and enabled Roger to combine writing, performing and teaching. I firstly seek to identify the key literary, social and affective influences from his formative years as a writer and as a young man growing up in Trinidad on a moral and political outlook marked by a 'double consciousness' (Gilroy, 2002). I then assess how early acculturation in a specifically oral culture and his subsequent discovery of hip hop impacted on Roger's relationship with language and, reciprocally, helped to form his pedagogic aims and methods. I then go on to examine his views and approach to teaching and personal development work with young people,

drawing this into a discussion about hip hop's articulation with municipal authorities. I conclude by critically evaluating some of the progressive claims Roger makes for his teaching philosophy and practice.

Cultural capital and social amelioration

Not long after Roger began to dedicate himself to writing poetry, he met the Caribbean poet Kwame Dawes, who became his mentor. Dawes advised Roger to undertake an intensive course of poetry reading in order to learn from the example of others. Taking this advice to heart, Roger claims to have spent two years on the dole in London solidly reading Russian and Chinese poets and 'conversing with my mentor'. Still continuing to write and perform the rap poetry that was his original signature style, Roger developed his poetic range to include the short lyric narratives on display in his 2004 collection *Suitcase*. One of the legacies of Roger's extensive reading is an attention to the detail of his craft and an ability to work in a variety of poetic and fictional mediums. An 'avid reader' still, he says that his current reading runs to 'at least three or four novels a month, a novel a week, two or three poetry books a month'. He cites the influence on his work of a lot of other writers, including the aforementioned Dawes, Raymond Carver, Pascal Petit, Ernest Hemingway, and Arthur Bradford. For Roger, teaching poetry grew out of writing; and writing grew out of an oral Trinidadian culture and identity, a life time's reading, and substantial input from inspirational teachers and mentors. Invoking the 'double consciousness' of book learning and a diasporic identity, Roger says that whilst his 'writing is very influenced by writers' it is also the product of 'just how I feel' (see Appiah, 1993; Gilroy, 2002). Poetry is the place where Roger claims to deposit and then attempt to rend into sensible form intimate memories, feelings and sense impressions. It is, Roger claims, a tool for living, enabling him to simultaneously reflect upon and externalise things troubling his psyche.[60] Much more autobiographical than his story writing, however, it is, he says, 'not fiction, but it is fictionalised'.

On first reading *Suitcase*, I was struck by an insistent theme: an *ethics of care*. The poems evinced a genuine affection for vulnerable but brave outsiders and ultimately endearing

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[60] This notion of writing as a 'tool for living' is pivotal to the place Roger reserves for personal development in his teaching poetry to young people. I return to this further on.

human flaws. Often they depict broken people and things, the victims of injustice, requiring the ministrations of a carer or protector. When I put this to Roger he knew precisely what I meant although he claims that there was nothing conscious or deliberate in this. He could see that *Suitcase* does have an implicit politics of a particularly left wing caste. I asked Roger where the origins for the book's politics lay. He replied that 'this book is very much me', meaning his primary social and cultural experiences.   Roger claims that its emphasis on human nobility in the face of adversity probably reflects the radical politics and community activism of many of his close family members in Trinidad. In fact he regards the poems as flawed in their idealised humanity. Flawed or not, in the course of our interviews a continuity between Roger's presentation of his political and moral motives for teaching and the 'socially ameliorative' voice that resounds in some of his poetry was clearly evident.

What *Suitcase* demonstrates is the way that Roger's evolution as a writer to this point has involved both a sustained dedication to learning his craft through the example and help of others and a social conscience at the level of artistic content. What he describes as the shocking spectacle of black educational failure and low self esteem that confronted him on arriving in a country as rich as England was a key galvanising factor in his going on to do educational outreach using hip hop and poetry. But crucially, the nature of his response to this educational failure can only be fully understood in light of the social function of reading and literacy in the Trinidadian society of Roger's youth. Roger says that he was always an omnivorous reader. People in Trinidad were forever giving books as gifts. He recalls once at the age of eight reading a 500 page 'big bicentennial book of facts' cover to cover for four days straight, and talks of having gobbled up encyclopaedias as a child. He states that in addition to the symbolic and practical importance ascribed to literacy in Trinidadian society, his father's 'frustrated' ambitions to write were a decisive factor in Roger's early and sustained book reading.

> I think my father wanted to be a writer, so I was introduced to a lot of writers when I was very very young. My father bought me all the classics in comic book form, and I was reading James Joyce from the time I was like 9/10 years old, y'know? So he really introduced me to writing and what writing can do.

Roger says, however, that 'the moral of being bookish wasn't about being introverted it was about being a rounded person in the society…they were encouraging us to be a social leader

in your community'. Erudition was by no means only prized for its symbolic capital. Its importance related to the high regard being 'able to talk in your community at all levels' was held in. Roger's point was that a facility with language in post-colonial Trinidadian society conferred a very particular form of cultural capital. In a context of social reconstruction and development, eloquence has an important civic function. In fact Roger claims that his secondary school Naparima College was a cradle for future Trinidadian political leaders, including government ministers.[61] Roger evinced an enormous admiration for his teachers and their commitment to a 'public culture'. He refers to the fact that the principal of Naparima College would devote time to fraternising in local bars and cafes in a deliberate effort to engage in the everyday life of the community. Roger was adamant that, in the context of a post colonial situation, his scholarship education in an elite secondary school was geared toward the betterment of society (see Campbell, 1992: 102-110). The majority of the pupils were bright working class children on scholarships. So whilst educationally elite, it was, so Roger claims, no bastion of bourgeois privilege. This Roger contrasts to the British public school system of training mostly wealthy people to wield and subvert power. One of the things that helped Roger have such positive memories of his school years was that the school's ethos closely reflected that of his parents who had chosen Naparima College, in part, so that Roger would escape the sheltered expatriate world of his primary school. He describes his parents – particularly his father – as politically left-wing. As one of the few black people working for Texaco Oil in a position of management, his father had a central role as a negotiator with the trade unions. Both for reasons of politics and race his father's sympathies very much lay with the trade unions, and he impressed this upon Roger from an early age. Roger also claims that some of his uncles were acquainted with Fidel Castro. From about the age of thirteen, Roger recalls these uncles engaging him in serious political conversations about Cuba, America and colonialism. One of his uncles was also an architect who would undertake community projects for free. He cites these uncles as a big influence on the political and moral decision to combine writing and arts activism later.

As I discussed in chapter three the emergence of a grassroots multicultural spoken-word poetry scene in the early 1990s energised and provided an organisational focal point for a

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[61] For a treatment of the major educational themes and purposes of Trinidad's post-colonial education system in the period when Roger was at school, see Campbell (1992).

post-hip hop counter public sphere of idealistic young artists and activists disenchanted with commercial rap (See Asante JR., 2008; Beach, 1999; Kitwana, 2002/2004). Beach (1999) views spoken word as the 'contrarian legacy' of two specific social and cultural forces dominant during the 1980s and the 1990s. The first of these is the 'moral conservatism' of the New Right and its attack on the urban poor. The second is an 'encrusted and insular system' of academic poetry writing, pedagogy and publishing (Beach, 1999: 35). The former provides fuel for much of the anger expressed in many spoken word poems, whilst the latter necessitates the creation of a grass roots poetry community in which the marginalised artist, often of ethnic minority descent, can find a voice. A number of writers have noted that the increased institutional traffic between hip hop culture and municipal educational organisations over the last few decades is closely associated with the emergence of a – 'post hip hop' - spoken word culture (see Christen, 2003; Hoyler and Mager, 2003; Huq, 2007; Pardue, 2004; Stovall, 2006). In his ethnographic study of spoken-word educational outreach, Stovall, for example, observes of his subjects that 'teaching is the natural outgrowth of their work as artists, writers, and performers' (Stovall, 2006: 79). Roger entered this cultural milieu - where hip hop artists are routinely paid to give workshops to educationally disaffected youth in urban community settings - as a rapper and poet after first arriving in London around this time. To begin with, he says, teaching was a convenient adjunct to writing and performance, a way of supplementing income and being able to do artistic work. Over time, however, Roger reports that educational co-collaborators who had observed him at close hand started to let him know that they believed he had a special talent for teaching:

> A few people said to me, 'look dude you can't ignore this shit in you, its in you…you have the ability to absorb information, break it down into tiny bits, give it back to somebody else, but not only make them better in terms of the art form, but make them a better person. And the whole idea of making somebody a better person, it's a role that you have in life, you can't stop it, this is something you have to do'.

Roger's initial response was 'I don't *have* to do anything'. But on reflection he came to regard teaching as something he *should* do as, in Roger's words, a 'civic and social responsibility'. He says school teachers from institutions he had run workshops in would ring him up and say ' 'this boy was really going off the rails and ever since he met you he is trying to get his work back together, he'll end up passing all his o-levels and going on to

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university'. I was like, yo! It saved him'.   Roger says that the process he underwent in his own head was basically the gradual realisation that he should 'give to communities', and that he 'should give in the only way' that he knew how, i.e. through hip hop and poetry. Five years ago Roger and a small band of London based poets who had met on the spoken word circuit and had taught together started an arts educational collective called The Poetry Kitchen. Based in Stratford East London, the latter provides free weekly poetry workshops for people of a multicultural background with little money or access to cultural amenities. What is interesting about this collective is that it combines what Roger calls a 'writer's community' with open access educational outreach. Roger distinguishes between 'workshop' work, essentially teaching, and the 'writer's community' which is about poets providing each other with mutual support and critical input. Organisationally loose and informal, the workshops are devised on a needs led basis related primarily to the various craft and formal aspects of poetry writing. For example, Roger has led workshops on rhythm, meter and scansion in poetry. Underlining his claim that The Poetry Kitchen is 'democratic to the point of stress', its membership apparently expands and contracts according to whoever pitches up. A key philosophical source for this pedagogic egalitarianism is Brazilian popular educator Paulo Friere and his declaration that: 'the point of departure must always be with men and women in the "here and now", which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene' (Friere, 1996: 66).

There is thus some justification for regarding post-hop hop community arts work of this type as animated with a set of activist energies that evoke the US Black Arts Movement of the 1960s (see Asante JR., 2008; Kitwana, 2004). Gilroy speaks of the Black Arts Movement as emerging out of a longstanding 'anti-hierarchical tradition of thought' within the black diaspora prizing 'the value of self-activity' (Gilroy, 2002: 79). The latter's activism, he avers, offered the fledgling promise of a 'democratic, communitarian moment' of 'new non-dominating social relationships' (ibid). Fisher, for one, claims that hip hop poets like Roger, 'organizing spaces separate and distinct from formal institutions', are reviving this idealistic, culturally civic minded spirit (Fisher, 2004: 308). Fisher sees latter-day spoken word artist/pedagogues as working in the tradition of such black American poets as Gwendolyn

Brooks who, during the 1960s, ventured out into urban neighbourhoods to create 'learning spaces wherever there were people willing to participate' (Fisher, 2004: 296). Poets and artists seized with the black liberation politics of the time, such as Brooks and Amiri Baraka, regarded their 'aesthetic commitment to the black community as an ethical obligation' (Kalaidjian, 1989: 200; see Kelley, 2002). In a rejection of both elitist salon culture and bohemian withdrawal, these artists regarded it as essential to be in as close proximity as possible to the people whose lives were to be touched through grassroots arts activism (Fisher, 2004; Smethurst, 2005; Smitherman, 1973). Baraka recalls the moral mission of a Harlem based project he had helped to organise in 1965: 'a summer arts programme called Operation Boot Strap' working in 'playgrounds, street corners, vacant lots, play streets, parks, bringing Black Art directly to the people' (in Thomas, 1998: 312).

However, it is important to underline that the post-hip hop community activism represented here by Roger's work with The Poetry kitchen (see Chang, 2006; Kitwana, 2002; Morgan, 2009) is also articulated with more immediate exigent and contingent factors related to the politics of municipal sponsorship of multi-cultures, and artistic survival in conditions of social and economic marginality (see Hutnyk, 2000; Pardue, 2004/2007). Writing in a Brazilian context, Pardue, for instance, argues that for hip hop 'posses' positioned physically and symbolically on the social periphery, *institutional penetration*, achieved by strategically 'linking their practices to themes of "education" and "citizenship"', is regarded as a 'conquering' or invasion of official public spheres that routinely exclude them (Pardue, 2004: 412/415). This 'penetration from below' essentially amounts to securing state funding for 'employment channels' for hip hop artists: hip hop work-shops, outreach in schools and prisons - as well as the provision of dedicated, neighbourhood based cultural centres for education and performance (Pardue, 2004: 414; see also Hoyler and Mager, 2003; Huq, 2006/2007). A number of writers see this as consequent on the social position of hip hop 'movement intellectuals' (Eyerman, 2004) and the groups and individuals they mediate on behalf of. Hence, a strong tie to neighbourhood and social marginality – The Poetry Kitchen's Stratford location was in this sense strategic and fortuitous - combine to encourage the articulation of hip hop culture and municipal support (see Bennett, 2003; Hoyler and Mager, 2003; and Huq, 2006/2007). Like their municipally sponsored Brazilian

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confreres, the Turkish German hip hoppers in Andy Bennett's (2003) study operate out of youth clubs and community centres, acting alongside 'community education and social workers' to facilitate workshops in graffiti writing, dance and rap, musical production and DJ mixing (see Hoyler and Mager, 2003; Huq 2006/2007). Bennett claims that critically engaged questions of multiculturalism, citizenship and race are an insistent feature of this municipally sponsored cultural production and educational exchange (Bennett, 2003: 262-264). This is, importantly, both at the level of the kinds of lyrical content generated in the workshops and in the way the latter occupy and democratically reconfigure public space. Pardue concludes that municipally sponsored hip hop culture offers 'a "position"…from which practitioners and non-participants (politicians, academics, journalists, community leaders) alike seek to destabilize conventional notions of knowledge, experience, and personhood' (Pardue, 2007: 679).[62]

When I asked him whether he would still teach even if he had an assured private income, Roger replied 'even if I had a million pounds I would still teach'. Roger has come to believe that 'it's the responsibility of artists to take the elevator back down'. The 'social ameliorative factors' of teaching poetry he lists include exposing black and working class youth to an alternative 'lifestyle', promoting personal 'development', and demonstrating that art can be a 'job'. Roger's words about his teachers in post-colonial Trinidad and his own genesis as a teacher of poetry evoke Gilroy, who speaks of 'the specific ethical obligations and political responsibilities which constitute the unique burden of the black artist' (Gilroy, 2002: 84). I asked Roger the following question:

> Patrick: To what degree are you now that college principle [of Naparima College], walking down the street in the role of public intellectual?
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> Roger: You know I'm not sure, I'm not sure because I'm talking and I'm thinking at the same time and I never connected the two but it must have a big influence. I know for a fact the left-wing politics of my uncle plays a part in me teaching. I used to refuse a lot of teaching that wasn't for children who had either poor access to literature or from working class, black or Asian communities. I definitely thought my role was to expose literature to these

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[62] Although, as I indicated at the end of chapter three, and as I return to further on in this and (particularly) the next chapter, such democratic claims require counter-balancing with consideration of specific contextual and institutional factors. What is the political-ideological welfare structure of municipal sponsorship for hip hop? What is the scope thereby for 'penetration from above'?

people, in terms of letting them know that this could be a job, it not only could be a job, it could be like a *dope* job.

Orality, hip hop aesthetics and pedagogy

Roger's self-designation is 'Kafka for the hip hop generation'. In many ways this bricolage phrase perfectly captures his whole hip hop metier, particularly the cultural sampling explored a little further on which informs his aesthetic of periphrasis. It also expresses an aspiration to be located on a cultural terrain somewhere between an artistic avant-garde and a vernacular culture; somewhere between the literary and the oral. In short: fusing enigmatic invention with the demotic and empathic. This deliberately tongue-in-cheek phrase also betrays two further factors intrinsic to Roger's cultural armoury, a concern with aesthetic craft and an ethical compulsion to combat 'posturing'. Roger informed me that pivotal to his later decision to work with disadvantaged youth in a teaching role was the specifically oral mode of narrative in the day-to-day life of Trinidad:

> Anywhere you are in Trinidad the function of storytelling happens consistently 24 hours a day. And that's just how it is. It's not about the *fact* - it's about the *story*. And if you have facts to tell you better get it within a story or else nobody's gonna listen to you. Between sport and stories that's how Trinidad is. You might be driving in a taxi and you say one thing and he has a story to tell you. When you say the oral culture, it's much more so than other Caribbean countries.

Roger attributes a strong oral tradition in Trinidad to the fact that slavery was less pronounced on this island than in other parts of the Caribbean (Heuman, 2006). Many African oral tendencies that might otherwise have been 'erased' survived.[63] One of the functions of storytelling, according to Roger, is the rationalisation of issues. Stories offer a vehicle for putting into comprehensible form something one does not yet fully understand. However, the oral tales he grew up listening to in Trinidad did not so much furnish source material as a way of telling. An environment teeming with oblique fables exchanged in everyday conversation schooled Roger, he claims, in a periphrastic 'way of seeing'. Orality conferred a 'central voice', 'a different cultural perception' from that of white Europe; and one that he claims has become a constant 'trope' in a writing career that only began after leaving Trinidad (see Gilroy, 2002; Perry, 2004). And this way of seeing is deeply connected

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[63] For a brief treatment of the history of Trinidad and Tobago during their early period of colonisation and the relationship of indentured Europeans to African slaves and the indigenous people of the islands, see Heuman (2006).

to the indirect manner in which Trinidadians tell jokes. It is an approach to humour that eschews the punch line. A situation is narrated in a particular tone of voice and there is a conversational context. The listener, however, has to discern for him or herself the precise object of the joke as the teller trails off without warning into a new subject. Roger claims to be able to discern similarities between the syntactic elements of Trinidadian and Nigerian speech: what constitutes a sentence's 'essential focus and what makes up its 'side focus'. In sum, 'how you tell a story.' This is a narrative strategy of showing rather than telling. Suggestion is all. This betrays an insistent theme in Roger's philosophical and methodological approach to poetic composition and its teaching: learning has its basis around a tangible, practical problem. The joke's intent can't be apprehended through another's explanation: it must be embodied, experienced. The oblique serves the strategic function of impelling the listener to plumb meaning through iterative induction.

Roger claims to have first found a creative outlet for this Trinidadian 'central voice' after being inspired to write poetry by hip hop. Hip hop's urban culture of inventive, extemporaneous adaptation evinced, for Roger, a democratic politics and aesthetic consonant with both the egalitarian ideals of Post-Colonial Trinidad and the island culture's periphrastic 'way of seeing'. As oral poetry with avant-garde potential it also transgressed the hegemonic cultural hierarchy which, from the perspective of a society emerging from white European domination, Roger stood opposed to. He says that:

> The thing I take from hip hop is the whole refusal of high and low culture; that high culture is the refined, developed, classic thing; and low culture is ghetto and unrefined. So what I take from hip hop culture is the expectation that people who do not have a lot of writing experience can do it and make something meaningful; not only meaningful for them but meaningful for the whole of society.

Somers-Willet argues that one of the effects of rap poetry over the last thirty years has been to mount an implicit challenge to modern Western notions of who has access to poetry' and even 'who is a poet' (Somers-Willet, 2001: 42; see Stovall, 2006: 78).[64] As I discussed in chapter three, hip hop culture is regarded by many as graphic evidence of what disadvantaged youth with little conventional schooling or cultural capital can achieve

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[64] She also says, significantly, that despite rap and spoken-word's much vaunted political consciousness that 'there is [also] an anti-intellectual undercurrent' (Somers-Willet, 2001: 42). I return to this issue further on in the chapter.

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independently with oral and popular cultural forms (see Belle, 2003; Green, 2001; Jocson, 2006; Mahiri and Sablo, 1996). Lionel-Smith avers that vernacular continuances in present-day oral cultures are grounded in an 'egalitarian' 'aesthetic' of 'mutual participation' (Lionel-Smith, 1991: 99). In this 'spirit of inclusiveness' the oral poet and their muse may fleetingly embody and invoke the democratic participation and liberty that are denied by political and economic oppression (ibid: 100).

Roger claims that hip hop's irreverent freestyle, 'let's just do it' spirit and democratic sensibility provided him at once with no less than an inspiration, a metaphor, and a template for the whole creative process of writing, performing and teaching. Without hip hop, Roger says he 'wouldn't start to say that I could write a book of poetry, I wouldn't write a play'. When Roger first encountered rap group De La Soul during the early 1990s he thus neither wrote poetry nor had a connection to London's spoken word circuit. Already a confirmed member of the 'hip hop generation', however, what particularly struck Roger about De la Soul, as no other rap group before, was the way in which they combined artistic sophistication with political consciousness and intelligence. De La Soul emerged in the late 1980s as part of the Native Tongues Collective of New York rap artists that included The Jungle Brothers and A Tribe Called Quest. What Gilroy calls the 'ludic Africentrisms' of this group of artists fuelled hopes at the time for a more politically enlightened, more nuanced expression of black identity than that proposed by either the nihilistic materialism of gangsta rap or the neo traditionalism of cultural nationalist hip hop (Gilroy, 2002: 85; see Decker, 1994). Roger speaks of having experienced a moment of epiphany when first hearing De la Soul's lyrics. Free of all the stale connotations of literary and academic poetry, De la Soul's playful use of words and rhythm revealed to Roger for the first time how the 'way of seeing' he had inherited from Trinidad might find a poetic form. Rogers explains:

> After *Three Feet High and Rising* I was, like, this is me. And that's where I started to get introduced to more ideas of metaphorical heights...Cause I couldn't understand what was said but I knew it sounded dope. That's why I was just like, 'whoah, okay', an so I kinda got into poetry through, y'know, De La Soul and *Three Feet High and Rising*.

Roger describes how, in the early phase of his development as a rap poet, he worked very hard on the craft aspects of composition by modelling his approach on that of admired artists. So, for example, he would concentrate on a particular line of De La Soul's and think

about why it had worked in terms of the relationship between rhythm, meter, scansion, word, meaning and cadence. He would write the line down, analyse how the original combined 'word play' and cliché, and then compose his own version. He gives the example of hearing the phrase 'if a scar could launch a thousand words then I only hope two of them would be cocoa and butter'. When I asked him to show me how a reconfigured cliché might sound in one of his own raps, he immediately offered the following example based on 'here today, gone tomorrow': 'If you were here today and I was gone tomorrow – I only hope our yesterdays were worth it'. Roger regards word-play in hip hop as an important foil to misplaced sincerity and directness. A poem is successful only to the extent that its meaning is evoked indirectly through suggestion: through narrative structure, figuration and concrete imagery. Roger claims that, as with his example of Trinidadian humour, this allows the reader or listener the pleasure of discovering the argument or point allusively via an accumulation of sense impressions and associations rather than by candid declaration, abstract explanation, polemic, or sermon (see Beach, 1999; Lionel-Smith, 1991; Mackey, 1992). This is about showing rather than telling. The feeling of what is expressed is a result of its formal representation. Yusef Komunyakaa, an African American poet admired by Roger, has said that 'poetry is a kind of distilled insinuation. It's a way of expanding and talking around an idea or a question. Sometimes, more actually gets said through such a technique than a full frontal assault.'[65]

For Roger, the best hip hop artists, like De-La Soul, employ this mode of 'distilled insinuation', or periphrasis, in their expression. Roger gives an example this in a line of Lil Wayne's: 'A million here and a million there, I'm a cash-money millionaire tougher than Nigerian hair'. Roger's gloss is that Wayne is alluding simultaneously to the toughness of Nigerian culture, life as a hip hop millionaire, and his own personal toughness. Roger regards this as form of 'meta- poetry' 'imploding' the line of commentary to create a self-conscious narrative voice. Like, as he puts it, 'somebody doing spoken word on spoken word'. He gives a brief extemporized example: 'I'm coming up here and people are talking about being black, and I should clap?' Roger's own use of periphrasis is demonstrated in an acapella poetic tongue twister, 'Tongue Kung Fu', from his 2005 hip hop album, *Illclectica*.

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[65] From 'Komunyakaa on Poetry', *Modern American Poetry*: http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/komunyakaa/poetry.htm Accessed on 28/07/10.

In the following extract a riddling image cluster of alliterative cadences and syncopated phonics assemble themselves into the poem's sensuous meaning:

> Stippled stars sweep the skies/Toffee coloured caramel thigh wide denial you and I smile/Wide eyed sexy moon heels/Maple syrup flick hip lipstick barello cherry tongue Kung Fu/Flower aphrodisiac, power sacrosiliac, baby bud an milliac chiller/Familiar love rhymes and loose leaf Rizla the sizzle brings sandalwood sweet smoke to air/In an ink hair on a graceful face be she/Venus have served for ten sons/Attention sixteen ounces on your aura/Depends on lips tongue kiss and your aura/And then some dew drop moons bloom to flora

Richard Sennett says that 'the uncertain object' invites 'reciprocal intervention' (Sennett, 1992: 209). So that what might be enigmatic or periphrastic in hip hop poetry, its 'creative and often hilarious use of puns, metaphors, similes' (Kelley, 1997: 37; see Bartlett, 2004: 394) is productive of antiphony. Indeed, the misunderstanding provoked by hip hop's linguistically 'incomprehensible' elements is potentially as intrinsic to its cultural political armoury as polemics (Perry, 2004: 50 – 51).[66] Echoing Komunyakaa, Rose (1994: 99-100) speaks of hip hop's 'oppositional transcripts' in just these terms, maintaining that for strategic reasons they frequently eschew 'frontal attacks' (see Scott, 1990). She writes that 'developing a style nobody can deal with...may be one of the most effective ways to fortify communities of resistance and *simultaneously* reserve the right to communal pleasure' (Rose, 1994: 61; see Jones, 1988). Roger claims that his own signature aesthetic of things looked at aslant also owes a great deal to the hip hop aesthetic of *sampling*: of incorporating into one's work and identity fragments, quotes, citations, and passages drawn from a wide range of cultural sources and perspectives. Indeed, his poetic verses produced for the page are literally crafted using sampled materials and montage:

> In my new book the general theme is about spirit. I'm going through things like National Geographic and scientific papers that talk about spirit and then sampling two lines...or even sampling a whole stanza and keeping it in, and then like putting notes in just like you have to say it's sampled from blah blah blah at the end of a record; and I wouldn't be able to do that without hip hop culture. Y'know what I'm saying? I wouldn't think about it...without hip hop culture.

Bartlett speaks of sampling in hip hop as a democratic mode of archiving, enabling an artistic agency of 'evocative interchange'; a penetrative knowing of the broader culture by

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[66] On Afro-American English and debates over its place in education and poetry see Smitherman (1972; 1973; 1997).

participants (Bartlett, 2004: 394; see Kelley, 1997: 42; Potter, 2006: 68-71). However, as Susan Buck Morss observes, the radically modern nature of montage equally dictates that 'the images ideational elements remain unreconciled, rather than fusing into a "harmonious perspective"' (Buck Morss, 1999: 67). This refusal of the 'harmonious perspective' Roger valorises, paradoxically, as his Trinidadian identity, his 'central voice', claiming to have discovered its metropolitan correspondent in the periphrastic hip hop sampling aesthetic. It bears emphasising that this construction of the culturally and linguistically refractory as 'unreconciled', as a 'negative capability', is what chiefly distinguishes Roger's approach to hip hop's codedness from that of the informants in the previous chapter (see Gilroy, 2000). As his cultural apprenticeship evidences, moreover, for diaspora subjects the fragmenting and individualising of 'everyday' identity by modernity (Roberts, 2006) occurs not only through a specifically Western mode of urban disarticulation. The 'daily and commonplace existence' reworked by the diasporic cultural producer is heterogeneous both in the diversity of its roots and routes (Clifford, 1997). It is in view of this that Roger declares himself perplexed by accounts of hip hop which in seeking to fix its racial, cultural, philosophic and stylistic horizons overlook the aesthetic radicalism of its black vernacular heritage, what Mackey (1992: 68) speaks of as a 'counter-tradition of marronage, divergence, flight, fugitive tilt'. Roger says that:

> The thing I can't stand is *canned B-Boyism*, y'know what I'm saying? Which is a very narrow element of it which is just like 'yah, B-Boy stance', y'know what I'm sayin? That isn't relevant to me now, I'm forty one year's old. But the elements of hip hop culture are very relevant to me even now.

The 'Canned B-Boyism' Roger refers to is a vulgarised, reified idea of hip hop based on certain iconic images of US B-Boy style. It equates to a lifetime's commitment to a codified cultural silhouette; to confirmed and settled tastes and predictable expressions. It reduces hip hop to a nativist folk-art arrested in its adolescence (see Gordon, 2005), where artistic evolution is a betrayal and shimmering cultural horizons a threat.[67] For Roger, hip hop's syncretic sampling aesthetic, by contrast, like the jazz aesthetic, is impelled by the unending quest for new fusions. So that a hip hop aesthetic and sensibility by definition can only ever at best be implicit if it is not to be faux: 'hip hop is an amorphous thing. There's no one

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[67] See chapter four of this thesis.

definition of what hip hop is or isn't'. Roger gives the example of the most recent work of ex Tribe Called Quest emcee Q-Tip: Y'know...Q-Tip's new album – it's not technically a hip hop album but it's informed by a hip hop aesthetic; but he's a rapper. But if he came out with a straight up hip hop album – in fact that wouldn't be very hip hop at all, that would be posturing.' Roger is thus adamant that it is only in seeking to render the generic identity of all he does a matter of some equivocation, to ensure it avoids 'posturing' and cliché, that he is personally being faithful to hip hop's original transgressive spirit. Only by offering a certain resistance to 'hip hop' can Roger rightfully claim *hip hop* as his metier. Here the opposition hip hop versus rap as family drama over authenticity and betrayal is given a different valence to that of the binomialism of sacred and profane. Roger glosses this through the analogy of hip hop sartorial style:

> Yeah, being hip hop is like, yeah, instead of wearing a Kangol you might wear a hat made of wool in a Kangol shape, or you might wear a jacket with jeans with a T-shirt because, y'know, incongruous elements go together in hip hop – it's a sampling culture. You didn't wear a shirt with your jacket, you wore a T-shirt and the colours didn't naturally mesh together. So it's incongruous and yet you believe it can work which is what hip hop is all about. Elements which clearly don't work together, re-meshed together.

