PIPELINES AND TIGHT RHYMES
VIRTUAL MEDIA AND HIP-HOP IN JAPAN & NEW ZEALAND

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By
Andrew William Peter Witty

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Abstract:

  This thesis looks at hip-hop as a contemporary pop cultural phenomena and its relationship with media in the construction of underground hip-hop communities in Japanese and New Zealand settings. My work on hip-hop in Japan illustrates how global networks influence a traditionally mono-cultural society reckoning with a style connected to African-American experience. A New Zealand setting illustrates how virtual networks allow connections to wider hip-hop culture from a geographically isolated setting and legitimises the local scene. In looking at both settings side-by-side, this thesis underscores the various ways that virtual networks and their increased visibility are used contemporaneously in the construction of local hip-hop scenes as a tool to understand and promote hip-hop music. Based on a mix of virtual fieldwork, fieldwork in New Zealand, as well as fieldwork in Japan, this thesis shows that questions of authenticity in hip-hop have become more complex through different manifestations of hip-hop culture that challenge traditional understandings of the genre's meaning. This is a result of the varying levels of user-agency in virtual networks. In a Japanese setting, we see an increased importance placed on virtual networks, allowing hip-hop fans and musicians alike to be part of the immediate conversation. Language barriers to hip-hop's dominant English vernacular mean that this conversation is generally filtered through the most dominant networks and 'mainstream' culture. These impressions of hip-hop are the driving forces of style for the Japanese scene, leading to a collapse of the dichotic underground/mainstream divide seen in the earlier generations of Japanese hip-hop. In a New Zealand setting, virtual networks are used to connect with English speaking hip-hop musicians overseas, allowing musicians to operate in 'underground' virtual communities that are not physically manifested in New Zealand. By drawing attention to the ways that hip-hop culture is formed, legitimized, and understood in these two geographic and cultural settings, this thesis demonstrates that hip-hop culture exists in an integral relationship with virtual media and explores questions of appropriation, imitation, and authenticity.

Preface:

"Id rather be lowkey" - stevie franchise (Twitter, August 12th 2017)

Outside of my studies at university, I operate in hip-hop cultures. Hip-hop to me has always been a beats driven, lyrical music thats essence lies in the linguistic delivery of stories dealing with internal apprehensions or celebrations. As I get deeper into the realm of academic hip-hop studies, I find the discourse becomes convoluted as scholars attempt their best to create a tangible working definition of a genre that exists in flux. The roots of hip-hop have been adequately described, but once we attempt to explore what hip-hop is contemporaneously, in all settings, cultures and contexts, musicians and cultural actors push the boundaries of our understanding. Often changes in hip-hop culture take place outside of our academic discourse for a number of years. When these changes are finally written about and understood, the genre has been shaped into something that our discipline has not adequately defined.

In my own experience outside of academic discourse, I think about concepts and ideas that feel intrinsically different from how other scholars have written about them. I constantly ask myself, who is the one misunderstanding here? In no way do I feel that I am undertaking a form of 'bimusicality' when I am freestyle rapping with my friends late on a Saturday night. I do not do it for any other purpose than that I enjoy the rush and feeling of expression with my friends. The style of hip-hop that we make is inspired by the dominant hip-hop styles internationally, which spawn from African-American culture. My friends rap about issues that are personal for them. I do not take part in this music in an effort to understand it, I *do* understand it. Or at least, I understand what it means to me. But when I travel up to university on a Monday morning and I begin reading academic chapters about what hip-hop is I often feel like I cannot relate to these ideas. I am not constantly juggling my interpretation of the music I am exposed to and how I internalize it. Many hip-hop scholars may find this problematic, I am not actively thinking about what it means to be a white man rapping in a genre tied to Black experience. For this reason this research has continued to change scope from when I set out on this project. To reconcile some of these anxieties I have chosen to look into underground hip-hop culture in New Zealand and Japan to understand how local performers think about their hip-hop identity. By discussing New Zealand musicians' processes alongside those of underground musicians in Japan, I hope to draw attention to how diverse hip-hop cultures implore ideas of racial understanding while promoting their own music's dissemination and understandings of authenticity.

Hip-hop grew out of conditions embedded in African-American experiences and has been used as a vehicle of voice in these communities ever since. Through generations of hip-hop being swept up in

the world of popular culture and popular media, hip-hop's popularity in communities around the world has created what is commonly called a 'hip-hop nation' (Bennet & Morgan 2011: 191-192). Each hip-hop community must come to its own rationalization of hip-hop's meaning through local social contexts and understandings of wider hip-hop culture. For the scholar, understanding how the African-American experience is intertwined in localized formations of hip-hop in communities outside of the USA is a challenge. Many of the scholars mentioned in this thesis argue that African-American culture needs to be inherently understood for any 'authentic' hip-hop production to take place. For instance, Yvonne Bynoe argues that "Unless one has at least a working knowledge of Black Americans and their collective history, one cannot understand hip-hop culture" (Bynoe 2002: 77-78). Hip-hop is also tied to Latinxs influences and experiences, as mentioned in future chapters. Bynoe writes that the central part of hip-hop culture, the story-telling and information it imparts about a specific group of people, cannot be mimicked from the authentic Black experience. Although Bynoe's paper is only fifteen years old at this time of writing, contemporary networks of dissemination that hip-hop music moves through shows a malleability that allows hip-hop to manifest in new settings in ways that perhaps Bynoe was not expecting. Bynoe asks "Are the permutations of Hip Hop culture developed abroad merely branches of the original tree, or do they constitute new cultures in their own right?" (ibid.). This work seeks to show that subcultures can emerge with their own dignified processes formed through impressions and exposure to global hip-hop culture in virtual networks.

Although hip-hop was conceived from the racial marginalization of African-Americans, if an outlook based on ideas of 'Black Americans' is necessary for hip-hop culture to be understood, how do we talk about the emergence of different hip-hop subcultures across the world? Many, if not most, of these communities are not integrally tied to understanding or re-manifesting Black experience. Once subcultures form around the musical style detached from this understanding, does this mean they are not hip-hop? Are they "non-authentic"? And how does the discourse of authenticity in hip-hop inform our understanding of these issues? Part of the reason that these different cultures and contexts have the ability to form a hip-hop subculture based out of contextual ties to other racial communities, is through their increased exposure to the genre in multimedia pipelines such as the internet. Eun-Young Jung discusses how Korean Americans have been able to circumvent racial barriers through the video-sharing website YouTube. She states there is "potential for new technology to circumvent the entrenched race-based *modus operandi* of the mainstream industry with regard to popular music production and dissemination" (Jung 2014: 55). In Jung's work, she explores how Asian-Americans face their own form of racism when performing in a dominantly Western setting from "persistent marginalization in the United States as 'perpetual foreigners'" (ibid.). Jung shows that virtual mediums can help to overcome limitations that artists may face in regards to their racial identity.

At the beginning of this research the Japanese hip-hop scene was intended to be the sole scope of study. On the realisation that the New Zealand hip-hop scene uses the same pipelines of virtual networking as a Japanese scene in dramatically different ways, I have chosen to underscore how virtual networks challenge a simplistic lineage of hip-hop culture as it is disseminated in global flows. This thesis seeks to show how virtual networks have opened multiple pipelines for inter-cultural exchange through music. Japan, as an often considered 'homogenous' society, has strong traditional roots that ferment in each aspect of its social hierarchy. In my time spent in Japan, people often referred to Japanese society as inward-looking and built upon its own principles, sometimes referring to the country as a 'galapagos'. It is compelling to consider how global popular cultural phenomena can manifest inside a society with a predominantly inward-gaze. Despite its apparently monolithic nature, Japan is a technologically advanced society, with a fast-paced economy that has succeeded in delivering Japanese enterprise and products to the world. Japan Inc., capitalistic conglomerates, and government initiatives of a 'Cool Japan' - a conceptual brand seeking commercial capital of the country's culture industry - show that Japan seeks commercial recognition for things considered essentially Japanese. How then does a musical culture which is inherently tied to defiant foreign voices find authentic localized understandings in a Japanese context?

New Zealand is a comparatively outward looking multicultural country. New Zealand has a long history of being inspired by overseas musical styles and internalizing them to create something uniquely 'New Zealand'. We see this with the success of the music label 'Flying Nun' which has become a metonym for New Zealand Music (Shuker 2008: 280). Flying Nun is a New Zealand-based indie label. The most prominent artists identify with reinventing overseas styles of music within a New Zealand context to form something local out of the global. But these influences came through old media such as radio, records, and television. Now with growing internet accessibility, new media allows musicians to connect with various musical styles and musical communities online. The construction of musical styles within New Zealand is dependent on the influence of dominant virtual networks. Dialogues around authenticity in New Zealand music no longer take place just within the geographic borders of New Zealand, but unfold within wider global communities online. Constructions of genre exist within the virtual networks that users operate in.

How do the different outlooks of such culturally disparate societies find authenticity in the performance of identity through hip-hop style? And how do virtual networks open possibilities for shared interconnectedness through music? On analysis of the various methods of virtual networking in both the Japanese and New Zealand hip-hop scene, we see contrasting methods in the formation of local scenes,

but similar understandings of identity. These are the driving reasons for these two highly independent cultural climates being chosen as the focus sites in this thesis.

This thesis focuses on Japanese hip-hop in Tokyo and acknowledges the space between 'underground' and mainstream. I originally came into this work thinking that Japanese hip-hop musicians needed more networks of exposure to be appealing to overseas markets. My initial outlook was to foster ways that we can emphasise the global aspects of hip-hop by exploring the levels of agency that Japanese hip-hop musicians have in the dissemination and promotion of their music. I wanted to understand how these artists connect to multi-national markets through virtual networking. While this remains a fundamental aspect of this work, the precise reasons why hip-hop culture is malleable to an extent, is because it depends inherently on local processes. In attempting to juggle local processes spawning from global ones, we see enactments of globalization and glocalization. Recent publications from scholars work with the idea of glocalization in trying to outline how understandings of race manifest in translocal environments. Dionne Bennet and Marcyliena Morgan in their discussion of hip-hop's global imprint conceptualize hip-hop culture as a 'diaspora' for the reason that it is impossible to be isolated to a singular trajectory (Bennet & Morgan 2011: 182). Dal Yong Jin in her discussion of K-Pop and globalization uses the term glocalization to describe the hybridization process of global linguistic elements, musical production, and local sentiments 'mixing' (Jin 2016: 113). Seminal scholar on Japanese hip-hop, Ian Condry draws from Roland Robertson (1995) in his discussion of glocalization as it is manifested through local diversification within simultaneous global homogenization (Condry 2006: 92-93). This concept has initial ties to Japan, as Robertson explains that the term glocalization is a translation from the marketing term *dochaku* - referencing "the process of making global products fit into local markets" (ibid.). This is differentiated from concepts tied to localization excluding global processes or forces. In my discussions of hip-hop in Japan I use the term *dochaku* to discuss how hip-hop tropes drawn from the USA are able to 'fit' into Japanese local markets.

My perspective occupies a fickle space that consistently challenges my positionality as a hip-hop scholar both inside and outside of academic study. I have to balance my position as a Pākehā male in a geographically isolated country trying to adequately conceptualize a genre that was conceived out of expressions of identity directly tied to the African-American experience, while placing emphasis on media pipelines as mediators for hip-hop culture. All doing so without being problematic. In this thesis I demonstrate that hip-hop is a now global cultural phenomenon, which requires new methods of study in order to describe the genre and the meaning it imparts in communities across the world.

Chapter One: Introduction and Background

1.0 Introduction

As the growth of virtual technologies and media continues to flourish into the 21st Century, goods and entertainment become increasingly accessible in online networks. Mass media facilitates the promotion of entertainment. Music has become a part of the shared information that is exchanged in virtual networks. With the increased presence of music-based digital networks and platforms propelled by a capital-driven music industry, catalogues of music can seem endlessly accessible to consumers and fans. This has led to the exposure of various different musical styles being shared in the global community with the impression of being instantaneously accessible. But the 'musical product' when shared as a digital medium often holds no connection to the cultural context it has arisen from. Dialogues around music are constructed in virtual spheres. Essence and nuances of culture do not translate as easily as their 'musical product' through commercial media networks. Instead, the most commercially marketable music leads the foray with the most 'accessible' and popularized music being the most widely disseminated to listeners. This is seemingly without the consideration of culture or context needing to be understood. But this does not deter music making in its most integral form: music created in local contexts as voices of expression and dialogues of experience.

In this thesis I treat hip-hop culture as a contemporary pop culture phenomena because of its exposure and manifestation in varying cultural climates. I focus on Japanese and New Zealand 'underground' hip-hop community formations, analysing the influence that mass media and virtual networks have in the construction of hip-hop meaning. This is an effort to demonstrate the changing questions of authenticity of hip-hop culture. This stems from the transition from its conception as a 'Black cultural form' with ties to urban communities, towards its current status as a pop culture phenomenon with permeations in cultural contexts across the globe. This transition raises questions for contemporary hip-hop scholars about how to define hip-hop communities that appear in flux, as well as raising questions about imitation, appropriation and authenticity. In order to discuss the liminal aspect of hip-hop cultures' malleability, this thesis focuses on specific media networks and their influence throughout New Zealand and Japan. I draw attention to the various ways different social and cultural climates connect and enact in hip-hop cultures in a contemporary setting. This thesis looks into hip-hop communities that are influenced by commercial pipelines of popular music dissemination, but often operate with a functional goal of not attempting to enter the commercial industry. I look at the contexts and formations of underground hip-hop in Japanese and New Zealand cultural settings. I show how these two highly different cultural climates can come to their own understanding of what hip-hop is. This is

demonstrated by exploring the localized formations of hip-hop in these settings and their connection to hip-hop as a global cultural phenomenon.

1.1 Thesis Overview

This chapter discusses hip-hop's background as a culture, and how such a style has been recreated in communities across the world. I discuss my methodology, and how an inherent liminality must be addressed in hip-hop study. I then go on to discuss my positionality as a researcher in this project. The second chapter of this thesis focuses on the formation of the Japanese scene. I offer a brief history of Japanese hip-hop from its conception, indicating the socio-economic context of Japan at the time of hip-hop's original influence. This is followed by breaking down Japanese hip-hop culture into three distinct generations. I discuss the relationship that American media has had with Japanese hip-hop over this period, and how this is heightened in the third generation through virtual networks. I follow this by raising questions of authenticity, and how judgements of authenticity are complicated in cross-cultural exchange in art. Then, I write about Japan's first big trap performer, Kohh, who successfully managed to break into hip-hop markets outside of Japan. This is followed by a discussion of artist Weny Dacillo and the importance of social media and popularity, as well as artist Cz Tiger and thematic issues of hip-hop music when imitated or appropriated. The next chapter looks into a New Zealand context, briefly discussing the formation of the New Zealand hip-hop scene. This is followed by a discussion of how virtual technology is used by many current 'underground' hip-hop artists, connecting with real communities overseas through virtual networks. In my conclusion I demonstrate that although the scenes of New Zealand and Japan are very different, they rest on the same fundamental flows of information through global pipelines. These pipelines are harnessed in different degrees depending on localized cultural contexts and their relationships with media, which complicates a tangible and definitive understanding of hip-hop culture. This draws focus to how questions of authenticity in hip-hop are increasingly mediated through the proliferation of virtual networks.

1.2 Hip-Hop Background and Discursive Context

From the outset, I do not attempt a blanket definition of what 'hip-hop' or 'hip-hop culture' is. Outside of an inherently simplistic description of 'expressions of experience', hip-hop is a challenge to define. The breadth of social actors creating what can be considered 'hip-hop music' in innovative ways challenge an implicit understanding. This is the driving force of this work, to challenge ideas of what hip-hop is by looking at two different cultural enactments of hip-hop communities. Examples of the Japanese and New Zealand hip-hop scene demonstrate how virtual networks mediate understandings of

hip-hop for communities outside of the USA. But it has not always been this way. By illuminating the initial lineage of the four original elements of hip-hop, we see how the godfathers of hip-hop instilled a 'revolutionary aesthetic' in the genre. This worked to bring specific local New York Black and Latinx communities together through hip-hop style.

In *Can't Stop Won't Stop,* Jeff Chang chronicles the social context of hip-hop in the United States from the late 1960s among Black communities resulting in civic unrest. He outlines the three godfathers of hip-hop being DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambaataa, discussing the tremendous amounts of cultural capital the figures had in their communities (Chang 2005: 67-109). The figures together helped expand the cultural style throughout Manhattan and the Bronx in New York through innovative processes drawn from various musical styles and technical equipment. Born in Jamaica, DJ Kool Herc was known for his use of 'toasting'. Toasting is a form of speaking rhymically over a drumbeat drawn from Jamaican dub music, and is considered a precursor to modern rap. DJing was necessary in order to isolate drum beats, or 'breaks', by using a mixer to switch between different beats. This spawned 'scratching', the noise made when pulling on vinyl records in order to time the beats. Afrika Bambaataa, a prominent electro DJ began spinning breakbeats on his turntables at local parties in the Bronx, bringing rival crews together. This helped to foster a sense of Black solidarity through hip-hop (Chang 2005: 102).