Roger is adamant that this hip hop aesthetic and sensibility infuses his whole approach to teaching poetry. The idea of improvising, *meshing*, and playing with structures, he says, is at the base of how he nurtures the creativity of people with little experience and confidence. For example, he declares that his aim in a workshop is always to get participants 'through a process of' working on their poetry 'with structure'. But only once they have been able to generate unexpected ideas through some sort of reciprocal, serendipitous process of free-association. Hip hop culture is again both analogy and template:

> So in a way it is tantamount to – it would be the equivalent of freestyling a piece. Just getting it out; and then after that then 'okay we can make any adjustments we need to make'. So it's really about just providing a structure. Sometime with freestyling you give somebody a name, a subject, or it would be defined as a battle rhyme. So in a battle rhyme there's a certain type of thing that will come out, whatever the genre is. So, elements of giving it form, or something like that, to work within, so that they can do this creative work and bring it out and give them a kind of structure.

When Roger teaches young people poetry the role of hip hop is both implicit and explicit. It is at once a means of demystifying poetry, valorising popular oral idioms and local

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vernacular, bridging to other poetic forms, styles and genres, and enlarging the expressive repertoire and technical competency of young writers. Aiming to confound the negative attitudes to poetry he routinely encounters his basic starting point is that - like hip hop - 'this shit aint complex, it's as natural as everyday'. The process and structure Roger employs to lay bare the prosodic rudiments of poetry composition is more-or-less the same in adult and youth workshops, only the 'phrasing', descriptions, and choice of poetic examples is different. For instance, in his teaching with young people Roger says he will draw upon what he regards as the more formally innovative end of hip hop. He will play to his students American artists such as Cannibal Ox and High Priest: emcees that are models of virtuosity in their rhythmic flow (see Alim, 2007). The particularly complex rhyme schemes, scansion and cadences of these artists are seen by Roger as relevant for working with groups whose understanding of rap has likely been formed by exposure to UK grime, a popular contemporary British variant in which flow is primary (see Gidley, 2007; Reynolds, 2007/2009).[68] Roger talks, for example, of playing the work of an emcee from the Cannibal Ox collective able to rhyme every single word within two successive sixteen beat bars. The trick, he says, in teaching young people, is to get to the 'doing stage' as quickly as possible. In a process that recalls his own rap apprenticeship, Roger's students are thus encouraged to break a rap down into its component parts to discover how it works in terms of its rhythmic flow, rhyme scheme, narrative, choice of words, and use of metaphor. Students will then write their own rap poems in response, attempting to incorporate some of the elements of models they have analysed. Roger's intention is for young people to gradually stumble upon their own poetic voice whilst experimenting with a stanzaic form – emcee bars – many are likely to already have some familiarity with.

He speaks also about the importance of always including 'imagery and the senses' in his teaching, getting participants to 'draw out' and 'start talking about the story in terms of the senses'. He will thus use labelling as a way to 'get that moment-to-moment imagistic response to things'. For example, he will ask a group of school students to draw a cartoon of a person they care about with three exaggerated physical traits. They are then instructed to label these characteristics and to consider what each would be if it were something else,

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[68] I return to the relationship between vocal flow and use of words and language in hip hop workshops in the following chapter.

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e.g. hair 'like fresh cut grass', or 'nose like a Toucan'. He then gives feedback. The students are informed that what they have just done is compare one thing to another thing. Basically Roger is reversing the standard deductive procedure for learning about simile and metaphor. The students have been given practical, hands on experience of these things before encountering them as academic concepts. Roger will point out that we unthinkingly make these sorts of comparisons, i.e. talk in simile and metaphor, all the time when referring to people and things in our daily lives. Once there are concrete ideas, words or images to work on he will then encourage his students to write verse stanzas and emcee bars that approach their subject as far as possible by periphrasis. That is, he will urge them to show and don't tell in their written narratives. The idea, he will say, is to leave readers or listeners with a cumulative impression by making each stanza or set of bars a montage of enigmatic details and images like a series of cinematic shots or frames. Summing up his democratic ethos and inductive methodology, Roger says 'I take them from what they know to what they don't know. I never take them from what they don't know'. He also says:

> Just because people *just do it* in hip hop culture that doesn't mean they don't have any rules. And especially good people have more rules and forms it's just that they make the rules for themselves and adhere to them. The rules are based on the aesthetic. What you find in bad spoken word is that the person is operating with very few rules, it's just loose...and I think that's anti-hip hop.

Hip hop pedagogy and personal development

It is Roger's stated aim to foster in his creative writing students an ability to improvise and be open to serendipity, on the one hand, and focus, system, structure and economy of expression, on the other. By enabling and hopefully liberating creativity in a way that honours hip hop's radical aesthetic he believes people can overcome ingrained writing and expressive habits, and perhaps even go on to produce poetry of 'distilled insinuation'. As Roger's biography demonstrates, his writing and teaching are impelled by a highly developed concern for social amelioration. He valorises hip hop's oral periphrastic aesthetic for being at once grounded in the demotic and the democratic and for offering significant scope for written formal invention. But there is a whole other dimension to his appreciation of the developmental possibilities offered by hip hop through poetry teaching, particularly where educationally and socially disadvantaged young people are concerned. And this is linked to some of the claims discussed in chapter three that as a vernacular aesthetic of the

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African diaspora hip hop instances what Thomas (1998) calls the 'functional role' of oral poetry and Shusterman (1991) terms rap's 'practical functionality'. This is poetry as a medium of socially useful communication and as a means of social betterment and justice. This in turn has its movement aspect, also discussed in chapter three: the post-hip hop and spoken word scene where a politically egalitarian concept both of poetry and the poet's identity are signal features (Beach, 1999). In his study of 'teaching social justice through poetry', Stovall concludes that spoken word artists frequently arrive at a point where they feel a need to use their art for social betterment (Stovall, 2006: 79).

Might not Roger's highly discriminating choice of reading, his avowed dedication to subtle and inventive poetic form, and his rejection of identity politics and codified 'posturing' be in some tension, however, with a certain activist poetic practice? I was somewhat surprised to learn, for example, that his criterion for choosing works to show his young students was 'ultimately' dictated by 'emotion' rather than 'technique'. A work being 'deeply affecting and moving', he said, is more important than its excellence in 'academic' terms (see Belle, 2003). But this of course is also consistent with Roger's egalitarian assertion that in his teaching he seeks to take young people 'from what they know to what they don't know'; that he 'never take[s] them from what they don't know'. Did this mean then that Roger regards personal development work and attempting to expose educationally disadvantaged young people to aesthetically and philosophically complex art as non identical? His short answer was yes. Given the exigencies of engaging young people lacking bourgeois cultural capital the two *were* antithetical. Because it was the *person* Roger was interested in first and foremost the materials should always be dictated by their situation, experience and knowledge (see Friere, 1996). To start with a canon of supposedly enriching works was, in his view, a top-down approach, against the spirit of his 'person centred' teaching philosophy. Poetry should not be fetishized. It is only a means to an ends, no more than a hopefully pleasurable 'vehicle' for developing a young person's thinking skills, political awareness, and confidence in communication.

Recalling Green's desire to promote methods of teaching and the use of materials that dissolve the borders between classroom and the 'vernacular community' (Green, 2001: 167), Roger says he is far happier showing his students a 'freeform' American poem than a

'turgid' sonnet (see Baker JR., 1990: 176). One of the benefits he cites of using hip hop and spoken-word pieces in school classrooms as compared to 'academic' poetry was the former's socially realistic treatment of such 'relevant issues' as teen parenthood and drug abuse. For Roger, this poetry of edutainment serves a didactic *and* an emancipatory function: raising awareness of issues whilst providing young people with a starting point and template for self-expression and communication (see Stovall, 2006). His ultimate intention, he says, is to impress upon young people that 'things that are important to you, you can say in poetry. That you can have a voice, especially if you are not being heard'. Jocson claims that a more 'response based, cultural studies approach to teaching English' reflects a burgeoning cultural and methodological plurality that has been decisive in the emergence of partnerships between schools and community based creative writing projects, agencies and individual artists (Jocson, 2006: 233). This has opened up opportunities for schools to work more flexibly with those young people for whom mainstream educational methods have proven a failure (Mirza, 2006). Provided the expertise is on hand to enable this to happen, going with the grain of popular cultural preferences and incorporating them in the classroom becomes a viable strategy for stemming educational disaffection and encouraging young people's participation in mainstream school life (see Huq, 2006/2007):

> Roger: I'm very aware that on a micro-level teachers are bringing us in because they do not know what to do next with the kids. Oftentimes we're brought in when kids are just completely gone and they [the schools] don't know what else to do and they heard about us and they bring us in to see if we can do anything to help. A guy I was teaching with today, he was saying that we're barely even teaching art anymore, we're teaching how to make them better human beings. We're trying to give them the confidence and the fearlessness to step ahead in their life through art.

> Patrick: Do you really believe in that?

> Roger: Yeah, I believe in it a lot. Because I'm seeing it in action, because it's also about that reflective moment I was talking about when you can think about your life and what you have to say. And kids aren't being asked anything.

> Patrick: So how much do you think what you're doing is therapeutic?

> Roger: Well, I would shy away from therapeutic, but I think it is an aid. Oftentimes we hear they do better in other classes because they do better in English; because poetry is originally about systems thinking. Poets are the original systems thinkers. And when you start to think about different levels of systems thinking, it pays out in other things.

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Roger claims that to a large degree his personal development agenda as a teacher of poetry is about getting black and Asian youth to understand that they cannot allow others to get away with defining them by their colour. He says to his students, 'your words define your world. What you say and do and how you communicate will define your world eventually'. Roger's own education and acculturation in a rich oral milieu helped to prepare him to become both a poet and a teacher. He genuinely, believes, however, that young people lacking these primary modes of cultural capital, and facing the dual obstacle of racism and poverty, can, with the right input, still transform their situations at an individual level. By being given the opportunity through culturally relevant educational materials to learn to convert their thoughts and feeling into a poetic form capable of being shared verbally, young people who start out life socially disadvantaged can be set on a path to enjoying the practical benefits of language. Citing his own experience of survival as a professional poet, Roger claims his conscious mastery of language gave him the rhetorical means of persuading others and gaining their trust.

Roger was very clear that his belief in the curative properties of art comes directly from personal experience. When he first arrived in London from Trinidad, he claims to have struggled living on his own and to have become self destructive. Coming to a majority white country he experienced for the first time what it felt like to be almost completely defined on the basis of your colour. Skin colour as a socially definitional point suddenly rendered Roger déclassé. To the white host majority, Roger's middle class characteristics were utterly eclipsed by the visual fact of his blackness. Roger states that 'it didn't matter what class you were from, you were just black'. Once he began to write poetry, Roger claims, he acquired the psychological means to rescue himself from the emotional vortex into which he had been sucked by a combination of destructive relationships and confusions around his identity. Poetry writing gave Roger a 'deeper philosophical thinking': 'a reflective space'. Reciprocally, the act of reading other people's poetry allowed him to learn from their emotional and political struggles. Not only did he discover that poetry could be a means of personal development, but that he could also earn a living from it whilst enjoying himself. But Roger is emphatic that, for him at least, poetry writing is never mere therapy. Even

though he claims to find the act of composition cathartic, the emotional content must be painstakingly filtered through the volitional process of aesthetic craft:

> I work myself out in poetry books. But the trick is to work yourself out without it being therapy for everybody else. You understand what I'm saying? So after you work things out you have to transpose that into a form of art. And you do that by using artistic techniques. Form, metaphors, similes. How do you move it from just the shit you wanted to say to 'this is a piece of art'?

Hence, Roger is categorical: 'there's good poetry and there's bad poetry' and this applies equally to writing both for the page or the stage. However, he thinks it entirely possible that a poor poet – and he believes there are many on the spoken-word/hip hop poetry circuit – can be an inspiring teacher to someone otherwise alienated from poetry. Not because they will encourage the latter to produce good poetry – quite the contrary in fact: the poems such young people are likely to write will be 'patterned' on bad examples. But because the teacher is able to connect with young people, and to thereby develop an interest in language which may pay out in *future* creative excellence:

> If you have a young boy from Hackney who is alienated from the English language and literature, yeah, and you may not be a great poet but you've taken enough interest in his life, and your passion, whether you're considered a good or bad poet, with your passion you have ignited his passion in words. Even if you're a bad poet you have done good.

The most important thing he believes is to show 'passion', engage young people, and find a common cultural ground. In Roger's person centred teaching all other considerations are secondary, or for another day. The impact of any particular teacher's input is always going to be contingent on so many variables, none of which can be easily specified in advance or quantified after the fact. Doing outreach therefore has to be understood, he says, as: 'a brief social encounter which takes into account an interest in the interests of the child – and that in itself, there's meaning in that'. In other words, the actual context, situation, and the relational dynamics of personal encounter – things which are not always easy to predict – are the crucial variables and cannot be chalked off against either the artistic ability of the teacher, the aesthetic quality of the artistic materials being used, or the academic competency of the students. He says his own aspiration as an educator, moreover, has never been about making poets so much as helping people find the poetry that is their birth right to make themselves.

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So, for the strategic purpose of personal development work, Roger's own commitment to aesthetic notions of periphrasis, 'distilled insinuation', subtle suggestion, show don't tell, and montage, is strategically bracketed from an arguably cruder and more direct socially realist hip hop of lyrical *edutainment*, a hip hop of 'issues'. Equally, his carefully detailed, exacting standards of teaching poetry are sacrificed here on the altar of 'relationship'. I put it to Roger that this seemed contradictory, perhaps even anti-art. He speaks about wanting to 'start a revolution of black, Asian and working class young writers'. But whilst promoting the egalitarian notion that everyone can write and *should* have access to the opportunity to learn writing, I suggested he was not being entirely honest about the actual toil involved in learning to write well, not to mention the stubbornly enduring cultural obstacles preventing socially disadvantaged young people from 'finding their voice' (see Skeggs, 2004). Writing, of all sorts, involves a continuous apprenticeship in language and high levels of investment of time. It thus requires plentiful stocks of mental and physical energy and opportunities for their expenditure and investment. If the aim is to nurture intellectual and creative resilience in those who do not necessarily enjoy direct support and input, then at a minimum there must at least be plentiful opportunities to read and write and access to the material resources which make this possible. Moreover, if the application of any evaluative cultural criteria is elitist *tout court* and if no prohibition is allowable on who gets to teach poetry do these factors actually not further disadvantage young people whose vernacular cultural capital can also be an index of their socially subordinate position? Shouldn't there at least be an aspiration to ensure only those who are both good writers and good teachers get unleashed on children and young people in formal educational contexts? Further, isn't the point of outflanking the cultural gatekeepers about making the riches they guard the property of everyone rather than propagating the populist notion that their caskets contain objects of questionable value (see Ryle and Soper, 2002)? Roger was adamant. To judge, to apply evaluative criteria, to prescribe what to teach and who is fit to teach is, in his words, a 'top-down', 'hegemonic' approach and inimical to the open spirit and sensibility of hip hop. He asks rhetorically: 'who decides who is good? Is a good poet a good teacher? It could be the two things are completely different.' He goes on: 'If you subscribe to the idea of good poets and good teachers, you subscribe to some kind of hegemonic system where you give up to an authority - which is actually anti-hip hop'.

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Municipal hip hop and the therapeutic

> Even if public policy may not be the most obvious mode of study for rap it is a key prism through which twenty-first century rap operates.

(Huq, 2007: 91)

As much of the preceding chapter illustrates, Roger himself is not coy about making ethical and aesthetic judgements and being highly discriminating. For instance, his allegiance to hip hop's sampling aesthetic represents a broadside against neo traditional abrogation and all other manner of 'Canned B-Boyism' and hip hop 'posturing'. His categorical statements on 'show don't tell' when describing how he teaches writing would imply that a teacher with little grasp of this principle could at the very least retard a budding writer's development. I would argue, however, that his philosophical commitment to social amelioration in combination with an insufficiently interrogative stance toward the political and institutional context of his personal development outreach has created a blind spot where hip hop pedagogy is concerned. For example, neither Jocson's (2006) claim that the cultural studies turn in English teaching has been a cradle of insurgent possibilities nor Stovall's (2006) on the activist tendencies of the spoken word milieu can fully explain the municipal embrace of hip hop. This is because hip hop's deployment in mainstream educational institutions needs also to be seen in light of some of the regulatory concerns of contemporary public policy (see Huq, 2006/2007; Pardue, 2004/2007). In the context of 'dispersed' social control (Cohen, 1993) and an actuary welfare state marching to the tune of neoliberal individualism it would be naïve to just accept the claim that hip hop's municipal sponsoring and incorporation is essentially a consequence of the penetrative agency of a hip hop counter-public sphere (see Brown, 2005; Rose, 1999). It would be equally myopic in my view to regard hip hop education as just reflecting the emergence of an enlightened generation of policy makers in tune with youth and validating popular culture in the name of cultural diversity and relevancy (see Mirza, 2006).

Roger's take on recent policy, though essentially pragmatic and supportive, was seasoned with some criticism. He regards, for instance, the funding of hip hop artists like himself to go and work in schools and local neighbourhoods as partly bandwagon jumping on media notions of youth culture by out of touch policy makers, and evidence of bureaucrats and

teachers casting around for novel ways to stem educational and social disaffection (see Hughes, 2002). Pardue underscores the role played by certain voluntary organizations in mobilizing the small-scale entrepreneurial potential of hip hoppers by 'procuring financial aid on the basis of an articulation of hip-hop to vocation or hip-hop as a "seed" of industrious discipline and an active sense of citizenship' (Pardue, 2004: 422-423). Here the need of the socially marginalized for gainful employment aligns with the socially integrative concerns of the state. In Roger's view, many hip hop education projects are badly researched and culturally wide of the mark. However, he is convinced that employing artists like himself attuned to vernacular youth cultures and idioms is a fundamentally progressive way of reaching those for whom more mainstream methods have proved a failure (see Huq, 2006/2007). Rupa Huq actually argues that municipal recuperation of hip hop needs to be understood more fundamentally as marking hip hop's 'repositioning away from the underground' (Huq, 2006: 131). In conditions of globalization and hip hop's mainstreaming, she says, the convergence of the municipal and the *residually* subcultural reflects the steady expansion of the 'situational settings' of highly popular forms such as hip hop (ibid: 110).[69] This explanation would seem to run entirely counter to the views of US commentators such as Ards (2004) and Kitwana (2004) for whom post-hip hop and its outreach and organizing capacity amounts to an 'underground' secession from commercial and mainstream interests. However, on closer inspection these seemingly divergent positions have much in common. Both Huq and the aforementioned US commentators – not to mention Roger – are more-or-less of one mind in regarding municipally sponsored hip hop outreach as progressive and beneficial to all concerned. Huq actually has in her critical sights those, who like Pardue (2004/2007), are more equivocal about the consequences for hip hop culture of receiving municipal support and state endorsement (see also Mahiri and Sablo, 1996). She sees such resiling as an outmoded, logically unsustainable attachment to the 'subcultural valorization of 'underground''. For Huq, to oppose 'the resistive capacity of hip-hop' to its 'outreach capability' amounts in the end to little more than a romantic self-indulgence. It is to deny a crucial opportunity to extend culturally relevant support services

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[69] This notion is developed further in the following chapter in relation to the subjective image of themselves young people involved in hip hop education carry around.

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to disadvantaged youth having to traverse difficult, individualized trajectories in conditions of globalized risk (Huq, 2006: 128-131).

As he says, Roger is reluctant to regard his hip hop outreach in schools for personal development as therapy, preferring to see it more as an 'aid' to develop the kind of thinking which will ensure academic success in lessons beyond English. However, the line between hip hop's deployment for personal development in cultural studies terms and therapy understood as psycho-social integration is blurred by a contemporary public policy driven by the perceived demands made on citizens by globalized risk and individuation (see Giddens, 2004; Mirza, 2006; Nolan, 1998). For example, the facilitated analysis and discussion of the sociological content of rap lyrics in the context of a school classroom, both as a prelude to poetic composition and as a means to 'make...better human beings', is not so ethically straightforward as notions of edutainment might have one believe. As part of a critical pedagogy of culture it might well, following Henry Giroux, provide an 'opportunity to link the political with the personal in order to understand how power is mediated, resisted, and reproduced in daily life' (Giroux, 2006: 40; see Kellner, 1995: 93). Hip hop pedagogy so understood could in theory, in the pioneering radical spirit of Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson (see Steele, 1997), enable young people to journey some way to the complex social sources of their cultural experience and disaffection and even perhaps reflect upon the role of schooling in this. By contrast, Tyson (2002) and Allen (2005), both US based researchers and clinicians in the professional field of social care, champion what they call 'hip hop therapy': a 'culturally sensitive' school-based pedagogic approach with 'at-risk' and 'delinquent' youth. Like cultural studies approaches (see Jocson, 2006), hip hop therapy involves the guided analysis of rap lyrics. Recall how Roger spoke of the usefulness of relevant lyrical content for making a direct connection with young people's own lives. With hip hop therapy, lyrics are chosen strategically either for their 'positive' or 'negative' treatment of socially and culturally salient themes (Allen, 2005: 31; Tyson, 2002: 135-136). Where Roger's personal development approach inevitably makes an implicit invitation - in light of the normative framework of the classroom – for young people to embark on a process of ethical self-scrutiny, hip hop therapy turns this into an injunction. Allen is explicit on this: 'HHT [Hip Hop Therapy] allows practitioners to embrace youth culture while

simultaneously attempting to deconstruct negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors held by the youth and replace them with healthy and positive goals and objectives' (Allen, 2005: 30). According to Tyson, the personal development aim of treatment is to improve 'self protective concepts' (Tyson, 2002: 135).

By utilising a cultural idiom highly familiar, and hence unthreatening to the targeted cohort, practitioners are believed to be more likely to gain access to otherwise inaccessible 'emotions and behaviours' (Allen, 2005: 30/31; Tyson, 2002: 133; see Hughes, 2002: 11). Indeed, Allen combines a 'multi-cultural' argument for the resistance of some youth to therapeutic treatment with more straightforwardly psychological explanations. She asserts that 'not all youth have the adequate ego structure to observe their own need for therapy' (Allen, 2005: 30). Hence, the alleged genius of hip hop therapy as a public policy intervention with such young people is that its culturally congruent and sensitive design works to disarm customary modes of resistance or opposition, unlike more standard therapies (ibid). Demonstrating in my view the worst excesses of a nakedly instrumentalist approach to culture, the reductive hermeneutics this involves seeks precisely to liquidate the 'tension between ideology and art' Perry speaks of in relation to hip hop (Perry, 2004: 41). In collapsing speaker and utterance it is guilty of the empathic fallacy.

However, might not the incipient possibilities for hip hop's therapeutic recuperation to some extent reside in its very democratic appeal at a lyrical level to realness and authenticity? Somers-Willet speaks of the frequency of 'confessional' and first person narratives in spoken word poetry 'dealing with a poet's gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or politics', linking this to an anti-intellectual current that valorises 'emotion' over technique (Somers-Willet, 2001: 43 – 44; see Beach, 1999). Perhaps the assumption that poetic works which vaunt the cultural identity of their producers and trade on a fealty to authentic experience through a directly confessional mode of address need questioning therefore with respect to their inherently critical and progressive character (see Lionel-Smith, 1991; Mackey, 1992; Ryle and Soper, 2002) This corresponds to a tendency identified by Beach (1999) in some multicultural poetry programmes to focus on 'thematic' questions of identity and biography to the almost total exclusion of aesthetic and formal issues. Whilst sympathetic to the demand for a more inclusive, less ethnocentric poetic canon, Beach

regards some of the efforts to bring this about as hampered by an 'impoverished' critical one-sidedness. He writes that 'discussions of American Multicultural poetry' have relied 'almost exclusively on institutional forms of analysis (i.e. the effects and implications of racial and ethnic "difference") rather than on aesthetic evaluation or formal explication' (ibid: 111). What this risks is a form of affirmative pedagogy privileging 'a naively biographical approach over a more complex or nuanced critical analysis' (Beach, 1999: 108). The irony is that lyrics which might sound insurgent and critical can, in the context of municipal tolerance, be recuperated therapeutically in the manner described by Allen and Tyson. 'Conscious' lyrics, for example, ones which ostensibly promote 'self-protective concepts', can be wielded by educators prophylactically against 'negative' ones which appear to promote nihilistic and self-defeating messages (Perry, 2004: 28). As a 'culturally sensitive' therapy hip hop then becomes a 'micro-technology of self-improvement', where 'the social is dissolved into the interpersonal as a condition of the expressive becoming fully instrumentalized' (Cohen, 1997: 294).   Far from being a tool, therefore, of young people's empowerment, the public policy deployment of hip hop starts to represent the therapeutic management and insidious policing of arguably legitimate disaffection, 'the act of rendering justified anger as impotent' (Presdee, 2004).

Conclusion: immanent critique versus personal development

> How is it that culture could speak of the therapeutic as an answer to the harshness of a mechanistic technological society but that, in the context of political languages of legitimation, therapeutically orientated programs are justified on the basis of their instrumental efficacy?

<div align="right">(Nolan, 1998)</div>

Roger's poetry collection, *Suitcase*, is crammed full of autobiographical tokens of his childhood and teenage years in Trinidad.   One poem, 'Sleep', is a series of tableaux dedicated to a father's efforts over a lifetime to provide for his family. It depicts a young man of twenty two (presumably Roger's father) burning the midnight oil as he attempts to study nights for a university degree, a squealing child in one hand, and a text book in the other. Aside from the admiration it evinces for the figure of the father, the image is emblematic of Roger's concern with human agency and the role played by culture and learning in this. To be an artist and to choose to teach – and Roger is adamant that teaching

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poetry has become a vocation – expresses his own agency. But agency does not emerge out of a social void. It is constrained and enabled by temporally prior contingent factors in a person's social environment (Archer, 2003). When he says that in all he does 'I let what I am come through. And what I am is essentially a product of Trinidad', Roger is perfectly expressing this sense of agency constrained and enabled by its cultural environment (see Archer, 2003). Moreover, the specific components of this – an inherited oral primary culture, the social function of literacy in Trinidadian society, growing up in a milieu of political awareness, and a high level of book based learning and supportive input – have created in Roger a 'double consciousness' (Gilroy, 2002). And this 'double consciousness' in turn has arguably both enabled and motivated him to seriously dedicate himself to educational outreach with disadvantaged youth.

I believe, however, there is a lacuna in Roger's unwavering faith in the curative power of words and communication with respect to hip hop and poetry teaching. Gustave Flaubert once said: 'Do not imagine you can exorcise what oppresses you in life by giving vent to it in art' (in Alvarez, 2005: 76). Selves are in so many ways illegible, especially to their putative owners (Castoriardis, 1997: 186-187) despite our best positivist efforts to counteract this by rendering them transparent, available for classifying. Self-expression through writing does not necessarily lead either to personal insight or increased autonomy. The presence of an organisation in London called Survivors Poetry made up of present and past users of the mental health system attests to this fact. Many are still unhappy and unwell despite writing poetry; some would even say writing *sent* them mad and is more akin to a compulsion than a therapy. Roger may well maintain that his facility with language helped sustain him through the humiliating, oppressive and psychologically wounding experience of racism and condescension on his arrival in the UK. And that personal development means therefore extending this facility to others similarly positioned. However, even during his darkest hours the intellect and psychic security that comes with an emotionally secure, culturally and socially rich upbringing never entirely abandoned him (see Sennett, 2003). Ryle and Soper write that 'the idea of culture as contributing to self-realisation presupposes a view of the individual as formed by culture but also actively responsive to it, and capable of self-change in the light of its influence' (Ryle and Soper, 2002: 7). Pivotal to Roger's cultural

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development, his 'self-change' both through hip hop culture and other forms of literature, was the 'influence' of social structures he had little decision in.

Mickey McGee declares that 'Self-improvement culture, as it actually exists, derails the opportunities for individuals to understand injuries or grievances as part of systemic social problems. In this sense it offers a worldview that is precisely the inverse of the "sociological imagination" that C.Wright Mills proposed' (McGee, 2005: 182). However, McGee is also fully justified in stating elsewhere that too stark an opposition between notions of public and private, collective and individual, ignore the justly 'prepolitical' struggles of victimised individuals throughout the ages at the level of subjectivity. Indeed, the presence of a thriving 'self-improvement' industry is surely a telling index of the powerful urge felt by individuals to find solutions – however flawed - to enduring 'social dissatisfaction' (ibid: 23/97). But personal development programmes will ultimately make little impression on the profound social antagonisms that rend society and are behind the unequal distribution of cultural capital. For all Roger's protestations municipal support for hip hop as a 'participatory art' can actually be a means of neutralising the critical grounds of 'self-change', a way of legitimising the extension of governmental authority and norms of social reproduction (see Bradford, 2005). Roger asks: 'how come we don't have working class poets and a working class poet's movement in this country?' The answer to this difficult question dwells more, I would argue, in deep lying structural terrain than in participatory agendas and opportunities to be heard in public (see Beech, 2008). Moreover, as Beach (1999) observes above, it is all very well to be heard: but what is being said? Perhaps Roger's bracketing of vernacular 'emotional' and 'academic' poetry on grounds of cultural relevancy robs him of aesthetic resources more refractory to prophylactic agendas and so less easily recuperated. Ryle and Soper write of 'high culture':

> If from one point of view the universal normative claims of the cultural ideal are hypocritical and oppressive, from another they are grounds for an immanent critique of societies that proclaim in the domain of culture the equality of persons while in their economic and social life they reproduce and rely on structural inequality.

(Ryle and Soper, 2002: 5)

I would argue, indeed, that Roger's periphrastic 'central voice' - his hip hop sampling aesthetic with its penetrative knowing of the broader culture - potentially provides this very

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'immanent critique'. When Roger refuses to discriminate between good and bad teachers of poetry he is actually only logically extending his conviction that hip hop is 'amorphous'. These are ideas also explored by Perry (2004) and Hall (2005) of black popular culture as being, respectively, an 'ideological democracy' and 'a contradictory space'. It is perhaps reasonable to argue, therefore, that given hip hop culture's unstable plurality – its inexorable 'infighting' (Hoch, 2006: 361) - that hip hop pedagogy must of necessity honestly reflect this. In the previous chapter, however, the limits of such tolerance were surely tested as hip hop education was seen to assume at points a charlatan form. The big irony of course is that Roger himself is both a good poet and a teacher with exacting standards. In this sense he perhaps disproves in practice what he argues ethically and politically for in theory.