Breakdancing, or 'b-boying' had a changing significance with the proliferation of hip-hop culture. As gang-controlled streets became less common in New York, break dancers who were once relegated to their bedrooms could perform in open air competitions and at house parties. Richie 'Crazy Legs' Colon was the leader of the Rock Steady Crew, a breakdance troupe that eventually travelled to Japan and spread hip-hop culture. Colon spoke to Chang about being invited down to a schoolyard one Summer. It was here he witnessed the 'four elements' of hip-hop all together: breakdancing, DJing, MCing, and graffiti. With gang presence still lingering into the mid-1970s, graffiti became a way to move on from just 'tags' or, scribbling a name on a wall, and become a method of artistic expression - fed from, as well as feeding the urban contexts of the young artists.

While the four primary aspects of hip-hop can be considered different from each other in terms of each way they are produced, as Chang writes "they shared a revolutionary aesthetic… unleashing youth style as an expression of the soul, unmediated by corporate money, unauthorized by the powerful" (Chang 2005: 111). It is this expression that was sought after in hip-hop communities outside of the United States. This has led to the creation of the term 'connective marginalities' a theme explored in relation to Japanese hip-hop. The concept is used to describe a common understanding of anxious youthful social rebellion, inherently tied to the socio-political struggles of Black Americans that conceived

hip-hop as a tool of expression against socio-political inequities (Osumare 2001: 172-173). In Derrick P. Alridge and James B. Stewarts 'Introduction: Hip Hop in History: Past, Present, and Future', the authors offer an extended review of academic books and articles tracing the lineage of hip-hop histories. Importantly, Alridge and Stewart acknowledge that, like earlier African American art and cultural forms, hip-hop has been commodified by the 'culture industry' leading to mass distribution of the style "in ways that reinforce historical stereotypes about African Americans by highlighting sexist, misogynistic, and nihilistic lyrics and images" (Alridge & Stewart 2005: 193). This points to a need to discuss how mass media flows depict culture when intertwined with culture industry networks, leading to potentially problematic representations. Friedrich Neumann considers hip-hop as a popular music style which 'filled the gap' left by rock music's mass popularization (Neumann 2000: 54). As hip-hop grew in power and prominence, a direct lineage of hip-hop became difficult to ascertain. Alridge and Stewart write, "As a result of both its longevity and its cogent message for many youth worldwide, Hip Hop cannot be dismissed as merely a passing fad or as a youth movement that will soon run its course. Instead, Hip Hop must be taken seriously as a cultural, political, economic and intellectual phenomenon deserving of scholarly study" (Alridge & Stewart 2005: 190). In keeping Alridge & Stewart's wish, this thesis explores cultural formations of hip-hop culture and their importance to youth culture in global communities.

‘Underground’ hip-hop needs a more definitive outline. In this thesis I focus on underground communities of hip-hop. This is because the parameters that require an artist to operate in underground circles relies on an acute sense of self and internal deliberation about what hip-hop means to the individual. The underground can be loosely defined as hip-hop subcultures that do not attempt overt commercial success. This means these artists are unwilling to change their style to be more commercially appealing. In hip-hop scenes worldwide, artists attempting to dilute their style in the form of lyrical themes or sonic tropes to be recognisably appealing to mass audiences is often considered as ‘selling out’ and being inauthentic. Drawing from Dionne Bennet and Marcyliena Morgan's definition of the ‘underground’, I look into hip-hop subcultures that are ‘produced, defined and sustained’ internally within local neighbourhoods and communities, often to challenge conventional norms (Bennet & Morgan 2011: 180). In this thesis, I extend the definition of hip-hop subcultures to include those based in specific virtual networks. Ian Condry writes that in Japan, underground circles are dominated by males who take hip-hop ‘seriously’ with specific ideas of what hip-hop does, and does not consist of (Condry 2006: 13). Artists who stay in the underground do so to remain outside of the commercial gaze or to retain a sense of identity. This sense of identity is where the question of authenticity lies. Themes that artists choose to invoke arise out of interpretation about what hip-hop means to the individual. While an integral part of my research, discussing the different understandings in Japanese hip-hop communities must take into consideration wider social contexts of both Japan and hip-hop culture. Condry has been challenged by

fellow Japanese hip-hop scholar Dexter Thomas for simplifying nationalistic and potentially racially problematic rappers as 'innovative' (Thomas 2016: 214).

Authenticity in hip-hop has often been considered 'keeping it real'. This indicates a connection to the streets and local communities, while showing talented ability as a hip-hop performer (Williams 2007: 7) (Cutler 2003: 215). This is self-determined within the parameters of the local scene. With the proliferation of hip-hop in overseas communities this definition becomes complicated when placing limitations on the boundaries of a scene. Ian Condry explores how most Japanese audiences perceive Japanese rappers who use imagery of gun violence and wear hip-hop streetwear as more authentic than Japanese rappers who explore traditional Japanese themes. This is even though the pioneers of Japanese hip-hop sought to make Japanese hip-hop something unique. The reason is that the rapper who employs stylistic traits of popular hip-hop is more likely to be accepted and seen as participating within hip-hop's dominant culture, among 'the best' hip-hop musicians in the United States (Condry 2006: 28). Markers of hip-hop style such as clothing and vernacular can draw questions of appropriation in wider hip-hop circles, as will be explored in this thesis. But they also serve as a connector to hip-hop's dominant forms are closely associated with hip-hop in the USA. Cultural *dochaku* takes place in which understandings of wider hip-hop culture, and locally accepted identities are contested simultaneously to form local hip-hop communities. This raises new questions of authenticity and how it is formed through connections to broader hip-hop tropes, but judged in local hip-hop communities.

Most previous scholarly analysis of Japanese hip-hop includes discussion of race and the appropriation of Black culture. As a style borne out of Black and Latinx experience, this must remain as an important part of this work. Dawn Elissa-Fischer has outlined that early understandings of hip-hop in Japan are a part of an "imagined black cultural practice" (Fischer 2013: 140). This remains true in a Japanese setting, hip-hop culture is innately tied to conceptions of African-American culture. But in order to discuss how hip-hop style moves, I shift the weight of the conversation on race to being directly intertwined with the portrayals of race in media. Explaining the third generation of Japanese hip-hop, I show that the semantics of the genre now play more of a part in the construction of a Japanese hip-hop scene than that of attempted racial imitation or appropriation. Yet these issues still remain a controversial aspect of the Japanese hip-hop scene. Fischer states that within hip-hop research, the researcher needs to 'find a balance' when analyzing hip-hop narratives with reference to Blackness, to juggle meaning without hierarchically situating research findings (Fischer 2013: 148). For deeper analysis on race and hip-hop in Japan, see Dionne Bennet & Marcyliena Morgan's "Hip-Hop & the Global Imprint of a Black Cultural Form" (2011); Dexter Thomas' "N****ers and Japs: the formula behind hip-hops racism" (2016); Nina

Cornyetz's "Fetishized Blackness: Hip Hop and Racial Desire in Contemporary Japan" (1994); and, of course, Dawn-Elissa Fischer's "Blackness, Race and Language Politics in Japanese Hiphop" (2013).

1.3 Methodology

The methodology for this thesis exists between virtual networks and 'on-the-ground' fieldwork in a Japanese and New Zealand setting. This research has took place predominantly out of New Zealand with two months of intense fieldwork in Japan. In occupying spaces in virtual networks I have performed 'virtual fieldwork' in online spaces of hip-hop. I have been invested in a range of websites and social networks that Japanese and New Zealand hip-hop artists connect in and promote their music. Websites of note include YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These social media websites are based in English and have worldwide reach. They have proved vital to connect with hip-hop musicians from both New Zealand and Japan. Other networks include SoundCloud, a music-sharing platform by predominately independent artists, and LINE, a Japanese social networking application.

The research into hip-hop cultures in New Zealand was based in Wellington, which has a strong undercurrent of underground hip-hop musicians, locally called 'bedroom producers'. Although I am personal friends with many hip-hop musicians in Wellington, in an effort to avoid any implicit bias I have sought out hip-hop performers that I do not have a personal relationship with. As I will indicate, the underground hip-hop scene relies on specific considerations of hip-hop mediated through virtual networks. Although New Zealand has a hip-hop scene with a long history, the rise of virtual technology has fundamentally changed processes for many underground hip-hop musicians in New Zealand. The underground scene in New Zealand, while fostered with internal understandings of the 'underground', is integrally related wider understandings of underground culture. These understandings are formulated specifically through virtual networks on the internet as a point of reference and a platform for dissemination. Japan, however, has a wider support base for hip-hop culture that has evolved through three generations of hip-hop musicians. Underground hip-hop in Japan is based within specific nightclub performances, and intertwined with conceptualisations of Japanese geography. For instance, rappers in Tokyo will tell you that Shibuya, Tokyo is based on a 'street' hip-hop style, more concerned with urban aesthetics. Shinjuku, a 20 minute walk from Shibuya is 'gangsta' style, affiliated with performance of 'gangsta' identity through music (Zen La Rock, pers. comm. 2017). Japanese hip-hop musicians form their own local underground communities inspired by understandings of hip-hop culture drawn from the most visible of United States' hip-hop themes, and use these themes to internalize understandings of authenticity in a local setting. New Zealand underground hip-hop musicians attempt to connect with

underground cultures online, as there is not the local infrastructure to support a local scene on New Zealand shores.

The time spent in Tokyo, Japan has been critical to my understandings of how local hip-hop culture is enacted and formed broadly. Tokyo was chosen as the focal point of fieldwork study in Japan for its strong roots in the conception of hip-hop in Japan. For instance, Yoyogi Park in Shibuya is the first known site of breakdancing in Japan, which was a precursor to further hip-hop subcultures in a Japanese setting (Manabe 2013: 38). Tokyo is now an interesting place for Japanese hip-hop, as the urban and hyper-connected city has become a base for many Japanese hip-hop labels. It also provides the opportunity to look at artists who are attempting to be commercially successful, outside of the underground, while also having a strong underground scene. I have spent time connecting and interviewing artists who I have met through virtual networks of social media/SNS that frequently post their music in online spaces. I have attended a range of hip-hop gigs from commercial and underground artists, interviewed local informants, scholars and journalists, and frequented local hip-hop hotspots such as venues, recording studios and areas of the city in which hip-hop musicians generally hang out. LINE, a Japanese social media application proved vital in order to connect with Japanese musicians while in Japan. Functions from visual-based social media platform Instagram as well as text-based platform Twitter are both often used by Japanese hip-hop musicians and social actors. They proved vital for immediate updates on shows, gatherings or other hip-hop-centric events. This was often the way I found out about gigs in the underground, and indicates some of the new methods of promotion and social connectedness that arises through virtual networks. As Japanese hip-hop has moved through three distinct generations, I have interviewed hip-hop musicians who have been involved in each fundamental wave of hip-hop Japan. This thesis concerns itself with the third generation of Japanese hip-hop specifically, pointing to the ways that virtual networks and technology have changed the local scene in Tokyo and at times complicates the perceptions of what is 'underground'. I implore the use of creative descriptions in order to discuss the liminality of the Japanese underground, and to draw attention to my own dependency on virtual media as a tool for fieldwork (and thus navigation of hip-hop cultures). In various sections throughout this work, I describe my own actions and reactions in undertaking fieldwork which demonstrates the fluidity of operating in a music scene. This draws specific attention to the use of media and virtual networks as a basis for learning about hip-hop culture broadly.

1.4 Liminality in Hip-Hop Study

The various ways that hip-hop travels through pipelines of exposure to global musical communities shows an inherent liminality. I believe it is very important for ethnomusicologists to place

increasing importance on the liminal space between localized musical cultures and their global influences. By emphasising the purely local context we risk forgiving driving forces that impact musical cultures. Often these forces stem from powers such as the culture industry, capitalistic enterprise, local governmental policy, as well as international media pipelines. In hip-hop, we see how these forces control the presence and interpretation of cultural tropes that affect musical trends. These forces are, to borrow from Thomas Turino, some of the 'multiple layers of determination' that comprise a given context. Turino writes that within musical ethnography, "in order to approach the concrete historical complexity of a given practice or event, we must reconstruct the determinations that constitute it." (Turino 1990: 407). To appropriately explore how these layers work in different cultural climates, we must pay specific attention to how the localized determination is formed. What causes a certain musical style to have similar traits in highly different cultural climates? For instance Halifu Osumare has written that in the world of hip-hop culture, the attitudes expressed by individuals within localized settings "are not necessarily under the control of the music industry" (Osumare 2001: 172). She uses the term 'collective marginalities' to describe how hip-hop in its exportation as a culture often creates similar dynamics in various settings. Performers and fans resonate with Black expressive culture and its contextual political history of marginalization. This often emerges as tied to anxious youthful social rebellion and an expression of global socio-political inequities. How then, is this contextual political history transferred among virtual networks which have become integral to hip-hop's dissemination?

By our very nature as researchers involved in a social arena, when we place a definitive outline towards a geographic area or society we are illuminating points of difference or to an extent saying 'this is how things are' in this specific place. Usually we only draw allusion to these processes because they differ in other climates. Ethnographers who try to circumvent this often instead attempt to describe all the aspects that other (and evidently future) ethnographers must remain aware of in their study. This in order to avoid issues of simplified comparisons between two societies and to avoid leading us down the slippery slope back to comparative 'arm-chair' musicology. This work by nature is to a degree, comparative, but there exists no value judgements here. Rather, I point to the roles that media and virtual networks play in the formation and understanding of hip-hop in a Japanese and New Zealand setting. I aim to illuminate the ways that hip-hop culture can impact highly different cultural environments through each setting coming to a rationalization of what hip-hop culture *is*. I focus on two locations of localized hip-hop to show how different trajectories of hip-hop depend on a constant 'push-and-pull' of forces within the local environment. This does not deter music making in the hip-hop style, but complicates a blanket definition of what hip-hop *is*. In fact, when I began this research I intended to focus solely on the Japanese hip-hop scene. This changed when I first sat down with cultural informer and now good friend Kento, who lived in Japan until high school and still travels back to see his family in Japan frequently. I realised that one of

the most interesting aspects of hip-hop is its formation of shared connections to highly different cultural and political climates. On our first meeting, the more I asked Kento about how underground hip-hop performers operate in Japan, he would respond with "just like they do it here". 'How do they promote their music?' 'how do Japanese performers book shows?' 'how do they make beats?'. Time and time again, Kento would imply that the processes in Japanese underground hip-hop, do not differ fundamentally from hip-hop culture in New Zealand.

Hip-hop culture can be a fickle term. Part of the dialogue this work attempts to wrestle with is how hip-hop culture is able to transgress into styles and fashions of a global urban youth culture while showing cultural bondage through a musical style. Ian Condry has outlined that through the progression and diversification of hip-hop in a Japanese setting as a part of the 'third generation' of Japanese hip-hop, "we see scenes among scenes that the party-underground divide can no longer come close to capturing. We find a broad spectrum including rock rap to hard core to gangsta, spoken word/poetry, to conscious, old school, techno rap, anti government, pro-marijuana, heavy metal sampled rap, and so on … we see the disappearance of any orientation towards a center" (Condry 2006: 82). These traits are not just isolated in a Japanese setting. We see hip-hop diversification take fold in both contemporary underground and mainstream movements worldwide. It becomes less tangibly defined by evident musical markers or directed towards a center or structure, but more engrossed as a form of symbolic communication through music. Therefore it is important to focus on the multiple layers that determine hip-hops diversification in localized settings. With increased global interconnectivity and the exchange of cultural styles broadly, hip-hop becomes an important site of study as the dominant popular culture style for youth culture. This thesis explores how this form of 'symbolic communication' is determined in Japan and New Zealand settings through virtual networks.

I conceptualise hip-hop culture as a social movement that exists in flux, a phenomena that encompasses as much as it rejects through varying cultural interpretations in social climates. This thesis demonstrates how increased human agency in virtual networks results in different manifestations of hip-hop participation in different cultural climates. To illustrate this, this thesis concerns itself with hip-hop on three basic levels: 1) Hip-hop culture 'on-the-ground', as in, hip-hop communities that exist in physical spaces and operate in immediate communities specific to Japan. 2) How hip-hop virtual networks foster online communities through bonding over music taste and aesthetic style, and 3) Hip-hop virtual networks and the role mass media plays in the dissemination of style to Japan and New Zealand hip-hop communities.

1.5 Positionality

"Why do we focus on fieldwork when the liveliest debate among social sciences during the past several decades has been about the adequacy and legitimacy of our means for describing the cultural Other in writing? The reasons lie hidden in the sonic shadows of the musical practices we are privileged to study. The power of music resides in its liminality, and this is best understood through engaging in the experimental method imperfectly called "fieldwork," a process that positions scholars as social actors within the very cultural phenomena they study."(Cooley & Barz 2008: 3-4).

This quote is drawn from Cooley and Barz in their introduction to *Shadows in the Field,* a collection of essays concerning itself with methodological questions in ethnomusicological fieldwork. The editors acutely recognise that the researcher themself is a social actor in their work once they are in the 'field'. As this thesis draws on many facets of 'fieldwork' such as virtual fieldwork, fieldwork based in Wellington, New Zealand, and fieldwork in Tokyo, Japan, it is important to acknowledge the position I hold as a social actor in these varying landscapes. I have lived in New Zealand my entire life in a relatively stable environment. I have not experienced systemic injustices like have been experienced by African-American and Latinx communities that have shaped the formulation of the hip-hop genre. I come from a predominately ethnomusicological background, with specific interest in virtual networks broadly, and the generation of virtual communities online. Finally, an important part of my positionality in this work, is my relationship with the Japanese language. Prior to undertaking this research, I was not familiar with speaking or understanding Japanese. My time spent in Japan was mainly (but not wholly) spent talking to Japanese musicians who are able to speak English. This limited the breadth of cultural actors I could include in my text. But I am most interested with the third generation of Japanese hip-hop, which is the youngest and has more English speakers than any other wave of Japanese hip-hop. This was explained to me by Japanese hip-hop DJ, MC and my friend, Zen La Rock. "Young rappers in Japan now, most can speak English. It's a young person thing. Most young people have friends from overseas so they need to speak the language. Speaking English also opens doors. I lost a lot of time and lost a lot of experience when I could not speak English. I talk to my Chinese and Korean friends in English when I tour." (pers. comm. 2017). The fact that I remain interested in Japanese hip-hop despite language barriers shows an important undercurrent of this work. The pathways of hip-hop are now so far-reaching, that a Pākehā male from New Zealand is able to become interested in Japanese hip-hop music, beginning as a fan before a researcher.

If this study were to take the form of a more extensive research project more emphasis would be placed on the role of Japanese language in Japanese hip-hop. But that is not vital for the production of

this work. Deeper analysis on the role of Japanese grammatical structures and phrases in rap music can be found in Ian Condry's *Hip-Hop Japan* in chapter 5 (2006)*, Natsuko Tsujimura & Stuart Davis' 'Dragon Ash and the Reinterpretation of Hip Hop' (2008), Dawn-Elissa Fischer's 'Blackness, Race and Language Politics in Japanese Hiphop' (2013), and perhaps the best structural analysis of Japanese language adaption to hip-hop flows and cadences, Noriko Manabe's 'Globalization and Japanese Creativity: Adaptations of Japanese Language to Rap' (2006).

I occupy an interesting place in relation to all of these themes. I am a (relatively) young white male in New Zealand, studying a musical style borne out of African-American and Latinx expression. I look into how this music has manifested in the vastly different cultural climates of Japan and New Zealand, paying specific attention to the virtual networks and media that the musical style travels through. It should come as no surprise that I would often have bouts of wariness and scepticism that I am the right person to undertake this project. I found comfort in the words of Lauren Sweetman, a Canadian ethnomusicologist who travelled to speak with staff and students at the New Zealand Music School in 2016. She told us about her hesitancies when she undertook a project at a mental health center for Māori patients in the upper North of New Zealand. Before she was approved to do the work, she had to sit in front of a tribunal who decided if she would be approved to use their facilities. The tribunal said that they can see the importance of her work, but why is a Canadian women the one to examine *our* culture? At that moment, the person representing Lauren (who attended the meeting via Skype) walked to the back of the room and opened the door. "Do you see anyone else out here doing this work?".

Hip-hop culture has now left a global imprint, and we see formations of hip-hop culture localized in societies over the world. I am too a social actor in hip-hop in and outside this research in New Zealand, affiliated with various social cultural actors. It is because I am so far removed from the epicenter of hip-hop in the United States and Japanese society that puts me in a position to talk about the networks of hip-hop culture. I do not suppose to imply that I have taken an omnipresent view of hip-hop networks, but I am indicating that no one in this work need be treated as an 'outsider' within the hip-hop genre . In this thesis I show the ways hip-hop creates an 'insider' culture in highly different geographic and cultural contexts through its relationship with media and virtual networks.

Chapter Two: Tokyo Hip-Hop and a Scene in Flux

2.0 Social Change in Japan

In this chapter I explore hip-hop's relationship with media in Japan. Following discussions on the importance of including the 'multiple layers of determination' that make up any given context, I offer a brief overview of the changing socio-political context of a wider Japanese society. I discuss the changing social context in Japan following the fallout of the 'bubble-era' economy. These changing contexts show how imagined connections could be fostered between Japanese culture and hip-hop's themes. I then deliver a brief history of hip-hop in Japan. I follow the evolution of Japanese hip-hop through three successive generations, exploring the role that mass media has had as a mediator of influence. This sets up discussions of contemporary hip-hop in Japan in the third generation. I discuss three case studies, one of Kohh, Japan's first global trap star, a second of Weny Dacillo and an underground gig in Japan, and the third of Cz Tiger and mainstream performances. This chapter shows how the use of virtual networks in contemporary Japanese hip-hop scenes result in new understandings of cultural capital, authenticity and appropriation.

Hip-hop formation in Japan has been highly intertwined with socio-political changes that spawned from a changing economy, government transparency, and virtual network connectivity. In this section I offer a brief overview of the changing social contexts of Japan which happened simultaneously as hip-hop culture's initial growth. There is an often romanticized view of Japan as a powerhouse of technological production, built on traditional social hierarchy and a hyper-modern homogenous culture. But the make-up of contemporary Japan has undergone several economic and social shifts in the last three decades. Prior to the emergence of hip-hop in the country, Japan's economy was seemingly bustling in production. Japan held a wealth of global market-shares and emerged out of the middle of the 20th Century supposedly unscathed from wartime atrocities aimed at the nation. But the bubble built out of dominant economic forces and cherry-picked history was to burst. A time of change was evident in Japanese society.

Japan in the 1990s is known as the 'the Lost Decade'. The country had peaked economically and was at the brink of a pervasive recession. The implosion of the economy left rank stains throughout social order in Japan. The leaders of 'Japan Inc.', who were once heralded for taking Japanese enterprise worldwide were now facing the barrel of a systemic collapse. At the same time, the death of Showa Emperor Hirohito revealed coverups in Japanese history and their involvement in wartime misconduct. Traditional hierarchical Japanese social order was beginning to be called into question. Those in positions

of power caused an evident collapse and confusion amongst economic and social ladders (Kingston 2004: 12-41). It was a part of a small but important social transformation for Japanese youth. Alongside the increased visibility of media flows and social technology within Japanese culture, social change resulted in a fertile ground for consumption of new and foreign ideas. An inter-cultural exchange between Japanese youth and hip-hop would flourish as a younger generation formed a conscious distance from traditional values of Japanese hierarchical social order.

An uncertain future in a contemporary economy caused what Halifu Osumare calls 'connective marginalities' for Japanese youth to Black hip-hop culture. Connective marginalities are resonances between the youth of Japan facing undetermined futures connecting with Black expressive culture within its contextual political history. It is often tied to anxious youthful social rebellion, and has become an expression of global socio-political inequities (Osumare 2001: 172-173). This was coupled with an increased interconnectivity and accessibility of younger generations to social worlds outside of their own through globalization and mass media. Cultural styles began to manifest and change Japanese youth culture at increasing rates. Through a vague initial connection over shared understandings of marginalization, Japanese youth sought new cultural styles that rejected a traditional hierarchical order in social life. This was the fructuous soil that led a Japanese youth to adopt an overseas music style called hip-hop, internalise it, and make it Japanese.

2.1 Japanese Hip-Hop History

The history of hip-hop in Japan is extensive and surprisingly well-documented. Ian Condry's 'A History of Japanese Hip-Hop: Street Dance, Club Scene' in Tony Mitchell's *Global Noise* is dedicated to explaining how trendy youth went from frequenting disco spots to forming their own scenes of turntablism in Shibuya night clubs and breakdancing in Harajuku *hokoten* [pedestrian paradise]. Noriko Manabe has written about how initial Japanese DJs were concerned with ideas of imitation began incorporating traditional aspects of Japanese music such as the concept of *ma* (2013). Andrew Armstrong specialised in demonstrating how hip-hop acted as a tool of agency for 'gangsters' in Kyoto from the early 1990s leading into the 2000s (2002). Ian Condry has also released the full-length *Hip Hop Japan* in an effort to explain paths of cultural globalization in music and popular culture (2006).

In this section I highlight the fundamental evolution of hip-hop through three generations. I demonstrate its interaction and dependency on the evolution of hip-hop and media in the United States. This is by no means is a complete history, but points to important cultural figures who propelled hip-hop

culture in Japan. This history initiates conversation about Japanese hip-hops relation to media in its third generation.

In the beginning of October 1983, a direct flight from New York touched down at Narita Airport, Tokyo. The plane full of 36 young African-Americans and Latinos were mainly from the South Bronx. They were to be the cultural gatekeepers that began spinning the disc of Japanese hip-hop culture. As they arrived into the terminal, despite the jetlag, one young man pushed play on his boombox. A few of the crew began dancing in the airport. Japanese onlookers peered on confused. What is this music? Who are these people? This style of music and dance was yet to make it to Japanese shores, but as a result of this crew, that was all about to change.

The passengers were from the movie *Wild Style,* a 1983 American film and the first hip-hop motion picture. Over the coming weeks the crew would tour around Japanese streets, department buildings and parks showcasing turntablism, graffiti, breakdancing, and of course, rapping. 6700 miles away from their home, and days before the movie would even premiere in the United States, *Wild Style,* and the culture it represented began travelling throughout Japan. ""Japan was a bit ahead of the curve," Fred Brathwaite, aka Fab 5 Freddy — who played one of the main characters in "*Wild Style*" — told The Japan Times. "At that point, (rap) was barely even reaching other parts of (the U.S.), it was still primarily a New York thing." (Many will remember Fab 5 Freddy as the longtime host of "Yo! MTV Raps" and the creator of one of the most-sampled records of all time, "Change The Beat.")"The response was way beyond anything we imagined — unbelievably big press conferences," says Brathwaite. "Nothing comparable happened in America."" (Fazio 2015).

The group travelled around Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, visiting pop culture hotspots of the cities performing in-store promotions, club nights and concerts. The unaware pioneers that they were, the *Wild Style* crew planted a seed into the fertile ground of Japanese youth culture. But the social context of the style formed from marginalized American peoples was non-existent here. Only those who could afford it, often moving on from the New Wave trend, were the first prominent cultural actors in Japan.

A few days into the promotional tour, the *Wild Style* crew ventured to Yoyogi Park in Tokyo. They travelled in a big black van covered in graffiti art, quickly drawing an audience of local Boy George look alikes who the crew initially mistook for a gang. Between the Meiji Shrine and *takenoko-zoku* [Japanese street dancers], the Rock Steady Crew laid down a boombox and began performing headspins

and windmills to the boombap drum beats. The initially hesitant and "freaked out" local audience peered on in awe. Yet it would take only three days for the Japanese audience to begin to mimic the style and form their own breakdancing troupes in Yoyogi Park (Isobe 2016). In Kyoto, a week after DJ Charlie Chase performed scratching on his turntables to a virgin audience, the DJ style was being picked up by local performers.""In that one week, the (Kyoto) DJs had figured it out. They didn't have it down perfect, but they were close enough to add some scratches on the beats. That was an education that we were gonna connect," says 'Fab 5 Freddy' Brathwaite." (Fazio 2015).

While still in its infancy in the United States, hip-hop and its main components of graffiti, rapping, turntablism, and breakdancing began to ripple into Japanese youth culture. Thanks to the gut-feeling of American *Wild Style* director and leader of the 36-strong crew Charlie Ahearn and Japanese promotional organiser Katsuhisa Kuzai, *Wild Style* had set the cogs of Japanese hip-hop in motion.

2.1 A - First Generation

In this section I discuss the first generation of the Japanese hip-hop scene and its important cultural actors. I discuss settings in which hip-hop's four fundamental elements of graffiti, DJing, breakdancing, and MCing took place. I show how conversations of what authentic Japanese hip-hop consists of are inspired by global tropes of hip-hop. These tropes were exposed in Japan through media such as movies and magazines, or on reflection of what it means to be Japanese making hip-hop. This demonstrates how mass media has always been a facilitator for the Japanese hip-hop scene.

In 1986 a club opened up in Shibuya called 'Hip-Hop'. It was the first club dedicated solely to the hip-hop genre in Japan. Enthused by the energy and attitude of hip-hop, DJs would play breakbeats often behind a dancing troupe of breakdancers. Those that would frequent these clubs would often be of a wealthy background, arriving after work sometimes still in a suit and tie. A *J Rap* scene was being fostered, with immediate musical connections to the mainstream *J Pop* scene. J Pop is a Japanese popular music built from stylistic influences of electro synth-pop and US/Euro styles from the 1980s.

At the same time breakdancing culture was beginning a life of its own in Japan. The instrumental music used to dance to meant that no language barriers were present. American movies became an important source of cultural information for this element of hip-hop. Crazy-A, an early Japanese breakdancer and eventual MC was inspired, like many others, from the dancing seen in *Wild Style*. He had heard that Yoyogi Park on a Sunday was becoming a staple of breakdancing performances. He was intrigued, so he began to dance. Bringing with him a radio cassette and cardboard, sometimes with

turntables and a PA system, Crazy-A became a staple of the Yoyogi Park breakdancing circuit (Condry 2006: 63-66). More crews started to appear Yoyogi Park enacting this form of bodily globalization.

Hip-hop media grew in presence and in 1984 US breakdancing films *Breakdance* and *Breakin' 2* were shown in Tokyo. Japanese street-dance takenoko-zoku groups were slowly being overshadowed by B-Boys and B-Girls inspired by US styles of breakdancing. Crazy-A, who is now the leader of *Rock Steady Crew Japan* started organising the annual "B-Boy Park" at Yoyogi. Breakdancing became the most prominent element of hip-hop in Japanese origins. On Sundays in Harajuku throughout the early 1990s, the streets would be closed to traffic for performances of street dancing (ibid). The initial Japanese hip-hop performers did not fully understand the roots of hip-hop and its specific social resonances with African-American culture. Although a common appeal lay in taking a cultural phenomenon out of the realms of materialism and consumerism and exploring a performative identity through bodily expression. A semiotic connection existed between seeing images of urban sprawls and population density in the US and the industrialized body of Tokyo City. Importantly, breakdancing was a visual phenomenon and there existed no language barriers. Breakdancing became a foundation for Japanese hip-hop not through cultural understanding but an excitement to explore a new cultural dynamic.

As hip-hop in Japan spread in Japanese youth culture, different sub-cultures of hip-hop began appearing. The stylistic split between J Rap and Japanese hip-hop was widening. 'Japanese hip-hop' was considered a different beast to J Rap. Japanese hip-hop came to represent an underground and linguistic heavy music. It took more influence from a New York style of heavy boombap drum beats. Japanese hip-hop used digitised sampling beats of melodies to create instrumentals, rather than the composed synthesised melodies for the songs found in J Pop. Questions of authenticity arose internally between the cultural actors of this new style in Japan. As hip-hop music was growing to express an attitude of the Japanese youth psyche, it existed as two cultural styles. This was explained by MC Bell of B-Fresh in an interview with Ian Condry. "When you talk about Japanese hip hop, you definitely have to recognize that there are two streams. One is that of Itō Seiko and Tiny Punks, what might be called the classy [oshare] style that started with the people who frequented clubs, the other stream started with Hokoten ("pedestrian paradise") in Harajuku. At Harajuku's Hokoten, it started with break dancing. If you consider that hip-hop culture developed in stages, the first way we [B-Fresh] took up hip hop was in Breakdance." (Condry 2006: 229-230). MC Bell's breakdown of Japanese hip-hop describes the split of the more affluent J Rap scene versus the urban Japanese Hip-Hop scene.

While both scenes were growing in different styles, each initially struggled to rap in Japanese. One of the first rappers to change this was Ito Seiko. Seiko is known in Japan as a *maruchi-tarento -*

essentially meaning a multi-talented man. He is a TV comedian for children, a novelist, a poet, and also one of the first rappers to rap in Japanese. Ito's exposure to hip-hop happened on a different course than that of Crazy-A or B-Fresh. He first heard hip-hop music in the form of The Sugarhill Gang on Far East Network. The Far East Network (now known as the American Forces Network) was set up as a network of American military radio and television stations to serve U.S forces in Japan. In 1986 Ito Seiko and Tiny Punks released the album *建設的* [constructive] which includes heavy allusions to New York and the Bronx. Apart from some fleeting assonance, the lyrics on the album do not particularly rhyme. In 2009 Ito released a song called 'Hippu Hoppu no Shoki Shodo' ['Hip-Hop's Initial Impulse'] which describes how in his early years he would "imitate the sounds into gibberish English" and that it "took some years to turn it into Japanese" (Nakano 2017).