In the next chapter I stay within the sphere of hip hop educational work to explore the intra-cultural battle hip hop versus rap as that between hip hop and a recently emergent rhyzomatic strand, UK grime (Gidley, 2007; Reynolds, 2007/2009). I retain a focus on the grassroots use of hip hop for young people's personal development. Enlarging on themes from the present chapter, I examine how pedagogic efforts to 'constructively' channel the dissonantly creative libidinal energy of young grime emcees in the name of 'conscious' hip hop actualises certain individuating tendencies in contemporary culture. Particularly as these find an expression in policy approaches to young people's welfare concerned with risk management, self-care and futurity (see Finlayson, 2003).

CHAPTER SIX:

Spittin' Life-Bars, Doing Grime Prevention

Introduction: grime emceeing and libidinal energy

I begin this chapter with an extract from my field work notes:[70]

> I'm scurrying about in a large harshly lit hall, part of a multi-use community centre on the edge of a local authority estate in North West London, taking photos of young people aged ten to eighteen participating in a thirteen week rap emceeing programme, the 'Griot to Grime' Project. The distorted clamour coming from the PA system is UK grime, the mash-up bastard spawn of a three way union between dance-hall, garage and hip hop.[71] The young people are seated on a crescent of chairs adjacent to the DJ rig in groups of 'olders' and 'youngers'. The majority are black and mixed heritage plus three white youths. Their attention is mostly fixed on workshop leader' V''s scratching, cuing and knob twiddling at the DJ decks. This age based seating will form the core social and spatial arrangement of the workshop over the course of the evening. From-time-to-time young people will spring to their feet and break off to bundle, petition the workers, confront each other or temporarily leave the building, before returning to their seats. Also as the inspiration takes them – or rather the DJ drops a particular beat - upward of three or more of the olders will peel off from the rest of the group, remove to a space at the side of the hall, just out of direct earshot, and will form a 'cipher'.

> A cipher[72] is a key term in the hip hop lexicon, or lore. It is a knot of bodies leaning into a tight circle where each takes it in turn to extemporise some emcee bars [lyrics]. Whilst one spits [raps] the others mostly look down at the floor nodding and shaking their heads, rocking their bodies in time to the rhythm and mentally preparing their imminent rapped retort. Participants describe it as a circle of communal energy formed by an emcee performing for those in his or her immediate proximity with listeners invited to spontaneously respond by joining in. Hip hop dancers also create ciphers. It can sometimes develop into a 'battle' between two or more of its members where bars are spat in a zero-sum game of escalating hyperbole, word-wizardry, insults and challenges. Bursts of stylised rhythmic and lyrical virtuosity elicit approving yelps and marionette like hand-movements fanning the conflagration. In this sense the dialectic between community and communal, on the one hand, and individual distinction and competition, on the other, is crucial and in many ways paradigmatic of hip hop culture.[73] Those surrounding the emcee form a sort of pulsing enchanted shield or perimeter, underscoring the sense of exclusivity, separation and group solidarity. The focussed energy and attention is directed toward the core of the cipher – a fixed point on the ground in the middle of the circle – serving to repel uninvited onlookers or at least

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[70] Friday 14th November 2008.

[71] See Reynolds (2007: 356; and 2009)

[72] See Morgan (2009: 59) and Alim (2007: 97-101).

[73] Alim in his sociolinguistic study of Hip Hop Nation Language (HHHNL) writes that 'HHHNL is both a communal and competitive discourse, with the cipher being the height of community and competition within the HHN....Lyrical battling, which often occurs in the cipher, is a highly animated engagement where the Rap lyricist's skillz are sharpened and presented to a critical circle of Hip Hop conscious beings' (Alim, 2007: 97).

ensure they maintain a respectful distance. This is exactly how I feel on this night when itching to go over and observe up close one of these mini bush fires.

A number of factors militate against this, not least that I am nowhere near familiar enough with this group of young people to penetrate one of their temporary autonomous zones. Whenever a cipher bursts into life like sparks on dry tinder it very publicly ensures its proximal isolation, underlining its fugitive nature with darting, stolen, over the shoulder glances at possible intruders. This warning not to advance on the enchanted annexed space only serves, however, to make such a trespass the more tantalising. The couple of times I'm unable to resist the urge - against my better judgement – to bear down on one of the ciphers, it simply melts away without so much as a word of protest and reforms elsewhere. For example, one time a group rebuffs my advances by slipping into an ante-chamber to the side of the hall buffered by stacks of chairs.

Young workshop participants operating under the concerned gaze of youth work professionals but nonetheless finding ways to elude surveillance and maintain a semblance of endogenous interaction and expression. The image is emblematic of the sense of expressive autonomy, opportunity and containment which characterised the hip hop educational work I observed and at points helped to facilitate during this phase of the field-work. The emceeing and poetry workshops I examine below are centrally concerned with addressing the aesthetic consequences of what their respective facilitators, 'V' and 'Fran',[74] regard as two closely related ethical problems: first, the failure at some level of certain young people's socialisation as evidenced by their rap lyrics; and second, the failure by mainstream institutions to provide for the specific cultural and educational needs of young people who emcee. Like Roger, these educators think it impossible in light of the social situations and mentality of those they have taught to de-link such questions of personal development from their educational outreach. Tutelage of the creative libidinal energy of young grime emcees is thus conceived by V and Fran as an opportunity to temper a perceived reflex of negative enunciation, to develop the editorial facility, and to school new semantic and compositional habits. In what follows, channelling emcee flow with hip hop consciousness means 'nurturing' an ethical – even penitent - mode of lyrical reportage; getting grime emcees to exchange their negativity for what V calls 'Life bars' (positive hip hop lyrics).

However, as I started to discuss in the previous chapter the personal development agendas of activist educators with their desire to see municipal spaces democratised by hip hop

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[74] 'V' and 'Fran' are pseudonyms.

culture can involve a particular myopia. I spoke of how the incipient therapeutic tendencies in the lyrical content of hip hop and spoken word and a targeted, 'culturally sensitive' public policy formed in response to accelerating cultural individuation and social risk potentially converge within hip hop education. With grime, as I explore further along, this situation is exacerbated by a constitutively hyper individualistic character fully in tune with the dominant neoliberal survivalist ethos of our times (see Reynolds, 2007/2009; Fisher, 2009). Further, what was embryonic in 'third-way' approaches to the welfare problems of late modernity (see Beck, 2004: 130; Giddens, 1998: 181/187), an appeal to 'affect', 'choice' and 'desire', is increasingly manifest in a public policy dictated by 'capitalist realism' (Fisher, 2009; see Brown, 2005; Rimke, 2000)). Sam Binkley argues that:

> As more and more areas of life are confronted as markets, subjects of neoliberalism must develop new forms of conduct specifically tuned to such challenges. Individuals today must learn to handle the freedoms the market imposes on them.

> (Binkley, 2007: 119)

In such a situation seeking as a matter of welfare strategy to render uncertain where spontaneous and informal expression ends and the behavior desired by rational authorities begins takes on the appearance of hard-headed realism.[75] As a government strategy paper from 2004 which first proposed the incorporation of 'behavioural economics' states: ''Policy'...should not simply proclaim personal responsibility or blame, but be shaped around the ways in which people actually think and feel and the social and psychological forces that influence behaviour' (Halpern et al, 2004: 67). The hip hop for grime prevention reported upon in this chapter marks, I argue, an instance of this recently emergent policy (see Finlayson, 2003).

Words v flow

> Thinking about music – a non-representational, non-conceptual form – raises aspects of embodied subjectivity that are not reducible to the cognitive and the ethical.

> (Gilroy, 2002: 76)

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[75] Wendy Brown writes that 'neoliberalism is not simply a set of economic policies; it is not only about facilitating free trade, maximising corporate profits, and challenging welfarism. Rather, neoliberalism carries a social analysis that, when deployed as a form of governmentality, reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy to practices of empire' (Brown, 2005: 39).

Grime music has a reputation for not only inheriting and extending the most virulently nihilistic aspects of gangsta rap at the level of lyrical content and public image but its distinctively high rhythmic tempo and intensity – its emcee flow - is charged with incarnating mindless volatility and inflaming adolescent aggression. As such its very musicality is seen by some informants in this chapter as inimical to conscious, sober reflection and critical intelligence, or even entirely at odds with the linguistic and semantic accent of poetry composition.

Grime emceeing notoriously flaunts a (sub) proletarian swagger and audacity (Reynolds, 2007/2009). Corporeally, it combines insouciance and insolence, intensity and menace. Its gender is determinedly masculine, tending to the sinewy and virile regardless of the actual sex of the emcee. Where US rap frequently gets located along a vernacular poetic continuum that takes in oral storytelling and jazz poetry (Alim, 2007), UK grime 'spitting' both ruptures this continuum and harks back to the slackest of Jamaican dancehall emceeing (Gidley, 2007: 149-151; Reynolds, 2007: 381).   It relies heavily upon a non euphonic rhythmical fluency, flair and prosodic technique hard to recognise in any ratified poetic traditions. One that in its sheer haste, hustle and incontinence, its psycho assonance, alliteration and enjambment, is simultaneously slip-shod and elaborate.[76] The consummate grime emcee composition – be it written or extemporised – usually involves a surreally fissile lexicon and unstable narrative of menacing neologism, alliterative rutting, and bawdy punning (Reynolds, 2007: 349). Written composition, verbal wit, a knack for metaphor, intellectual range, political awareness, or narrative ability, that is, both literary and sociological considerations, are ultimately trumped by musicality and muscularity. Even the staple of hip hop battling, the witty put-down, cuss or diss, has potency and heft with grime only if carried on an implausibly circuitous metrical expectoration. Or put another way, *consciousness*, of whatever order, would appear to be of secondary importance to the libidinousness of emcee *flow*.[77]

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[76] This is mirrored in the musical accompaniments, what Simon Reynolds calls 'Grimestrumentals'. The latter's high tempo 'textured beats and synthesiser programming veritably bleeps and grills with 'cheap and nasty timbres...influenced by pulp movie video soundtracks, videogame muzik and even mobile phone ringtones' (Reynolds, 2009: 77).
[77] That said, Reynolds identifies a grime consciousness characterised by a 'virulent verbosity', 'pinched meanness' and a toxicity rising from the 'sewer of the soul', eloquent of the shuttered horizons, monochromatic

V and Fran, who each acknowledge that grime is the musical and stylistic template of choice for a generation of British emcees currently in their teens, essentially look upon this order of precedence as a matter of sociological fact with highly equivocal effects. It is something to be supported, enabled, challenged - and then transcended. Fran speaks of the dominance of rhythmic flow in grime as running counter to her own relationship with hip hop where language and meaning enjoy priority:

> I wanna discuss a word that keeps being said to me, which is new, that word is *flow*...we never had that in the old days as a performer. We never had any: 'your flow is really cool man' or anything like that, and it's taken me a while to figure out what flow is, and of course the flow is 'ddaa ddd ddaa ddddaa di di da...'. Right, so the flow has become more important than the words.

I spoke with a group of boys from an East London secondary school – 'Penfield' -[78] that had shown great relish for composing and performing their emcee bars in one of Joelle's workshops. They were adamant that in grime, *flow* – the idiosyncratic rhythm and style of the bars spat by an emcee, an individual's sonic signature or fingerprint – did indeed always comes before *words*. Fame as an emcee was achieved by public displays of dextrous flow consisting of rhythmical poise, formidable breath control and dynamic oral cavity hydraulics. Alim writes that 'flow is one's ability to exploit the rhythm, rhyme around the rhythm, and yet be able to faithfully return to the rhythm on time' (Alim, 2007: 96). The claim that flow has precedence in grime was echoed by two teenage boys from another East London secondary school – 'Belton' -[79] who assured me that it was all about 'how fast you say it and the way you say it'. 'You could be talkin complete rubbish. It's all about the beats.' I put it to them then that it was almost like turning words into abstract sounds so as to produce a kind of sound poetry. One responded 'words are sounds...People like emcees are not really writers. It's all about the music...it's the *way* they say it'. One of the Penfield boys informed me that his older brother had mastered 'double-time' flow, which basically means getting double the number of words into a bar and demands speed and muscularity of tongue movement and impressive breath control. I was then given an exhibition of double-time emceeing. The boys said that emcees skilled in double-time enjoyed the highest status in

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landscape and bleak prospects of its E3 birthplace (Reynolds, 2007: 381). He speaks of 'the sunless spirit of grime', declaring 'grime is winter music' (ibid).
[78] 'Penfield' is a pseudonym.
[79] 'Belton' is a pseudonym.

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the grime pecking order. These same boys had produced some bars on the theme of identity theft and I commented that when reading their words off the page it was not immediately apparent how they were intended to be delivered rhythmically. I contrasted this to more recognisable forms of page poetry that – however experimental - gave prosodic, syntactic and orthographic clues to the reader. I asked what they were doing with these particular lines. What they told me was that for them, essentially, the rhythmic tail always wagged the linguistic dog. One Penfield boy, 'Stim',[80] said:

> You need to think about the rhythm first. Don't think about the rhyme, think about the rhythm. Think about how it could flow when you say it.
>
> Patrick: So you're thinking about it as a sound?
>
> Stim: Yeah. Same with the lyrics, you're cutting it up to make it work with the flow.
>
> Patrick: So you've got the kind of rhythm that you want to do. Then you add some words, but you take words away and you add words in order to make it fit in with that rhythmic flow.
>
> Stim: We needed to cross out some words 'cause they didn't fit in with the rhythm.

Both Fran and V are at pains to acknowledge and fully credit – with a view to mobilising - the aesthetically distinctive character of grime emcee flow. V, for example, speaks admiringly of the raw creative appeal of grime and its startling pervasiveness (Reynolds, 2007: 386), maintaining that it has encouraged an emcee style amongst today's UK rap lyricists that is almost unsurpassed in its syncopated, polyrhythmic inventiveness and fluency. As he puts it of the young emcees he encounters through his youth work:

> To them talking about lyrics or rapping about stuff is standard, it's intrinsic with those guys. If you see them out, if you see grime cats or mad hip hop cats that spit like it's, like it's water. I'm amazed! They're like seven and six it's intrinsic to them; they have that ability and skill.

However, it is precisely those sonic qualities which make grime music potentially so compelling - its rhythmic speed and frenetic intensity - that some view as the main source of its inherent limitations. Serving to obscure any semantic content, these qualities encourage the impression of one-dimensionality, merely attesting to the vast reserves of libidinal energy of the creators. Fran concedes that she and other poets judging slam poetry competitions lavish far more attention upon the use of language and narrative in an

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[80] 'Stim' is a pseudonym.

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entrant's composition than on the palpably musical and rhythmic elements employed in its metre, scansion, and cadences, e.g. its flow. Significantly, Fran considers grime emcees in this regard as relatively disadvantaged, not to say impoverished, compared to their hip hop counterparts: 'The reason why in [...a national slam poetry competition...] a rapper's won once but an emcee hasn't, is probably because the flow's dominated the words'.[81] Two boys of fourteen I spoke to at Belton School maintained that due to the overpowering beats and the rhythm in grime music you only actually hear the principal words and phrases; any 'little details' and subtleties are sonically drowned out. So that even an emcee blessed with profundity and a knack for narrative would struggle, in their opinion, to convey much more to their listeners than degrees of vehemence. One boy claimed that: 'If you read a poem to a girl the girl's gonna fall in love with you innit? But if you emcee to a girl she'll be like 'what are you doin?'' In terms of the scope within grime to vary and deviate from this sonic template they were doubtful: 'all you can do is faster and slower and louder and quieter.' One girl from Penfield School confided that she considered the emcee compositions of her mostly male peers to be aesthetically limited when judged by the standards of free-verse. She maintained that emcee lyrics, unlike the poetry she was familiar with, were 'immediate' and concrete and 'normally not that abstract'. A girl from Belton also drew a contrast between the demotic vernacular of the language used in emceeing and what is usually understood by poetry: 'well it's not like poetry – it's more like everyday life. There's swear-words in it and everything'. The aforementioned girl from Penfield had composed a poem which attempted to come at its subject from a self-consciously philosophical angle. In terms of its form, it was written in couplets, used metaphor, mostly achieved syntactic consistency and employed standard spelling, eschewing the obvious end rhyme. By contrast, two boys aged thirteen in the same workshop produced some fast-paced bars. This composition, more prosaically confessional deployed cliché without irony and consisted of shorter lines following an a/a end rhyme scheme:

> These streets stick to my feat,/My brain stays in contact,/With the people that I meet,/I
> try to stay focus/Rap and compeat,/life isn't hard/Stick with the Jo Blogz/aim for the
> stars/like Obama Aim with your heart./You may think its finished/but this is just the start.

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[81] Interestingly, the contrast offered here by Fran between rappers (hip hop) and emcees (grime spitters) is perceived contrawise by Khonsu from chapter four, for whom 'emcees' are the real hip hop and thus enjoy primacy over mere 'rappers'.

Gilroy has written that 'the power and significance of music within the black Atlantic have grown in inverse proportion to the limited expressive power of language' (Gilroy, 2002: 74). I would argue that these emcee lyrics exemplify a tension here between the respective roles played by the linguistic and the musical in grime born largely of imperatives created by the institutional context in which they have been elicited (see Gordon, 2005: 379; Huq, 2007: 89). Recall Stim's comment above which underlined the subordination of language to music in grime emceeing: 'We needed to cross out some words 'cause they didn't fit in with the rhythm'; or the Belton School boy who said 'People like emcees are not really writers. It's all about the music...it's the *way* they say it.' So, for example, the use of capitals, full stops and commas in the written script of this particular emcee piece gestures at the Standard English syntax schools demand proficiency in the use of. Indeed, the presumably accidental misspellings: 'compeat', 'focas', 'feat' for feet, draw attention to inadvertent rule violation rather than to self-conscious creative mutiny. In the end, however, they are almost random orthographic marks. Far from being elements in a musical score, they overlay an arbitrary linguistic coding which seems to betray the awkward conjunction here of formal schooling and demotic vernacular. They also bear little relevance to the actual rhythmic flow and musical shadings of the oral performance (Alim, 2007). It is not incidental that emcee lyrics are frequently referred to as *bars* – as in bars of music – rather than verses, emphasising the sonic over the linguistic.

On the one hand, the subordination of linguistic content to the musical and corporeal has arguably egalitarian benefits. To vernacular communities rich in creative idioms – but who perhaps, in Basil Bernstein's terms, are restricted in their facility with Standard English – it increases opportunities to publicly participate in cultural production and exchange. On the other, this condition is seen by critics of grime as potentially encouraging the absence of any quality control or self-censorship with respect to semantic content and imagery. So that given free reign emcee lyrics can literally flow - as in a completely unchecked stream of consciousness - with all the vile unrepressed effluvia of late modern Western popular culture: grotesque gender stereotypes, hyper-consumption and possessive individualism, homoerotic gang solidarity, video-game violence, and atavistic sexual relations (see Power, 2009). One young person told me that through attending V's workshop he had been made

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aware just how ingrained was the 'negative' content of his emcee bars and how difficult it was to express alternative sentiments. He spoke of violently competitive lyrical content as almost a matter for him and his peers of pre-conscious, habitual reflex:

> It's easier to make stuff like 'I'm gonna shank [stab] your mum' and stuff like that. It's easier to think because you can think about it. But when it comes to positive bars [lyrics] you're so used to writing negative bars you can't actually even write positive bars.

Franco Berardi speaks of contemporary life as involving a structurally engendered, pathological condition of normalised, violent excitation.

> Competition has been the universal belief of the last neo-liberalist decades. In order to stimulate competition, a powerful injection of aggressive energy became necessary, a sort of permanent electrocution producing a constant mobilization of psychic energies. The 1990s were the decade of psycho-pharmacology: a Prozac economy.

(Berardi, 2009: 97)

Here is an echo of Khonsu and Swiss in chapter three, who perceive the speed and vehemence of grime emceeing as an expression of modern pathology. Correspondingly, it is not for nothing that in his educational work V deploys the cipher in talismanic fashion as a trope for community, what Marcyliena Morgan writing on hip hop describes as 'part of a system of social corroboration...tied to social and community building values' (Morgan, 2009: 83). For V the cipher is a symbolic and practical foil to grime's aberrant Hobbesian cosmology in which, as Reynolds puts it, 'community and communion shrink to at best the feral solidarity of the gang' (Reynolds, 2007: 348; see Fisher, 2009: 10-11). It is also why as a hip hop neo-traditionalist V critically juxtaposes the figures of the ancient griot and the grime emcee, explicit in the fact that he regards the former as both ancestor and ideally heir to the latter.[82] As a fan of hip hop Fran says she appreciates the best work successfully fuses rhythm *and* poetry: 'of course I am the person whose nipples go hard at the way you say something and what you're talking about and then, of course, everything else comes into play with the *flow*...every now and again when the two come together we have perfection'. Indeed, during moments of relaxation when her critical faculties are in abeyance and words have far less purchase the musical/sonic will come to the fore: 'I love the [emcee] flow: if I'm in my bedroom it's the flow I'm interested in'. But in the end the

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[82] As Khonsu from chapter four says: 'for me hip hop is grime, hip hop is garage, hip hop is it all. Why? Because it's lyrics – it's all about lyrics and beats, right? So it's all tied in and it goes back to the essence of the ancient griots, the ancient storytellers.'

hip hop Fran holds in the highest esteem is that in which writerly virtues and ethical awareness are the most prominent features. As she said to me: 'I'm in it for the words; that its. So then your ethics, for me, are tied in strongly with your ability to write.' The flow may in fact be comparatively rudimentary in the best work:

> Grandmaster Flash, very simple flow in 'The Message'. And I always refer back to 'The Message' because I was a kid I was fourteen/fifteen years old and we can't undervalue the impact a track like that had. But it was *what* they were sayin that made me want to say it myself.

To the school students she repeatedly said: 'It's about the words'; or 'The best way of getting selected for the short-list is the lyrics'. Essentially, for Fran and V such alternative technical and presentational competencies as rhythmic flow and expressive delivery are in the end for both ethical and aesthetic reasons secondary to a facility with language, narrative and written composition: *the message*. It is the ability of certain rap artists to combine conscious lyrical content and recondite rhythmical flow, thereby producing work that is at once aesthetically audacious, philosophically intelligent and ethically principled which, in V's opinion, marks out the best hip hop from any grime thus far produced.[83] Indeed, the interpretation of rhyme flow offered by Morgan restores the centrality of the linguistic with respect to hip hop nation language. She writes:

> The ability to flow is based on the power of the Word, which is the bible, the law, and the source of worship and competition. It is the core of the hiphop [*sic*] nation, the power, trope, message, and the market all in one.

<div align="right">(Morgan, 2009: 75)</div>

Lionel-Smith maintains that a dominant thread running through 1960s Black Arts Movement aesthetics was a tension between orality, music and the linguistic (Lionel-Smith, 1991: 100). He cites Black Arts theorist Larry Neale commenting on the radical contrast between black music's vibrancy and 'the dead forms taught most writers in the white man's schools' which 'will have to be destroyed, or at best, radically altered. We can learn more about what poetry is by listening to the cadences in Malcolm's speeches, than from most of Western poetics' (ibid). In this valorising of orality and musicality Lionel-Smith discerns a politically

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[83] Reynolds, who on the whole subscribes to the view that such aesthetic and ethical criteria misses what is most exciting and distinctive about grime, nonetheless regards the London artist Kano as the closest thing grime has come thus far to potentially producing an emcee whose words and flow combinations can punch their weight with the best US hip hop has to offer (Reynolds, 2007: 384; 2009: 83).

driven essentialist desire to found a singular 'black aesthetic' rather than a 'black aesthetics' in the plural (ibid: 96). In this singular 'black aesthetic' – inverting the valences of the primitive artist - blackness becomes a déclassé, oppositional sign soldered to the robust musical traditions of Africa (ibid: 97 – 98). The vernacular forms of Gangsta rap and grime, however, would seem to mark a limit to – to sorely test even – this anti-bourgeois, anti-Eurocentric imperative of 'music as a paradigm for literature' (ibid: 101). Grime may crackle with raw creative energy but its 'sunless spirit' brings into relief what critics of rap perceive as the regressively profane tendencies in black vernacular orature, its ethical impropriety and semantic irreverence (see Moses, 1999). V, who shares these concerns, believes this demands a grassroots countervailing educational response:

> When I was young there was this variation in hip hop but now with these lot everyone's just on a thug thing. So, yeah, for me I'm not like saying to them what they're doing is wrong with the grime - the rhyme the flows, the energy, the vibe - I'm just trying to give them an alternative.

Fran vents a similar frustration with what she sees as the one-eyed, anti-social character of grime.   Like V she believes that when compared with 'conscious' hip hop the ethical shortcomings of grime are glaring. She too argues, moreover, that this situation calls for pedagogic action, the provision of 'an alternative':

> There's a frame of reference [with grime] which is aggressive, it's absolutely aggressive. When people say that about hip hop/rap, y'know, they're wrong, because there's a massive history and a backlog of very conscious work, but grime doesn't have it – as far as I'm aware. So all you've got is this 'you come to me and I'll bang you/I'll give it my gat [gun] and I'll shank [stab] you'…So we provide as adults, this is not even as artists, this us as grown-ups providing a framework.

Validating and channelling grime *flow*

Finding a constructive 'alternative' as V puts it, or in Fran's terms 'providing a framework' for this libidinal energy, means in effect seeking to go with and against the *flow* of grime (Huq, 2007). The double action of this figure deliberately underscores the ambiguity of what is being described here, and this I shall be exploring for the remainder of the chapter. If the 'aggressive', 'thug thing' in grime, like in gangsta rap, vitiates hip hop, infecting it with negativity, it is also in the view of these hip hop educators what prevents so many adults and indeed other educators from appreciating the nascent artistry lurking within 'the rhyme the flows, the energy the vibe'. Echoing Roger Robinson V argues:

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> The problem I think with a lot of the work we do with young people – they're looked at in a negative way because they have so much energy and we don't know how to channel it. And if we can channel that in a positive way then it can be *amazing*. An that's what I try an do.

Both V and Fran are adamant that there is a need to look behind the public facade of the semi-literate anti-social grime spitter and see the nascent conscious wordsmith. So that with the correct educational input an embryonic, even latent, intention to play with words in a poetic and socially aware way can be redeemed from its routinised misuse as a means to commit common verbal assault. It is not young people's libidinal energy that is at issue here, they are saying, so much as the form of its expression (See Skeggs, 2005) and, pivotally, the social opportunities made available by educational and cultural organisations for its sublimation and channelling. It might well, as V maintains, now be 'standard' for many young people in UK cities to 'spit like it's water'. Nevertheless, demotic slang and profane banter, however routine and pervasive, is still for the most part regarded – at least beyond the youth peer-group - as culturally deviant rather than as a creative use of the English language (Alim, 2007: 82-83; Reynolds, 2007: 349). The cultural divergence or opposition between what socially disadvantaged young people do creatively in their peer groups and informal associational spaces and what they are taught to do in educational institutions is a staple of the fabled 1970s North American urban origins of hip hop. Baker JR. (1990) passionately asserts that the vernacular arts of hip hop – rap emceeing, graffiti and break-dancing – were originally adaptive responses to a culturally remote and irrelevant educational system arrogantly insensible to the artistic and linguistic idioms of its black working-class students (see Kelley, 1997).

Hence, the intra-cultural politics of hip hop versus rap, with its desire to 'channel' and provide 'alternatives' and 'frameworks' to deviant elements in hip hop culture, elides here with a seemingly democratising advocacy of marginalised expression. This is calls by hip hop educators for 'access' to the resources and sources of validation locked up in mainstream public spheres (see Hutnyk, 2000: 33). As I explore further on, part of the implicit logic of this is the perception that mainstream institutions bear a deal of the responsibility for the collective failure in socialisation behind the anti-social content of negative rap and need therefore both as a matter of justice and pragmatics to support the countervailing efforts of grassroots cultural educators. Moreover, as I have discussed in previous chapters a

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discourse of 'institutional penetration' from below (see Pardue, 2004: 412-415) is foundational to the idea of a 'mature' post-hop hop counter public sphere of community activism and educational outreach. So for example, like Roger, Fran claims to be stirred by what she regards as an unjust, unequal distribution of cultural resources and esteem. She talks of educational and cultural institutions routinely overlooking and neglecting the raw idiomatic creativity of working-class 'street' poets and performers. She thus casts herself in the role of counter-hegemonic advocate and calls on those institutions to extend their validation and support the 'symbolic creativity' of youthful individuals languishing outside of what is mandated and officially esteemed (see Willis, 1990). The problem, as Fran sees it, is that 'free-verse poetry of a certain kind, page-poetry is valued by society in small doses, whereas a bit of rough emceeing which needs nurturing is not as valued – and certainly not by the schools.' Of her slam poetry work with schoolchildren she therefore says:

> This slam...it's not just about those kids who are clearly marked as excellent and doing this kind of thing from day one. We're getting to those kids who are never ever given any sort of accolade for what I see as their as excellence which is to say their emceeing at the back of the estate or their fantastic use of beat box or anything like that.

> Patrick: So the things they already know how to do and already do in their peer-groups.

> Fran: Yeah - rewarding that and giving it the same status as an incredible piece of free-verse poetry.

In both their respective workshops I observed V and Fran radiating genuine pleasure and pride in the faltering artistic steps of young participants however guileless and rudimentary. I also witnessed young people enjoying the arena for creative display made possible by the workshop, relishing the opportunity to show off their lyrical skills to an audience made up of attentive adults and admiring peers. From my field work notes of V's workshops:

> The DJ decks and the opportunity to emcee exert a strong gravitational pull on most present. There is an almost constant nervy muttered undertow of urgings and counter-urgings in relation to who wants – or who dares - to emcee in front of the others. This means ensuring you are in a position to receive one of the two microphones. As it passes between hands and different muffled voices become audible over the PA system a nervy anticipation is palpable amongst those who are next up. The crescent of seats becomes a whispering gallery of stolen, hesitant rhyme flows rehearsed under people's breath or conspiratorially through pursed lips in a neighbour's ear. There are jibes and jibs and quick, knowing glances, all, in this ostensibly informal context, encouraged or benignly ignored by the few adult workers in attendance.