Toshiyuki Ohwada, an American Popular Studies professor at Keio University in Tokyo explained to me that the difficulty of rhyming in Japanese comes from century-long understandings of poetry. Unlike linguistic-based art from other countries, Japan had never been a rhyming nation. This is mostly because common Japanese syntax needs sentences to end in auxiliary verbs, such as *desu, deshita, masu, masen.* "Japanese poetry, in tradition. We don't rhyme. The first generation of Japanese rappers, the utmost importance was how to rhyme in Japanese and not sound, funny. They come from the hood the slums, but then they have this creativity to make a Japanese verse sound in a way that it's not fun to laugh at. The first, second generation, those guys were breaking up those grammatical structures and putting them upside down so it rhymes." (pers. comm. 2017)

In its early years, music critics expressed hesitation about the Japanese language being adapted to rap music and that the music may eventually die out. Ito Seiko would imitate English lyrics into gibberish, and K Dub Shine initially began rapping in English believing it was impossible to rap in Japanese. Shiho Watanabe claims that King Giddra, and K Dub Shine in particular, were the inventors of Japanese rhyming. "King Giddra and K Dub Shine, they started how to rap in Japanese, and how to learn the structure of rhyming. They were the inventors. Before King Giddra they would only rap, like singing at a fast pace. But King Giddra invented rhyming in Japanese." (pers. comm. 2017).

King Giddra is a hip-hop group named after a kaiju film monster from the movie *Three-Headed Monster* released in 1964. The group was made up of K Dub Shine (rapper/leader), Zeebra (rapper) and DJ Oasis (DJ). They are often heralded as the godfathers of Japanese hip-hop, especially so regarding lyricism. When he was 16, K Dub Shine did a school exchange to Philadelphia in the United States. It was here he encountered hip-hop culture without the lens of a digital image or the solitary demonstration of one hip-hop collective performing in Japan (Condry 2006: 158). K Dub Shyne witnessed hip-hop as a tool

for repressed communities to speak out against systematic and cultural injustices, and brought these ideas back to Japan. King Giddra began to rap politicized messages throughout their albums, dealing with themes such as lack of job opportunities for Japanese youth, socio-economic imbalances and the overarching influence of media on Japanese society - connecting marginalities with USA hip-hop tropes. Employing these themes inside innovative rhyme schemes in Japanese shows an important evolution in Japanese hip-hop. K Dub Shine and Zeebra began flipping sentence structures to create something uniquely Japanese, while exploring themes that relate to hip-hop culture more broadly. This helped fellow Japanese rappers to find footing rapping in the language and allowed them to send a message - a Japanese message - through hip-hop music.[1] The beats used on the groups first album *空からの力* [Power from the Sky] in 1995 were all heavily reminiscent of a trend in American hip-hop known as sampling. The producers on the album would take an isolated drumbeat from an already released song (as long as there was a tough snare on the third beat). This would be embellished with melodic riffs (usually sampled piano) and chord hits to accentuate cadences.

Not all producers were as systematic. Another legend of the Japanese hip-hop scene who is a connoisseur of sampling is DJ Krush. Krush was also inspired by the movie *Wild Style* and began attending the outdoor dance performances at Yoyogi Park. But rather than imitate the style, Krush initially looked outward and "wanted to produce something that left a ripple in the water" (Manabe 2013: 37-38). Attracted to the power of the music he felt, he wanted to form a new way to think about hip-hop music. But not necessarily a Japanese one. He did not grow up listening to Japanese traditional music and felt he would be 'lying to himself' if he was to include traditional Japanese aspects in his music. (ibid.). But whilst touring overseas, he was continually asked why he was not including Japanese music into his sets. "In going to various countries, and in learning about different genres of music, I ended up taking another look at Japan. When you're in Japan, you can't see your own fields so well. But when you leave your country, you start to see the good and the bad of the place more objectively. So I came to believe that if I thought the music of my own country was good, I should study it, listen to its many types, and absorb it." - DJ Krush to Noriko Manabe (Manabe 2013: 38).

Although he did not include identifiable traditional Japanese elements in his initial compositions, DJ Krush became more interested in the inclusion of these concepts. This came from a standpoint of *being* Japanese as a performative identity. Japaneseness then becomes essentialized and performed through the realm hip-hop music while opening up stylistic possibilities in the genre. For instance, Krush had often used heterophonic ideas in his music. This lack of synchronisation between different musical lines

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[1] For a proficient breakdown of how King Giddra broke down grammatical structures in rhyme, see Noriko Manabe's 'Globalization and Japanese Creativity: Adaptations of Japanese Language to Rap' (2006)

was something he felt came 'naturally'. After travelling overseas and on reflection on what it means to make music as Japanese, he spent time familiarizing himself with traditional Japanese music that was not in his immediate environment growing up. Upon listening, Krush began to be inspired by *shakuhachi* music. This proved fitting for these heterophonic movements especially regarding its sense of *ma* [the Japanese aesthetic of space] (ibid.). By incorporating traditional Japanese instruments, Japanese musical ideas became a heightened and recognizable part of Krush's music. It is a keypoint in the early sonic differences in Japanese instrumental hip-hop to that of US styles.

Thus, DJ Krush was able to find a way to incorporate ideas of Japaneseness into his hip-hop production. Importantly, the music as instrumental and without language barriers meant it was easier to define as a part of a global hip-hop culture, similarly to breakdancing and graffiti. Osumare writes that DJ Krush offered insights into a "self-authenticating and validating process predicated on an internalizing of black aesthetics" (Osumare 2007: 102). By treating culture as intertext, she argues, Krush views culture as a constant evolution and continually reforming process. This idea of evolving culture through hip-hop outlines an important point of this thesis. Hip-hop allows performers to internalize Black aesthetics and validate the style through their own changing contexts. Through exposure and success this style can be reflected to wider hip-hop communities reforming ideas about what hip-hop culture is.

Japanese attraction to hip-hop was an affinity with a new and exciting American style. This was not inherently new in Japan. En masse Japanese youth were known to digest popular culture styles borne out of American cultural contexts often based around music. Prior to being inspired by the culture of hip-hop, Japanese youth were dressing up as New Wave artists, wearing leather jackets and slicking their hair back (Isobe 2017). In hip-hop specifically, questions arose regarding authenticity and appropriation in a music style borne out of socio-economic contexts of Black America. These will be looked at in the next section. But unlike the fleeting trends of past, hip-hop in Japan had its own evolution. Japanese hip-hop became internalized with its own parameters of authenticity and understanding. There was however a conceptual split. The importance placed on cultural elements of hip-hop and demonstrations of 'keeping it real' to the streets were opposed to local Japanese pop tropes in which more playful and innocuous themes were explored. They were broken into the different cultural servings of *J Rap* and *Japanese Hip-Hop*. As I will demonstrate, the evolution of the genre in both forms continues to be intertwined with global media forces. These forces mediate understandings of meaning in the genre to a Japanese audience. Although traditional aspects of Japanese music and culture came to be used in some of the original formations of Japanese hip-hop, they came on reflection of what it means to be Japanese making a music from a different cultural style. But what makes this generation so important, was that they legitimised hip-hop as a cultural style. They allowed hip-hop to be performed by and to Japanese audiences. This

opened doors for future hip-hop musicians to express understandings of Japaneseness through hip-hop music.

2.1 B - Second Generation

The second generation of Japanese rappers are part of the cultural reshaping of hip-hop in Japan. This generation can be understood as happening from the mid-nineties to around 2010. The fundamental differences in the second generation of Japanese hip-hop from the preceding one include increased collaboration with American artists and further exposure to a 'semantic' understanding of hip-hop. Media presence facilitated an increased importance on visual elements of hip-hop culture in terms of fashion and music videos. This allowed Japanese performers to identify and perform hip-hop with broadened understandings.

In 1999, Zeebra (from King Giddra) released the song 'Mr. Dynamite'. It became the first Japanese hip-hop song to reach the top 50 of the Japanese Oricon Pop charts. More frequently hip-hop songs produced by Japanese musicians began to be legitimised through popular culture acceptance in charts and sales. Most were still associated with a mainstream J Rap style, likened to J Pop. Tokyo-based group Rip Slyme sold 920,000 copies of their album *Tokyo Classic* in 2002, being ninth in the most sold albums for that year in Japan (Condry 2006: 104). The topics discussed on the album are far-removed from subjects delved into in King Giddra's music. Rip Slyme's top single 'Rakuen Baby' shares imagery of a Summer fling and inoffensive youthful innocence. These types of unobjectionable themes were just the right formula for major Japanese charts.

Conversely, a lot of hip-hop was appealing to a number of Japanese fans for its edgy content. Hip-hop musicians in Japan began performing messages of gangster violence, counter-culture, and defiance of the law. One Japanese artist who embedded these themes into his lyrical content was Dabo. Dabo was signed to newly launched label Def Jam Japan under Universal Music in the late 1990s as one of their first hip-hop artists. Def Jam as a label was originally conceived in New York from Russell Simmons, and boasted hip-hop heavyweights such as Run DMC and Beastie Boys. Critics have responded that the Japanese imprint of the label with Dabo helped to build a global brand of Def Jam and hip-hop being a 'gangsta music' from the streets (Condry 2006: 105-106). Although Dabo's lyrics were to a degree fantastical considering the content of gunfights that were virtually non-existent in his life, being signed to a major label was a massive step in constituting Japanese hip-hop as being real and authentic. The stylistic traits he employed showed a thematic connection to hip-hop's dominant culture in the United States.

Zen La Rock, a J Rap MC and DJ recounted being attracted to the 'fuck you' nature of hip-hop, with its disregard for authority. To Zen La Rock, hip-hop had an embedded youthful energy. It was not until he visited New York in 2000 in which he saw white hip-hop group Beastie Boys perform, that he thought he could be accepted in the genre of hip-hop. Although Zen La Rock was initially attracted to the genre through its defiant themes, his music took the shape of many J Rap party DJs. He believes the energy of hip-hop is embedded into the style, no matter how broadly it is used. (pers. comm. 2017)

Importantly, barriers between the USA and Japanese hip-hop scene were beginning to be broken down during this second era of Japanese hip-hop. American corporations behind major labels and magazines were seeking overseas markets, tapping into the growing affinity Japanese youth culture had with hip-hop. Virtual technology became a visible force leading to increased exposure of hip-hop artists outside of Japan to Japanese audiences. Relationships began building across cultures, but within the realm of hip-hop through fashion and artistic collaboration. Dabo recorded a remix with prominent USA rapper LL Cool J's for the song 'Queen Is', an homage to Queens, New York. DJ Krush collaborated with CL Smooth, a New York rapper in 1995 with the song 'Only the Strong Survive'. In 2000, underground American hip-hop group 3 Melancholy Gypsys (3MG) performed in Tokyo. They released the performance as a live album through the Tokyo label Mary Joy Recordings.

In the second generation of Japanese hip-hop, USA hip-hop styles and performers were becoming more visible to Japanese audiences. New international hip-hop acts were performing on Japanese shores and hip-hop media became more present through hip-hop magazines, music videos, records and performances. Hip-hop media from the United States became a way of rationalizing hip-hop in Japan and ideas of 'realness'. Manhattan Records in Shibuya would receive The Source magazine weekly from the USA. The magazine featured hip-hop content from the United States picturing photoshoots of commercially successful rappers (Shiho Watanabe pers. comm. 2017). Often lines would be going out the door of Manhattan Records full of fans eager to digest the latest US hip-hop content. Pictorials and music videos also illuminated how Japanese artists could tune in and engage with hip-hop through an increasingly important cultural product - fashion. At this time fashion scenes in Japan and Tokyo especially were booming and American hip-hop artists began looking overseas for 'fresh' clothing with cultural capital. Influential artists such as Jay-Z and Kanye West were pictured wearing Japanese label Comme des Garçons in their music videos. The Japanese fashion label BAPE (A Bathing Ape) founded by Nigo in 1993 became one of the biggest fashion brands in hip-hop. This was through a collaboration with Pharrell Williams' brand Billionaire Boys Club which depicted anime and kawaii imagery on clothing for sale to predominantly US audiences. W. David Marx has written extensively about how Japanese fashion 'saved' American style through its fashionable production of streetwear. These brands became

highly influential as they began being increasingly collaborated with and worn by famous American pop culture icons. As Japan had been absorbing popular American styles and rebranding their own, Marx writes that American audiences "clamoured after the Japanese brand A Bathing Ape the same way that the Japanese had obsessed over American style in the preceding decades" (Marx 2015: 182). This was the beginning of a shift in cultural digestion. Through increased visibility of visual aesthetics through media, hip-hop culture broadly was beginning to change how it represented itself.

During the mid-2000s the 'Bling Era' of hip-hop was at its height. The term was coined by Cash Money Millionaires, a group from Louisiana, New Orleans who boasted how their diamonds 'bling' on the 1999 song 'Bling Bling'. USA Hip-hop music videos were being played frequently on MTV, and having a well-produced music video became an integral part of being a popular artist. Visual depictions through videos, magazines and some websites meant that to be a hip-hop musician you could no longer just make good music, but you had to portray yourself as a self-built entrepreneur. Showing off your wealth with expensive jewelry and fashion became an important part of hip-hop representation. Popular hip-hop in the United States shifted from representing strictly marginalized communities projecting their voice, and began demonstrating how rappers have built an empire through their talents (or 'hustling'). This had to be expressed with the latest fashion and 'bling'. One famous US rapper who exemplified these traits in popular culture media is 50 Cent. 50 Cent grew up in Queens, New York to a low-income family. He made a living through hustling drugs on street corners during the crack epidemic of the 1980s. He was shot in an attempted robbery and left for dead in 2000. These themes he explores extensively in his lyrics. But 50 also explored new themes which began to be a staple of hip-hop in popular culture, 'look at how rich I am'. Songs from his 2003 album *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* center around how 50 was able to build an empire despite being shot at while 'hustling' on the streets. He turned his tribulations into triumph through his talent. This exemplifies the importance of these themes in mid-2000s mainstream US hip-hop. 50 Cent is 'true to the streets' but also shows off his wealth with flamboyance and lack of humility.

These types of visual themes allowed Japanese hip-hop audiences new ways to perform a hip-hop identity. Fashion and jewelry became an integral part of 'looking the part' of a hip-hop performer. They offered new methods of visual expression for Japanese audiences which were not racially based. The increasing visibility of media in hip-hop allowed for new forms of cultural exchange to take place between Japan and the USA. Although not purely one-sided, Japanese ingestion of hip-hop was often considered imitation and shallow to early American critics. But with an increasing emphasis on visual depictions of culture through music videos and fashion, USA artists began to consume Japanese cultural products to fit

into their hip-hop identity, an ongoing cultural *dochaku*. This was exemplified in Teriyaki Boyz exchanges with prominent American hip-hop musicians.

The Teriyaki Boyz are a hip-hop group from Yokohama, Japan. They consist of rappers Ilmari and Ryo-Z from Rip Slyme, Verbal, Wise, and Nigo, the DJ and founder of streetwear fashion brand, A Bathing Ape. The supergroups first album *Beef or Chicken* was released in 2005 and had production from some of the most prolific US hip-hop producers at the time. These included Adrock from the Beastie Boys, Daft Punk, DJ Shadow, DJ Premier, Just Blaze, Jermaine Dupri, Mark Ronson and Pharrell Williams with the Neptunes. The album reached #4 on the Oricon Charts in Japan. Never before had a Japanese hip-hop album been so intertwined with mainstream US hip-hop artists. Part of these connections were set up within the label of Def Jam, but also through mutual respect of style between Nigo and Pharrell. It showed a growing dialogue between two culturally different climates bonding through musical style. In 2007 the group released the song 'I Still Love H.E.R.' featuring an up and coming rapper by the name of Kanye West. The video for the song pictures the group performing on 'Teriyaki Tube', a parody of video-website YouTube. This type of ironicized media in videos would become more important for the next generation.

The Teriyaki Boyz were also the creators of the song 'Tokyo Drift'. This was the main title track for the 2006 movie *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* (released as *Wild Speed 3* in Japan). The movie made $62.5 million in the United States, bringing Japanese culture and Japanese hip-hop to mainstream US (predominantly young, male) audiences, 23 years after the release of *Wild Style*. Despite the success story of the Teriyaki Boyz, it would still be years before Japanese hip-hop was to truly make an impact on US audiences. Teriyaki Boyz were one of a kind inside of Japan. Most Japanese hip-hop musicians were focused on internal success and did not seek success in international markets before they had risen to the top of their own.

During this boom of the Japanese hip-hop scene, the Japanese music industry took notice of the buzz the genre was making locally. Major labels began signing hip-hop artists focussed on selling as many CDs as possible. Japan is still the No. 1 CD-selling country in the world. However the conservative Japanese music industry did not adapt to the changing methods of music dissemination. iTunes and YouTube became the most common ways for younger generations to stream, listen and be exposed to new musical styles. Yet Japanese labels kept their artists offline in a bid to avoid piracy (Taylor 2015). Rapper Taku Takahashi from the group m-flo cites this as a cause for a fundamental change in the Japanese hip-hop scene. "We didn't look abroad like we should have because we were content with the domestic market since we were selling so many CDs … The industry is in transition, figuring out how to

operate with less money — we have to. Fifteen years ago, there was more space for something different and m-flo was fortunate to debut at that time. We wouldn't have been signed if we debuted now; we'd probably be on a netlabel" (ibid.). Takahashi signifies an important relationship with technology and hip-hop music. Media is not just important to build connections and create exposure for hip-hop, but it is integral for its dissemination. Hip-hop as a contemporary popular music evolves in relation to the media pipelines it exists in.

The emphasis on media technology as a way of reckoning for Japanese artists became increasingly important. Artists sought a self-determined authenticity as hip-hop musicians inspired by dominant hip-hop traits. In the post-bubble era, younger artists had increasingly more access to emerging American styles of hip-hop and its rapidly changing trends. Fans and musicians could become a part of the immediate conversation. Different trajectories of hip-hop started branching out in Japan. Communities of right-wing performers with nationalistic themes who do not seek legitimation in American hip-hop tropes emerged, as well as party rap J-Rap performers, who were equally unconcerned with what was happening outside of their immediate Japanese culture (Manabe 2015: 248-251). Yet the ability to be exposed to take part in hip-hop original community thousands of miles away would be a driving influence for younger rappers towards the second decade in the 21st Century. But the music industry in Japan did not move fast enough to keep up with changing methods of music exposure. Hip-hop hit a peak in terms of infrastructural support from labels and companies internally in Japan. The wave receded, and hip-hop went back underground, eventually to return with a new flavour.

2.1 C - Third Generation

The third generation of Japanese hip-hop is signified not just by a change in attitude, but also a change of style. The style of hip-hop that became the most prominent through media pipelines was sonically different than that of its boombap predecessors. 'Trap Music' is a Southern USA hip-hop style with an identifiable sound. The music is normally 4/4 and between 135-160 beats per minute, however by design it often feels at half-tempo. The signature layered drum sounds usually include rattling high-hats or claps that often move at 1/16 or even 1/32 pace, a tinny timbre'd snare on the third beat, and a kick drum that often alternates between the on and off beat (depending on the groove). The most important element in trap music is the deep 808 bass drum. The term 808 refers to the Roland TR-808 drum machine designed by Japanese engineer Ikutaro Kakehashi. It has become a staple in contemporary electronically produced music. What stood out about the 808 compared to earlier drum machines, was its 'futuristic' interpretation on percussion. It was remarkably affordable and comes with an easy-to-use interface. In Kanye West's song 'Love Lockdown' from the album *808's and Heartbreak* (of which every

song on the album featured 808 drum samples), the 808 kick has been likened by critics as reminiscent of a heartbeat (Hasnain 2017)(Richards 2008).

The term 'trap' music arises from the colloquial term for drug houses. 'Trap houses' are known houses that sell drugs, are sometimes abandoned and exist predominantly in minority communities in the United States. Once you begin selling drugs and making a monetary return you become stuck in the 'trap'. In 2003, Atlanta artist T.I. released the album *Trap Muzik*. The album chronicles the life of a rapper stuck in the 'trap' trying to make ends meet. In an interview with Stereogum in 2012, T.I. describes the album. "If you don't know what the trap is, that's basically where drugs are sold. In this country, the majority of us live in a neighborhood where drugs are sold, whether we like it or not. Whether you in the trap selling dope, whether you in the trap buying dope, whether you in the trap trying to get out - whatever the case may be, I'm trying to deal with all aspects of that lifestyle." - (Patel 2012). In OutKast's 1998 song 'SpottieOttieDopaliscious', rapper Big Boi signifies the entendre of the word trap, rapping: "Can't gamble feeding baby on that dope money / Might not always be sufficient / … So now you back in the trap /just that, *trapped*" (Benjamin & Patton 1998).

Trap music did not prominently enter the mainstream US charts until the 2010s. It was already in its second evolution in Atlanta, moving on from the style of 'Crunk Music'. The sound became polished, and producers grew in prominence for their new groove-embedded style of gangsta hip-hop. Trap music achieved commercial success through T.I. and other influential Southern hip-hop artists such as Gucci Mane, Young Jeezy, and OutKast in the US. Trap music has continued to grow in popularity amongst mainstream culture pipelines into the 2010s, especially through its genre-fusion with electronic music, leading it to gain a strong presence in popular music charts.

The rise of the Atlanta trap scene was coupled with an increasing visibility and accessibility of virtual networks. In 2006 the social media website Facebook expanded its beginnings in college campuses to allow users all over the world to form a virtual profile and allowed for easier methods of sharing information between friends and fans. Twitter launched in 2006 which let users post messages to their followers. Instagram, a visual-based service, allowed users to post images to other users. And in 2011 Japanese-based software corporation launched LINE*,* an instant communications service that reached 600 million users in 2016.

As such, the new style of trap music started reaching a youthful audience living in a more interconnected, globalized world. This was expanded through increased consumption of SNS (Social Network Services) and multi-media platforms used for hip-hop promotion. The third generation of

Japanese hip-hop demonstrates a integral relationship with social media technology as the mediator of understanding hip-hop, and an integral tool of self-promotion. The young audience in Japan who were first exposed to trap music most likely did not experience troubled upbringings that Atlanta trap artists represented. The highly-saturated media pipelines of popular culture from the United States became ever-more present in Japan but held no social context to the music itself. However Japanese audiences felt attraction to trap music through its romanticized images of wealth and sex through trap music.

<div align="center">

generation changed we gotta accept that

you can hate but you can't stop that

— SEEDA (@SEEDA_CCG) November 27, 2017

Tweet from First/Second Generation Japanese rapper, SEEDA

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The pioneers of the Japanese hip-hop scene sought to legitimise hip-hop in Japan as an authentic hip-hop that takes influence from overseas styles to make something Japanese. But now an evident split exists between the third generation of Japanese hip-hop and its prior generations. Semantics have become more important over style or lyricism. This has caused a rift between the younger, third generation of hip-hop performers basing themselves in this trap style, versus the older generations who spawned hip-hop culture in Japan. Many older MCs feel that younger rappers are not paying homage to those that went before them. Others find it as just a new evolution of hip-hop style. But where the third generation have succeeded in regards to their predecessors, is visibility. The younger generation have harnessed the ability to turn social media/SNS into a vital tool for self-promotion and music discovery. By using profiles across multi-media platforms, artists can create an aesthetic building upon the importance of visual style, as well as giving fans and followers a glimpse into their daily lives. Through video-streaming platforms such as YouTube, they can embrace the visual nature that is now so important in hip-hop style. However, now new questions of authenticity and appropriation arise.

2.2 Old and New Questions of Authenticity

There have always been apprehensions and critiques by authors and cultural figures in Japanese hip-hop about questions of authenticity. This stems from performing music so closely associated with racial understanding. Similar questions have arisen since the post-war jazz boom in 1950s Japan. Questions regarding imitation versus innovation have often underscored the questions of what is legitimate, authentic participation in jazz cultures. E. Taylor Atkins has written about the struggles of Japanese jazz musicians attempting to authenticate themselves in a genre where authenticity lies fickley between a racial understanding of Black America and progressive innovation. One strategy of

authentication for the Japanese jazz scene was to recreate a social and cultural environment in which 'real jazz' could be produced. This Japanese 'hipster' scene, which included its own slang, attitudes, and fashion was then deemed to be inauthentic regardless, as it subverted a basic principle of jazz to innovate and explore new ideas and agendas (Atkins 2001: 161-162). As Edward Bruner acknowledges, 'authenticity' implies authorial conviction, indicating someone has the power to legitimise something as authentic or not (Bruner 1994: 400). One of hip-hops most deeply held values is that of being real, or, understanding the roots of hip-hop and being true to oneself. However when hip-hop culture transpires in different cultural climates the question of authenticity has to be asked in an internal localized setting, as well as reflected in a wider US-driven understanding.

The first and second generation of Japanese hip-hop musicians were often fine-tuned with hip-hop dialogues from the United States. When hip-hop media was limited, there existed such a high demand to understand hip-hop that performers such as K Dub Shine and Zeebra would literally study hip-hop culture. There existed a drive to know more about the genre and how to perform it. In Ian Condry's book *Hiphop Japan*, he posits that the question was not whether Japanese hip-hop musicians were performing hip-hop, but whether they were doing their homework (Condry 2006: 3). But the third generation of Japanese hip-hop complicates some of these issues. The most visual and marketable, and therefore influential US hip-hop to influence contemporary Japanese audiences is mostly concerned with aesthetic style. It has become less about demonstrating and raising awareness of socially relevant issues. This points to a decentralization of hip-hop culture as it is filtered through capitalist driven media networks. Corporations with the most capital and network control have the most influence into geographic areas where hip-hops main exposure comes through pop culture media. This is not to undermine the fundamental roots of the genre as a powerful tool of voice for oppressed communities out of the USA. Yet hip-hop has become the dominant popular culture force in the early 21st Century, commodified by the 'culture industry' leading to mass distribution of the style (Alrige & Stewart 2005). The different manifestations of hip-hop in varying cultural climates (albeit usually intrinsically inspired by the roots of Old School US hip-hop and its messages) have convoluted a definable and attainable 'authentic' performance of hip-hop. So then, the question for many Japanese hip-hop actors and scholars becomes - is this current era of hip-hop in Japan less authentic to previous generations since the roots of hip-hop are not being acknowledged? Or is it part of a wider change in hip-hop with thematically different ideas, often dealing with hedonistic themes?

Hip-hop has become a popular music phenomenon through the increasing presence of virtual media and that internet acting as disseminators of American popular music. This saturation of hip-hop means that artists do not seek internalized authenticity by the same markers of performative identity that

the first two generations of Japanese hip-hop musicians found so important. Hip-hop culture no longer just encompasses the four basic elements of graffiti, breakdancing, turntablism and rapping. It has grown into a pop culture force with linguistic importance in youth culture through colloquialisms and using fashion as a performance of hip-hop identity. This saturation of hip-hop as a commodified style in popular youth culture means it is now impossible to essentialise hip-hop into fundamental parameters. This delineates questions of authenticity. For contemporary Japanese hip-hop musicians, authenticity lies intertwined within various understandings of identity. *Am I a Japanese hip-hop musician? Or am I apart of a wider hip-hop culture?* Borrowing from Du Bois, Noriko Manabe discusses that Japanese hip-hop musicians deal with a 'multiple consciousness' in terms of "facing foreigners' expectations of Japanese balanced against the preferences of the Japanese audience, awareness of global trends in hip-hop, and the performer's own national pride and musical strengths" (Manabe 2013: 37). In an interconnected globalized setting, these questions become increasingly complicated when analysing specific enactments of hip-hop performance in Japan.

2.3 Kohh, 'It G Ma' and Levels of Appropriation

The biggest figure in the third generation of Japanese hip-hop is rapper Kohh. On my travels throughout Japan, Kohh would consistently be considered as the sole-figure who made Japanese hip-hop famous to overseas audiences. Kohh is primarily a trap musician. His level of exposure in this style points to the importance of virtual networks for Japanese hip-hop musicians in the third generation. Kohh, whos real name is Yuki Chiba, is a Japanese rapper from Tokyo. He grew up in tribulating circumstances that would feed into his identity as a hip-hop musician. His father killed himself whilst on drugs when Kohh was young, and following his father's death his mother became addicted to drugs. After his mother quickly started running out of money, Kohh, his mother, and his little brother moved to Kita Ward in Tokyo, a part of a low socio-economic housing area. Attracted to the defiant mentality of the genre, Kohh began rapping at a young age, producing various mixtapes independently. He reached out to 318, a successful producer, A&R and label-owner in Tokyo in the hope of getting signed. The two began messaging each other through a Japanese SNS application, Mixi. Through Mixi, 318 was able to hear Kohh's music and read up on his background. 318 was initially going to reject Kohh because he was still 18 and poor. But after learning that they were from the same neighbourhood, 318 signed Kohh to his record label GUNSMITH PRODUCTION (Thomas in *Noisey* 2015).

Kohh's identity as a performer is a reflection of a wider movement for hip-hop musicians in Japan. Despite virtual networks opening up new dialogues between music, Japanese culture cannot be separated from the Japanese performer. Hip-hop culture offers a path of 'resistance' and defiance for

Kohh. He raps about 'forbidden narratives' of social injustices and drug problems. There are issues that exist, but are not discussed, by wider Japanese society. In the trap genre that he voices these ideas in, socially conscious narratives are still few and far between. In terms of what may constitute a traditional Japanese performer as well as a trap musician, Kohh subverts expectations. Kohh is covered in tattoos which are considered a taboo in Japan from their association to the yakuza (Japanese mafia) and his music is stylistically based around trap music. The heavy, dark sonic timbres do not fit comfortably in Japanese popular music styles. Although it is an act of resistance against traditional Japanese expectations, his resistance identity has offered Kohh the ability to transgress out of the Japanese music scene. This is shown through the success of the song 'It G Ma'.

'It G Ma' is a trap song originally written by Korean musicians JayAllday and Keith Ape. Jay AllDay, who produced the song, spent four years in Tokyo. During this time he was in tune with the rising Japanese hip-hop scene. He reached out to Japanese rappers Loota and Kohh to be on the record. The song itself features three languages, imploring the use of Korean, Japanese and English. The main hook of the song 'It G Ma' translates to 'do not forget!'. This is followed by Jay AllDay, a Korean MC, rapping '*uri ga ichiban*' which translates to 'we are number one' using both the Korean and Japanese language. The song, despite its seemingly shallow themes actually points to an important concept in globalized hip-hop flows. There are long historical feelings of contempt for each other between Korea and Japan, but JayAllday is quick to denounce any sort of nationalistic views. "We have a history behind us, but I don't give a fuck about it. I think it's better for our generation to do positive things together. It's not about a country. It's all about a person." (Thomas with *Noisey* 2015) This is reiterated in Kohh's lyrics: "Talking about the past is lame so forget about what happened long ago!". This new wave of trap music does not usually include the social commentary like earlier hip-hop. However these artists use the genre as a vehicle for inter-cultural exchange directed towards a younger generation. It is interesting to note the reception of the song and the perceptions of cultural stereotypes. Non-Asian audiences have been quick to describe It G Ma as appropriating American culture, yet the reversal is rarely discussed. Japanese hip-hop scholar Dexter Thomas writes that the rappers on It G Ma "have managed to flip decades of our emasculating Mr. Miyagi stereotypes and break into the southern trap sphere on their own terms—all without official American connections or a deal" (Thomas with *Noisey* 2015).

Despite the heavy presence of Korean and Japanese language in the song, It G Ma managed to reach the number two spot on the Billboard charts in America. Part of this success lies in the heavy visual aesthetic of the accompanying music video. At the end of January 2018, the video has amassed 49.7 million views on YouTube alone. The video pictures the rappers moving throughout a hotel, with neon images and cartoons appearing on the screen in the form of caricatured faces or *yen* and *won* symbols. The

rappers are dressed in BAPE and Comme des Garçons clothing and dance around with bottles of beer, Korean rice wine, and sake (a Japanese liquor). The song sonically draws heavy influence from trap music, with sparse 808 basslines, an atmospheric synth, and high-paced rattling hi-hats. There is no hiding that this song was written with American audiences in mind. The songs title, which means 'Don't Forget' in Korean, is written phonetically so it is easy to pronounce in English. The type of musical and visual aesthetics the song utilizes were dominant in the American charts at the same time. This drew questions of appropriation from American audiences and hip-hop musicians alike. Atlanta trap musician OG Maco tweeted his discomfort with the song, saying that he believes the group ripped off his song 'U Guessed It'.

> I'm aware of the Koreans that mocked me and took my sauce. I'm not impressed. I'm not inspired. I think it's kinda lame. To each his own.
> — L.A. Maco (@OGMaco) February 4, 2015

In some ways, OG Maco is right. The group were inspired by the basis form of 'U Guessed It'. In talking with Dexter Thomas, Jay AllDay said "you can say we were inspired, but the thing is, we weren't like 'yo, let's copy OG Maco's shit!' you feel me?" (Thomas with *Noisey* 2015). At the same time, there is nothing integrally Korean or Japanese about the song. The video does not depict Asia at all, and bears no association to Korea or Japan apart from the rappers themselves, the products used, and the flashes of currency symbols. Jay AllDay has said that the ideas to use those signifiers came at the last minute, as money, alcohol, and music act as a universal language. But are they appropriating Black culture itself?