One boy Fran and I worked with at Penfield School had demonstrated his skill in emceeing but could be quite disruptive and was constantly being admonished by teachers. During a focus group interview he spoke of his feelings of cultural empathy for Fran and how he appreciated her solidarity as a fellow emcee. He found the uninhibited manner in which she had stood up in front of the class and not only performed her own lyrics but those written by him and his classmates, personally validating. By demonstrating her ability to emcee in this way it appeared that Fran had in his eyes acquired a certain cultural credibility and kudos lacking in those who usually taught him. As he put it, she could 'understand': she was 'on the same level as me.' Indeed, he seemed to share Fran's conviction that young people like him are routinely overlooked in the context of school for their emceeing ability, denigrated even:

> I think it's good yeah? Havin teachers, yeah, that like do the things that you do - because if you're like rappin or something like that then the *other* teacher will be like 'oh stop, you're chattin rubbish' yeah? But, like, the teachers that do it [emcee/rap] themselves be like helpin you like.

Recall at the beginning of the chapter I recounted a scene from V's workshop: participants breaking off from the facilitated group to form a cipher. This was an image eloquent at once of containment, surveillance, autonomy and exodus. It was something I also witnessed in Fran's workshops, indeed on occasion involving the boy just mentioned. Co-present with an appreciation of time, resources and validation was a desire to seek out separate *liminal* spaces for display and experimentation – a corridor, a store-cupboard – outside the 'adult framework' with its imperative to integrate and to render idiomatic expression legible and appropriate. In practice, both sets of workshops were marked by a simultaneous sense of egalitarian solicitousness, therapeutic tutelage, young people's pleasure in performing and receiving attention, and low level resistance. Indeed, this very resistance attested to a mostly inchoate appreciation of how validation segues into 'channelling' and invariably means control. To confer institutional recognition on emceeing on 'a Peckham council estate stairwell' by bringing it into a workshop and providing expert adult 'nurturing' cannot but involve efforts to socialise and civilise grime flow. As Dave Beech argues, with reference to the recent popularity of artistic outreach in arts policy, there is a 'political fissure' running through 'every participatory event':

The social and cultural distinctions that prompt participation in the first place, which participation seeks to shrink or abolish, are reproduced within participation itself through an economy of the participants' relative proximity to the invitation. Outsiders have to pay a high price for their participation, namely, the neutralisation of their difference and the dampening of their powers of subversion. Participation papers over the cracks. The changes we need are structural.[84]

(Beech, 2008: 4)

But it is crucially hip hop itself which is intended to provide the paragon example of civility in the form of 'conscious hip hop'. For here, according to its advocates, is a vernacular expression which at its best is deserving of the 'accolades', 'rewards' and 'status' usually reserved for more academic 'free verse'. Moreover, remember that like gangsta rap grime flow is considered a mutant rhizomatic strand of hip hop culture: it is expropriated cultural goods; a cultural weapon for black people's subordination; a debased 'thug' cosmology; verbal effluvia; minstrelsy even.

It bears emphasising that the convergence of countercultural energies and public policy means that hip hop education is able to combine a strongly egalitarian aspect and one that is more closely bound up with the modern day imperatives of actuary welfare, where as Nikolas Rose says 'the well being of all...has increasingly come to be seen as a consequence of the responsible self-government of each' (Rose, 1999: 264). Like Roger in the previous chapter, V maintains that teaching emceeing is in fact only a vehicle for his real vocation: personal development work with young people. He says: 'Pastoral work; bit of mentoring, and that's the whole thing, y'know, about the teaching role for me; y'know the whole notion that I just go and teach skills is a nonsense.' According to V, the altering of public perceptions of grime energy needs, therefore, to begin with challenging grime emcees personally. This means assisting them to reflect and make an inventory of some of the key symbolic materials deployed in UK grime to fashion its emcee bars, sonic compositions, and its habitus of gangster braggadocio. V declares that his essential message is:

Just look at a lot of the issues we're facing like with the gun crime ddddd and the media representation of that. And we're just simply sayin that 'you know what, you don't have to live that life. You can live a different way. You can live a good life without havin the

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[84] See Pardue who in his anthropological study of hip hop outreach in a Brazilian youth prison maintains that 'From the general hip-hop perspective, violence and crime are the result of living under the system in the periferia [periphery]. To change the system requires a kind of violence that disrupts, or, in common talk, "revolutionizes" normal social relations' (Pardue, 2004: 417).

latest gun, without havin the latest ddddd, all the consumerism commodification. You can be fully creative and be successful. You can be a good person, or do good and want to help the community and be successful. You can do all those things'…You can do what you love and you don't have to take the short-term route which is presented all the time through the media sayin ddddddddddddddd –.

V is saying that the normative and cognitive structures of the youth peer groups inhabiting the grime milieu are permeated by ceaseless 'media representation' of 'gun crime' and 'consumerism commodification'. Reciprocally, grime flow is a conveyor belt for their endless endorsing and propagation. Musical bars producing and reproducing ideological bars of self-incarceration in an endless mediatised recursion. Like Khonsu and Tuggs in chapter four, V repeatedly contrasts this to conscious hip hop artists like KRS1: sources of emancipation; portals to wider knowledge and exploration; providers of tools for living. He argues:

> For a lot of the guys now I think a lot of what they're consuming is not liberating them. It's actually – I call it the 'bar mentality'; the postal-code mentality. What I mean by bars is that it imprisons them in their own space. With me hip hop made you want to go out and search, go and find out; quest dddddd. Whereas now I think it's the opposite. The music that they listen to keeps them in their environment.

A key element in the lyrical content of grime spitters is the generic projection of a romantic attachment to local territory. Many bars consist of wildly overblown communiqués warning potential aggressors of a determination to defend the post-code to the death. This serves to construct a highly balkanised urban morphology almost parodying the outer limits of cultural-ethnic nationalism (Gidley, 2007: 150-153; Reynolds, 2007: 381; 2009: 78). Such bars are often given video treatments in the precise locations referred to and then posted onto the internet, replete with gang colours, deliberately obscured faces, brandished weaponry and canine back-up.[85] Grime music is thus regarded as both cause and effect in an essentially false consciousness trapping grime youth physically, intellectually and spiritually (Tyson, 2002: 132). V is seeking in voluntarist terms to re-tilt the psychic axis towards a primordial essence capable of withstanding *all* culturally alien threats.

This purportedly works in the following fashion. Subjected to close pedagogical scrutiny grime flow is first to be liberated from the nihilistic thug cosmology described here (see

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[85] See, for example, the London 'Grey Gang' music video at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DO2HewWNzs8 Accessed on 26/07/10

Allen, 2005: 32-35) and then restored to its authentic primordial sources in pre-slavery Africa and the vernaculars of the African diaspora (Henderson, 1996). Hence, both Fran and V each seek to trace in their respective workshops an historical arc where all types of spoken word poetry and rap has its origins in African drum culture and orality. Fran begins each session with a performance of one of her own poems on this very theme:

> ...mouth to mouth, skin to kin/The story begins with the...African/And the – resuscitation of the oral tradition/From the – village to village, mother to son/African griot and a talkin drum/Learning to speak in a fusion mother-tongue/Learning to stand in a foreign lexicon...

She is essentially making the didactic and strategic point of there being a homology between the modern day 'ordinary' multicultural orality and dance rhythms these young people take for granted (see Gilroy, 2006: xi) and the performance poetry of which she Fran is an exemplar. That each, whatever the differences of 'lexicon', are rooted in and routed through historical black vernacular culture (Back, 1999). This is literally hip hop being deployed against grime for the purposes of ideologically de-programming grime youth (see Allen, 2005; Tyson, 2002). The essential idea is to undergo a shift in one's verbal and written expression from anti-social fantasy to sober reportage. Violent and nihilistic content will cease to be a supposedly pre-conscious, habitual reflex as the new habit is formed of editing and channelling emcee flow with consciousness (Allen, 2005: 31-34). The palpable results of this tutelage V gives the appellation 'life-bars': lyrics with a supposed fealty to actual life experience but incorporating an ethically wholesome and uplifting message often heavily seasoned with penitence. By encouraging young people to express in their emcee bars a subjective identification with such redemptive narratives as, say, struggle, despair and overcoming the aim is to change 'mind-sets'. It is this verbal testimony which precipitates therapeutic 'treatment'. Some boys in V's workshop explained to me what they understood by 'life-bars': 'It could be something like: 'I've been bad in school or what's he done.' Another added: 'Or if like you've been attacked, or you're running away from police or something.' Yet another offered this clarification: it was about the difference between critically commentating on negative experiences and exalting in them or promoting them:

> You can talk about it in a positive way, like if you're saying, 'yeah, this happened blah blah blah.' You're not talking about it like you're gonna do it, it's like what's happened.

Life-bars: confessional rhetoric and edutainment

The intra cultural politics of 'life bars' versus negative lyrics thus promotes the prophylactic uses of hip hop. In its heightened attention to the expressing subject, their chosen form and the ethical content of their expression, it serves to substitute a structural investigation into the grime cosmology with an amalgam of self-help moralising, ad-hominine criticism and conspiracy ideas - which are themselves components of hip hop discourse (see Morgan, 2009; Perry, 2004). Michel Foucault depicts this variety of normative educing as 'a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it' (Foucault, 1998: 62). To view all this through the lens of co-optation, however, is perhaps to miss something historically and culturally novel about this phenomenon. Far from being adversative, the personal development concerns of governmental authorities actually converge with certain dominant themes found in hip hop and grime: individual distinction, material acquisition, financial success and a somewhat conventional morality of taking personal responsibility. 'Life bars', as I now discuss, emphasise the incipient futurity in much hip hop through self-help, confessional rhetoric (Featherstone, 2003). Educed, emceeing can become a policy opportunity *and* a talent showcase for the nominally outcast; a tamed outburst in the present in the service of a more mature and wholesome identity and lifestyle in the future. V teaches in his workshop that emcee lyrics are incantatory, capable of summoning into being the situations and acts described in words. He explains that:

> And a lot of what I do is about that, the power of words; words have influence, have power. So the next level's they influence is your chakra, and if you use certain tones of bass lines you influence certain elements of your behaviour in a negative way.

Evidently, V is promulgating new-age theories of language and music that echo those of Chandler in chapter four for whom the semantic content of every word and sound unequivocally communicates either a positive or negative energy to its receiver and thus makes imperative a countervailing attitude of self-vigilance. On the negative side of the equation this means that, as one young person explained: 'If you're talking about stuff like 'I'll stab your mum' it comes to life and then whatever happens to you you do it to someone

else.'[86] However, on this basis positive self-talk can be equally potent and effectual. When young people spit 'life bars' under the guidance of V they become emissaries for self-help (see McGee, 2005; Rimke, 2000). In the example below V is seen extending indulgence, solicitousness and a concern with lyrical content. The young participants, reciprocally, perform in a way that meets his approval on both aesthetic and ethical grounds. From my field-work notes:

> At one point V leans over to one of the two youngers whose emceeing stands out from the rest and gently petitions him to show me some of his positive lyrics, or 'life bars'. The young black boy aged about twelve duly obliges, launching into some bars [rapping] about the financial hardships his mother has had to endure whilst raising him on her own, her sacrifices to keep him well clothed, and his appreciation of her efforts. However, it is the second of these two boys whose fluency as an emcee is the more striking. A small and slightly built white boy also of twelve –the runt of the litter – he not only evidently enjoys the admiration and respect of his peers for his emceeing, he exudes an authority and confidence verging on arrogance which belies his somewhat frail appearance. V assures me: 'I could get him to record and all that but I don't want to send him wrong. He should just enjoy his talent'. It is clear that the boy relishes this opportunity to spit in public with a microphone and beats. He is virtually glued to the mic for the entire session. As he raps his 'life bars' he remains planted to the spot, eyes shut, doing a jerky metronomic dance, physically inscribing his lyrical flow like a seismograph:

> I've been born and raised in the town [...]/ I'm not gonna lie it's been hard for me/Cause I put my head down /To spit hard rhymes /Tell the truth it's been hard times/Like I keep going, I don't fall/I just pull up my socks and stand up tall/Yeah I do something in life/It's not about guns it's all about grime/I'm a sick rhymer part-time grimer/Roll wi the scores don't roll with the fiver/Get to the top don't park with the fakers/Park with the real guys and the money makers/Come with the bars the bars you can't hold/Name [...] and my heart is cold/Like Jam K blocks and you see me on road and I'm sick/It's like listening to my flow

The self-help theme and pious tone: 'I keep going, I don't fall/I just pull my socks up and stand up tall/Yeah I do something in life' develops seamlessly into the later more expansive pledges to aim high and make money: 'get to the top don't park with the fakers/Park with the real guys and the money makers'. This young person's performance of 'life-bars' is intended to mark a penitent turn away from the classic feral content of grime lyrics. At the same time, it is important to understand that as Reynolds points out 'aiming high' expresses

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[86] However, there were sceptical voices amongst some of V's workshop participants: 'No, but if someone says, yeah I'll push you off a cliff, when are you are you ever gonna be in that situation?' The boy went on to explain that 'I know some kid who spits these outlandish bars that are like 'aah, erm I'l beam you up into space and stuff [some laughter from a few of the others], how is that ever gonna happen?' Another responded: 'Nah, like he basically means that as like a metaphor: 'I'll beat you up so bad that you'll be sent up in space.'

a certain brand of bootstrap entrepreneurialism engendered by neoliberalism (Reynolds, 2007: 382; see Berardi, 2009; Brown, 2005; Harvey, 2004) and modelled by commercially successful US hip hop artists (see Perry, 2004). Such aspiration is, crucially, both a constant leitmotif in grime music and a vital source, according to Reynolds, of its cultural impetus. Wendy Brown contends that:

> Neoliberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life. It figures individuals as rational calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for "self-care" – the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions.

(Brown, 2005: 42)

Writing in the context of US hip hop and its racial politics, Perry discerns in the role of the 'thug' and 'capitalist playa' a performance of blackness in the hegemonic key of atomised self-assertion, serving to parody and subvert dominant white American codes (Perry, 2004: 47-50). There is something important here in what Perry is saying in terms of nuancing Brown's structural insight with a reminder that all interpellation requires an acting, catalysing subject as well as the cultural script they are working from (see Archer, 2003). Perry writes that 'part of the theatre of hip hop becomes life and a representation of how life is conducted' (Perry, 2004: 39). Fran speaks of how frequently she has encountered, for example, the penitent trope in the work of emcees coached through the slam projects: 'I guess they're all sort of confessional pieces and they're all sort of regret pieces, y'know? And there's a trend in that and there's almost a genre in the 'regret rap' or the regret emcees.' The following 'life-bar' from V's workshop I think conveys something of this.

> I like money, like to spend/Buy new creps in the West-End/Nike, Adidas, Apirada[?]/Means my mum has to work a little bit harder/Yeah, an I thank her a lot 'cause she's been providing since day dot/When she's older I'll repay her not by cars or paper.

The desire for fashionable items is sublimated here in the acknowledgment of a mother's honest toil and sacrifices and then disavowed in a puritanical pledge to 'repay' her in a wholly different - presumably spiritual/affective - coin. The author of this short lyric declared:

> This community centre's the reason why I started to write life bars. 'Cause V pushed me to write life bars when I'd still be writing negative I'm not gonna lie. But I don't really want to write negative anymore because…I don't want to be fake.

Perry underlines the fact that hip hop artists, like this boy, often appeal in highly earnest tones to notions of authentic reportage as a way of justifying their expression. But - if indeed they are being sincere - they are as likely to be blind or deaf to the constructed, citational nature of their own work when offering a realist explanation as their critics or defenders. To believe otherwise, 'that through speech and remonstrance alone we can endlessly reform ourselves and each other' is to commit a version of 'the empathic fallacy' (Perry, 2004: 49-50). The 'empathic fallacy' - a belief in the transparent meaningfulness of intentions, ideas and feelings (positive or negative) as these are directly transmitted in acts of communication - equally plagues 'conscious' and 'anti-social' emcees. A purely 'social scientific analysis' of the content of rap lyrics thus risks a form of reductionism that overlooks the thick textual weave used to create the mimetic effect, i.e. the formal and rhetorical properties that are pivotal to the sense of reportage (see Mackey, 1992; Ryle and Soper, 2002). And these rhetorical devices and 'vocabularies of motive' (Burke, 1989) are obviously available in culturally variegated form to all types of rapper regardless of ethical standpoint. In the section below from my fieldwork notes the generic iconic presence so frequently found in 'life bars' of a suffering mother figure is seen once more tendentiously off-set by that perennial grime emblem of menace and precipitate action the gun trigger:

> Fran, kneeling next to a table of boys aged thirteen and reading out loud a line of rap written by one of them, near perfectly capturing its syncopated flow, turns to me and says: 'I like this line, listen to the rhythm of this: 'Someone about to pull a trigger no stop a pale-faced mother as she's lost her son'. That's just a beautiful rhythm, that 'trigger'/'mother' rhyming as well as 'gun'...[to the author of the line, who looks sheepishly pleased with himself] yeah fantastic, ten out of ten.' Fran shows her willingness here to perform the words of her students. This seems partly to stem from a desire to validate their creative efforts; partly about modelling how to perform; and partly an antiphonic method of eliciting critical self-awareness. Kneeling and performing the words of the boy she is being empathic, lowering her status, minimising cultural and generational distance. Praise is also being lavished on the lyrical content. The boy's treatment of gun crime receives a 'ten out of ten'. He has inverted the stock grime celebration of weaponry and made a mother's loss at the hands of a gun toting youth the dramatic focus.

I asked Fran how much she thought this penitent type content was elicited, either explicitly by the workshop facilitator or at a more ambient, viral level through the context of the work, the tacit expectations of the sponsoring agencies and institutions. Perhaps, for example, using the theme of 'identity' or, as in previous years with these slam competitions,

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'respect', carried an implicit invitation, if not injunction, for the young writers to engage in a particular kind of self-scrutiny (see Brown, 2005; Rose, 1999/2005; Skeggs, 2004). Fran believes that the confessional genre (see Somers-Willett, 2001) perfectly meets the requirements of conscious hip hop's edutainment format in terms both of content and audience:

> These confessionals whilst they're being said to be more palatable to these middle-class – lower middle-class communities; and also delight school-children, you get lots of work and all that kind of thing: 'I was doing it wrong and now I'm doing it right, and I'm telling you how to do it so you don't do this [i.e. a cautionary tale]. It's a real typical structure...You become an educator at the same time as being an artist.

Staying outside or inside: participation and diverting grime emcees

Urban youth defensively bunkering down in their postmodern post-codes generate predictable political anxieties about social disorder and attract a raft of historically novel policy initiatives for their monitoring, diversion and control (Young, 2007). Hip hop educators and the moral entrepreneurs (Ferrell, 1996: 115-117) who green-light their interventions evidently agree that the negativity of grime attests to a failure in some young people's socialisation. Being invited to participate in an emcee workshop under the tutelage and direct supervision of adults is demonstrably not purely a matter of gaining access to the creative nurturance and validation Fran argues for. It can also be a means of seeking to protect young people from potential harm – harm done to others and to oneself. By harm to oneself I mean the self imprisoning attitudes V argues are constitutive of grime. Fran's egalitarian zeal for extending institutional recognition to grime spitters is thus not only tempered with, but to an extent fuelled by, anxiety over the anti-social character of what young emcees express when operating below the radar of adult surveillance in a 'Peckham estate stairwell'. It also has to reckon with the more pragmatic and instrumental designs of the sponsoring educational and political authorities who too share these anxieties (Huq, 2006/2007). On the one hand, hip hop pedagogy would seem to answer idealistic demands from below for a more egalitarian and culturally sensitive distribution of educational resources and opportunities (see Baker JR., 1990; Pardue, 2007). On the other, this can all equally be given a top-down integrative value (Mirza, 2006). Hip hop pedagogy then becomes a hard-headed solution to the educational disaffection and lack of engagement in mainstream services of problem youth and the risk this poses to wider society (Pardue,

2004). But if this represents the effective convergence of V and Fran's palpable ambivalence towards grime with practical policy what is the broader discursive arena for this with respect to some of the themes already discussed in this chapter?

In her fieldwork in a municipal hip hop project in Manchester, Huq (2006/2007) discerned a preoccupation with self-development echoing that found in the workshops this chapter reports upon. She speaks of being alerted to the 'reflexive biographies and individualized trajectories...played out' by her young informants (Huq, 2006: 126). In what she heard and observed she found evidence of a generation adapting at the level of subjectivity to dramatically changed social conditions which require the daily micro-management of risk (see Giddens, 2004; Huq, 2006: 126). As I started to discuss in the previous chapter, Huq's thesis is that there is essentially a discursive and existential fit between the altered and expanding purview of a hip hop culture which now encompasses both global commerce and public policy and the 'individualized trajectories' and needs of post-millennial youth. Nullifying routine understandings of youth subcultures, young people's individual and collective agency expresses itself though what Giddens terms 'Life-planning' rather than through rebellious resistance to constituted authority. She thus notes a convergence between the concerns of her informants with futurity and 'skills' development and that of the sponsoring authorities. In sum, these hip hoppers for all their 'street' posturing are not rebels but actually 'conformist youth'. They blithely accept rather than resist 'hip hop institutionalisation' by public policy - indeed, hoping to be its beneficiaries (Huq, 2007: 88). Huq concludes that: 'In this way hip hop then is being appropriated as a means of risk minimisation (ibid: 84).'[87]

It should perhaps come as no surprise to learn that young people who are the object of such solicitous attentions can be the willing agents of their own 'neutralisation' (Huq, 2006/2007). 'Difference' and the temporary autonomy it might secure is not necessarily something social outsiders experience with equanimity (Skeggs, 2005). Fran relays that an

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[87] Whilst I think Huq's thesis persuasive in terms of contemporary normativity and as a counter to simplistic and outdated cultural antagonisms I think she is in danger of simplifications of her own. Were there ever purely rebellious subculturalists, and who but the most naive believed there were? This was certainly never the position of theorists associated, for example, with the Birmingham CCCS. The terms of 'mainstream', 'counter' and 'sub' are always complex, dynamic and historically specific as are the situational particularities of resistance (see Ferrell, 1996; Willis, 2006). It is certainly not my claim that the young subjects of my research and their neoliberal discourse or resiling from stigmatizing difference (see further on) equates to outright conformity.

early slam poetry event she had organised had been reported in the *Times Literary Supplement* in both nakedly cynical and racialised terms as effectively a piece of urban crime prevention: 'When I did the first slam the *TLS*, *Time Literary Supplement* said: 'at least our car radios will be safe tonight'…and they made a lot of comments about our participants being all black.' George Lipsitz, logging the history of moral panics concerned with the conduct of various lower-class immigrant communities in the US, explains that 'It is not unusual for members of aggrieved communities who have been defamed as not only alien but also nonnormative [*sic*] to embrace rigorous restraints on themselves, performing normativity in the face of their enemies in hope of disproving the stereotypes' (Lipsitz, 2007: 162-163). The young people I spoke to who had participated in V's project, the majority of them black, not only seemed to understand but were sanguine about its diversionary function and, correspondingly, its implicit concern with futurity and life-chances (Fawcett et al, 2004: 4-9; Huq, 2007). One said: 'If they [V and the youth workers] wasn't here – you never know one of us could be dead or something cause we never come here. If we never come here in our time then you never know we could be out doing other things instead.' I asked another boy of thirteen about the difference between emceeing with his friends outside the youth club and attending V's project. He told me:

> Staying outside, yeah? Makes it sound like we got something to prove against them lot. Makes it feel like we're bad people or something. But in here it all like sounds like we're good people. Makes us encourages us to be more good people and spread the word and stuff.

In this self-beleaguering discourse, he expresses an objection to my associating him with 'outside', a threatening place beyond the confines of the youth club whose Hobbesian codes and rules are unforgiving for him and his friends (Fisher, 2009). His alternative is framed in the motivational language of life-coaching, lauding adults that 'encourage us' and pledging to 'spread the word' (Rimke, 2000). He is directly alluding to the efforts of youth workers to offer validation and to 'nurture' talent, and, reciprocally, to the fact that the emcee bars he spits when 'inside' are of a quite different category to those he spits 'outside'. What a young person spits 'outside' is a matter of convincingly performing the self required to maintain or foster a socially appropriate reputation and ensure survival: 'Yeah, because most of them [lyrics] has to be negative…most of them are negative because you're basically saying, you're showing them who you are.' What has to be borne in mind is that in

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our conversation these young people frequently referred to 'outside' or 'on road' as something of a war-zone, a place where one was constantly either subject to the ridicule of 'olders' or, worse, likely to encounter at almost every turn one of the many hostile local youth gangs whose territory was contiguous (see Back, 2005). So for example, trading insults in an unsupervised emcee battle between young people where threats of violence form the basis of the rhetoric could result in deadly consequences:

> Yeah and you know some people have clashes [emcee battles]. But some people have their own bars and they spit their own bars in the clashes – not freestlin – so, erm, they'll start saying their bars, for example it'll be like: 'Oh I'm gonna stab your uncle' or something. And then if the other person thinks that that's directed at them, so they get proper angry and try to batter you and then bare things start happening. And then he might get his uncle and he might shank [stab] him or something – it might happen.

Moreover, this is a London neighbourhood that has frequently been subject to nine pm curfews for young people and the use of ASBOs in the decade following the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998. It was not surprising therefore that these boys gave little sense of conceiving of their immediate environment as a place of serendipitous possibilities, fugitive freedoms and opportunities to elude surveillance. In fact, so subject to continuous surveillance are these young people that their monitoring by CCTV cameras in the neighbourhood 'outside' is both replicated and intensified 'inside' the community centre which serves both as a place of sanctuary and monitoring (see Minton, 2009: 152-153). With CCTV in all parts of the building every space can be watched simultaneously in real time on a large multi-split screen inside the main office. With workers observing the emceeing and DJ sessions on this monitor the line between surveillance, scoping, voyeurism and entertainment was enigmatically blurred. Socially and economically deprived and accustomed to being at once the target and the subject of anti teen violence campaigns the boys participating in V's project were painfully aware of personally carrying the stigma of disreputable 'difference' (Skeggs, 2005: 88). To wit: 'staying outside...makes it feel like we're bad people or something'. Thus, it came as no surprise that in their understanding of participation they managed faithfully to reproduce and affirm both the transactional ratio of youth engagement and consultation and its tritely therapeutic tenor. Of this one said: 'we give them ideas to improve the youth club and they give us ideas to improve our lives'. Indeed, a throw-away remark by one boy about a recent graffiti writing workshop organised

by the youth club was couched in the disingenuous register of youth 'prevention' and 'involvement' where creativity, participation, permission and containment are deliberately conflated (see Christen, 2003; Huq, 2007: 85-89; Pardue, 2004/2007): 'There were like graffiti workshops...*so like people from round here they can do it and do it creatively.*'

At a thematic level, 'life-bars' and confessional lyrics are only repeating motivational axioms and saws normative both in conscious hip hop and market individualism: 'keep going'; 'don't fall'; 'get to the top'; 'aim for the stars'; 'like Obama aim with your heart' (Kitwana, 2002). Further, if 'life-bars' can be regarded as micro-moments in a policy of productive welfare (Giddens, 1998) then I contend that they illustrate some of the ethical tensions within this policy. Fawcett et al note that with the social investment state of the last decade or so: 'children become a cipher for future economic prosperity, overshadowing the child as citizen and restricting discussion of their own voices and their present quality of life' (Fawcett et al, 2004: 8). This is a discourse that constructs 'children as becomings' rather than 'beings' [so] can obscure the importance of engaging with them as subjects in the here and now'. Underscoring Dave Beech's assertion that 'the changes we need are structural', the durability of the specific social attitudes desired by policy and which hip hop education might help cultivate is, in any event, open to question. Such policy has to contend not only with the instrumentally mutable nature of social identity but also the profoundly ambiguous nature of a neoliberal ethics of 'self-care' and serving one's ambitions. A boy told me in shockingly stark terms that:

> Sometimes when you're writing positive bars and you can't write bad bars then people might think you're a 'pussyhole' cause all your writing about is [putting on a saintly voice] 'Oh I gonna be bare bare good in school man'. And then people start thinking 'oh you're a pussyhole' and then you bring out a knife or something to show that you're not, and then some bad things start happening and then you think 'yeah this is my time to use it', boom, shank them and then that's it.

Conclusion: socialisation and participation

> The anthropological content of the present-day individual is, as always, none other than the expression, or the concrete accomplishment in flesh and bone, of the central social imaginary of our times, which shapes the regime, its orientation, values, what it is worth living and dying for, the *thrust* of society, even its affects, and the individuals who will make all that exist concretely.

> (Castoriardis, 2007: 137)

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I have argued in this chapter that the intra cultural politics of hip hop versus rap, including the aspiration to democratise municipal spaces, can easily elide with a 'culturally sensitive' public policy of targeted normative regulation and control. I have attempted to show how both concern with grime emcee bars as graphic and sonic evidence of a failure of young people's socialisation and the emcee bars themselves serve to actualise certain individuating tendencies in contemporary culture. Indeed, I have presented this as a historically novel mode of dispersed social control – indeed as much about 'formation' as control (see Brown, 2005: 142) - seeking to go with the grain of neoliberal imperatives of risk management, self-care and futurity (see Fisher, 2009: 22). As I discussed in the previous chapter this is personal development work where the expressive is 'fully instrumentalized': hip hop deployed as a 'micro-technology of self-improvement' (Cohen, 1997: 294). I am not claiming here that this is at all deliberate or conscious on the part of people like Roger, Fran or V. Rather that both the dominant concerns of contemporary policy and certain therapeutic, confessional tendencies in hip hop culture itself encourage this situation (see Mirza, 2006). I am, however, claiming that the ambiguous character of hip hop education is correlated to an insufficiently interrogative stance by such educators towards the historical, social and political grounds of their practice.   This impression, significantly, was more-or-less consistently reinforced in every conversation I had with informants during the field-work for this thesis.

There is an evident tension here in the work of V and Fran concerning what is properly understood by giving authentic testimony in one's creative expression. With respect to the question of what is fake or authentic, or even rebellious or conformist in an emcee, I would argue that the issue is more one of habit and training than the elimination of cultural accretions blocking access to the true cultural and spiritual kernel as neo-traditionalist or romantics would have it. There is no pure recoverable conscious artistic identity to be found either socially 'inside' or 'outside' the spaces of 'participation' and 'inclusion' where, as I have shown, surveillance and endogenous interaction are transversal. For example, when young people emcee battle with each other or spit in a cipher the ostensible agent of surveillance or censorship is each other and the tacit codes and norms of the subculture. And these tacit codes and norms and the habitus they coalesce into are of course

'structured, structuring dispositions...constituted in practice and...always orientated towards practical functions' (Bourdieu, 2005: 53). That is precisely the point of being an 'outsider': it is saturated with that it is defined against. Moreover, as Esther Leslie says, all 'art [is] slashed by, negatively formed by, or located in relation to social division' (Leslie, 2007: 45). It is the enduring nature of 'social and cultural distinctions' (Beech, 2008: 8) which ensure that 'difference' which offends – e.g. subaltern grime flow - retains in its libidinousness certain 'powers of subversion' however scandalous to liberal humanist ethics and its canons of taste. The discourse of participation, however, is happy to overlook – indeed often denies the sociological validity of – such social and cultural distinctions, or at least believes in the redemptive value of their temporary symbolic overcoming in community and fellowship.