> I didn't have grills or extra jackets and lean cups and shit in the "U Guessed It" video, so why did they? Black stereotypes. Lame as fuck.
> — L.A. Maco (@OGMaco) February 4, 2015

Although Maco tweeted his discomfort about the use of props in the song, there is no 'lean cups' depicted. Kohh is drinking from Cass, a Korean beer. The other rappers are shown drinking sake and Korean rice wine. The fact Maco finds folly with 'grills' and 'extra jackets' is interesting - because that had become a popular style among Japanese youth culture in years prior to this video being released. Trap music had already begun to bear influence in these Japanese and Korean youth circles. Does the song then become problematic because of the platform itself as a popular hit? This leads us down a slippery slope. In some ways appropriation of another musical style is at play here. But this song is not the root of the appropriation itself. This song is a product of a wider cultural appropriation drawn from depictions in

media which have proliferated hip-hop culture throughout Japan and Korea. In any case, the song has opened doors not just for American audiences but also Korean and Japanese ones. One month after the song was released, Jay AllDay tweeted:

Azn boys been hitting me up like "yo u and yo squad r my hero. All the girls in school look at me different now"
— JA¥ALLDA¥ (@CHRT_JAYALLDAY) January 29, 2015

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Screenshot from 'It G Ma' video depicting rapper Kohh & the symbol for Korean currency *won* and Japanese currency *yen*

Kohh's evident success from It G Ma, four studio albums with GUNSMITH, and being recognisable to American audiences has caused him to be heralded as one of Japan's most important hip-hop musicians. However there are very few fellow Japanese rappers that have achieved the same success in popular culture markets overseas. And while Kohh may prove exemplary in terms of success, his method of cross-cultural collaboration and internet exposure is an anomaly in the local Japanese scene. Nevertheless, Kohh proved that there is an ability to tap into a global hip-hop market and achieve success through hip-hop as a Japanese musician. He has since been featured regularly on US-based hip-hop blogs and online magazines such as Complex and Worldstar Hip Hop.

There are plenty of reasons that play into Kohh's success being rare in a Japanese setting. Obviously hip-hop is a lyrical musical form, with much importance being placed on the lyrics themselves. The language barrier that exists between Japanese and English (the dominant language of rapping) is so extensive that it is hard to imagine a lyrical genre being enjoyed without the lyrics. Then why do Japanese

hip-hop musicians not rap in English? Because, well, they do not want to. When I began this research I was under the impression that Japanese hip-hop musicians would want to achieve global success through their music. But this is not always the case. Ryo Isobe, a hip-hop scholar from Tokyo discussed with me how much Japanese society views itself as a galapagos. He uses the archipelago as a way of explaining some of the fundamental homogeneity in Japanese society (pers. comm. 2017). The society predominately looks inward, and although it is influenced by styles outside of Japan, they are maintained within a Japanese setting. Shiho Watanabe said that Japan is a mono-lingual and a mono-cultural society - which she expects to never change (pers. comm. 2017). These thoughts echo sentiments of the Japanese as a individualist society amongst world cultures. Japanese musicians do not rap in English because they are Japanese. They are producing their music for Japanese audiences because that is who they are. If Japanese hip-hop musicians were preoccupied with trying to be successful in global hip-hop networks, they would be subverting hip-hop's principles about speaking on the realities of daily life. This would be considered being inauthentic to the genre.

In my experience in Tokyo, whenever I asked the question - 'what makes Japanese hip-hop Japanese?', apart from different language forms, often the question was turned back to me. What did I think made Japanese hip-hop unique? Shiho Watanabe told me that by being so embroiled in the Japanese hip-hop scene since its conception, she found it hard to put barriers on what makes hip-hop Japanese. My impression is that although Tokyo hip-hop constantly reinvents and reaffirms itself, it does so from the glare of the dominant hip-hop culture in the United States. As media plays an increasingly vital role in disseminating hip-hop in Japan, hip-hops trajectory is constantly under the whim of the dominant culture industry in the genre. For this reason, Tokyo hip-hop has not been able to sustain itself as fundamentally its own music, in its own right, on its own trajectory, different from other popular styles of hip-hop. But this is not necessarily a bad thing. By constantly gazing towards the dominant hip-hop culture, immediate conversations that exist within hip-hop globally regarding social contextual issues, or what is 'real' hip-hop now happen in simultaneously in Japanese networks. If Japanese hip-hop was to become its own thing in its own right, removed from wider hip-hop dialogues, then issues of appropriation would be much more of a concern. This is because the musical style would have been mimicked in a new setting far-removed from its original conception and context. In this way virtual networks and media foster hip-hop dialogues in a range of communities formed through hip-hop culture, allowing them to have these conversations together. This is partly what complicates questions of authenticity, as these conversations are continuously unfolding.

2.4 Hip-Hop Media & the Immediate Conversation

The dominant virtual networks that promote and disseminate cultural tropes of hip-hop in Japan are a mix of blog-sites, SNS accounts, and hip-hop interpretation sites. Despite emphasising the Japanese hip-hop scene, prominent sites for Japanese hip-hop culture include a mixture of Japanese and USA hip-hop promotion. While only mainstream American artists are depicted on these sites, they also promote a range of Japanese musicians at different levels of success. I was initially surprised at the depth of Japanese hip-hop media. Shiho Watanabe told me she felt that a lack of Japanese hip-hop media was the biggest thing missing in the Japanese hip-hop community. She said that despite the existence of several Japanese hip-hop websites, without a prominent hip-hop media online magazine "like The Source or Complex in the USA", Japanese hip-hop will not get the promotion locally that it deserves (pers. comm. 2017).

The main Japanese hip-hop websites that have been studied in this thesis are FNMNL and Amebreak. FNMNL was recommended by Shiho, and Amebreak was recommended by Kento. I have also heavily referred to Japanese hip-hop Twitter accounts such as Hip Hop Hype (@hiphop_hype), and 日本語ラップ専門アカウント(@Rhymeboy). FNMNL is the biggest Japanese hip-hop website according to Shiho, and it includes a hefty mix of Japanese and USA hip-hop. Japanese promotion usually includes a blurb about the artists, indicating which part of Japan they are from, a little about their background, how they started creating hip-hop music, and their current style of music. FNMNL helps build media profiles of these local artists. In their promotion of USA hip-hop news or releases, the descriptions are often drastically shorter (sometimes shorter than 100 words) and usually include a link to the source of news itself (from major USA hip-hop media based in English). The US artists are already well-established, and have been legitimized in the American scene through record label signings or making it onto the Billboard charts. The information of American artists on FNMNL is pre-digested, as it is translations of pre-written articles, and places emphasis on the artists success or 'importance'. While FNMNL is an important website for Japanese hip-hop, the context it gives for Japanese musicians is missing in their descriptions of USA artists. This feeds a decontextualization of the American hip-hop scene when travelled through media.

Amebreak began as an off-set blog from the Japanese SNS 'ameba', in which Japanese hip-hop fans would discuss various aspects of hip-hop culture locally and internationally. Amebreak is now set up as a blog, similar to an online magazine. It is broken down into six sections - news, columns, interviews, music/video, artist blogs, and an about section. While incorporating some promotion of US hip-hop

music, Amebreak primarily posts recently released Japanese hip-hop with links to the music videos or streaming platforms. Since moving from an open social networking site to a blog, Amebreak now lacks open forums that create dialogue around hip-hop music. Kento said that while growing up listening to Japanese hip-hop, he would scan Amebreak to read the conversations other Japanese hip-hop fans were having. At this point, there is not a focussed forum for Japanese hip-hop that is widely accessed or promoted.

Twitter account Hip Hop Hype has 41,000 followers and acts as a gateway for Japanese audiences into American hip-hop media. The account posts links to various English-based websites, while writing a small description in Japanese (within the 280 character amount limited by Twitters infrastructure) regarding the contents of the link. This account includes a variety of hip-hop information around the internet. Links include US-based hip-hop media such as The Source, Hot New Hip Hop, Billboard, as well as Japanese sites Amebreak and FNMNL. With just a small description in Japanese (as the linked sites are based in English unless they are regarding Japanese hip-hop), the most important aspect of Hip Hop Hype is the links to the music or video itself. The language barrier for the audience is obvious. The links to Japanese-based websites are by far most engaged with from followers.

Alternatively, there are Japanese Twitter accounts devoted to promoting Japanese hip-hop locally. While in Japan, an important Twitter account in order to find local events was 日本語ラップ専門アカウント [Japanese Rap Special Account]. The account is set up by Kasai Naoya, who has been using SNS for eight years and now boasts 20,000 followers. I exchanged e-mails with Naoya as he is based in the Aichi prefecture. Naoya was excited to hear from me, because it demonstrated to him how the Japanese hip-hop scene is growing. As a high school student, he began using his Twitter as a communication tool to connect with wider hip-hop communities. These communities were important to Naoya as he grew up in the countryside and did not have any friends that were listening to hip-hop.

"It was before Twitter became popular in Japan, but it became the style of the present while repeating trial and error in various ways. We have already opened an account for 8 years, but interest in HIP HOP is increasing *(sic)*." (pers. comm. 2017).

With the growth of his account, Naoya decided to focus his page on event promotion. He posts information about hip-hop events all over Japan. On Fridays and Saturdays he posts upwards of 50 tweets sharing a range of events. In order to find out about the gigs, he combs through various Japanese hip-hop accounts from venues, artists, labels, 'music sites', 'culture sites' and blog-sites. When asked about the current state of hip-hop in Japan, Naoya said that unlike overseas, there are only a few hip-hop songs that

ever reach the top 10. But, "It is expanding. The future is bright". The use of SNS as a blogging tool in the promotion of hip-hop indicates how deeply intertwined SNS has become in social life in Japan. While those interested in hip-hop can seek it out via various websites, Hip Hop Hype and Rhymeboy are only posting in social networking communities. They are demonstrations of how virtual networks allow Japanese audiences to be a part of the 'immediate conversation'.

Hip-hop radio in Japan has similar content as Japanese hip-hop blogs. They promote mainstream USA hip-hop and a mix of Japanese hip-hop musicians at various levels of exposure. Tokyo-based radio station WREP is devoted solely to hip-hop, and boasts regular features from legendary Japanese rapper Zeebra. Rather than just play one aspect of hip-hop style, the station broadcasts a range of hip-hop inspired music. These include disco breaks, early hip-hop songs, and contemporary US hip-hop songs that have achieved mainstream success.

Shiho Watanabe is primarily a Japanese hip-hop journalist and radio DJ. She hosts the 'Inside Out' radio show on block.fm. I was invited to sit in on one of her shows in Tokyo. Over the course of the show, there were 6 Japanese hip-hop songs played and 5 USA hip-hop songs. Interestingly, Shiho played homage to underground US rapper Lil Peep, who had died from a xanax overdose earlier that week. Lil Peep's death was highly chronicled in mainstream USA hip-hop media, but this was the first time that I had heard Japanese hip-hop media acknowledge underground USA hip-hop performers. Shiho is in tune with the cultural contexts of USA hip-hop, and she regularly travels to US hip-hop hot-spots to interview local rappers. More recently, she has spent time in Atlanta and is currently planning another trip there soon. Her fluent grasp on the English language has led her to be employed as a lyrics and liner notes translator for hip-hop and R&B albums. She told me that the most difficult part in translating hip-hop lyrics comes from the use of slang. Slang are colloqualized informal words that arise from the social context of the artist. The linguistic base of rapping means that slang terms are heavily employed in hip-hop lyrics and often different geographic regions will create their own slang. Shiho says that hip-hop slang changes so fast, and in order to understand the meaning for many words she uses the website genius.com.

Genius, previously called Rap Genius, is a lyric annotation website that began as an interpretation site for hip-hop lyrics. In the same vein of Wikipedia as an open-contribution website, users can add their own annotations. Other users have the ability to 'like' or 'dislike' an annotation, usually signifying agreement with the interpretation. The prevalence of Genius as a site for rap analysis signifies an interesting way that hip-hop dialogues are constructed in new media. Beginning as a project from three Ivy League school graduates, the founders of Genius came under scrutiny as the proprietors of a website

focussed towards rap music. In an effort to defend themselves, as well as legitimizing Genius, the founders created 'verified artist' accounts (Shontell 2012). USA rappers such as Nas, 50 Cent, RZA and A$AP Rocky have since annotated their own lyrics. This shows how virtual networks can create immediacy between the artist and performer through online networks. Genius allows barriers to be broken down between the listeners and creators of the music. Shiho relies on Genius in her important role as a translator between hip-hop cultures dominant English vernacular and the Japanese language. This makes her a cultural gatekeeper, as she creates a pathway from themes employed in wider hip-hop tropes and delivers them to a Japanese audience. Feenberg argues that the agency online users have on websites such as Genius, which allows users to agree or disagree with certain posts indicates a 'democratic rationalization' (Bakardjieva & Feenberg 2004: 15-17). Although some artists provide annotation for their lyrics, most do not. By promoting certain interpretations in a democratic way, this does not inherently mean that they are correct. Other rappers find Genius as an inauthentic and lazy as a way of understanding hip-hop culture. Californian rapper Earl Sweatshirt has tweeted "GET THE FUCK OFF RAP GENIUS THAT SHIT MELTS BRAIN CELLS I CANT BELIEVE YOU EVER THOUGHT THAT WAS A CHILL OPTION WHY THE FUCK ARE YOU SO LAZY" - @earlxsweat 24 Mar 2015. In this tweet Sweatshirt implies that Genius 'dumbs-down' understandings of hip-hop culture as it disregards the creative use of lyrical structures and context of the music. By potentially creating misunderstandings of lyrics, Genius may misrepresent the artists themselves.

2.5 New Media and Cultural Capital

New media's relationship with hip-hop in Japan has brought on interesting nuances that depict a changing understanding of cultural capital in hip-hop. Cultural capital has been always important in the hip-hop genre. Prior to the current era, this capital rested heavily on cultural products spawned from African-American culture rather than specific hip-hop based understandings. Cultural capital in hip-hop has always been heavily semantic. In the first generations of hip-hop in the USA, cultural capital could be accumulated with associations to bigger networks. This was shown in the forms of tattoos and gang affiliations. As hip-hop was spawned amongst oppressed communities who were often exposed to violence and crime, the display of 'cultural capital' within early hip-hop culture was associated to outsiders of the genre as embellishing and romanticizing dark themes. In actuality, it was a display of reality within these early communities. Bourdieu indicates how cultural capital is contextual in his explanation of cultural goods being symbolic goods, and their worth is only made possible "for those who hold the code making it possible to decipher them" (Bourdieu 2003: 175). As hip-hop grew into a commercial industry, being a 'signed artist' (picked up by an industry label) was a marker of someone with high levels of cultural capital. As visual media grew in presence, it began to be depicted through flashy weapons, bands

of money and designer clothes as signified in the 'bling era'. It showed these artists 'keeping it real to the streets' but also articulating their success through visual demonstrations. But the presence of social media in dialogues of hip-hop has shifted the semantic understanding of cultural capital from objects as signifiers to being based around a numbers game that equates to power. This commonly called 'clout' in hip-hop. In the most protruding SNS new media outlets between Japan and the United States, the way 'fans' and 'followers' are depicted on a users profile indicates exactly how many accounts are following that artist. I use the word account purposefully, as through the veil of virtual networks, differentiating between the 'real' and 'fake' accounts (i.e, those belonging to and being operated by real people) is blurred and just a number is given. The number of followers is of utmost importance to low-key musicians in Japan who have hopes of making it big, as I found out on a wet night in Nakameguro, Tokyo.

2.5 A - Childrens Story at SolFa

On a cold rainy Monday evening I had found myself at an underground bar in Shimokitazawa. It was opposite Jazzy Sport headquarters, a hip-hop label boasting signings of Japanese artist JJJ and known for releasing classic hip-hop records from the USA such as KMD. I was posted at a Soul & Bossa Nova bar playing homage to classic J-Pop singer Seiko Matsuda. It wasn't really my thing, but I needed to rest my legs. The bohemian part of Tokyo was lined with second-hand stores and arcade complexes. It was also the only part of Tokyo where I could find a good flat white coffee. I didn't have any gigs lined up on the agenda, it was a Monday after all, and my sleeping pattern was still questionable after a weekend of gigs finishing at 5am. I sat at the bar and flicked through Instagram stories on my phone from some of the artists I had seen since my arrival. Instagram stories are a way of posting an image or video that self-deletes in 24 hours. It's often used as insight into daily life, but in this case was being used as a tool to promote a low-key gig. I had been thinking that the night would end in a beer and a long sleep. But a few hours earlier, rapper Weny Dacillo had uploaded a gig poster saying 'TONIGHT' to his Instagram story.
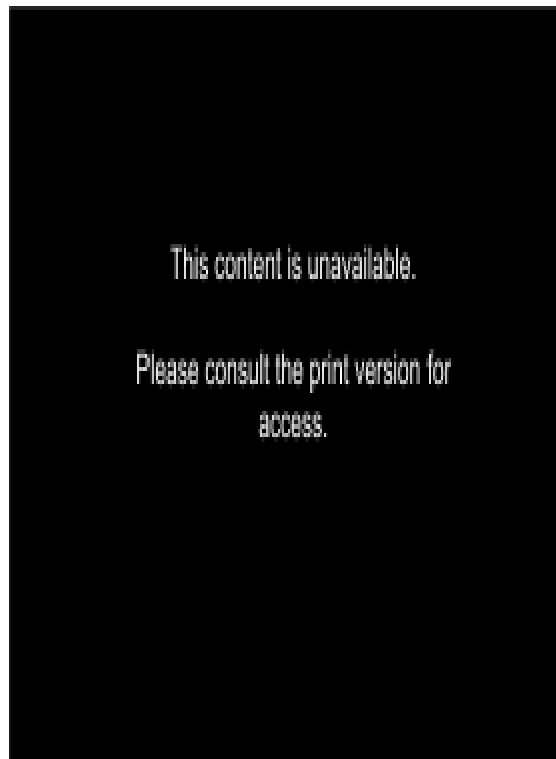
Poster for Childrens Story at SolFa 27.11.2017

I had reached out to Weny Dacillo via Instagram messaging prior to that night, but he never got back to me. He had performed at Sound Museum Vision for its sixth anniversary show. It was a massive showcase of some of Japan's top hip-hop performers in one of Tokyo's biggest nightclubs. In fact, that night I saw Weny at a Konbini, before I knew who he was. I asked him for directions to the gig and complimented his FedEx hat. Nevertheless, I was excited about a gig, any gig, that I could sink my teeth into.