Hence, in terms of their identities, young people learn to perform, to fashion with the resources to hand, what secures for them esteem and validation from their immediate environment, be this a school, a youth club or on the street with friends.[88] The confessional can be a particularly powerful instance of this because the penitent narrative is at once built into the lyrical tradition of hip hop and is congenial to the present-day modes of normative regulation of mainstream schooling and youth work (Foucault, 1998; Rose, 1999). It is not too sweeping to assume that expressions by young people of regret for deviant behaviour, promissory notes of futurity and righteous indignation at injustice are quite likely to receive an extremely sympathetic hearing with teachers and youth workers. A cursory scan of the average display area of the average British school or youth club will attest to the fact that in contemporary educational establishments the dominant tenor is motivational, with praise heaped upon, and encouragement given to, any expressions by young people upholding liberally plural values of tolerance, respect for cultural diversity, and taking personal responsibility for physical and emotional well-being (Hoffman, 1996: 546-547; Zizek, 2000: 215-221). The quest to validate vernacular expressive culture for the purposes of socialisation cannot but violate the 'practical function' of young people's endogenous expression in its keenness to render legible and to civilise the 'other'. I would claim that the institutional annexing of expressive practices from the cultures, social conditions and

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[88] The early historic development of hip hop culture is graphic confirmation of this (see Chang, 2007).

structures which first gave them form and critical content comes at the cost, paradoxically, of losing sight of these same structures and their political ontology. Consciousness, if such a thing exists, thus begins with an understanding that where power, symbolic violence and social reproduction are concerned there is neither 'inside' nor 'outside'.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

White Boy Hip Hop Suite: Hip Hop Theatre and the Colouring of Culture[89]

Introduction: the colour of global hip hop culture

In chapter three I referred to Imani Perry's in many ways perspicacious claim that America's deeply racialised ambivalence, illustrated in its cross-racial 'love-hate relationship' with hip hop, is all the confirmation required to demonstrate that hip hop is a black American cultural form (Perry, 2004: 27). Whilst hip hop is pre-eminently a product of its agonistic late-modern times - with race and class pivotal - and not of some primordial unchanging African essence, many more colours than black have contributed to its cultural chromo than Perry's standpoint would suggest (see Hoch, 2006). As I have shown, particularly in chapter four, one of the signal features of the hip hop versus rap discourse is a valorizing (re)assertion of hip hop's essential blackness with a view to demonstrating and reversing white co-optation of hip hop and its devastating consequences for black youth (see Lipsitz, 2007). The investing of racial identity with moral properties and the ascribing to different types of hip hop evidence of racial fidelity or betrayal is something, moreover, that Perry explains and critically exposes with great suppleness throughout her book. However, even if Perry rejects the ethical and ontological basis of a Manichean racial intra-politics which would pit 'sacred' against 'profane' black expression – whilst still acknowledging that this is part of hip hop's unstable ideological democracy – her own cultural annexing of hip hop has the effect of consigning white participants to at best 'wegro' status (Harrison, 2009: 149; see Kitwana, 2005). Now this is not the same as crudely suggesting that hip hop is essentially

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[89] I borrow this idea of 'colouring' culture, which I discuss toward the end of the chapter, from Les Back's (2002) ethnographic enquiry into musical cross-racial encounters in southern American R&B, which he interprets as a 'colouring of sound'.

black and rap is white (whoever is making it or consuming it). But it does suggest that many affiliated to the culture that hip hop's globalization has bequeathed (see Basu and Lemelle, 2006) nurse doubts about the validity of the legacy. Does hip hop's evolution make its diversification and social re-composition both inevitable and desirable? And if so, what forms of cross-racial and trans-cultural encounters does this make possible (see Harrison, 2009)? Or is a cosmopolitan hip hop just another cloak for white and class privilege, merely a liberal mode of white-cooptation of black culture (see Hutnyk, 2000)? What do white *and* black hip hoppers make of all this? How, particularly, do whites navigate these potentially choppy waters?

In this chapter I will be considering how hip hop theatre as a development within hip hop culture linked closely to the latter's now planetary reach provides a forum for reckoning with such questions. I examine whether hip hop theatre allows middle-class white males ambiguously positioned by virtue of what George Lipsitz calls 'the possessive investment in whiteness' to reflexively channel the cultural capital that is theirs. I explore the scope offered by hip hop theatre for the 'colouring of culture' and the further realisation of trans-cultural possibilities opened up by hip hop's global diffusion and (g)local adaptation (see Pennycook, 2005). I firstly examine how hip hop theatre is understood by, chiefly, a black, London based hip hop luminary and globally acknowledged theatre innovator, Jonzi D, whose week long workshop I attended as part of my fieldwork. Here my focus is on the opportunities for diversification, expansion, and social re-composition made available by the dynamic between the form and content of hip hop theatre. In light of this, I then reflect on the position of a particular white male middle-class hip hop head, Simon, whom I met as a participant in the hip hop theatre workshop, exploring his practice and biography. This then leads onto an exposition and analysis of a hip hop theatre sketch devised in the workshop and performed in front of the public - and in which I participated - on the theme of white people in hip hop and the dilemmas they face around cultural legitimacy and the use of racially charged language. I conclude with further discussion of aspects of the racial theme from the theatre piece in order to ponder a perennial cultural political question in hip hop: in light both of its constitution and its expanded social base, who does hip hop culture belong to?

Hip hop theatre: form, content, and social re-composition

> Hip-hop, as we understand it as an idiom, it already is hip-hop theatre. It already is visual art. It already is cinema. It is so in its definitive, ontological birth essence. It is a visual medium, it is a performance medium.[90]

Jonzi defines hip hop theatre as 'the exploration of the artistic definitions of hip hop culture in the theatre.' He says that out of an exploration of hip hop arts in the realm of theatre 'a million questions can come and then that's what makes hip hop theatre interesting.' For Jonzi, this above all means experimenting theatrically with hip hop's 'elements' and their 'disciplines' of dance, emcee, DJ, and graffiti with a view to expanding – as opposed to blurring - the formal boundaries of hip hop culture. He believes 'the [hip hop] form allows us to tell stories about anything' not just obviously hip hop related matter. Exploring and questioning 'artistic definitions', moreover, suggests a certain reflexive, meta-mode of theatrical practice. This is intentional on Jonzi's part and arises from dissatisfaction with what he says is the in-vogue explanation for hip hop theatre: 'theatre of, about and by the hip hop generation' (see Chang, 2006). Jonzi confesses to struggling with this notion. Even though for cultural political reasons explored below he is ultimately supportive, he is nonetheless troubled by the limits it potentially sets on artistic ambition. A hip hop theatre 'of, about and by the hip hop generation' is one that derives its content, subject matter, and its themes from hip hop culture but does not necessarily involve an exploration of its forms and aesthetic disciplines. Jonzi says: 'if you don't use any of the artistic disciplines and your basically being various characters that are seen in and around the hip hop space then ultimately you're doing theatre *about* hip hop'. I asked Simon, a white participant in the workshop, whose relationship to hip hop I discuss a little further on, for his explanation of hip hop theatre. His answer echoed Jonzi's: 'For me its theatre that uses skills and techniques from hip hop'. But at the level of its content he confirmed: 'I guess it [hip hop theatre] tends to be stories that focus around traditional hip hop content as well currently.'

This means then that strictly speaking it is possible, in Simon's words, to make hip hop theatre 'without any dancing or any rapping - about certain things that relate to hip hop'. What this indicates is hip hop theatre's Janus face, with all the artistic possibilities and

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[90] Greg Tate in Chang (2006: 45).

tensions this figure suggests. On the one hand, the scope for hip hop's aesthetic and cultural expansion through new spheres of action, collaboration and artistic interfusion; on the other, dealing with the hip hop 'culture', its stories, issues and concerns, as subject matter within a theatrical arena. Hip hop is founded upon particular vernacular narratives and histories. It is grounded, past and present, in particular social struggles, geographies, states of cultural exclusion, and political controversy. Much rap music, both in its lyrical content and through its televisual and cinematic representation and marketing, is precisely a theatrical commentary on the intra-cultural politics of all this. This is particularly so with regard to the familiar projection of an authentically 'real' subaltern identity; in recent years often replete with markers of gross conspicuous consumption in an immodest, politically ambiguous gesture of defiance (see Perry, 2004: 195-197; Judy, 2004). Reciprocally, the penitent and confessional trope in hip hop discussed in the previous chapter is a key component of its reflexively theatrical mode of enunciation. If hip hop is already theatrically primed, ontologically so according to Greg Tate, its thematic extension to the domain of theatre proper seems therefore both logical and organic. Given the apparent specificity of hip hop culture themes and perspectives, their relative neglect in actual theatre spaces, and the ceaseless desire for their explicit investigation by hip hoppers themselves, it is also arguably necessary.[91] Jonzi takes up this point:

> Regarding themes I think one could say that stuff pertaining to a working-class environment. Hip hop came from that strata in society, so it's very likely that a lot of themes will come from this context. So that's one of the things that might determine the theme. Also ethnicity is something that could determine a theme as well, particularly when you combine those two spaces. You know, working-class and a person of colour, maybe these are the two perspectives that you could see as obviously coming through in that.

So the roots of hip hop being in working-class persons of colour, the themes and subject matter of hip hop theatre will likely revolve around issues of race, ethnicity and social class. Given the dominant 'perspectives...coming through', a 'theatre of, about and by the hip hop generation' would thus appear avowedly egalitarian if somewhat circumscribed. It is not hard to fathom the source of Jonzi's ambivalence with respect to the thematic repertory this

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[91] Indeed, 'hip hop versus rap' is unsurprisingly one of them. See the recent Jonzi D produced and directed *Markus the Sadist*, starring UK hip hop star Bashy. This show traces the Faustian pact made by an up and coming UK rapper, Markus, who 'sells out' by adopting an utterly confected US 'gangsta' persona in return for mass commercial success. In selling his soul in return for fame and money he is crucially portrayed as betraying authentic hip hop culture. The latter, throughout the play, constitutes Markus' conscience.

potentiates. A hip hop theatre with a 'strong' appreciation of its cultural roots could imply storytelling that symbolically affirms – perhaps celebrates - a person's suturing to an authentically 'real' hip hop identity (see Mackey, 1992). Then again hip hop culture narratives could set out to interrogate, unsettle, test, recast, or even transcend, hip hop's imaginary borders. This suggests a hazy arena both for subaltern posturing and its parodying. But like Roger in chapter five, Jonzi claims that in hip hop the 'themes' it takes as its subject matter are filtered through a particular perceptual faculty or optic – *a way of seeing*:

> I think that *themes* are from the perspective of their head, yeah?...I think that whatever story you come with, wherever you are in the world, whatever context you are in, if you're coming from that perspective of a hip hop head, it's that undefinable [*sic*] perspective that you just get. It's not defined by the way you dress specifically or by the fact that you may rap or break or do 'brap' or any of these things. But it is a cultural environment in which you have an understanding of these forms, and you have an understanding of what real hip hop is really about and you live with that vibration.

Were the idea of the 'perspective of a hip hop head' living 'with that vibration' based on an ethnically or racially exclusive cultural identity and its endogenous cosmology this might suggest something mystical and primordial. However, Jonzi is adverting to the now planetary, cosmopolitan character of hip hop: 'wherever you are in the world' (see Basu and Lemelle, 2006). He is referring to a territorially unfixed 'cultural environment' where the 'real' of hip hop culture is the product of social interaction. In its global reach hip hop culture is accessed, constructed, agreed upon, and circulated by a socially and ethnically diverse range of people who call themselves 'hip hop heads'. Hence, if the development of hip hop theatre opens a space for rooted hip hop themes it also at the same time attests to the evolution, diversification, and, crucially, expanding social base of hip hop culture. Jonzi describes this 'complex', diversified situation:

> Then you've got where it gets complex: in England in particular the strata of the working-class is mostly white working-class and you'll see this reflected in hip hop in the UK. Most of the artists [in the UK] making hip hop now are white...an authentic hip hop jam, they're generally largely populated by young white males, working-class white males. Then there's more diversities; there's a lot of the middle-class community, black and white that are really attracted by hip hop's nerdier side as opposed to the hip hop rugged image that attracts some people. I think that there's a real acute attention to detail and discipline that I think some of the more, you know, university educated cats can recognise in the skills of hip hop artists across the disciplines actually. Arts, where graffiti art's concerned, music, where beat-making

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and DJing techniques are concerned, and definitely rap through literary and poetry, do you know what I mean?

Hip hop has long attracted adherents beyond its original working class racial and ethnic base (see Kitwana, 2005). A thirty odd year old aesthetic evolution as a cross-arts culture with increasingly codified disciplinary grammars, 'techniques', 'skills', and conventions has, in conjunction with its global diffusion, helped to make hip hop's social and cultural borders far more porous (see Alim, 2007). This has eased the participation of studious, often white, middle-class people, known collectively in the parlance as 'backpackers' (see Harrison, 2009: 145-147). Doubtless reflecting a socially privileged cultural capital and in probability a certain compensatory zeal, this subcultural type is notable, as Jonzi says, for an acute attention to artistic detail and technical discipline in conjunction with an earnestly encyclopaedic knowledge of hip hop culture and its history. For all the suspicions they arouse concerning questions of cultural authenticity, white privilege, and cultural tourism, backpackers are usually deeply sensitised to questions of black history, cultural property, and the uncertain status of their own affinity (see Harrison, 2009: 98-100). However, in his ethnography of San Francisco's 'underground' hip hop scene, Anthony Kwame Harrison observed marked elitist and purist tendencies amongst the backpackers (white and of colour) he encountered. This manifested itself in a jealous guarding of cultural borders, subtle and overt policing of endogenous conduct and expression, and frequently expressed anxieties over contaminating influences from beyond the 'underground' (ibid: 146). Jonzi continues:

> So I think that there is an access point into hip hop from there, and that's from a *form* point of view. And then what's interesting is seeing how the themes change. Obviously you've got this, like, Asher Roth's come out. This white dude from America who they're marketing. I think that there's a lot of tongue-in-cheek with that whole thing, but that's pop for you, but it's coming from a very real place, do you know what I mean? Ultimately, hip hop is becoming more and more diverse. So the themes are gonna get more and more diverse. And the arenas in which we express hip hop will become more and more diverse, for example the theatre.

In sum, what Jonzi is underlining here is how a dynamic, evolving hip hop culture is shaped by the creative synergies of hip hop's forms, its expanded social strata, spheres of action - or 'arena' - and its themes. Despite what he says about 'pop' he is not arguing that this represents a corruption of 'real' hip hop, and indeed his example of Asher Roth

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demonstrates the commodifying of the backpacker identity. But if the broader social base of global hip hop culture is resulting in a diversification of themes, and inevitably striking discordant cultural political notes for some of the 'hip hop generation', the foundational narratives of hip hop's original social strata are nonetheless axiomatic to this evolutionary process. It is not only the form of hip hop's four elements that have provided an 'access point' to wider constituencies. The global circulation of hip hop's thematic content has been vital to expansion into untried cultural arenas (see Chang, 2006), with all the diversity of mediation, interpretation and interactive use at the point of reception this implies. Indeed, a long reified hip hop subaltern ontology is endlessly re-played and recited globally both at a grassroots and a commercial level, continuing to supply the normative structure and iconography for much present-day hip hop output. So that, ironically, these foundational narratives at the point of their reception place a question mark over the status of artistic contributions from anyone other than those who belong directly to the authentic social base that originally feeds the subculture. But of course, it is precisely within this uncertain cultural space that their 'other' nature is able to exert such a strong attraction on those who are culturally and socially remote from such narratives. Projective identification with hip hop's subaltern habitus – the middle-class, white, Jewish Asher Roth is a good example – has the global capacity to spawn, variously, cloned copies, parody, pastiche, reverential augmentations, and hybrid innovations. Jonzi, however, believes that hip hop's global popularity is consequent more on the fact that its themes and symbolism consecrate certain *universal* existential conflicts and desires:

> My experiences of travelling and stuff I'm seeing a growing middle-class hip hop community who are into it because – okay one of things I think also connects people to hip hop is a sense of the outcast; is a sense of the 'I'm not on what everyone else is on there, man, I'm on my own shit.' 'Cause hip hop is a great environment to do your own shit. Hip hop is a great environment for you to be your own charismatic black leader, whatever colour you are. Hip hop is a great context for you to be amazing, yeah. And I think a lot of people who are down with hip hop in whatever community feel as though they're not being amazing, and this is the way they can be amazing, and once they feel it then that's it. And I think that's the same feeling that you have when you have nothing and to be called Grandmaster Flash or Grandmaster whatever is a way of feeling good in a horrible situation, and middle-class people feel that too. Just 'cause you've got money doesn't mean your situation's good; alienation, you know what I mean?

Greater thematic diversity and an expanded purview for hip hop culture may be a logical outcome of its social re-composition but this carries risks as well as opportunities. I asked

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Jonzi when he thought an evolving hip hop culture might perhaps cease to be recognisably hip hop. This was the question of distinguishing expansion from blurring. He deferred once more to the judicious authority of the global hip hop head:

> That's something I struggle with all the time. It's that undefinable thing that I'm struggling with. But what is interesting is that when you've got a group of hip hoppers within the space they all like 'yeah, that's that hip hop shit right there'.

However, crucially, each of hip hop's four elements has developed an identifiable gestural vocabulary and set of disciplines which can be codified, repeated and taught. And whilst the emergence of these disciplines over the last thirty years has served as the basis for hip hop's development and diversification it has also provided a set of benchmarks for distinguishing, verifying and – importantly – classifying specific art works. These can be fused with other traditions and augmented but, Jonzi argues, certain formal properties need to be in place for a particular piece of dance, DJing, poetry or painting to be accurately called hip hop:

> If someone's B-Boy going in the centre and they're breakin, and they do something that's gymnastic and stop, and that's what they're meaning to do because that's how they want to do it, *that's not hip hop*. If you go in there and you're calling someone out whose just done a move like that and then you do it and then go back to your thing, *that's hip hop* 'cause you're sampling as a gesture to diss someone, you know what I mean? But if you go in the circle and you start tap-dancing that's not hip hop.

I asked Jonzi whether any art form can be truly at the cutting-edge and also firmly anchored within a culture that so valorises tradition and identity. Hip hop's art forms are built simultaneously on vernacular idioms, subcultural solidarities and myths, and on sampling, splicing, disjuncture and cut and paste. Add to this hip hop's global expansion and socio-cultural diversification. This implies an inherently equivocal relationship to thematic and formal innovation. The innovation that is hip hop's lifeblood always threatens to transgress the cultural and disciplinary boundaries it requires for its coherency and legitimacy. Jonzi explains how he makes sense of this:

> You can be innovative in it because you've got the artistic disciplines of hip hop culture intact and then you've chosen to break out of them boundaries for the purpose of this piece of work. But you as an individual are very clear and understand hip hop disciplines. And that discipline is a shared discipline that over the world people have an understanding of. Hence the reason why we can have competition. If it wasn't for that you couldn't have a global competition in the art form.

So hip hop's 'traditional' vernacular elements, in this case the antiphonic, battle aesthetic, is able to transgress cultural and linguistic frontiers, enabling its global adoption and local adaptation. But in doing so, this *lingua-franca* aesthetic, in classic global postmodern fashion, starts to take on the appearance of a recognisable brand (see Jameson, 1995). As it diffuses and is (g)locally adapted hip hop, therefore, paradoxically also acquires a more uniform aspect. As I explore later on this chapter, however, through an instance of hip hop theatre, the phenomenon of hip hop battling and display serves to create a zone of intercultural dialogue that can pose the most direct and potent challenge to essentialist notions of cultural belonging and legitimacy. This can be vital to gaining access to the culture and the approval of its gatekeepers. Success in hip hop battle and public display offers the possibility of trumping the primordial claims of cultural identity with honed expressive skills, improvisational ability, passion and creative pluck.

Blue-eyed hip hop cipher

Jonzi explained how he believes the social re-composition and diversification of hip hop serves to strengthen an anti-mainstream 'underground' rather than weaken it. He says that as it has gone global hip hop has provided a trans-cultural point of convergence for many people who feel 'outcast', supplying the expressive materials for defiant public displays of artistic talent. It is not only a 'nerdy', technicist fascination with hip hop's disciplinary forms which attract middle-class backpackers to hip hop, therefore. According to Jonzi, such people also frequently harbour strong feelings of identification with the plight and alienation of hip hop's fabled urban originators. Hip hop makes available to more affluent would be cultural rebels an insurgent register in which to communicate both solidarity with the oppressed and express their personal social frustrations. Simon, who by his own admission can see how he might well fit the bill of white, middle-class backpacker, maintains that his own initial trajectory toward hip hop felt completely natural and unforced (see Jones, 1988). Growing up in Brighton, he was surrounded by peers who were into rap, DJing and graffiti. From the start, the culture exerted a strong pull on the teenage Simon, and this combined with a flair for language and word-play long in development. Hence, at the time, there was no agonised introspection about his proper place in hip hop based on his class and colour. At the same time, looking back, Simon is aware that probably informing his

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early attraction to hip hop culture was a feeling of identification with the insubordinate hip hop 'outcast' figure Jonzi refers to. Indeed, the political symbolism of black culture tends to ensure that the initial participation of white youth involves a component of sympathetic identification (see Back, 1999; Harrison, 2009; Jones, 1988). Simon grew up in Brighton in the 1990s, a place which at the time was socially mixed but racially homogenous. At the point of discovering hip hop, he had already been imbued him with a strong social conscience by left-wing parents - each active in social-care and educational work. He was aware of key figures from the civil rights struggles of the 1960s and had been educated about the evils of white supremacism. Thus, a certain left-wing middle-class cultural capital had developed in him a keen sense of solidarity with anti-racist, anti-imperialist struggles. He says that one of the effects of having been 'raised with that inclusive, very respectful attitude within a *white town*' was to render the figure of the racial 'other' and their political struggles heroic. He explains: 'So then you like have the idea of like the 'other' or whatever as an idea. For me instead of a looming, scary, dark figure it became almost the opposite of that.' If anything, the black skinned 'other' was a compellingly attractive identity to the teenage Simon (see Harrison, 2009; Jones, 1988). This figure represented the convergent point between the heroic fight for social justice and the creation of powerful aesthetics. Simon thus sought out and read books describing black political struggle and their rebel, 'outcast' cultures. Whilst this was *coincident* with Simon becoming initiated into Brighton's mostly white hip hop scene, and undeniably informed his political understanding of hip hop culture, he does not regard it as *causative*. In fact, Simon confesses that the significance of these primary affective, cultural and imaginative promptings to his later trajectory really only fully dawned on him during the course of our conversation. It permeates, nonetheless, his self-probing account of attempting to navigate respectfully around hip hop's racial politics as a participant in the culture. As Charmaz says, 'The past informs our thinking in the present, the present informs our reconstructions of the past' (Charmaz, 2009: 48).

Simon speaks of how growing up in a house without a television where he was encouraged to read widely and play with language by his parents had a strong impact on his confidence in extemporising with words. If reading and language had developed his social conscience, it also prepared him well for freestyle rap:

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I didn't have a TV when I was growing up. I read books all the time. My mum used to make me play ridiculous word games. We didn't have a car; we'd be on the train, or the tube or the bus, walking somewhere and you're just like playing, making up limericks around certain structures on the way somewhere. Just like playing with words has been part of my life. So when I find this hip hop thing and freestyling I was like 'yes, I can do that already.

Whilst Simon states that race never felt like a bar to his participation as an emcee and spoken word poet he was, however, over time increasingly aware of his racially ambiguous status in the wider hip hop culture. Perry gives a flavour of the binomial cultural politics of white identification with hip hop in the context of America:

Part of the seduction of rap for mainstream America, particularly white young people, lies in its iconoclasm in relation to white American cultural norms. It is Other, it is hard, and it is deviant. On the other hand, black listeners of hip hop, in a gesture revealing an anxiety about the increased commercialism of rap and a strong identification with the art form as their own, demand that hip hop music be "Real" and remain true to the experiences of black America.

(Perry, 2004: 136)

As a male, middle-class white emcee Simon knew he enjoyed certain privileges denied people of colour. If only inchoately he was aware of the plentiful benefits deriving from the 'possessive investment of whiteness' (see Lipsitz, 2006). Jonzi above offers an intriguing figure for what could equally be a transgression of racial ontology or a form of minstrelsy: using hip hop to 'be your own charismatic black leader, whatever colour you are'. This appears to suggest the possibility of suspending white privilege through creative expression. Late one evening, following a rehearsal, three white emcees from the workshop, one of whom was Simon, started a cipher spontaneously outside on the street. In so doing, they created a kind of theatrical performance embodying aspects of the social and cultural re-composition Jonzi ascribes to hip hop culture's recent development. What was notable was that they were the only participants in the cipher. Although there was nothing deliberate or contrived about this, strictly speaking this was not a situation of cross-racial encounter; this was a white rappers cipher. The following is an extract from my fieldwork notes:

I am walking toward Old Street station after one of the workshops. I am in conversation with Jo, a dancer and education coordinator for Jonzi D Productions. We are just a few paces behind Maxwell, Sensei C and Simon who are walking and exchanging emcee bars in a tight bobbing knot, leaning into each other's faces, wagging their hands to punctuate and underscore each phrase. By the time I catch up with the three of them we are inside the tube station standing next to an Oyster Card Reader. One of them – I don't recall who – is

recharging his Oyster Card. Fully stoked and happy to have a public audience, the three emcees launch into an overlapping freestyle commentary on this mundane activity. It is one part blow-by-blow account of the physical act of recharging an Oyster, one part surreal narrative on the situation and their feelings about it:

'- So put the card on the reader...'

'- I think that you should heed a pearl of wisdom and lay it on a twenty...'

'- That would be plenty for your travel...'

'-And now it wants to know if you'll confirm...'

'-To be or not to be? Will your Oyster ever learn?...'

It is almost ten pm and the station is still fairly busy. Be-suited commuters making their way home after post-work drinks and London Transport employees in orange tabards are milling about and starting to take an interest in the verbal melee. At one point a black man with flowing dreadlocks wearing a smart suit and shiny boots warmly approaches the trio holding out a mobile phone. He asks them if they would mind making up some bars for the person on the other end of the phone. They duly oblige, taking it in turns to provide a cheeky essay on the man's appearance with particular reference to his shiny and pointed boots. The spirit roused, they decide to continue on Old Street roundabout. I ask if they mind me joining them as an observer, and receive their consent. I am itching to join in but feel completely out of my depth in such skilled and confident company. I also appreciate that they are a crew who know each other's moves intimately; that the tacit craft and understanding required in this situation only an emcee on their par could possibly hope to tap into spontaneously. I feel were I attempt to play in this particular street I would simply be run over. The three prove unflagging and utterly uninhibited for the next hour as they stand hunched together roiling like furies by the side of the busy road issuing verbal whiplashes, mini shocks and hailstorms. Their emcee flow is by turns manic, confessional, comically surreal, and cut-throat, composed of poly-syllabic and alliterative goads, back-handed compliments, and ironic non sequiturs. They exchange verbal volleys, passes, feints, and chips like veteran lawn tennis partners.   At points, each one will appear slightly lost, exploring a particular riff, setting off on an oblique thematic and metrical tangent, only to return to an upright rhythmic and narrative thread.

Passersby stop and comment, cars slow down and hoot at this street theatre, their drivers sometimes leaning out to shout or to gesture. The three emcees gladly participate in this call and response by extemporising some withering or complimentary riposte. There is something simultaneously familiar and strange about this whole impromptu happening. The hyped confidence of the three emcees rapping in a grimy tube station and on a busy roundabout lit only by car reflectors, the sulphuric halo of street lights, and illuminated take-away restaurant signs, all invoke iconic hip hop images of freestyle urban performance. This 'ghettocentric' kinaesthetic of emcee flow, call and response, and street traffic, is recognizable from a thousand hip hop music videos, films, and adverts. But notwithstanding the visceral intensity of the actual cipher, something about the scene also strikes a discordant note with respect to such archetypal sounds and imagery. The white skin, style and élan of the three emcees, the subject matter, vocabulary, lexicon, phraseology, and cultural references of their bars, all betray cultural capital and social privilege at some variance to hip hop's subaltern foundational narratives. The shared idiom passing around the cipher has neither sub-proletarian swagger nor is it composed

linguistically of a vernacular demotic. What is being assayed rather is a brilliantly rapped composite of whimsy, self-deprecating irony, pop culture quotation and sly punning. These white emcees evidently possess a highly knowing, honed appreciation and understanding of the craft and culture of both hip hop and improvised theatrical performance.

Lipsitz writes that 'as the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations' (Lipsitz, 2006: 1).   Might the articulation here in this cipher of white skin-colour, spontaneous occupancy of public space, and middle-class cultural capital, create an expressive spectacle at once discrepant and normative? Citing Page and Thomas, Alim claims that hip hop nation language is distinguished by its capacity to disrupt what he calls 'white public space' (Alim, 2007: 56-60). This he defines as 'a morally significant set of contexts that are the most important sites of the practices of racializing hegemony, in which Whites are invisibly normal, and in which racialized populations are visibly marginal and the objects of monitoring ranging from individual judgement to Official English Legislation' (ibid: 56). Is Old Street roundabout a 'white public space'? Must the fact that these three white emcees are 'invisibly normal' in virtue of their skin colour be set against the anomalousness of their ostentatious, freestyle rapping on a busy central London street? Does their skin colour here indeed afford them a level of official tolerance with respect to non mandated uses of social space that would not be extended to an equivalent clutch of black skinned men? Moreover, as Alim claims, would the threat to social order posed by black men so congregating in 'white public space' have as much to do with linguistic and phonological deviations from white norms as anything visual? The implicit terms of this debate rightly point up the way in which the 'possessive investment in whiteness' enables people with white skin to traverse social spheres in a manner denied those whose skin is black or brown. But Alim is doing more than this; for 'white public space' logically requires 'black public space', the proper domain of hip hop culture and one of its foundational narratives. He is naming the raciological constitution of social spheres under white supremacism so as to acknowledge both the a-symmetrical nature of this separation *and* its strategic necessity until such time as white supremacism is eliminated. Opposition to actually existing racist social structures require solidarities based on a strategic separation (see Hutnyk, 2000: 132). In this ultimately reifying account the limits on cross-racial cultural encounter and social re-composition are set by the 'strategic necessity'

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of hip hop's essential blackness. Any gains from cultural integration are bought at the cost of black unity and strength and accrue only to privileged white allophiliacs like those at Old Street Roundabout (see Asante JR., 2008).

Given the traction of such foundational narratives amongst the hip hop generation, Simon's skin-colour and social class mean cultural political questions of ownership, belonging and legitimacy can never be bracketed from his involvement in hip hop culture. What is more, not surprisingly, the (urban) topography of this has managed to insinuate itself into his self-constitution as an emcee. This is illustrated in a story he relays to me of a racialised, threatening encounter that proved to be a formative moment in his self-understanding, helping to bring him to a much fuller awareness of the way in which both white privilege and his indeterminate role in hip hop are stamped indelibly on his epidermis. What is particularly notable about what Simon says below is how it instances the empirical testing and nuancing of his affinities, sympathies, identifications and even anxieties with the figure of the black-skinned 'other':

> To be brutally honest as well I don't think – maybe it didn't totally, totally hit home for me how much the culture of hip hop, that marginalized, oppressed, quite gritty, like, urban identity - I didn't realise how much maybe that wasn't mine until relatively recently. I don't mean like yesterday. And I was totally aware of the fact that it wasn't at all, because I wasn't like writing lyrics about shanking and whatever, I had no pretence about that. But I kinda had the idea that I understood that. You know, like a lot of the friends I'd grown up with they were white and they'd lived the situations like that and I sometimes touched in and out on the edge of it. I knew what it was like and had made my decisions and that was cool and – maybe that is the truth, to be honest; that it wasn't like I was totally removed from it; I wasn't, like, struggling to get out of it. But like I was coming down from White City, year and a half/two years ago about half twelve on a Sunday night and I got mugged, yeah, by these three dudes, one of them had a mask on, but they were all black. And – it was obviously really an unpleasant, horrible horrible, horrible experience. And obviously you just want to be like 'fuck you'. I was just, like, 'yeah, alright, y'know, give em my phone like, whatever'. You know it was a bizarre situation, I was like really calm, explained to them that though they were obviously like going to take my phone I'd appreciate having my sim card back 'cause it had numbers in, you know what I mean? It wasn't, like, I didn't feel like I totally got shat on. They took my money; I got my wallet off them with all my cards in it and everything. 'Cause what were they going to do with my driving license? It was kinda like 'look I respect that you're out here' 'we can't get money any other way' whatever; you know like 'man's got to eat' or whatever, I can't remember exactly. You know what? I was like 'I understand that, I'm not – I'm just saying, like, can I have my cards back like...You know? I went home after that, I was getting a bus the next day, I was listening to the *Guilty Simpson* [American emcee] album and there's this tune 'Robberies' and you know, like, and I was just listening to this beat and I was, like 'fuck man I'm listening to

this tune and I'm the white dude he's talking about mugging'. And I was walking past White City Estate and they thought I'd probably just finished work at the BBC and they thought they'd jack [rob] me and fuck it, fair enough! But it was kind of interesting 'cause, you know, you listen to that tune and you love hip hop and you're part of hip hop; you identify with the emcee, yeah? So I identify with the emcee and you think 'yeah, fucking get him man' you know what I mean 'I don't really give a shit, like; rich white dude with a big car: fuck it, take his wallet', do you know what I mean? And that's what you think. And I broke it down and I was like 'hold on, like, I was, 'what if this white dude?' I don't agree with him robbing people really. Like, what, regardless of what race or class they are, you know if he, like, really thinks that – and obviously this is a bit, you know, taking it too far and it's not really realistic, but if you really think that there's an unequal divide of wealth, like obviously you need some money; you're not stopping that system inherent in society by going and robbing people and mugging em.

What was important to Simon about his mugging was what it told him about how he as a white 'other' was perceived by these black boys. He, Simon, was reduced to the brute facticity of his skin-colour, all detail, shading, biography and contingency stripped away. Social and cultural division meant that it was enough for him to be young, white, and reasonably well dressed for him to be perceived as a legitimate target. Even being what Harrison hesitantly terms a 'wegro', a white person with 'an intrinsic appreciation of how hip hop can function to improve race relations' (Harrison, 2009: 149), offers no proof against racialised conflict in a chromatic economy where epidermis encodes levels of privilege and by obvious extension social class. But, additionally, this encounter casts an unflattering light on his relationship with hip hop as a white consumer. Part of his identification with the heroic black 'other' had been about being a 'race traitor' (see Ignatiev, 1997) and exalting vicariously in the violent assault on white privilege. Once he personally had experienced what it was like to temporarily embody white privilege this identification – and hence the certainty of his race treachery – was tested. What this experience also served to underscore was a keener sense of the hip hop 'marginalized, oppressed…gritty…urban identity' not being his. Not least because street robbery is something that his privilege has ensured he will never need to contemplate for the purposes of survival. All this only strengthened his determination to avoid compounding suspicions of being inauthentic in a 'black public space' by dispelling any doubts that he was laying claim to experiences and histories that are not his own. Simon says he is 'very conscious of not wanting to represent something that I haven't genuinely experienced.' The legitimacy in hip hop which for whites can appear so elusive requires that he ritually endorse a cultural disjuncture that casts his own artistic status into doubt. He must publicly emphasise and

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re-emphasise that his black-skin confreres are the direct cultural and racial legatees of the vernacular continuum on which hip hop sits.[92] If, however, the archetypal *theme* of social and racial 'outcast' initially drew Simon to hip hop, compelling him to make an affective investment in the culture, it was a sense of what he might do artistically with its *form* that first opened a prospect to a fuller, more legitimate involvement: 'I guess it comes back to me not owning those things [at the content level] as much. So hip hop theatre to me is more about the form and less about the content'. We spoke, however, about hip hop's sampling aesthetic and its diverse cultural sources, how this perhaps complicates the whole business of ownership and cultural copyright, particularly as these get framed in raciological terms (see Hoch, 2006). Simon maintained:

> But the people who originally started to use those things from all other different areas were at that time and at that place poor black people in America. And they drew from other things – so I can take from that which is a legitimate thing to do. I can be like 'I'm going to take some of hip hop into what I'm doing, yeah?' But that would be different from defining myself as hip hop. So your argument holds weight if what I'm doing is sampling hip hop within whatever art-form I'm making [to make something else] because that's what they've done, and that's what all cultures do. But if I'm doing that and saying: 'this is hip hop'?

But he also declared: 'I wonder whether I won't own it [hip hop] out of political correctness'. I suggested that the moment Simon became involved in hip hop he was implicated in all these ambiguities and imponderables. That perhaps the best he could do was to work creatively and reflexively within the constraints they set, which after all owed their proper sources to social structures beyond the perceptible horizons of hip hop culture, whilst trying to avoid paralysis born of white guilt (see Back and Ware, 2002). Ultimately, he talks about beginning to address the issue of the possible insolubility of his ambiguous status by effectively conceiving of his artistic contribution to, and derivation from, hip hop in an almost abbreviated form. This would be sampling from hip hop culture to make poetry and hip hop theatre, thereby respecting hip hop's animating spirit of bricolage whilst vigilantly guarding against posturing. In practical terms, this essentially equates to fusing a trained proficiency in acting, storytelling, narration, and improvisation with 'emceeing skills within a

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[92] But then again, there are those who would argue hip hop bequeaths a more cosmopolitan legacy then this allows. Hip hop's properly 'polycultural' socially agonistic origins, according to Hoch, have 'created a legacy of art forms and language that would wind up being inherited by all races, colours, and classes around the world' (Hoch, 2006: 350). I return to this point further on.

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theatre environment'. Indeed, the interdisciplinary character of hip hop theatre seems to offer Simon a more legitimate berth in hip hop culture, allowing full scope for building on hip hop's collage/sampling aesthetic. He says: 'For me what's exciting about the idea of hip hop theatre is that it's a young enough form to still be defined by people making work.' Seeking a way through *form* to something he can properly regard as authentic, he says, hopefully, that: 'The stuff that takes hip hop and mashes it up the most is almost the truest to it.' Here his words echo Roger's denunciation in chapter five of hip hop posturing and 'canned B-Boyism'. Widened 'access…from a *form* point of view' will potentially de-centre, or certainly complicate, the claims of hip hop's 'classical' themes of race and class identity through the kind of cultural augmentation and diversification which the artistic practice of the three white emcees above represents. It equally, however – as I discussed in chapter four – will incite a rearguard defence of these classical themes and the prior claims of their social base by more neo-traditional elements in hip hop. The question to set against this binomial construction, and which I now take up through an analysis of a piece of multicultural hip hop theatre, is: can hip hop culture also be an oppositional sphere with respect to all forms of racialism; one in which white privilege is at once acknowledged and surmounted through transversal encounters?

Backpacker's dilemma

Nigga, in its loud articulation, has presented a large space of social discomfort, a line in the sand which the artists continually ask their listeners to cross, enticing and challenging. It marks a provocative irreverence with potentially large but unknowable consequences. It is tricksterism par excellence.

(Perry, 2004: 143)

In what follows, a socially re-composed hip hop within the 'arena' of theatre is seen as offering the possibility for a critical (re)examination and re-imagining of encounters between black and white hip hop heads. This is a story that potentially violates – re-colours - the canons of hip hop's still racialised subaltern mythography. It takes the form of a piece of hip hop theatre devised collaboratively in a multicultural, cross-disciplinary week long workshop. The piece which I report upon here, and in which I participated in the creation and performance of as a 'participant observer', offers a comedic theatrical depiction of the

ambiguous situation of white middle-class males in hip hop, incorporating the use of a rap libretto.

The nine minute theatrical sketch which came to be known as the 'White Rappers Dilemma' was the fruit of careful devising and rehearsal over a period of roughly seven evenings. It was performed at the end of the week, alongside several other short pieces developed in the workshop, to a public audience in a West-End theatre. All the assembled white men participated, with Jonzi directing and acting, and one other black actor and rapper, Steve, also taking part. The idea for a piece on white rappers was proposed by a white emcee and theatre practitioner, Maxwell, who explained that he was interested in the whole problematic business of backpackers. At its worst this term denotes a clumsily naive appropriation, or colonising, of hip hop by racial and cultural outsiders who have none of the social historical links and lineage and whose insight is always external, whose enthusiasm, however genuine, somewhat forced. As Greg Tate puts it of white people's historic involvement in black culture: 'everything but the burden'. Echoing Simon, Maxwell spoke of his desire to explore how so-called backpackers navigate their ambiguous relationship to hip hop and its racial politics. This, he suggested, was exemplified in the complex issue of white hip hop heads and the 'N' word. Who is licensed to say nigga when many black people find any use of the epithet deeply offensive? When/where is white people's use of the 'N' word intentional or unconscious racism, allophilia, or cultural appropriation (see Hartigan, 1999)? Is it possible – let alone permissible – to distinguish these ostensibly different usages of the 'N' word (ibid: 126)?

The basic story of 'The White Rappers Dilemma' is that three white 'backpackers' in their late teens from an invented small town named 'Swithingham' are making a rare visit to a London hip hop rave. For these young men, who each emcee, this represents an entree into a milieu they entertain dreams of penetrating. Once they arrive at the club the ambiguity of their situation is instantly underscored when a hip hop track comes on featuring liberal use of the 'N' word. As hip hop heads are they licensed to join in with the black men enthusiastically chanting the chorus? Or are they debarred from this 'privilege' by dint of their skin-colour? Indeed, does this demonstrate that their position in hip hop can never rise above associative status? The action begins when the de-facto leader of three, 'MC

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Ethos', played by Simon, a slightly more savvy and credible figure than other two, gingerly enters the stage in advance of the party. Looking out to the audience with a somewhat rueful expression he launches straight into a poetic soliloquy in which he confesses, in terms which seem to blur fiction and biography, to harbouring a pained sense of uncertainly as to the legitimacy of being a white artist seeking acceptance in what he knows is a black culture:

> Now I'm not from the Bronx and that's obvious at once,/But I'm positive that we can get along if we want/Made every effort to respect and retrace the roots back to/The Griot story telling traditions of West Africa/Hip hop got me captured and caught/But my roots are more black board than black thought/White chalk taught me to love words, now I thirst for conscious deep lyrics/But my native tongues BBC accent Queen's English/Street living is something I've been privileged to avoid/But my culture, my music, of choice gives voice to those outkast and oppressed/And most folks who oppressed, even if these days it might be indirect,/Get oppressed by folks with white flesh/So am I positive? Yes./Can I rhyme fresh? Yes./But can I really lay claim to this culture as mine yet?

From the opening bars MC Ethos wishes to make it publicly known that he is fully aware that his identity does not match either standard racial or social criteria for being authentically hip hop. He is not from 'the Bronx' – a motif here for authentic origins - and his epistemological 'roots' are in book-based learning not in the school of life. He is no 'road-man' or 'organic' intellectual able to simultaneously draw on first-hand street knowledge and summon up the ghosts of other race-men in his rap. Like Fran in the last chapter he reverentially acknowledges the vernacular roots of his spoken-word poetry in West African griot traditions, suggesting that what legitimacy he may lack culturally and experientially he will make up for in the act of historically 'retracing' and locating his practice. The self-deprecating admission that his love of words come from 'white chalk' on blackboards, its idiom 'BBC Queen's English', is a deliberate inversion of the cultural hierarchy these institutions sit at the apex of. It says that he knows that his Eurocentric cultural capital has little currency in hip hop, where the source of 'conscious deep lyrics' resides in other cosmologies and histories. Meant to disarm criticism in advance in its ironical invocation of imperial bastions of white privilege, it also, however, calls attention to the normativity Ethos will continue in most situations to benefit from. Knowledge of griot traditions will not suffice to dislodge a cultural and racial hegemony that by definition enjoys dominion until such time as society is radically restructured. But the subtext – or meta-text – of the poem is that Ethos has little choice but to fully declare his 'privilege' if he is to avoid charges of social and racial bad-faith in his desire to be part of hip hop culture. The terms of his

legitimate involvement will have to be the precise reverse of hip hop's ghettocentric foundational narrative of social and existential precariousness and necessity. In a phrase that underscores the ambiguity of this situation, what he describes as his 'culture' he quickly qualifies as his 'music of choice'. Is he part of the culture or just an audience for it, a hip hop enthusiast? Indeed, is he saying that the vernacular that is hip hop provides an expressive medium in which the 'outkast and oppressed' can make themselves directly heard or that he is offering to make his own art a medium for their plight? But then the reflexive imperative is once more activated with mention of the 'oppressed'. He will have to accept that whilst his Anglo middle-class whiteness endows him with the 'privilege' and the linguistic means – his BBC English – to 'give voice' to the oppressed, as phenotype it also indelibly marks him as a representative of oppression. In the end he claims to have made enough of an ethical and aesthetic investment to 'get along' in the culture. Indeed, that he has developed a 'positive' consciousness and learned to 'rhyme fresh' is now being demonstrated and submitted for public approval. Everything he has said, however, returns him, ironically, to the sobering recognition that 'positivity' and being able to 'rhyme fresh' cannot transcend history. And yet the wistful concluding statement is posed as a question, keeping further possibilities symbolically open.

At this point the other two backpackers – 'Twizzle' and 'Norman', played by Sensei C and Maxwell, respectively - enter the scene eager to get into the hip hop club. Together, the three are meant to represent distinct and recognisable tendencies within the backpacker subculture (see Harrison, 2009). MC Ethos, as his moniker suggests, is 'conscious', enjoying (tenuous) status with both the older white and black hip hoppers. Twizzle, his face obscured by a hunting cap and thick beard, gives the impression of being nerdy, shy, and earnest as he apologetically trundles onstage. Tightly zipped-up, his arms-crossed protectively over his chest, he is clinging symbolically to a large back-pack for dear life. Then there is Norman the most energetic and febrile of the three, a wide-eyed goaty-bearded ingénue desperate to impress. Norman, an archetypal 'clown' with an open, affirmative nature, eagerly suggests a cipher before they go into the club. Ethos is in 'conscious' mode, spraying around words like 'community' and 'unity'; Twizzle is too inhibited to contribute; and Norman gives an overexcited but skilled roll-call of naff rap 'originators' like 'Marky

Mark' and 'Hammer'. As they get into their flow an older white emcee – played by me – Dorian Gray Man, saunters slowly onto the stage in an attitude of self-conscious disdain. He stands deliberately aloof, one arm behind his back, surveying the scene. Dorian has worked hard for acceptance in the milieu of London hip hop, and where other white people are concerned regards himself as something of a cultural gatekeeper. Through an adopted black patois, style, and set of mannerisms, he has sought to cultivate a 'thug' emcee identity and demeanour. This is his 'black-face' (see Lhamon JR., 1998). The white backpackers might be ambiguous figures: variously 'safari wiggers' (Kitwana, 2005), slavish encyclopaedists, and idealistic keepers of the flame. But to Dorian, who regards himself as the true allophiliac, they are more than just sad 'wannabes'. They are abject and malevolent, threatening to entirely undo all his careful work at gaining acceptance and a sense of belonging in this culture. With their earnestness and clumsy naiveté they potentially betray the scandalous truth that if anyone is posturing it is he, Dorian, in his rigid adherence to a pure 'ghettocentric' hip hop identity. The likes of Ethos, Twizzle and Norman – who can little conceal their lack of authenticity beneath an exterior of proletarian hardness - are a constant and irksome reminder, a mirror image, of Dorian's abiding sense of his own fragile status. He interrupts the cipher by calling out to Ethos, who he knows, and pointing in the direction of Norman and Twizzle, 'Hey yo. Are these your boys then?' Ethos reluctantly confirms they are. Dorian looks them up and down once more. In a rapped, thinly veiled threat - purporting to describe what he does figuratively and actually to 'wannabes' of their social and racial sort – he looms down on the visibly quaking Norman and Twizzle, taking his time to spit each line menacingly in their face:

> You know what? I shot little white-girl rappers to Emirate Oil Kings/I pluck weak neek amateur spitters like KFC wings/I make ring-tones by breaking bones of batty-boy fake emcees/I charge fees to Gs, who freeze, go weak at knees, in sight of me/Dorian Gray Man – out of my mouth an, pussyclat wiggers a g'wan inna thissya club man

This last line is delivered defiantly – chest puffed out – to the audience. In an intriguing variant of hip hop intra-racial politics Dorian is holding up the whiteness of the backpackers as evidence of artistic and cultural charlatanry. They are 'wiggers' and 'little white girl spitters'. Coupled with this is the charge that whiteness – out of place - equates to gender uncertainty: effeminacy, homosexuality even. The backpacker is a 'batty man' and white slave: 'I shot [sell] little white girl rappers to Emirate Oil-Kings'. In classic psychoanalytic

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terms Dorian studiously disavows that which he fears most. He knows only too well the impossibility of becoming what he wanly projects onto black hip hoppers, but feels utterly incapable at the same time of embracing the feminised subordination he grimly suspects his whiteness consigns him to. With great irony his name, Dorian Gray Man, intimates this repressed effeteness, calling attention satirically to his fall-guy status as a 'gray man' to the black men whose approval he craves. It also underscores the pathos of a frozen – ghettocentric - identity. Dorian's hostility towards the backpackers only confirms the guilty 'secret' already announced in his moniker.

Having served his warning, Dorian leads the crew of backpackers offstage with an exaggerated 'yardie' limp and into the 'club'. Already ensconced are two male black hip hoppers who Dorian greets with warmth and a slightly forced camaraderie. One reciprocates; the other gives Dorian a blank. Dorian nonetheless stands next to him imitating his stern, arms across chest stance. Norman – who it transpires is in awe of Dorian – runs across to hug him. The latter angrily thrusts Norman away with the words 'batty man' and turns his back on him. Norman's instant rapped retort is suitably incongruous: 'I'm mad man Taliban/Every time I walk in to the club somebody calls me batty-man'. If Dorian – the true Taliban in this situation - cannot repel the backpackers from a beloved milieu he suspects does not reciprocate his devotion than at least he will work to maintain as much physical and symbolic distance as possible, seeking always to deflect attention from his own questionable position.   Not long after they have all arrived at the club, the anthemic Wu Tang Clan track, 'Shame on a Nigga', comes on the system. This detonates the group who erupt into a grinning frenzy of shouts, bobbing bodies, and 'brap' (pistol shaped) fingers. However, whilst the white hip hoppers wholeheartedly dance and gesticulate, chanting the song's lyrics in unison, their voices go mute at each utterance of the word 'nigga', a hand shooting up comically to cover their mouths. One of the black hip hoppers, played by Jonzi, notices this and confronts Ethos. They have a rapped exchange at the front of the stage. Ethos says 'What do you expect?/I'm just trying to show some respect'. To which the black hip hopper replies: 'Ah, it's the 'N' word issue/Don't worry man I aint gonna diss you'. He goes on to speak about how the term/word has been 'reclaimed', how they are all just 'hip hop kids', and how, anyway, 'It ain't about race...its about class/So sing the

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chorus you bombarass.' Ethos, more than happy to overcome his misgivings, grateful for permission to use the 'N' word, concedes 'I guess we're all in this together'. To which his interlocutor rejoins, 'KRS said it how do you figure? Now they've got white kids calling themselves...' Before he is able to get the word out, Ethos lurches forward and in a wild release of pent up liberal guilt, arm flailing, bellows 'NIGGA!!' The music stops instantly; the other actors freeze; they go into a slow motion mime of recoiling in horror. The second of the black hip hop heads rears up in radiant anger. Ethos recognises his grave blunder. The atmosphere of warm conviviality is banished as a blast of cold, faster-paced beats issue from the speakers. Standing menacingly over Ethos' now cowering form, and jabbing pistol shaped fingers into his face, the black man delivers a rapid, verbal beat-down: 'It ain't all *white* mate'. The lyrical flow of digs and upper-cuts morphs into an actual kicking. Ethos' original interlocutor at first looks on hesitantly, but with a shrug of the shoulders and a sanguine glance at the audience, finally opts to engage his fists in racial solidarity. At that moment Twizzle, who up until now has been notable for his diffidence, springs forward, hurling himself between Ethos and his attackers. He seeks to redeem the situation by launching into an impassioned rapped defence of his own entitlement, and that of his friends, to be part of hip hop culture, providing their artistic approach has insight, honesty and empathy:

> I'm /making a point with the sharpest acoustics./Bringing high voltage and sparking your fuses./Summon up my gut, I put heart in this music. At /one with the spirit because I'm part of the movement. There's /no black and white, more states of ambivalence./Matters of taste are what makes the great difference./Stage turns to cinders with pages I implement,/Gliding on a set of wings flaming like Icarus./Killing it? Nah, I resurrect flesh like with/Lazarus, breathing heat back in cadavers./Handling matter that's hazardous, never lacking stamin/a A cracker yes but that just adds character. I'm /raw as a team of all black in fully amped hackas. /Try grasp the razor sharp wit, you'll get your hands tattered./Easy for you to label me back packer, but it's I that/Built my skills taking tuition from the blast master./- And that levels it, I spit resonant,/- Forget melanin when I'm reppin the testament./-Make it less separate and more intwined/In sync intellect to exercise insight.[93]

The tentative, introspective themes of Ethos' earlier piece were matched in its haltingly reflexive delivery. Twizzle's poem by contrast not only throws down a philosophical gauntlet but does so using a defiant phraseology, meter, tone and enunciation. He is

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[93] I have retained the author's written punctuation and spelling.

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challenging the complacency behind the 'label' backpacker and its racialised tenor which makes levels of 'melanin' rather than 'heart', 'spirit', 'heat', 'stamina', 'wit', 'intellect' and 'insight' decisive in who is 'part of the movement'. However, in a move echoing the black rehabilitation of the 'N' word, he is happy to reclaim 'cracker', a term used pejoratively in the US for poor whites. 'Cracker', which implies struggle and social exclusion, at least has the virtue of 'character', where 'backpacker' just suggests unearned privilege and cultural tourism. Referring to Judith Butler's work on 'injurious speech' as 'reproducible' and 'resignable' 'public text' John Hartigan underscores the imbrications of such usages in anterior political power (Hartigan, 1999: 113). Against the tendency to locate their cause and origin in individuals he says that 'we need to think through the "power to race" that precedes the subjects who make such utterances, structuring (through institutions and political organizations) the unequal social terrain where race remains significant.' The key phrase in the poem, 'no black and white, more states of ambivalence', side-steps the question of whether white hip hoppers can legitimately use the 'N' word. It is not an oblique comment on its 'resignable' possibilities and limitations, the situational nuances of its use by whites explored by Hartigan in his ethnography. But nor does it give support to the notion that the 'N' word in its reclaiming by blacks somehow consecrates a 'positive', or strategic, hip hop 'essentialism' (see Hutnyk, 2000: 132). The phrase seeks instead to de-essentialise race, issuing an ethical plea that is also an observation on hip hop's ontology: its periphrastic constitution and bricolage aesthetic (discussed in chapter four). Hip hop culture samples not only the materials and artefacts produced by different social strata but their populations too, in the process making them 'less separate', 'intwined'.   The hip hop 'movement' is productive of 'states of ambivalence'; a positive miscegenation. Les Back describes how archetypal oppositions tracing the involvement of white people in black culture refuse to acknowledge this rich penumbra. They instead produce a 'binomial' logic. Essentially, there is parasitic white creative 'imitation' versus black 'inspiration' (Back, 2002: 229). Speaking to the politics of cross race encounters in R&B music, Back maintains that 'the existing ways of writing about black music do not allow for the possibility that the orientation of white musicians may have changed over time. Rather, their desires, identifications, and motivations are fixed and reduced to the couplet of love and theft' (ibid: 231). Asante JR. portrays white people's enjoyment of hip hop in just these stark terms

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(Asante JR., 2008: 251-253). Pleasure and 'enjoyment' is a kind of racialised disavowal.

White fans of hip hop 'fetishize black disenfranchisement and transform the ghetto into a

glossy magazine spread, uprooting it from the chain of injustices that created it, thus

disconnecting themselves from it – like voyeurs' (ibid: 252).

Protectively locking up hip hop in a casket labelled 'black culture' precludes any possibility

of white people making an innovative, let alone ethical, contribution to the culture, so that

they are always at best skilled imitators.   Back urges, however, against attempts to resolve

the cultural encounter between black and white cultural producers through a 'form of racial

algebra, in which white musicians add their whiteness to the negritude of black musicians'.

Against a notion of 'racial alchemy' he offers something far more complex, embodying

process, multiple descent, and open composition with 'cultural legacy' (Back, 2002: 251).

Black and white cultural producers who work on shared projects – like the 'White Rappers

Dilemma' for example - are not bringing their racial essences into a *catalytic* encounter.

What is happening rather is the combining of different 'heteroglot' 'palettes' (ibid), a

colouring of culture.   Twizzle argues in his poem that his own entitlement to be considered

'part of the movement' is threefold: one, he has dug deep: 'summon up my gut'; he has

knowledge of both himself and the culture; two, he is seized with hip hop's 'spirit' of

spontaneous public performance, as this fervent lyrical challenge is meant to demonstrate;

three, his solidarity with other hip hop heads is based not on 'race' but shared 'taste'. It is

'taste' – in the sense of preference, yes, but more 'insight' and 'intellect' - which is a

legitimate scale of 'difference'. As Back says, the idea of cultural forms being racially

heritable relies on a model of 'crude correspondence'. It is 'cultural geneticism' to suggest

that hip hop *belongs* to people with black skin (ibid: 230). 'Taste' by contrast is socially

acquired and therefore fungible, equally capable of uniting and dividing. Culture has the

capacity, according to Twizzle, through taste to bring different people 'In sync'.   He is asking

that he and the other white rappers in the end be judged not on their skin colour but on

artistic merit and courage: 'razor sharp wit' and 'resonant' spitting. In the *battle* staged by

'The White Rappers Dilemma', what 'levels it' is artistic ability not phenotype or history.

This is embodied in the opposition between the 'amped' multicultural 'All Blacks' as a trope

for vigour and visceral unity and Twizzle's dismissal of 'melanin' as a mystifying abstraction.

In other words, Rakim's oft quoted mantra: 'It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at'. Unlike what has just been inflicted on Ethos, Twizzle's rhetorical violence and thematic risk-taking is meant as a dose of creative destruction with life-giving properties. He is turning the stage 'to cinders' and 'Handling matter that's hazardous' so as to 'resurrect flesh', breath 'heat back in cadavers'. Twizzle, who has stopped the violence and reduced the others to stunned silence, has attempted to 'resurrect' the white rappers, 'Lazarus' like, from their symbolic killing. Dorian and the two black hip hop heads depart the stage visibly chastened and impressed, muttering, in comic understatement, 'you know what? He wasn't bad you know.'

Conclusion: cultural property versus polyculture

In an e-mail correspondence the white rap artist, Sensei C, who created the character of Twizzle and authored the concluding battle rhyme in 'The White Rappers Dilemma', seems to resile from some of the more radical trans-cultural possibilities suggested by that poem, echoing Asante JR.'s (2008) broadside against white cultural co-optation:

> It also has to be pointed out that, particularly in the UK, white middle class influence has had a gentrifying effect on the culture of UK Hip Hop and caused it's, at times, removal from the community it supposed to represent. This is for a number of reasons (in my opinion) which I will save for another time. But the reason I say that Grime is hip hop is that (besides the fact musically it is) it is still very much the property of the urban black youth. As my friend says 'white people have a history of being usurpers...of countries, cultures and often music'. Basically what I'm saying is that yes white people can rap, break, DJ, make beats, graff, whatever. Often they can do it well, a few incredibly. However as to whether what they do is a part of true hip hop culture is down to what they do with it, how they understand their place in a much greater movement which has such potential power. This is the case for ANY practitioner, but in the case of white artists it is without a doubt (in my mind at least) a more sensitive issue.