I arrived just after 10PM. Usually hip-hop gigs in Tokyo go until at least 5am, the time when the first train lines of the morning start up. But considering it was a Monday, I thought that this gig would end a little early. The entrance was tucked away down 2 flights of stairs of what looked to be an apartment complex, surrounded by thick concrete walls but kept in clean condition. I paid my 2000 yen entry, received a drink ticket, and parked up on a couch near the bar. It is very uncommon in Japanese society to stare, but tonight I felt like I stuck out like a sore thumb. I could feel eyes watching me. As far as I could see, I was the only gaijin (outsider) in attendance.

SolFa is a predominately house and techno venue in Nakameguro. On some nights the bar lounge and venue opens its doors to music of other genres, such as did on this Monday in November. The venue has a 100 person capacity, relatively small by Tokyo standards. On entry you walk into a

relaxed bar lounge. The bar is nicely lit lined with liqueurs, there's two coffee tables with plants and ashtrays, and a small DJ booth at the back of the room. When I came in, the DJ was playing a mix of downtempo R&B and 90s era boombap hip-hop. I had learnt previously that most venues have at least two stages - I missed most of a gig earlier that week from that mistake. But my punctual arrival got the better of me, and the live performance from rappers were yet to begin.

I noticed a difference in gig attendees than the last Weny Dacillo show I saw. This was more of a communal vibe. And while there was an array of hypebeasts (people dressing in expensive urban wear fashion), much of the outfits were more subdued. Rather than just stand and watch the performers like I saw people do at a lot of the bigger performances, people here were happy to mingle. It seemed like a wider social circle whom I had gate-crashed. While I was sitting on the couch, a guy in his early twenties came up to me. I misheard him at first, and thought he was someone working the gig asking to see my I.D. In actuality, he just wanted a cigarette. I had been asked a lot for cigarettes at gigs and hadn't thought much of it. At times I thought it was almost a way of asking for a gift from someone who didn't belong. But as Kenta hung around and began chatting, I soon realised he just wanted to practise his English. Kenta and I brought each other a couple of rounds of drinks and he introduced me to his friends. I told him about my project which made him visibly excited to see someone take interest in the Japanese scene. He began asking me questions about Japanese hip-hop, giving me the feeling that I was offering a sort of validation of the scene. Kenta showed me music off of his phone, some Jay-Z, 50 Cent and Metro Boomin (successful US artists) amongst Kandy Town, ZORN and Gazilla (Japanese artists). He went on to say that USA hip-hop is better, especially the beats. "That is why USA will always be number one. Their music and beats evolve. But Japanese music is very lyrical. We have great rappers" (pers. comm. 2017).

Off to the side of the bar lounge was a heavy metal door that led through to the blacked out congested performance area. Once the live performance began I stood at the back. From my height difference compared to much of the audience I could see the whole show. The performances were great. Fuji Taito, a Brazilian Japanese rapper was full of energy, and despite his small stature was able to get the crowd hyped. Rapper FRank went on a 2 minute acapella freestyle. He rapped in a triplet-based flow, using Japanese auxiliary verbs that aren't used often in Japanese lyricism as a result of their stagnant form. And then, just in front of me, three guys took off their shirts and started hugging each other, dancing around in a circle. They weren't drunk, they were loving the atmosphere. I noticed people were not on their phones, recording the set. Most people were dancing. I started to register that this show constituted a part of the Japanese hip-hop underground. I was annoyed that it wasn't initially obvious - the lowkey rappers, the lack of advertising, the tight-knit crowd. But it took the audience engagement to really

illustrate some of the fundamental differences socially between mainstream and underground hip-hop circles. The lines are increasingly blurred. The headlining performer of the night was Weny Dacillo, who is successful. It would be hard to relegate him to 'the underground'. Other underground tropes I saw at various gigs were also missing. Usually at underground hip-hop gigs in Japan there is 'Soul Food', a hot broth of vegetables and tofu. But this night at SolFa was a bit more esteemed. The venue was clean-cut, no one was too drunk or causing a fuss. The music was predominantly trap-based, and Fuji Taito told me about how he had dreams of breaking out of the underground and making it big in Los Angeles. He finished off his set rapping, in English, "fuck everybody apart from Tokyo City".

At the end of the gig before everyone had left, the promoter of the show gathered everyone in the bar lounge, and bought those in attendance a round of shots. I had never seen anything like this at any other show I had been to, in Japan or not. It was a nice display of camaraderie to thank the audience. I managed to catch Weny Dacillo in the bar lounge area. I knew he could speak a little English, and he was more fluent than I expected. I told him about my project and how I would be interested in talking with him. He initially seemed keen. I asked for his LINE. He said Instagram was better. I searched up my Instagram account on his phone and handed it back to him. He pointed to my followers (a mere 200, miniscule in cultural capital terms). He turned to me, shook his head and walked away without saying anything. But I knew what he meant. Without followers, I had no social influence. Without having an array of people to deliver exposure, I was not worth his time. A little disheartened, I walked home.

In this section I have shown how the lines between mainstream Japanese hip-hop culture and the underground are increasingly blurred in Tokyo. In the first two generations of Japanese hip-hop there was an evident divide between J-Rap 'party' rappers and the underground. J-Rap usually consisted of innocuous themes and was performed in major nightclubs. The underground was retained in communities that are not involved in the industry and rap about harsh realities. But there has been an agentic shift. CD sales decreased and labels became less profitable as a result of growing technological accessibility. There now exists less necessity to be attached to a commercial record label, or to 'sell out' by changing the fundamental themes within ones music. This, coupled with the rising influence of the trap scene as a form of 'party music' and increased usage of SNS services means that there exists less reason for differences in style. The growing nature of hip-hop in Japan means it cannot be lumped into such a simplified division. As David Z. Morris writes in 'The Sakura of Madness: Japan's Nationalist Hip Hop and the Parallax of Globalized Identity Politics' (2013), far-right nationalist hip-hop groups operate in their own underground circles. As a result of the music being inherently antagonistic, these circles do not

cross into conceptualizations of the underground or mainstream as I talk about them here. The underground as discussed in this thesis, works in constant relation to the evolution of hip-hop style more broadly. This is attached to a US-driven popular culture industry. This night at SolFa was now an identifiably purist, underground gig. But the gig was a safe space for hip-hop fans to express themselves in more flamboyant ways than are traditionally accepted in Japanese culture. In such a polite and reserved society, it is rare to see such outward expressions of joy by taking off clothes, hugging, and dancing. But this low-key gig, which flirts with the underground and party rap divide, demonstrates the importance hip-hop offers to social circles in Japanese settings.

Another important aspect of this descriptive recount is that it demonstrates the increasing role of cultural capital in social networking services. As John Hagedorn writes, "those with *power* are those who define the cultural models that are propagated worldwide through the ubiquitous mass media" (Hagedorn 2009: 91) [italics added]. In Hagedorn's sense, he means political and monetary power. But I believe it is relevant in regards to the use of SNS applications. The 'culture industry' and especially 'pop culture industry' have begun harnessing the same networks of communication and information between peers and users online. Capital enterprises are able to use these networks for promotion, showcasing the most prolific and popular cultural figures on these sites. This is a pathway to new forms of advertising. Brands are able to pay popular cultural figures to 'wear this' or 'play this'.

It is not just the commercialised culture industry that relies on online popularity. Virtual networks have become an important tool for connecting musicians together. Bringing producers to rappers, or designers to DJs, interconnectedness through SNS applications now plays an important role in networking between creatives. We see this in the way Kohh was able to connect with 318. It is also the main way that I connected with artists in Japan, by sending them a private message through Instagram, Twitter, Facebook or LINE. But musicians are not just going to work with anyone. You need to prove yourself. Having a large online following works as a cultural capital that demonstrates independent success as an artist. This means others are more likely to work with you. By bringing fan bases together, both artists reap the rewards. It also, excitingly, points to an increased independence for artists. As artists no longer rely on the music industry to organise producers and promoters, producing content becomes more DIY. This results in increased individual input from the artist themselves. Artists are able to create their music on their own terms, outside of the parameters that may be imposed on them when contractually obliged with a major record label. This partly signifies why the division between underground and mainstream hip-hop cultures in Tokyo is being broken down.

2.6 Commercialisation of Culture & Receptive Aesthetics

The club Harlem is one of the few large venues in Tokyo devoted solely to hip-hop. Nestled among the nightlife district in Shibuya, the venue boasts a 1200 capacity. Inside it is fitted out with lockers, phone charging stations, free WiFi and 'Ameba TVs' which line the walls. The club first opened in 1997, and since then has had over 160,000 punters walk through the doors. The dance floor is expansive, with two stages cornering each other. This often changes depending on the expected size of the crowd. But the first night I was there, the floor was open. They were expecting a big one. When I was invited to sit in on Shiho Watanabe's radio show, she told me about a secret special guest that was due to play at Harlem to celebrate the 10th anniversary of 'Never Broke' parties in Japan. So on the 22nd of November, I paid my 3000 yen entry and walked through the doors of Harlem at midnight. I expected the show to be underway. It was not. DJ's hung in their booths, playing a mix of old school hip-hop from USA heavyweights such as Biggie, Nas, and Jay-Z. The crowd consisted of about 10-15 people. Those in the know knew things would not kick off for a while. Still, the few early-birds filled the rooms with heavy plumes of cigarette smoke.

The crowd slowly started to filter in at around 1am. Before any MCs took stage, a breakdancing troupe called the 'Never Brokers' appeared. They danced along to contemporary hit hip-hop songs such as Kendrick Lamar's 'HUMBLE'. The crew of three girls and one boy commanded attention from the sporadic audience, bringing them into main area. Unfortunately breakdancing is not in my expertise, so I was unable to enjoy it for much more than the aesthetic style and impressive moves. The fact that a group of breakdancers were openers to such a high profile gig was something that surprised me. In Japan, the four original elements of hip-hop, DJing, breakdancing, graffiti and rapping, are all still heavily intertwined.

After the breakdancers, the MC for the night CEO Kazu appeared. His hair slick and his clothes bright and flashy, he introduced the acts for the night. The first was YENTOWN performer Awich (pronounced 'A witch'). Awich is one of the biggest hip-hop stars in Japan at the moment from the release of her acclaimed 2017 album *8*. She says that learnt English through listening to Tupac songs. Shiho was quick to tell me about Awich is an empowering figure for female hip-hop fans in Japan. She destroys all stereotypes of female subservience in Japanese culture. Her commanding presence served as a perfect introduction for the calibre of performances for the night[2].

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[2] To read more on feminism in Japanese hip-hop, see Tiphani Dixons' FOREGINORITY: JAPANESE FEMALE AGENCY THROUGH ENGAGEMENT WITH HIP-HOP (2016)

After several more performers there was a quick break between sets and the crowd began to disperse. It was 3am and energy levels were hard to maintain, despite the heavy enthusiasm from the host CEO Kazu. But then a song started playing in the background, growing in volume. It was Dirt Boys, one of Kohh's most popular songs. Everyone in the building mashed into the dancefloor. An array of cellphones went up in the air. But surprisingly, there was little movement from the crowd itself. People watched, but did not dance.

I noticed this as a bit of a trend in Japan. It was something I could not work out at first. Breakdancing in Japan is huge, and Japan has a strong history of street dancing, but not dancing in clubs. A few days later I saw a sign half pulled off the side of a venue saying 'DANCING IS PROHIBITED'. In my research into Japanese hip-hop, I had missed something important. Dancing used to be illegal in Japan! The law was put into place just after the World War Two, in which dancehalls were a common cover for prostitution, as Japanese hip-hop journalist (who also happened to write a book on the illegality of dancing in Japan) Ryo Isobe told me. Deeper into the 20th Century the police began turning a blind eye to the ban. But after a death outside a nightclub and infrequent nightclub brawls, in the police began cracking back down on the law again by raiding clubs. This law was only lifted in 2016 as a result of the forthcoming 2020 Tokyo Olympics which will bring an array of visitors (and money) into the city.

Nevertheless, it was an interesting environment - aggressive trap beats blaring over the speakers, Kohh rapping intently into the microphone, and a crowd of onlookers who would only stare, occasionally bob their head and record the set on their cellphones. This was one of the biggest differences I found with the underground scene and the mainstream shows in Japan. The crowd was larger, less social, and less expressive at the bigger gigs. Although the music was stylistically similar to what I heard at Children's Story at SolFa, the atmosphere was completely different. The underground/mainstream divide now seems to inherently depend on the agency and community of the audience, rather than the music itself. Another interesting aspect was the use of English cues to the audience and DJ. Without a doubt the audience was predominately Japanese. But it was extremely common for performers to spout lines like, "drop that shit" or, "lets get it" or, "are y'all ready?" in English. This was uncommon at any underground gigs I went to. At these large performances the use of English worked as an appeal to wider hip-hop culture in and outside of Japan by using dominant hip-hop vernacular at performances. This will be looked into in the next section.

The most interesting part of the night came from one of the last performers, a rapper by the name of Cz Tiger. Cz Tiger is a young rapper from Tokyo who embodies a heavily Atlanta-trap-scene influence in his style. He was covered in diamond chains, came out shirtless with tattoos on his torso, and

performed trap-inspired hip-hop music. What was most interesting for me was something in his hand. In the Atlanta trap scene, there is a heavy presence of the drug colloquialized as 'lean'. Lean is a mixture of cough syrup that contains the active agent promethazine and codeine, usually mixed with soft drink Sprite. It is sometimes referred to as 'dirty sprite' (made famous by Atlanta trap star Future, on the album titled *Dirty Sprite*), or 'purple drank', since the colour of the mix creates a bright purple concoction. Usually served in polystyrene cups, the elixir 'double cupped' or, two cups placed over each other to stop the bleed from the drink onto the users hands. Cz Tiger was holding, what looked to be, two polystyrene cups holding a purple drink. But just before he went on stage I saw him off to the side filling the cups with grape soda. This raises new questions in not just the commodification of hip-hop, but also the commodification of hip-hop's dark underbelly of drug use. I tried to catch Cz Tiger as he left the gig to ask him about the meaning behind his cup, but I accidentally stepped a foot outside. "3000", the bouncer told me, indicating I had to pay to get back in. This turned into a bit of an affair when I tried to explain I had accidentally stepped out, and never left at all. The bouncer just kept repeating "3000". Without that amount of money on me, and considering it was 4:30am, I brushed it off and walked to the train station to make my way home.

Cz Tiger includes prolific imagery of the drug 'lean' in his chosen aesthetic as as artist. His 2017 album *Purple Wave* features an edited version of the classic Japanese image 'The Great Wave off Kanagawa' seeped in purple hues, playing into the purple aesthetic of the drink. It is an interesting mix of Japanese culture and hip-hop culture. Cz Tiger took a traditional image that is closely associated with Japan but reinvented it to signify waves of lean, a very real opiate, that is common in the genre. This video for the song 'Purple Wave' shows Cz Tiger and rapper MonyHorse surrounded by polystyrene cups and sipping purple liquid.

In the same month as the release of Cz Tiger's video, Chicago rapper Fredo Santana passed away from a fatal seizure, believed to have been caused by his opiate addiction to the drink. Unfortunately Santana's death is not an anomaly. Trap music as a style grew out of drug-related sensibilities, and they have yet to fade. Many of the biggest artists from the USA in hip-hop have all rapped at some point about using the drug, including A$AP Rocky, Drake, Young Thug, and Future. Although there is no way to rationalize the drug use, the presence of the drug in hip-hop culture gives it a 'cool' status to listeners when being presented by pop culture icons. When the social context of the genre is removed by themes being filtered through many media pipelines, the dangers of the drug are not as visible as the drug itself. This is not to discredit Cz Tiger. I am sure he knows the risk of using the drug. But in saying that, his

own proliferation of the drug in a Japanese setting is dangerous, as it brings an emphasis of drug culture to hip-hop culture in Japan. The active ingredients of lean are illegal to buy over the counter at a pharmacy without a doctor's certificate in Japan, so it is unlikely that lean culture permeated in Japan by its own means.