In a resonant key John Hutnyk cautions that in latter-day liberal celebrations of cultural hybridity the appearance of equivalence in cultural difference can serve to reproduce some of the ideological effects that obscure the unequal exchange in the sale of 'free' labour. He says that:

> In the culture industry's fascination with curry and cornershop, hip-hop and dreadlocks, and so on, it is possible to witness the cultural operation of this rhetoric of equality which appreciates difference on the basis of an oblique blindness to inequality and material opportunity. The recognition of this contradiction, in which fetishised and celebrated

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'objects' of culture come to do duty for obscured social relations between really existing people, is a first, but insufficient, step towards a cultural politics.

<div align="right">(Hutnyk, 2000: 132-133)</div>

Do the self-reflexive examinations in lyrical form offered by 'The White Rappers Dilemma' do sufficient justice to the political economy of hybridity to be called a 'cultural politics' as Hutnyk authorises this mode of action? When he speaks of hip hop being 'the property of the urban black youth' Sensei C is, I believe, correct in pointing out the ease with which white privilege can be slid beneath white participation in hip hop, or indeed any other ostensible black culture, so the first is obscured by the second. The categorical claim, however, that hip hop 'is black music sourced in black culture and it continues to ultimately belong to the black community', has depressing echoes of some of what Simon was exploring and testing through the creation of MC Ethos. My question is: what sort of cultural political alliance is *ultimately* created between white liberal guilt and essentialised theories of culture as the 'property' of people with a particular skin colour? In this well intentioned but ultimately self-immolating approach to white supremacism the cultural relativism of the former is enabling of the cultural absolutism of the latter (see Howe, 1999). The notion that whiteness debars white hip hoppers from anything more than some kind of tenuous associative status in hip hop culture rests, moreover, on questionable assumptions concerning the latter's essentially racially delimited character and, correspondingly, the legitimacy – let alone desirability – of lodging deeds of title (see chapter four). Respected white hip hop theatre practitioner Danny Hoch refutes the idea of hip hop being ultimately the legacy of a single race or culture. He is worth quoting at length:

> The notion that hip-hop is solely an African American art form is erroneous, and this becomes clear when we really examine the aesthetics. It is certainly part of the African Continuum, and if it were not for African Americans there would be no hip hop, but hip hop would not exist if it were not for the polycultural social construct of New York City in the 1970s. Hip-hop art is so multilayered that it could never have been born solely from the African continent, or solely from a poor community in the United States without African diaspora traditions. Neither could it have been spawned solely from a polycultural community in Durban or Barcelona or from a rural Missouri community devastated by Reaganomics. It could only have been born of the fusion – and profusion – of all of these complex conditions and circumstances.

<div align="right">(Hoch, 2006: 350-351)</div>

Hoch is neither making the liberal hybridity argument which Hutnyk claims is instantly recuperated by capital, nor is he emphasising – as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy have sought to against neo-traditional accounts - the essential modernity of diaspora black identity and its *routed* recombinant ontology. Hoch's point is far simpler than this. He is saying that due to the multiple socio-cultural inflows and historical contingencies out of which hip hop emerges and from which it takes its syncretic forms, it is untenable for any one part of its 'polycultural' social base - no matter how substantial their contribution - to seek to abrogate hip hop to itself and to preside over it as cultural gate-keeper. This is not, therefore, a matter of either cultural diffusion or cultural appropriation: hip hop is *constitutively* a multi-culture. Maybe it seems obvious, then, but the question as to whether white hip hoppers are licensed to say the 'N' word is something of a red-herring. If white people's legitimate involvement in hip hop is not a-priori in question then the politics of the use of the 'N' word as it pertains to hip hop starts to lose its efficacy as a place-holder for the particularistic solidarity a 'reclaimed' hip hop culture might seem to offer. In other words, the argument seems to be that the 'N' word and the passions its use arouses both for those who regard it as debasing and those for whom it is variously empowering and/or intrinsically functional in vernacular terms, demonstrates the awkward conjunction in a multicultural hip hop of white people and what is projected as a family dispute. Add to this the eliding effects of cultural proximity in the perception of non hip hoppers so that such whites easily get cast as 'wiggers' (see Hartigan, 1999: 127). Sensei C contends that the issue of white people's use of more intimate and profane black vernacular needs referring to the question of how one behaves in a house that it is not one's own. I believe it possible – and ethically right - to observe such rules of etiquette whilst avoiding self-immolation or paralysing guilt. However, what is lost in moral imprecation here is what was actually taking place with the MC Ethos character above in his usage of 'nigga'. Hartigan, speaking of the complexities of the use of the 'N' word by Detroit inner-city residents, explains that:

> Whether their uses provoke fierce reactions, bemused acquiescence, or even frustrated confusion, they are a means of figuring out how contexts matter and where racial lines cohere statistically or are characterized by plasticity. "Nigger", in these instances, is neither generated solely by an internal set of convictions about race nor is it a completely detached assessment of conventions and contexts; it is used as a function of the ongoing need to understand the unstable ways that race matters. Because white

racialness can be inflected from so many social positions, the local significance of race remains open-ended.

(Hartigan, 1999: 126)

That is a fair summary of some of the key social contingencies at play in the use of the 'N' word by Ethos above. Indeed the white rappers *dilemma* is surely a function of the fact that 'white racialness can be inflected from so many social positions.' Further, Kelley, in the context of a discussion on gangsta rap, explains how the valences of 'nigga' in hip hop culture are not so easily reduced to simple questions of skin-colour. Against its white supremacist usages ' "Nigga" is not merely another word for black' (Kelley, 1996: 137). He goes on: 'To be a "real Nigga" is to have been a product of the ghetto. Thus by linking their identity to the 'hood instead of simply to skin color, gangsta rappers acknowledge the limitations of racial politics – black middle-class reformism as well as black nationalism' (ibid). The fact that hip hop is an arena for such intra-politics does not redound to its discredit, however. Rather it highlights the socially and culturally aslant primary constitution Hoch refers to. Moreover, hip hop is not reducible to the agonistic terms of such intra-politics. As a 'polycultural' formation hip hop invariably involves the participation and contribution of people of many identities in an untidy situation where constitutive differences and historical antagonisms – such as 'the possessive investment in whiteness' - can at best be intelligently engaged and imaginatively rendered (Vron and Ware, 2002). But never conveniently annexed – let alone finessed - whilst their structural predicates and consequences remain intact (Delgado and Stefancic, 1997; Hartigan, 1999). Those self-identified groups or communities who wish to secede, and lay exclusive claim to hip hop in the name of cultural and racial purity and authenticity can and will do so. Whatever their rhetoric they have no enforceable mandate over what is done with hip hop and by whom. Their arguments, however, deserve to be engaged, for as Perry (2004) explains it, they are a crucial part of hip hop's unstable ideological democracy.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Journey of the Spoken Word

Two different definitions

> ...Rap knocked hip-hop out cold/And turned it into disco/Rap can ride any sound/Has no bounds/Hip-hop's a subculture/From a people with culture/Swooped on by vultures/...Some say hip-hop is pregnant/Cause rap dun fucked it up/Two different definitions/I love hip-hop to the bone marrow/Sometimes I turn rap down/When it's too narrow/Rhymes like arrows/To the head and heart/Hittin hip-hop from the start/Hip hop cannot be bought/But rap can be sold/Thus rap can get cold/Hip-hop's forever hot/Cause we are hip-hop.[94]

Chuck D, highly respected hip hop elder statesman and former member of legendary crew Public Enemy, is unequivocal in his eulogy to hip hop: 'Hip-hop's a subculture... Swooped on by vultures'. His poem, entitled 'Hip vs. Rap', is intended to disabuse anyone labouring under the misapprehension that hip hop and rap are the same. They are, he is adamant, 'Two different definitions'. This thesis has explored some educational and artistic projects and practices attempting to creatively apply this notion of a radical fissure or breach in hip hop culture. These projects have invoked hip hop versus rap as a mobilising point for, variously, cultural regeneration, cultural reclamation, personal development, and artistic and social experimentation. What this thesis has shown are instances of idealistic outreach employing hip hop culture in public spaces to build upon and expand people's stock of aesthetic, ethical and linguistic codes, particularly where these are perceived to derive from some variant of rap. The hip hop education and outreach featured in this study, I have argued, shows the mounting of an ethical challenge in the name of hip hop to the latter's corruption in word and deed by rap.

I have thus attempted to show how certain aspects of hip hop culture and history strongly promote pedagogic and reflexive tendencies which find their fullest expression in the figure of the hip hop organic or movement intellectual. This figure, operating publicly in the mode of edutainment, has stalked these pages. In an effort to more fully illuminate the hip hop organic intellectual, I propose to devote a substantial portion of this chapter to an exposition of a hip hop poem performed live in a lecture theatre. The poem, 'Journey of the Spoken Word', is intended by its author, hip hop poet and teacher, Tuggs Starr, to be a

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[94] Chuck D, in, Miller (2008).

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pedagogic commentary on some key hip hop versus rap themes. Programmatic, something of manifesto even, it hails the arrival of a post-hip hop counter public sphere modeled on the idea of edutainment. I use the term 'model' here intentionally and normatively. I will claim that the poem and its performance are at once a model or template for hip hop edutainment and are modeling it in real-time. By creatively incorporating the poetic trope of the 'journey' as intellectual awakening, it displays some familiar hip hop versus rap vices of idealism and moralizing imprecation. But before turning to this poem, I propose first to draw together key critical themes explored in the empirical chapters of this study.

Hip hop versus rap is essentially composed of two crucially related problematics: 1) it narrates and enacts struggles over the rightful identity and ownership of hip hop culture; 2) as pedagogy and edutainment it is potentially the site for the sequestering and regulation of young people's informal modes of expression and association. In other words, hip hop versus rap is, centrally, a drama about cultural deeds of title and cultural freedom. I will deal with the first part of this formation by discussing chapters four and seven, before turning to the second part in a discussion of chapters five and six.

Hip hop's markedly antiphonic battle aesthetic has encouraged endless didactic and critical injunctions in artistic and polemical form on hip hop's 'constitutive limit'. What is 'real' and authentic, who is parasitical and 'fronting', who belongs in the culture and who does not. The social marginality out of which hip hop originally emerges, part of a much longer sequence of black diaspora political struggles, promotes a rhetorical tendency in hip hop culture of 'backward looking forward', hagiography, and a constant genuflecting to mythic foundations. Hip hop's didactic tendencies are thus both incipient and highly evolved from the start. Hip hop deployed educationally is seen as expressing hip hop's sacred core. The pedagogic is higher 'consciousness' and the socially functional in black vernacular culture. It is messages of cultural uplift, ethical duty, caring for the community, respecting tradition, and hip hop's essential rootedness in the actions of African griots. Conversely, the profane in hip hop is anti-educational, nihilistic. It is frivolous, hedonistic, anomic, individualistic, venal, materialistic, carnal, and relentlessly Americanised. Moreover, to the 'neo-traditional' 'head', the profane in hip hop is culturally un-centred, deficient in melanin, and

ultimately capable of causing grave harm. In a rhetorical act of excommunication, the one is accorded the honorific *hip hop*, whilst the other, stripped of the culture, becomes mere *rap*.

The Afrocentric counter-public sphere being elaborated in chapter four featured hip hop elders who see it as their duty to alert younger consumers of rap music within their racial family to the true nature of what they are listening to. This heuristic and moral undertaking proceeds in large measure through a pedagogy of cultural criticism, shining a light into hidden or taken-for-granted recesses. The specific strategic form it takes is of a ritualised public demonstration of cultural unmasking. The appellant is placed in the dock, is prodded, exposed and then condemned. There is a sense of summary justice being handed out born of a need for the community or 'family' to speak back and to vent its frustration. Balance is not the point. The community requires an opportunity for common-sense to prevail, for it to speak truth to the corporate powers behind the commercial rap bewitching and exploiting its younger members. Profanity, violence, hyper-sexuality, celebrations of criminality and the exalting of materialism are all the things commercial and nihilistic rap is charged with. The lurid, racialised phenomenology of 'street' youth culture of media lore – gangs, knives, guns, drugs, black bodies, modes of apparel – is literally being put on trial (Noble, 2005). 'Negative' rap and youth, shoehorned into cause and effect: the one is incontrovertible evidence of the moral state of the other. To reveal these things in their true colours, therefore, is in part to alert, to confront and to awaken youth from their complacency. It is also to validate the frustrations of community elders, to salve their sense of despair, to galvanise and mobilise collective action around a cultural politics of musical regulation and self-vigilance and to prefigure a positive alternative.

With, as I have shown, its concern for the literal chemical corruption of passive, defenceless youthful bodies by rap, this neo-traditionalism has a strongly bio-political aspect. Reciprocally, this involves efforts to settle hip hop's cultural boundary disputes and resolve deeds of title. This means questioning in a racialogical key whether whites have any legitimate role to play in a hip hop culture that will always be the cultural property of its original subaltern social constituency. Hence, the particular topography being plotted here in the name of the racialized family requires the ceaseless invoking of cultural boundaries and is radically inimical to transversal alliances and expansionary encounters. That all this

involves the co-presence of a profoundly conservative ethno-obscurantism with moments of sharply critical awareness of historical structures of white supremacist oppression makes for an intriguing if deeply problematic basis for a progressive social movement. Ultimately, such a cultural politics is bathetic. Its critique rings with shrill denunciations familiar, ironically, from white conservative moral panics in the US with their pathologizing of black culture and consequent calls for censorship. Something that George Lipsitz in his book *Footsteps in the Dark* has brilliantly savaged. This neo-traditional mobilisation of hip hop might be full of energy, idealism and sincerity. But at a substantive level much of what it is propounding is both factually and politically questionable. A cavalier disposition toward proof and a notion of history and research evidently driven by vindicatory, therapeutic imperatives at best constructs a rather embattled counter public sphere, at worst forms the basis of a highly regressive educational model.

Against this, the reflexive attempt by whites and black in alliance in chapter seven to carve out a multiculture hip hop, one that openly acknowledges and deliberates over the difficulty of white presence in the historical context of white supremacism, proves philosophically contrapuntal to such expressions of racial essentialism. It is significant, therefore, that the transversal lines traced in a reflexive, multiculture hip hop theatre produce regulatory concerns of a quite different order to those issuing from situations where racial borders are sovereign. The whole debate humorously anatomized in the 'The backpacker's Dilemma' over white people's use of the 'N' word proceeds on the basis that white people are – notwithstanding ongoing problems – an established part of hip hop culture. This is about negotiating, critiquing and developing the terms of cultural membership through the phony war of hip hop's battle aesthetic - not about highlighting the existential threat posed to hip hop by the 'colouring of culture'. So that attention is focused on public displays of stylistic 'excellence' and philosophical acuity in such a way as to undermine the mystic primordial claims of epidermis. What this underscores is something intrinsic to hip hop culture. That is, the dialectic between codification and repetition, on the one hand, and formal innovation and development, on the other. In this dialectic, white artists are seen as eminently capable of contributing not only to hip hop's expanded/expanding purview and social composition, but also enlarging the chromatic range of its expressions. Of all the 'new hip hop practices' I

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encountered in my fieldwork work it was thus hip hop theatre that seemed to offer the fullest possibilities for creative 'polycultural' encounters. And this is not least because hip hop theatre is by definition pushing at the limits of hip hop's forms. What this does is to make the culture hospitable to a wider range of 'others' and their 'colours'. And these 'other's, in turn, not only bring a range of aesthetic skills drawn from an array of practices and conventions, but also a range of stories for exploring theatrically from beyond hip hop's generic urban imaginary.

In chapter five my informant, Roger, was similarly, in his writing, performance and teaching, attempting to till cultural terrain beyond neo-traditional limits; to cultivate a radically aslant and un-centred hip hop. In regulatory terms, Roger's riposte to the species of hip hop repetition that is 'posturing' is that hip hop has a properly 'amorphous' character. Hence, his declared solution – both as an artist and a teacher - to posturing and reduction is to probe and foreground the homologies between the traditions and practices which have enabled him to mature and develop artistically and stylistically as a hip hop artist. This includes the oral Trinidadian cultures of his childhood, developments in contemporary poetry, and hip hop's radical sampling aesthetic. Through modes of 'distilled insinuation', or periphrasis, e.g. 'show don't tell', Roger claims to have developed a hip hop aesthetic and pedagogy free of stale stereotypes and limiting trappings. However, as I argued in chapter five, there is a profound tension here between a valorising of hip hop's transgressive, aesthetically aslant possibilities and hip hop's mobilising for 'personal development'. In his haste to ensure the democratic credentials of his pedagogy, I believe Roger in danger of seeing his 'periphrastic central voice' recuperated by the therapeutic drift of recent youth cultural policy (see Beech, 2008; Leslie, 2007; Wallinger and Warnock, 2000).

Hip hop for personal development poses some difficult questions which in my view have thus far received surprisingly little scholarly and critical attention. When hip hop is presented in strategic terms as a 'bridge' between mainstream modes of cultural literacy and the profane vernaculars youth develop and exchange autonomously, largely below the radar of adult governance, what are the cultural politics of this? Are these cultures now seen in evaluative terms as equivalent? Is the previous hierarchical arrangement which historically allocated esteem and social station based on opposed notions of high and

popular culture now in such disrepute that bridging in this context is genuinely about conferring previously withheld recognition? Twenty years on from Paul Willis's call for the 'symbolic creativity' of youth to be given institutional recognition and material support popular youth culture and its ever expanding range of technological mediums now has a strong foothold both within the mainstream school curriculum and extra-curricular activities, as well as in youth work. I would argue that if anything this level of embrace of popular youth culture in the name of cultural democracy, relevancy and pluralism is in danger of subordinating any aspirations for a transformative learning experience in the humanities to entertainment. The effect is to crowd out the possibility for more artistically and intellectually challenging educational material and to de-legitimise the broader knowledge, expertise and vision of educators. What place in this vision for the sort of cultural and political education Roger received in his youth, not to mention the shimmering artistic uncertainties of periphrasis? Hip hop in the classroom has all sorts of potentially beneficial applications and roles to play, not least in contributing to a critical sociology of culture (see Giroux, 2006). I also believe there a place for a 'polycultural' comparative educational praxis in which, to borrow the sampling metaphor, different registers are brought into an aesthetic and social encounter with homologies and resonances explored. So, for example, the oblique, rhythmically meandering colloquial soliloquies of rap emcee MF Doom could be examined alongside the streams of consciousness of early modern 'automatic poetry'. But this would be because these specimens represent aesthetic and social innovations in their own right and are therefore deserving of analytic attention. Roger would no doubt regard such discriminating injunctions as hegemonic but I believe they ultimately honour the periphrastic aesthetic he so eloquently vaunts.

This brings me to the educational channelling of grime emcee flow, the topic of chapter six. Leaving aside the precise character and merits of particular examples, emceeing from 'the back of the estate' trades a-priori, if only implicitly, on its rejection of mainstream ethical norms and aesthetic values. It is often, to repeat hip hop educator, V, on a deliberately 'thug thing'. But it is precisely by being in deficit in this way that grime emceeing - sonically dissonant and attitudinally offensive, eliciting public anxiety and censure - indexes the social and lexical alienation which invites responses that mingle pleas for tolerance and official

sponsorship with calls for reform. Gordon speaks of a creative tension – even a cleavage - between the radically postmodern nature of hip hop's form – he is referring to its aesthetics - and the frequently conventional character of its content, particularly its lyrics (Gordon, 2005: 377). Grime narratives of post-code patriotism and martial, sexual, sartorial and artistic self aggrandizement may or may not be grounded in truth and autobiography. What is undeniable, however, is that their vernacular is rudely announced in a particular discursive constitution and semiotic coding. But more than this, in grime the linguistic *is* for the most part utterly subordinate to the sonic and the musical. The slip-shod nature of the rhymes, particularly those created by young people in the churn of daily relations, with their seemingly arbitrary or entirely functional choice of words, simile overload and mixed metaphors result in compositions artlessly if potently flooded with the demotic. Grime music is thus uncontaminated by mainstream literacy, its mode of consciousness; it is both other *and* conventional. For a start, the words in the lyrics are often woven on the loom of a subaltern existence lived out in frequently bleak, atomised ex-working-class urban communities where a paranoid fortress like mentality seems increasingly to prevail (Reynolds, 2007). Here popular mass culture of the kinetically audio-visual variety is hegemonic. The aesthetic, cosmology and lore of grime owe much therefore to a peculiarly contemporary and urban everyday subaltern phenomenology. This is one where internecine rivalries, mundane survival struggles, and mythologized milieus and solidarities are folded experientially into a multimedia, satellite, digitised and streamed mobile and domestic sensorium of relentless excitation (see Berardi, 2009: 96-98).

Gesturing to the ideas of Friederike Nietzsche, anthropologist Michael Taussig asserts that 'some things, the important things in human life and history, are motivated not only by rules but by the need to break them' (Taussig, 2006: ix). The channeling of grime flow has all the appearances of efforts by the state to find a viable means to civilize its internal barbarians. That is to say, that whatever attraction youth's fungible vernaculars might exert on present-day adults in control, their capacity for generating anxiety is far greater. So that inviting these cultures in 'off the street' and giving them a platform is only *ostensibly* about extending parity, opportunity and recognition, and rather more about rendering the creator and creation legible to those in power. Taussig attempts to set forth an ethnography of

estrangement in which neither the 'known' nor 'unknown' is so easily recuperated. He writes:

> Bataille would have called this sovereignty, meaning the mastery of nonmastery, and in this he followed Nietzsche who complained that we don't think sufficiently about the fact that when we explain the unknown we reduce it too quickly to the known...We strip the unknown of all that is strange. We show it whose boss...We tolerate neither ambiguity nor that which can't conform.

(Taussig, 2006: viii)

Howe writes of the pivotal importance in certain colonial era writings on African natives of making the 'other' and their ideas legible so as to build bridges between this 'otherness' and the rationalism of the colonial powers (Howe, 1999: 157). He speaks of how the Belgian missionary Father Placide Tempels sought to publicise to his compatriots the philosophy of the Bantu language group in order to 'build on the elements it had in common with Christianity, purge it of its illogical and 'magical' residues, and so lead the natives towards a more civilized, morally perfect life' (ibid). This has resonances with the forms of governance of hip hop dealt with in this study: stripping both the 'known' and the 'unknown' of anything strange; making the *illegible* legible; civilizing the offensive; bringing the unruly under rational control.

Poet Man's Quest

As promised I will now offer an interpretation of a spoken word poetry performance as a 'case study' of hip hop edutainment. The performance begins with the hip hop poet Tuggs declaring to the audience that 'I want to take your time to have a conversation with you about the journey of the spoken word from an African perspective'. He essentially provides a synopsis of his key lecture themes in a poem called 'Journey of the Spoken Word'. However, it is quickly evident that he is also allegorising his own biographical trajectory through hip hop into this art form. As he says later in the presentation: 'Now with regards to when I look at my journey into spoken word, for me to make poetry make sense to me, I had to look at what has my specific journey into poetry been'. The narrator of 'Journey of the Spoken Word' is superhero alias 'Poet Man': critic and activist, excavator of history; setting records straight and duelling enemies. The basic narrative arc of the poem, the 'journey' of spoken word, is hip hop's historical rise, its fall, and its resurrection and

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redemption through the emergence of a (post-hip hop) spoken word global public sphere; one 'brought back to bring back the balance in our creative brilliance' as Poet Man avers in his alliterative closing remarks. Poet Man's authority to pronounce on matters of hip hop history and to directly castigate its betrayers – those 'so call rappers don forgot their job description' – is bound up with the biographical persona he artfully projects in the poem, through vocabulary, tonality, rhythmic flow and delivery, of cultural insider, expert witness and adept. For example, by peppering his lines throughout with turns of phrase and usages from the global idiolect of hip hop English such as 'back in the day', 'eejuts [idiots]', 'switchers [turncoats], 'wack' [sub-standard], 'down with' 'don't even be', 'dealing with', and 'beef' he anchors his spoken word performance both stylistically and thematically in rap emceeing. Furthermore, as Poet Man launches into an inventory of wrongs committed by modern-day rappers the pitch, tempo and resonance of his voice builds to an angry pay-load evoking the 'pioneer' emcees – Public Enemy, KRS1 – whose righteous path has been abandoned.

The poem opens with the paradoxical trope of spoken word as both contemporary and archaic: an 'evolving cycle', proof that all culture and cultural production marks a simultaneous return and departure: 'Let me introduce you to the beginning of – the ending of something which is the beginning of something new/Like occupying small-times in life's evolving cycle'. This goes with his claim elsewhere that spoken word, being the unadorned, oral quintessence of rap, is both hip hop's 'younger sibling' and 'great great grandfather'. The spoken word poet/superhero 'Poet Man', ranges across historical time imaginatively, journeying to cultural nodal points where he retrieves and proclaims forgotten, overlooked or repressed histories and practices: 'Scribed by poets informing audiences of past life experiences'. As 'scribe' and 'informer', the poet is as much medium - a midwife to cultures past and present - as originator and cultural innovator in his own right. Perhaps more so given that the Afrocentric foregrounding of poetry's social role implies a critique of Western individualist notions of creativity. Poet Man traces a familiar black vernacular cultural continuum from 'spirituals', 'gospels' and reminiscences of 'the West African High-Life' and 'rapping of the passion of four hundred years of enslavement', through 'the coming of the blues' to 'beating skill down lyrics over the sound of sampled beats'. Echoing his own

educational and political awakening, and again underlining the social role of poetry, Poet Man hails 'those early pioneers' – Public Enemy, KRS1 – who 'followed their call for instructions'. This suggests that the original impetus to use oral expression to, as he puts it, 'ignite' 'dormant souls into action' arises from duties owed to the community; conscripted by a trans-historical spirit consecrated in previous generations rather than through obedience to a whimsical muse.

Poet Man underlines the importance of maintaining the cultural chain, offering this counter-historical conjecture: what if pivotal figures from hip hop had judged the personal burden too great and refused the 'call'? 'Imagine...if Chuck D said: 'who really wants to be a public's enemy at all''. But for all the 'raw' greatness achieved by such 'pioneers' in their heyday, Poet Man has sadly to relate the fact that hip hop at that very moment took a deliberate fall. It wilfully suborned the trans-historical *geist* of black functional communicative expression to the culturally extrinsic interests of white corporate money. Poet Man figures this as an unequal competition between (indeed a colliding of) divergent cosmologies. Black vernacular culture, on the one hand, and 'mainstream' white culture, on the other: the expansiveness of 'spirituals', 'passion' and 'soul' versus the instrumentality of the financial bottom-line. So in this moralised romantic narrative, where culture is implicitly constitutive, variously enabling and constraining depending on its source and identity, there is a familiar equivocation at work in terms of where to attribute ultimate blame: to the seducer or the seduced? Poet Man first of all lays the blame at the foot of hip hop which allowed itself to be captivated by easy money: hip hop 'bopped over to the mainstream and we exchanged our soul for their goal'. But then using a metonym for both race and social position: 'white-collar musical manufactures', he locates the act of enticement within a larger historical sequence of 'mainstream' cultural cooptation. Hip hop, he is saying, is vulnerable to these culturally imperialistic forces with their access to vast financial and hegemonic capital. The result is an attenuated consumer product carefully modified for middle-of-the-road palates. Poet Man thus laments that: 'expression of the beats has been beaten down into weakened covers'. But this process of dilution has a more obviously baleful aspect. For it has also involved the successful commercial packaging of black proletarian masculinity as anti-social, violent, materialistic, and sexually rapacious. Blackness in hip hop – coeval with the latter's

global conquest - becomes a raced, classed and gendered synecdoche for extreme machismo, hyper-heterosexuality and peacock sartorial display; one which at a psycho-social level of projective desire exercises as strong a pull on young white male consumers of rap music and as on young blacks.

But this deviant identity is for Poet Man steeped in cultural values and ethics wholly alien to conscious hip hop culture, with tragic and farcical consequences. It is not surprising, he seems to be saying, that hip hop heads turned by white corporate money and the individualistic ideology which underwrites it - the newly rich and pumped up rap stars that have emerged from this cultural conjunction – now turn on each other and start a civil-war. Poet Man reports the way in which with deadly seriousness these latter have enacted a series of high profile, mediatised feuds and combats for the benefit of a decadent public hungry for gladiatorial slaughter and the prurient display of black flesh, replete with theatricalised flaunting of diamonds and expensive apparel. His tone becoming more shrill and intense and his words dripping with contempt and righteous indignation, he takes these individuals to task for their triviality: 'While people are starving you're dealing with some miniscule issues bro/200 hundred dollar shoes? You aint from no ghetto, see ghettoes I know don't even be seeing diamonds let alone wearing them'. With an astringent nostalgia that is part utopian yearning, part history lesson, part rebuke, Poet Man laments that 'Back in the day your real rap would have talked about this' (e.g. urban poverty and glaring wealth inequalities). Instead modern day 'reality rap' in its narcissism merely chronicles and elevates to importance internecine disputes and perceived personal slights amid the mandatory ghetto 'hood' iconography and its cheaply obtained reflected authenticity; the latter serving both as a foil to ostentatious material display and a signifier of black proletarian virility. Waving an apocalyptic red flag he thus dramatically depicts these developments within hip hop culture as a violent and tragic severing of the 'the last link' with black history. However, such poetic overstatement is both strategic and conventional. In spoken word, performing fears of black cultural annihilation through an apocalyptic rhetoric of denunciation is precisely how it once announced its arrival as an alternative to the counterfeit turn in hip hop. The seemingly ritualised restatement of this fall narrative serves in spoken word as an incantation for keeping such annihilation at bay and as a

warrant of authenticity, consciousness and exemplary deeds. In the work of poets such as Tuggs Starr it has a dual pedagogic function. One, to marshal adherents and ensure the maintenance of an attitude of vigilance, and two, to reach out to and awaken younger generations of ignorant souls beguiled by some or other latest strain of commercial rap. For Poet Man, violating the social function of hip hop is tantamount to a rapper having 'forgot their job description', a job description bequeathed to them as novices by the historically rooted culture. Worse, they have wilfully elected to ignore the fact that their own creative talents merely confirm that they 'were the chosen ones'. In other words, despite his alluding to the lure of corporate money and the depredations of the wider social structure, Poet Man seems to plump in the end for voluntarism. The decline of hip hop was primarily traceable to individual rappers choosing to ignore the duties and obligations owed to their culture.

Those who have betrayed hip hop, however, – Poet Man calls them 'switchers' – have in dialectic fashion seeded the ground for hip hop's renewal through the spoken word poetry scene. He does not enter into the historical details of this phenomenon, pausing only to pledge that 'we've exorcised those demons'. Instead he hails the emergence of a figure that will exalt in the simplicity and directness of oral poetry and make good on hip hop's initial progressive promise. Hip hop's decline has given 'birth to an elite squad of excellence who take exception to poets being seen as inferior creations'. Spoken word incorporates the feistiness of rap with the dogged idealism of an artistic practice which in the west has long endured on the social and cultural margins. In the concluding section of the poem Poet Man apostrophises this emergent figure (himself) in a hectic display of spoken word sound technique and rhythmic flow. For example, alliteration: 'elite squad of excellence who take exception'; and 'we execute excellence, excite audiences...' Or assonance: 'Poet man travels hostile lands and mans be like 'damn who on earth invited a Jedi Mac to the slam'; and 'See I don't write poetry I just channel my inner chi, close my eyes feel the vibe and let the pen be my scribe.' This last line enacts the historical cycle attributed by Poet Man to spoken word at the very start of the poem. In so doing it marks a final return to his central anti-individualist thesis that the poet is properly a channel for creativity energy from both within and beyond *being* as much as the egotistical source; an energy, at once ancestral,

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metaphysical and mystical; and when used properly, enlightening and socially fortifying. As he sees it, the poet who understands this is placed to receive and to communicate 'some heavy mental vision sent down from above'. An artistry subordinated to social purposes demands a hybrid practice, however. Poet Man insists that the spoken word poet must at once entertain, innovate linguistically, be a storyteller and news caster, emcee rhyme, and, most importantly, teach. A hip hop 'job description' committed to memory means having to be a 'poet slash wordsmith slash griot slash rapper, educator, edutainer slash edutainer'. Spoken word in this account therefore represents the possibility for the historic return of hip hop culture to its ancestral roots and obligations. But these repeated 'slashes' are perhaps also the echo of a ceaseless rhetorical ground clearing by poets such as Tuggs Starr for whom 'the beginning of a resurrected art-form' manifestly calls for an attitude of extreme vigilance. Furthermore, if Tuggs' narrative is meant in the best Afrocentric tradition as both tragic and progressive – in the words of Ron Eyerman a 'backward looking movement into the future' (Eyerman, 2004: 82) – it is also, like so much of hip hop, studded with plunder from modern-day popular culture. Hence, with the relish of a film geek Poet Man depicts the public quarrels between celebrity rappers as a 'black Star-Wars beef' peopled with characters 'Like Luke Skywalker swinging light sabres over hip hop brothers'. In the end, the personage earnestly declaring the arrival of 'a resurrected art-form' is by his own lights an imaginative composite of 'hood' street grandee and mythic Hollywood creation: Poet man is 'a Jedi Mac'.

Perry states that 'the rapper or MC is both subject and artist in much hip hop composition' (Perry, 2004: 38). Of this self-narration she says 'the MC usually occupies a self-proclaimed location as a representative of his or her community or group – the everyman or everywoman of his or her hood' (ibid: 39). In provoking a 'sociological interpretation of the music' the MC is seeking to convey 'the real' (ibid). This is an arresting image, invoking a hip hop narrative edutainment of sociological reportage, an artistic mode bringing private and public into dialectic relation. Tuggs' performance manages in many ways to do this and certainly offers an access point to hip hop versus rap debates. Moreover, his samplings from popular culture are a light-hearted counterpoint to the more substantive cultural political claims of the narrative, working against the vein of purism that is an inevitable

consequence of the poem's message. Tuggs Starr's performance instances how even a neo-traditional counter-public sphere can offer a space of cultural exploration. But on that: the poem enunciates a disciplinary call which goes beyond the symbolic iteration of vernacular communal practices and generational hierarchical traditions. 'The Journey of the Spoken Word' sought to identify the source of hip hop's decline into mere rap music. It posed the question – never resolved by Tuggs: does responsibility for this state of affairs lie ultimately with corporate exploiters of hip hop or those – black producers and consumers - who willingly succumb to exploitation. This ambiguity sits in the very capillaries of hip hop versus rap, finding expression in a disciplinary code that reproduces, albeit from within hip hop culture, explicitly conservative critiques of rap music. For all its panache, and for all its claims to be concerned with history and education, in the end this is a hip hop edutainment of proscription and prescription. For as Lipsitz writes, 'the attack on rap not only suppresses social memory; it also silences social theory' (Lipsitz, 2007: 172), in the process substituting a much needed structural enquiry into the causes of social alienation with an ultimately superficial cultural analysis of symptoms. It confutes and conflates complex causes and effects.

Beyond repressive (in)tolerance

As I have shown, as a project of social control hip hop versus rap finds one of its avenues in mainstream educational incorporation, another in Afrocentric efforts to purge hip hop of its corrupt elements. What is common to these projects is that each is at points set upon a civilizing mission that essentially involves attempts to sequester discrepant subjectivities and a mandating of autonomy. For the neo traditionalists, the topography of racial belonging and pride requires a particular kind of 'right living' and consciousness. This underlines the way in which efforts to defend cultural boundaries require the vigilant marking out of personal, ethical and cognitive ones. But, crucially, this demonstrates a convergence upon regulatory imperatives beyond the immediate bounds of any 'family' or intra cultural dispute. As I have discussed at length, the ambiguous cultural politics I am here referring to is discernible at a number of levels in hip hop versus rap. To take a key example, 'consciousness' in hip hop 'edutainment' frequently shades into self-help notions of personal development and normative ideas of 'self-care', futurity, 'seeds of

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industriousness', and entrepreneurialism (see Pardue, 2004). Moreover, in both hip hop pedagogy and hip hop lyricism there is a prevalence of confessional themes of 'self-care' and making reparation. In this de-emphasizing of the social lurks a stubborn strain of conservatism in black diaspora political thought traceable to Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey (see Gilroy, 2004A; Moses, 1999) - as well as more contemporary individualistic mores (see McGee, 2005; Reynolds, 2007). However, as a (re)educational project it also expresses wider policy concerns over risk management, self-actualization and individualized trajectories in conditions of ontological uncertainty (Giddens, 2004). A project of using hip hop reflexively to promote self care/development and reparation making amongst at-risk youth can in practice mean the corralling and channeling of groups whose exclusion and alienation indexes the woefully inadequate nature of the wider social and political imaginary. Hip hop used therapeutically (see, Allen 2005; Tyson, 2002) thus amounts, in my view, to an incursion by 'actuary welfare' (Rose, 1999) into those informal modes of exchange and expression with at least vestigual 'resistive capacity' to disadvantaged youth.

The utilitarian starting point of agencies charged with control of youth, however, means that expanding their domain in this way is not referable to an adversative ethics or politics. Seeking to dissolve the borders of spontaneous and elicited by mobilizing idioms and vernaculars birthed in a sense of social rejection and hypocrisy is essentially a matter for such agencies of developing ever more creative, flexible techniques of rational management and control (see Cohen, 1993). However, identifying from where the ultimate agency for this phenomenon derives is extremely difficult in practice. Could this be because 'above' and 'below' – 'underground' and 'mainstream' - are in fact philosophically far closer in 2010 than either side would care to admit (McGuigan, 2010)? From the beginning (see Chang, 2007), hip hop's popular cultural iconography, styles and mores made it a vehicle of profane modernity – albeit humorously and subversively. At the same, hip hop had always enunciated 'late-modern' themes of 'self help', expressive individualism and entrepreneurship. It is my contention that the pedagogy and bio-politics of hip hop edutainment make it extremely difficult in practice to disentangle municipal co-optation and 'cultural' messages of uplift (Binkley, 2007; Brown, 2005). This is not at all to suggest that

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the one is reducible to the other. It is, however, to declare that each, despite pious noises about 'community', has a normative stake in re-socialising and *forming* youthful subjects adapted to individualized conditions of risk (Brown, 2005). Moreover, that neither has as of yet constructed a viable political or educational project capable of critically addressing the profound social negativity of capitalist culture and its subordinate institutions and policies. But of course, any genuinely radical alternative would by definition actively countermand the 'dispersed' (Cohen, 1993) social control function of municipally funded youth provision and associated forms of welfare. This, I believe, makes a mockery of 'constructive opposition' and lends continued piquancy to modes of subcultural negation. Hip hop culture is still capable of providing an idiom and expressive repertoire for youthful acts 'below the radar'; the inchoate dissent of insubordinate speech and semiotic trespass (Beech and Roberts, 2000; Leslie, 2007; Roberts, 2004).

What all this bequeaths is highly equivocal and various. What do the new hip hop practices that feature in this study signify to the wider community of hip hop practitioners, young people, new audiences for hip hop, future artistic and educational collaborators from beyond its bounds, and policy makers? I will end by briefly hinting at some cultural resonances and suggesting something of a pedagogic re-visioning rather than laying down policy implications and recommendations. Chang's (2006) recent mapping of present-day evolutionary mutations within hip hop culture thirty odd years into its lifespan suggests a mature entity whose contours are increasingly indeterminate. A key factor in this is that hip hop has not only expanded globally but due to its longevity its demographic has correspondingly expanded also, meaning it is no longer the exclusive symbolic domain of black working-class youth and associated subcultures. Hip hop's aging has occurred during post-modernity and has been co-extensive with the rise of Black Studies in US universities and the emergence of Cultural Studies as an academic trans-discipline much of the world over (see Harrison, 2009). Hip hop has thus to a certain extent like much subculture been institutionalized and rendered legible to an educated readership through the scholarly gaze, and this is but a further instance of the cultural diffusion and hybridizing it has undergone in its history (Huq, 2007: 81). That hip hop's artistic and intellectual margins are expanding is widely evidenced (see Chang, 2006; Harrison, 2009; Miller, 2004; Miller, 2008). The modes

of 'consciousness' this attests to, in conjunction with some of the concrete practices being elaborated, also offers persuasive evidence for a feedback loop between parts of modern day hip hop and its scholarly exegesis and theorization. This then touches on what has become a staple of a certain sociological debate about postmodern society: does this phenomenon actually provide evidence of a *mature* – adult - post-subcultural hip hop culture? Or does it, rather, show a generation in the advanced capitalist world – a generation including academics in the humanities and social sciences - developmentally arrested in their adult long commitment to what is inescapably a culture of youth if not a youth culture (Gordon, 2005)? And does partial responsibility for the challenges of exercising any critical discrimination in how popular culture is used pedagogically with young people at all reside with the latter?

In this thesis I have attempted to consider the balance of forces between what is crushed and abridged in the sponsored elaboration of a post-hip hop counter public sphere and what is enabled, liberated even. It has been one of my aims to present this as a grounded theory, a radical contextualization, dealing with social and cultural issues that cannot be approached merely at the level of aesthetic or discourse analysis. Its conclusions have been as far as possible deliberately complicated and at a variety of levels, attempting to avoid and expose the dichotomous reductions of hip hop versus rap. Hence, one of its normative aims has been to skewer – always, however, as a hip hop aficionado - some hip hop canards and cant. My ultimate plea is for academics, researchers, teachers and cultural policy makers to discover or rediscover the capacity to make more exacting critical judgments where popular culture is concerned. To work with and support a broad range of expressive materials artistically, educationally and intellectually but in a pioneering rather than aesthetically permissive spirit, conceding nothing to functionalist demands and dealing with questions of engagement more robustly. This is linked fundamentally to a counterintuitive political conviction. Those of us at the frontline of youth arts educational provision should strongly resist the egalitarian urge and/or policy imperative to kill youth cultural expression with kindness.

Domesticating grime, rap and graffiti in the name of personal development or validation further shrinks the horizons of young people's informal association, further denuding the

everyday of spontaneity and expressive life. Underlying the creation of facilitated 'permission zones' for hip hop is an obsession with legibility and bringing everything aberrant under the compass of rational control, one which aspires to smooth out any discrepant urban textures and rough edges and so leave little room for genuine cultural difference (see Ferrell, 2001; Lefebvre, 2003). What is more, the consumer calculus behind mobilizing 'relevant' materials (see Binkley, 2007) in youth programmes betrays a cynical lack of educational ambition. The idea of 'meeting young people where they are' is deployed in policy terms as a seductive instrument of 'engagement' and 'participation'. The public face it vaunts to the young is of a democratically responsive adult world offering 'validation' and 'recognition' to neglected cultures and creative idioms languishing outside of formal and 'establishment' institutions. It makes a fetish of its egalitarian determination to banish anything antediluvian or elitist which might condescend to youth culture. But as I have shown, this 'recognition' is highly ambiguous. For the *soliciting* of 'barbarian' youth has a surveillance function; the *eliciting* of their 'barbarian' expression a civilizing mission. But if the determination of youth policy to keep young people securely within its bounds and to regulate their expression exposes the sham nature of its democratic claims, its whole legitimating architecture of 'cultural relevancy' and 'sensitivity' amounts to an abdication of adult responsibility for making available to young people potentially transformative cultural experiences. This instrumentalist, therapeutic approach to cultural education and policy promotes a cultural solipsism, affirming and consolidating existing identities and tastes. For rather than challenge young people's (understandable) reluctance to stray - in a spirit of critical adventure - beyond the familiar, it seeks to mobilize such parochialism for therapeutic ends, making a virtue of recapitulating the endless same. But this is not general a criticism of today's youth. The 'underground' and 'mainstream' who jointly 'deliver' this work are committed by their respective ideological agendas to the linguistically, philosophically and aesthetically proverbial. The mobilizing of cultural solipsism is symptomatic of these agendas *and* how they converge. The narrow cultural and political horizons I sketch here are those of both youth policy and some of hip hop's organic intellectuals. My plea is for youth arts workers and educators to actively countermand this tendency by seeking to facilitate encounters with cultural expressions and modes hitherto, perhaps, alien, irrelevant, or just unknown. There are numerous cultural 'others' innovative

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youth cultural programmes could profitably incorporate. And hip hop theatre for one can certainly contribute to this, offering abundant scope for experiments probing hip hop's 'negative capability'. But there is also a need for honesty and even modesty about what art can and cannot do so socially and politically. The anthropologist Paul Stoller relays an old story about the highly respected Songhay weavers of Niger. Three weavers sit together conversing. One muses how wonderful it would be to be able to 'weave the world' and in so doing set it straight, eliminating all conflict. The oldest weaver responds:

> ..."A blanket, my brothers, cannot change the world. It cannot rid the world of conflict, jealousies, and betrayals. We can weave the world, and that act brings to it the great beauty that our color and patterns provide. That beauty protects us, if only a little, from conflict, jealously, and betrayal."

> (Stoller, 2009: 117)

Global hip hop culture has certainly changed the world. Can it be a vehicle for ridding the world of 'conflict, jealousies, and betrayals'? I am not persuaded. Are the many and varied 'colors and patterns' it produces potentially enriching and vivifying? Of this I have no doubt.

In the meantime, in a spirit of freedom, play and cultural experimentation, I say let young people get on with their sometimes brilliant informal hip hop and grime expressions, unhindered - however much these may trouble liberal multicultural sensibilities. Leave them to their ciphers and 'battles'. This is not, I hasten to add, a call for 'repressive tolerance' of hip hop nihilism. Opponents of gangsta rap are quite right that capitalism has already seen to that in its brazen commodifying of a Hobbesian hip hop code of the street (Kitwana, 1994; Fisher, 2009). Hip hop's sometimes bleak and indecipherable cosmologies and rhythms are a negation of negation; a profane and discomforting reminder of the harsh social and cultural ecologies bequeathed to their creators (see Kelley, 1996). The latter's negativity is, of course, ultimately our own, part of our modern day anthropological formation (Castoriardis, 2007); the negativity neoliberal Western cultures at once aggressively manufacture and disavow (see Berardi, 2009). The brand of positive psychology behind the sacred/profane annexing of hip hop culture spectacularly fails to acknowledge this complex totality. Its 'saying is believing' credo leads it to confuse reification and 'conscious' refusal. Young people persuaded to exchange their negativity for 'life-bars' (see chapter six) are assured that 'through speech and remonstrance alone we can

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endlessly reform ourselves and each other' (Perry, 2004: 49-50). But this idea of achieving a personal redemption and transformation through the confessional narrative appealing to the 'conscious' roots of hip hop culture is a wan fantasy. It relies on a tendentious reading of hip hop history that in disavowing the profane suppresses hip hop's pragmatically syncretic constitution (see Chang, 2007). Hip hop culture has always been an adaptive, articulated response at the local level, creatively utilizing the available technologies and aesthetic materials near at hand. Thematically, hip hop has always been a philosophical composite, a fissile mixture of vernacular and mainstream concerns and mores. And indeed, the confessional narrative belongs precisely to the more utopian parts of hip hop's rhetorical repertoire, an aspect of its unstable ideological democracy (Perry, 2004).   To acknowledge this cultural continuity, however, does not thereby commit one to endorsing its mobilizing at an educational level for prophylactic or regulatory ends. It is entirely possible to enjoy and admire – indeed to understand - these vernacular expressions of overcoming alienation through critical self-reckoning without at the same time regarding them as a template for progressive action. In my view, that would be to mistake the dramatic rhetoric of hip hop's battle aesthetic for sociological analysis.

Shifting from therapeutic recognition of hip hop to a kind of benign neglect and disinterest could open up spaces for different and untried kinds of cultural explorations within arts, youth and educational institutions. Indeed, such 'neglect' might *indirectly* foster novel synergies with the idioms young people create and exchange informally with each other. Directly linked to this, however, is a broader plea for critical intellectuals, political activists and critical practitioners to take up the cause of children and young people's 'right to the city' (see Borden, 2001; Ferrell, 2001; Ward, 1990). As indicated in my introduction, the recent sponsorship of youth culture by policy is, in my reading, inversely related to the scope now available to young people to operate beyond the jurisdiction of formalized control and surveillance regimes. Genuine support for youth cultures would thus mean resisting and working to reverse the relentless enclosure and surveillance of our public spaces in the name of commercial profit and risk management by the double helix of state and capital.

So, finally, let's have hip hop history in schools and in youth clubs, yes, but not for propagandizing and instrumentalist ends, e.g. in the service of anti-gun, drug or knife campaigns; and certainly not for racial or cultural uplift. Rather, let's engage hip hop and associated popular and vernacular cultures deliberatively and analytically as part of a critical cultural studies or sociology of culture. This would be a pedagogy of de-familiarization and exercising the 'sociological imagination' rather than one of domestication and cultural vindication. To merely lionize hip hop's greats and condemn its alleged betrayers is an educational cul-de-sac. Meanwhile, members of the older 'hip hop generation' like Roger and Jonzi will hopefully continue to create potent hip hop expressions whose authenticity resides not in any B-Boy template but in an animating spirit of cultural miscegenation. It is not the antagonistic essence of *hip hop versus rap* I ultimately resile from but the confuting of ideology and art.

Appendix

Research Carried Out

Timeline of the study

The fieldwork for this thesis was spaced over broadly five phases, four of which were brief, one of which was extensive. The first of these, July 2006, was a month of weekly individual interviews and one observational session. The second, May 2008, comprised a single observational session. The third, October 2008 to July 2009, comprised a number of individual and focus group interviews, participant observation and observational sessions. The fourth, October 2009, comprised a single observational session. The fifth, March 2010, comprised two observational sessions.

Fieldwork

I was involved in thirty two distinct sessions of participant observation. I conducted eleven distinct observational sessions. The line between observation and participant observation is a problematic one. However, the criterion I am using here is between fieldwork involving high degrees of interaction with other 'participants' combined with immersive observation, and fieldwork in which I explicitly occupy the role of 'detached' observer and/or audience member, note-taking/logging in situ and consciously restricting any interaction to the minimum.

I conducted twenty interviews in total. Eighteen individual interviews and two focus group interviews. However, as I discuss in chapter one, I have incorporated the verbatim speech of many informants in this study based on public performances and conversational exchanges recorded or recollected during my interactions as a participant observer.

*Indicates pseudonym.

Individual interviews

Participant	Role	Organisation	Place of interview	Date	Duration
Roger Robinson	Hip hop poet/teacher	Independent/freelance	Foyles Bookshop, London	05/07/06	Two hours
Roger Robinson	''	''	Foyles Bookshop, London	17/07/06	Two hours
Roger Robinson	''	''	Foyles Bookshop, London	26/07/06	Two hours

Nick Howdle	Project Director	Sound Connections (Youth music and mentoring)	Rich Mix Centre, London	13/10/08	One hour
*Fran	Poet/teacher	national schools 'slam' poetry project	Cafe, Central London	11/11/08	One hour
*V	Hip hop teacher	Independent/freelance	Art gallery, Central London	04/12/08	One hour
*Nat	Rap emcee/hip hop poet/teacher	national schools 'slam' poetry project	Library, Central London	04/12/08	Two hours
*Joe	Poet/teacher	schools 'slam' poetry project	Arts centre, Central London	09/12/08	One and half hours
Roger Robinson	Hip hop poet/teacher	Apples and Snakes, literature development	Pub, Derby city centre	05/02/09	One hour
*Fran	Poet/teacher	national schools 'slam' poetry project	Poetry project base, Central London	09/02/09	Two and a half hours
'Marcus'	Hip hop dancer/theatre practitioner/teacher	Independent/freelance	Cafe, arts centre, Central London	04/04/09	Three hours
*Sol	Company Director	Marketing/PR Company (deals with hip hop clients)	Company premises, Central London	05/04/09	One hour
Cedar Lewisohn	Curator (author of *Street Art*)	Tate Britain, art gallery	Tate Britain, Central London	06/04/09	One hour
Christian Jeffrey	Director	Street Art Services (Marketing)	Hotel, Docklands	10/04/09	Two hours
Simon Porter	Hip hop poet/teacher	Independent/freelance	Simon's home	23/04/09	Two and a half hours
Marcus Willcocks	Coordinator of 'A Dialogue with Graffiti' project	Centre for the Design Against Crime, Central St Martin's School of Art	Central St Martin's School of Art	07/05/09	Two hours
Jo Gamper	Educational Projects Coordinator	Jonzi D Productions	Sadlers Wells Theatre	08/05/09	One hour
Jonzi D	Director	Jonzi D Productions	Sadlers Wells Theatre	19/06/09	One hour

Focus group interviews

Participants	Role	Organisation	Place of interview	Date	Duration
Years 8/9/10 secondary school pupils	Slam poetry workshop participants	*Penfield Comprehensive	School classroom	20/11/08	One hour
North London youth club attendees	Hip hop education project participants	*North London youth club	Computer room, North London youth club	21/11/06	One hour

Participant Observations

Event	Organisation	Activity	Venue	Date	Duration
'Hip Hop Versus Rap' public debate	Centreprise Literature Development	Audience member; observing/interacting with speakers and other audience members	Camden Centre, London	10/10/08	Three hours
'Hip Hop History' Lectures	TameRe House	Audience member; observing/interacting with speakers and other audience members; taking photos	London College of Communication	25/10/08	Four hours
'Cans Graffiti Festival' aftermath	Southbank Centre/Banksy	Audio logging impressions; taking photos; speaking with graffiti writers and passersby	Leeke Street, Lower Marsh, SE1	25/10/08	Two hours
'Public Graffiti Wall'	Camden Council	Writing graffiti; observing/interacting with facilitators and other participants	Swiss Cottage Library	30/10/08	Three hours
'Hip Hop History' Lectures	TameRe House	Audience member; observing/interacting with speakers and other audience members; taking photos	London College of Communication	01/11/08	Four hours

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'Hip Hop History' Lectures	TameRe House	Audience member; observing/interacting with speakers and other audience members; taking photos	London College of Communication	08/11/08	Four hours
'Cans Graffiti Festival' aftermath	Southbank Centre/Banksy	Audio logging impressions; taking photos; speaking with graffiti writers and passersby	Leeke Street, Lower Marsh, SE1	08/11/08	Two hours
'Hip Hop History: Early UK Hip Hop Flyer Exhibition'/Book Launch	TameRe House	observing/interacting with attendees and organisers; taking photos	London College of Communication	11/11/08	Three hours
'Grime Hip Hop Education Project'	North London Youth Club	observing/interacting with participants, facilitators and organisers; taking photos	*North London Youth Club	14/11/08	Four hours
'Hip Hop History' Lectures	TameRe House	Audience member; observing/interacting with speakers and other audience members; taking photos	London College of Communication	15/11/08	Four hours
'Slam Poetry in Schools twilight INSET session'	national schools 'slam' poetry project	Participating in writing and performance workshop; observing/interacting with participants and facilitator; taking photos	Poetry project base, Central London	18/11/08	Three hours
Schools Slam poetry workshop	national schools 'slam' poetry project	Co-facilitating writing and performing workshop; observing/interacting with participants and facilitator; taking photos	*Penfield Secondary School, East London	20/11/08	Six hours
Schools Slam poetry workshop	national schools 'slam' poetry project	Co-facilitating writing and performing workshop; observing/interacting with participants and facilitator; taking photos	*Haden Secondary School, East London	25/11/08	Six hours

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Schools Slam poetry workshop	national schools 'slam' poetry project	Co-facilitating performing workshop; observing/interacting with participants and facilitator; taking photos	*Penfield Secondary School, East London	27/11/08	Three hours
Schools Slam poetry workshop	national schools 'slam' poetry project	Co-facilitating writing and performing workshop; observing/interacting with participants and facilitator; taking photos	*Lescott Secondary School, East London	02/12/08	Six hours
Schools Slam poetry workshop	national schools 'slam' poetry project	Co-facilitating writing and performing workshop; observing/interacting with participants and facilitator; taking photos	*Tristan Academy Secondary School, East London	08/12/08	Three hours
Schools Slam poetry workshop	national schools 'slam' poetry project	Co-facilitating writing and performing workshop; observing/interacting with participants and facilitator; taking photos	*Crowden Secondary School, East London	09/12/08	Three hours
Schools Slam poetry workshop	national schools 'slam' poetry project	Co-facilitating writing and performing workshop; observing/interacting with participants and facilitator; taking photos	*Tristan Academy Secondary School, East London	10/12/08	Three hours
'Grime Hip Hop Education Project'	North London Youth Club	observing/interacting with participants, facilitators and organisers; taking photos	*North London Youth Club	12/12/08	Three hours
Schools Slam poetry workshop	national schools 'slam' poetry project	observing/interacting with workshop participants and facilitator; taking photos	*Haden Secondary School, East London	17/12/08	Six hours
Schools Slam poetry Showcase	national schools 'slam' poetry project	observing/interacting with performers, facilitators and audience members; taking photos	Central London Arts Centre	04/02/09	Three and half hours

Hip Hop Theatre Laboratory	Jonzi D Productions	Participating in writing and performance workshop; observing/interacting with participants, facilitators and organisers	Talawa Theatre, London N1	16/03/09	Three and half hours
Hip Hop Theatre Laboratory	Jonzi D Productions	Participating in writing and performance workshop; observing/interacting with participants, facilitators and organisers	Talawa Theatre, London N1	17/03/09	Three and half hours
Hip Hop Theatre Laboratory	Jonzi D Productions	Participating in writing and performance workshop; observing/interacting with participants, facilitators and organisers	Talawa Theatre, London N1	18/03/09	Three and half hours
Hip Hop Theatre Laboratory	Jonzi D Productions	Participating in writing and performance workshop; observing/interacting with participants, facilitators and organisers	Talawa Theatre, London N1	19/03/09	Three and half hours
Hip Hop Theatre Laboratory	Jonzi D Productions	Participating in writing and performance workshop; observing/interacting with participants, facilitators and organisers	Talawa Theatre, London N1	20/03/09	Three and half hours
Hip Hop Theatre Laboratory	Jonzi D Productions	Participating in writing and performance workshop; observing/interacting with participants, facilitators and organisers	Talawa Theatre, London N1	21/03/09	Three hours

Hip Hop Theatre Laboratory	Jonzi D Productions	Participating in writing and performance workshop; observing/interacting with participants, facilitators and organisers	Sadlers Wells Theatre, London EC1	22/03/09	Three hours
Hip Hop Theatre Laboratory Showcase	Jonzi D Productions	Rehearsal/public performance/public after show discussion; observing/interacting with participants, facilitators and organisers	Soho Theatre, London W1	22/03/09	Four hours
'A Dialogue with Graffiti Project', Centre for Design Against Crime	Central St Martin's School of Art	observing/interacting with project organisers	Central St Martin's School of Art, London WC1	25/03/09	Four hours
Designing Out Crime Association Seminar (illegal graffiti)	Designing Out Crime Association	observing/interacting with participants, facilitators and organisers	Central St Martin's School of Art, London WC1	27/03/09	Five hours
Schools Slam poetry Showcase	national schools 'slam' poetry project	observing/interacting with performers, facilitators and audience members; taking photos	Central London Arts Centre	30/04/09	Three and half hours
'Book Slam' Spoken Word performance evening	Patrick Neate	observing/interacting with performers and audience members	Tabernacle Centre, London, W11	25/06/09	Four hours

Observational Sessions

Event	Organisation	Activity	Venue	Date	Duration
Spoken Word performance evening	Fuel	Observer/audience member	Great Eastern Hotel, London, EC2	19/07/06	Two hours
Cans Graffiti Festival	Southbank Centre/Banksy	Observing/logging	Leeke Street, Lower Marsh, SE1	05/05/08	Three hours

Youth Music Mentors Feedback Session	Sound Connections	Observing/logging	Sound Connections office, Rich Mix Arts Centre, London, E1	14/10/08	Two and half hours
Process performance Poetry evening	Roundhouse Youth Arts	Observing/logging	Roundhouse Arts Centre, London, NW1	17/10/08	Two hours
Apples and Snakes Poetry Workshop	Apples and Snakes North	Observing/logging	Apples and Snakes North, Derby city centre	05/02/09	Five and half hours
Hip hop rap 'cipher' on the street	none	Observing	Old Street Station, Old Street Roundabout, London, EC1	17/03/09	Hour and a half
Breakin Convention festival of hip hop dance theatre	'Breakin' Convention'/Sadler's Wells	Observing/logging	Sadler's Wells, Theatre, London EC1	04/05/09	Five hours
Hip Hop Theatre Laboratory Showcase	Jonzi D Productions	Observing/logging	Soho Theatre, London W1	28/06/09	Two and half hours
Markus the Sadist, hip hop theatre show	Jonzi D Productions	Observing/logging	Arts Depot Theatre, London N12	02/10/09	Two hours
Hip Hop Theatre Laboratory Showcase	Jonzi D Productions	Observing/logging	Deptford Albany Theatre, London, SE8	06/03/10	Two and half hours
The Word's a Stage spoken word performance	Apples and Snakes, London	Observing/logging	Deptford Albany Theatre, London, SE8	12/03/10	Two hours

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