Conceptually, the use of a lean aesthetic ties Cz Tiger to trending musicians in the United States. As I have acknowledged, Japanese hip-hop is not a mere imitation of USA styles. Shiho told me "they are the leaders, but we are not just the followers" (pers. comm. 2017). By incorporating this drug-related aesthetic into his style, Cz Tiger employs what I call a 'receptive aesthetic'. This term is drawn from Russell A. Potter's term 'resistance vernacular'. Potter uses the term to express the use of new or altered dialogue in African-American hip-hop from the dominant English language. Potter argues this "reform[s] and reposition[s] the rules of intelligibility" (Potter 1995: 69). This provides new methods of 'resisting' dominant power structures through the use of language. Tony Mitchell has gone on to write about how French, Italian and New Zealand hip-hop communities also enact forms of 'resistance vernaculars' (Mitchell 2008). Of course, Japanese hip-hop musicians do too. But by using tropes heavily associated to US hip-hop culture in the form of specific drug aesthetics, Cz Tiger ties himself to the dominant hip-hop culture stylistically. Japanese hip-hop artists do not seek legitimization from American audiences for the most part. But by including imagery, lyrics, and tropes associated to hip-hop culture broadly, they fit themselves into conversations of hip-hop's dominant US culture. This is in the same vein as the performers from Harlem, who would use English phrases when speaking to the crowd of Japanese majority. Or why we find so much use of the English language in Japanese hip-hop. It is not particularly there to be understood by all audiences. It serves a purpose of bringing together the different cultures of hip-hop by saying 'hey, we are having the same conversation'.

Cz Tiger does not just incorporate drug-related themes as a receptive aesthetic, he also makes money off of them. Cz Tiger and his affiliates have started selling a plastic cup that is reminiscent of the double cup used for lean. It can be found on his online store. The product, simply titled 'Double Cup', commodifies a very real drug culture. This raises questions about moral judgements in hip-hop when threatening values transcend between cultures. When dark themes are romanticized through media the question becomes, who is responsible? Is it the original artist (whom drugs may be apart of their life)? Is it the label of the original artist? Is it the responsibility of the new artist imploring these themes? Or is it the media pipelines of the culture industry themselves, however intangible they may be? This inherent complexity shows that through the proliferation of popular culture determining what is appropriation is complicated. Musical cultures now face judgements of principles in the wake of inter-cultural exchange through media.

2.7 Outward Gaze, Internal Meaning

The Tokyo hip-hop scene has been formulated and sustained within relation to dominant cultural understandings of hip-hop as a style. Meaning is found within hip-hop in localized Japanese parameters, but the culture is formed from dominant understandings of hip-hop based out of the USA. Through increasingly visible virtual networks, depictions of hip-hop are exchanged at increasing rates. This results in the most prevalent hip-hop tropes from the US hip-hop scene having the most emphasis in the Tokyo scene. We see a form of *dochaku* take place within Japanese hip-hop through "the process of making global products fit into local markets" (Condry 2006: 92-93). Although hip-hop culture is not a product. We see how tropes of hip-hop 'fit' into Japanese hip-hop through shared understandings in the local scene. This exchange helps to create meaning within local scenes in Tokyo, but is consistently tied to wider ideas of what hip-hop consists of. Contemporary Japanese hip-hop performers have extreme amounts of exposure to global hip-hop tropes, in terms of fashion, vernacular, and behaviour. These are generally spawned from the USA and at this time, specifically the Atlanta trap scene. Through virtual networks, however, certain cues have more weight in Japanese society. Visual and strictly audible tropes without language barriers are the most likely to be manifested in a Japanese setting. These forms travel through pipelines of the dominant 'culture industry' and their capitalised networks of dissemination. SNS services allow artists to be exposed to prominent culture actors in the American scene, inspiring new ideas of what is cool and trending in global hip-hop. The earlier generations of Japanese hip-hop worked to rationalize the use of hip-hop tropes through connecting marginalities or via innovating localised techniques. These methods hold less importance in contemporary Japanese hip-hop, as the style continues to evolve in relation to the dominant hip-hop culture of the USA. The exchange of tropes in virtual networks means new tropes and trends are consistently contested. Hip-hop trends now move at a rapid pace through these networks in which cultural elements spawned from the United States are not presented as connected to their cultural roots. It points to a decontextualisation and detachment of hip-hop style to identifiable origins. This raises future questions of how to define questions of appropriation or authenticity in popular culture and virtual medias.

Through three case studies in this chapter I have shown how contemporary understandings of Japanese hip-hop in Tokyo work in a distinct relationship with virtual networks. In the study of Kohh, we can see that Japanese hip-hop musicians can find solace in hip-hop style, through connecting with understandings of marginality. This involves understanding the roots of hip-hop as a Black cultural form. By facing his own personal struggles, Kohh used hip-hop to create a dialogue addressing inadequacies in Japanese society. Yet when Kohh achieved recognition with the song 'It G Ma', he still faced questions of appropriation from the US scene. This was even though he was not the one that first incorporated the use

of questionable aesthetics. Can you stop a culture from incorporating a broad sense of style? It was only once these tropes received attention in US markets did wider questions of appropriation arise. In the study of Weny Dacillo we see how virtual networks provide new methods of connection to hip-hop culture broadly. We also see how they can be used as tools to expand the local scene in Japan. Virtual networks allow performers more independence as artists, as they do not need to rely on capitalistic industry to promote themselves. They give artists new methods of promotion and interconnectivity to fans and fellow artists, demonstrating a new form of cultural capital in virtual networks. In the study of Cz Tiger, we see the use of receptive aesthetics to connect Japanese musicians with hip-hop culture broadly, albeit in a somewhat problematic way. The origins of what spawn certain hip-hop styles are decontextualized when travelled through virtual networks. When drug culture is a dominant theme in hip-hop culture, this can raise questions of ethical portrayals in mass media.

Of course, not all hip-hop scenes in Japan are affected by these dominant lenses of exposure. This chapter has focussed on the Tokyo hip-hop scene, which is the most dense and diverse scene in Japan. But it is also the most hyper-connected, as it is in Japan's most populated and 'international' city. For instance while I was in the more traditional city of Kyoto on my last week in Japan, I ventured to a 'Born Free' gig at Metro. I was invited by my friend Kento who was in Kyoto at the time and grew up with the Born Free crew. The community was tight-knit. There were no trap beats, there was little use of English or any forms of 'receptive aesthetics', there were no cellphones in the air from the audience. Generally the hip-hop style in Kyoto is heavily reminiscent of 1990s New York hip-hop. This form of the genre was more prominent in the first and beginning of the second generation of Japanese hip-hop. Other performers were a lot more avant-garde, employing the use of hip-hop beats that do not sit comfortably in any particular definition. As Andrew Armstrong has pointed out in his Master's thesis 'Japanese hip hop in Kyoto : Assessing global pop culture flows on a local scale', the Kyoto scene has a more internalized, sustained, and original production of hip-hop culture that works from processes built out of local understandings (Armstrong 2003). In this way, the hip-hop scene in Kyoto is more 'essentially Japanese', as it has been harboured and evolved closer to Japanese social understandings. Sure, evident hip-hop tropes born from the US hip-hop culture still exist here, but the contemporary scene does not consistently reinvent its style through popular hip-hop tropes exchanged in virtual networks. Hip-hop in Kyoto exists more heavily in underground gigs, with its own stylistic approach. It differs from the trap style influence we see at gigs in Tokyo. It shows that hip-hop culture still works fundamentally on geographic parameters of the local scene.

Chapter Three - New Zealand/Aotearoa Hip-Hop and the Online Persona

In this chapter I show how virtual networks allow a younger generation of New Zealand hip-hop artists to foster relationships with US-based hip-hop communities. I explore this issue by briefly chronicling a New Zealand hip-hop history from its conception, drawing on how Māori and Polynesian communities found resonance in hip-hop themes. I discuss the changing presence of hip-hop in Aotearoa pop culture, leading to the formation of virtually-connected communities. Through virtual ethnography, I examine how social actors on the internet have created new methods of performing as a hip-hop artist. I show how New Zealand-based cultural actors are embracing these methods, and collaborating with US-based underground hip-hop communities. By drawing from Stevie Franchise's identity as an online persona, I indicate how new dynamics of underground hip-hop are formed in virtual networks.

3.0 Race and Culture in New Zealand

If Japan is a relatively homogenous society, then New Zealand must be considered a relatively heterogeneous society. Waves of settlers have migrated to New Zealand shores, each changing the balance of what makes up the core of New Zealand culture. The indigenous Māori have laid ownership to the land since the 1300s, with Pākehā settlers claiming sovereignty in 1840. Exchanges between people living in New Zealand have not always been peaceful, but throughout the 1900s Māori and Pākehā formed a relatively young bicultural nation through intercultural exchange. Prior to the 1950s most Māori lived in rural areas of New Zealand, and as such most of their traditions were kept out of sight of mostly urban Pākehā communities. As a result of the job opportunities within towns and cities post World War II, many Māori communities became more urbanised, and integrated with Pākehā. During this time Māori took part in voting, playing in the nation's rugby team, joining parliament, and marrying white New Zealanders while still exploring their own heritage and traditions. Second and third generation Pākehā New Zealanders began disassociating themselves from British New Zealanders through exploring ideas of 'kiwiana'. White New Zealanders imposed meaning on things particular to New Zealand Pākehā culture, such as Marmite, pavlova, jandals and Buzzy Bee toys. This formation of a Pākehā cultural identity and the use of the term Pākehā points to an attempted distancing of white New Zealanders to their colonial ancestors.

Throughout the latter of the 20th Century, Asian settlers moved into New Zealand to take advantage of the local gold rush boom. Post World War II, New Zealand saw a huge increase in Pacific Islanders arriving into the country. This ethnic mix changed New Zealand's socio-cultural landscape and

how New Zealand viewed itself as a country. New Zealand like most, if not all, colonised countries still possesses ongoing issues of culture clash between the indigenous culture and the European settlers. Yet the relationship and contestations between Māori and Pākehā now takes place amongst a melting pot of other cultures and traditions.

Fozdar & Perkins have discussed the multiple identities faced by many New Zealanders as a result of the new settlers' many backgrounds. They draw from Paul Callister's idea of the 'browning of New Zealand', in which the complexion of the country began to change as different cultures continued to integrate. The changing complexion complicates cultural lineage in New Zealand, as visible markers imply predisposed ideas about how 'kiwi' certain New Zealanders are. As in the United States, in which if a person has any visible African heritage, they are likely considered Black, typically, a 'brown' person in New Zealand is considered either Māori or Pasifika. Many families possess cultural lineages from various ethnic backgrounds, but people often prescribe to particular cultural values, rather than a broad New Zealand identity. For instance, New Zealanders with any Māori ancestry will likely identify with Māori demographics rather than Pākehā (Fozdar and Perkins 2014: 134-138). One reason for this is that Māori culture is typically celebrated as intrinsic to New Zealand culture, however this is also a result of the perceived racial makeup of brown New Zealanders. Fozdar & Perkins discuss how in contrast to Pākehā communities, Māori culture has attainable and stable traditions. The authors argue that this likely points to Māori culture being understood as a key essence of New Zealand culture (ibid.).

A sense of acceptance between multiple cultures within New Zealand arose, in part, out of an understanding of multiculturalism. Initially proposed in Canada in the 1970s before spreading to New Zealand, identifying as a multicultural country meant that communities could legitimately identify as New Zealanders, while maintaining their own traditions, food, and language. This was exemplified in 1974 at the first New Zealand Day ceremony in Waitangi in which the cultural variety of everyday New Zealanders was celebrated (Phillips 2015: 13). Although New Zealand consists of a mixture of rich cultures, the variety of different cultural groups that live in New Zealand are often differentiated between levels of New Zealandness. This is made noticeable by the language used when describing immigrants who arrive to New Zealand. For instance, white people with a distinct New Zealand accent are likely to be considered Pākehā, whereas any noticeable accent will often differentiate someone as being an American-New Zealander, or Asian-New Zealander, and so on. These audible cues also work within non-immigrant contexts in New Zealand, as certain vocal inflections and vernacular suggest association with specific Pacific or Māori communities, or conversely South Island Pākehā communities.

This has led to a peculiarly hard to define 'New Zealand identity' within arts and culture. Aotearoa does have local artistic traditions, yet many artists have often relied on funding from major institutions. Organisations such as New Zealand on Air and Creative NZ prioritize music and organisations with roots in European music traditions or Māori music and art, implying a bicultural formula of 'what New Zealand art is'. This has led to a production of New Zealand art hailing from various Eurocentric and Māori traditions. Popular music in New Zealand has faced its own problematized labels such as the term 'kiwi music'. Tony Mitchell writes that the term became an "easy, lazy marker of New Zealandness that has a predominately Pakeha cast and which not only does not usually acknowledge Maori identities, but excludes the numerous other hyphenated identities which exist in Aotearoa/New Zealand" (Mitchell 2010: 20).

With the rise of virtual networks, younger artists in New Zealand are able to avoid aligning with major arts organizations locally, or associating themselves with a certain lineage of New Zealand culture by taking a DIY approach to producing art and music. The diverse makeup of the country's population has meant that the younger, online community possess the tools to readily adapt to changing artistic cultural contexts more-so than their predominantly institution-funded predecessors. We see varying groups of young New Zealanders finding resonances in musical styles that may not be produced from local processes, working outside of local institutions and infrastructures. One such example is contemporary, virtually-based New Zealand underground hip-hop.

3.1 New Zealand Hip-Hop History

Prior to virtual media facilitating hip-hop in New Zealand, mass media provided exposure to hip-hop communities overseas. This exposure was then authenticated in New Zealand through traditional elements of New Zealand culture being explored in the music. The first New Zealand hip-hop musicians connected perspectives of marginalization towards Māori and Polynesian groups to a perceptions of a US-based Black experience. In *Hip-Hop Japan*, Ian Condry argues that the actual 'site' of hip-hop culture in Japan, its localized epicenter, is at the performance of nightclubs. This is where fans and artists congregate over shared meanings of hip-hop. He calls this term *genba*, meaning 'the real site' (Condry 2006: 5-6). For New Zealand hip-hop in the 1980s, *genba* existed in immediate conversations between cultural actors. It was not in night-clubs, nor was meaning created in the recording studio. In an effort to connect to hip-hop culture broadly, intimate conversations between the originators of hip-hop in New Zealand is where New Zealand hip-hop was embedded with value. These conversations explored the ways that cultural actors could bring attention to the systematic oppression of Māori and Polynesian communities through hip-hop music.

One of the most clinical figures in the early New Zealand hip-hop scene was Dean Hapeta. He became interested in the street dance style he was seeing in magazines such as NME (New Musical Express) in the early 1980s. Hip-hop media was very limited in New Zealand at the time, but the music began trickling in to New Zealand charts. US hip-hop hits 'The Message' by Grandmaster Flash and 'Planet Rock' by Afrika Bambaataa became popular in New Zealand in the mid-eighties. Exposure to hip-hop style came through the form of magazines and movies primarily. An important movie to New Zealand hip-hop fans was *Beat Street,* which pictured graffiti as a 'business' and not just random writing on walls. Similar Japanese hip-hop origins, hip-hop in media (movies, music and magazines) were the main forms of exposure for New Zealand audiences to hip-hop culture. The utmost importance of hip-hop style to Hapeta, was that it represented marginalized communities, giving them a voice to share perspectives of oppression (Shute 2004: 13-16). Darryl Thomson and Hapeta had shared feelings about the state of Māori people in New Zealand being a disparaged group affected by systematic racism. And together in 1985, Hapeta, Thomson, and a few friends, formed the group Upper Hutt Posse, a four-piece hip-hop group incorporating influences of reggae with politically-conscious rap lyrics.

The biggest single from Upper Hutt Posse came in 1988 through the song 'E Tu'. The song itself was a call to Māori to stand up for their rights. The track included lyrical imagery of Māori culture, beginning with the phrase "Karanga, rangatahi, Whakarongo! Whakarongo!" (Calling out the youth, Listen! Listen!). The musical backing of the song includes sporadic turntable scratching, programmed 808 drumbeats and a basic keyboard melody. The lyrics depict strong allusions to Māori history and culture, rapping about Hone Heke, the Māori Battalion, and Te Kooti. Upper Hutt Posse went on to have relative success in the New Zealand music scene releasing eight albums by 2011, and supporting US hip-hop group Public Enemy on their tour of New Zealand. The group led the charge for pop cultural acceptance of hip-hop in New Zealand, and set the bar for hip-hop to be an expression of voice for indigenous peoples locally. Their music, while not always politically conscious, challenged ideas of the political system in New Zealand through traditional imagery of Māori warriors in popular culture.

The New Zealand hip-hop scene would continue to grow regarding the performance of Polynesian and Māori identity. A lot of the musical tropes of New Zealand hip-hop were conceived in relation to American style, but early New Zealand hip-hop artists employed ways to explore aspects of indigenous New Zealand culture. Tony Mitchell has written about how the use of Māori terms in Upper Hutt Posse's music works as a form of 'resistance vernacular'. These are forms of expression that relate specifically to a community and are only meant to be heard within that context. Upper Hutt Posse did this by using phrases and imagery relating particular to Māori culture (Mitchell 2008: 13-14). April Henderson

has written about how breakdancing became an identity marker for Samoan diaspora in New Zealand as a form of cultural expression through shared understandings for marginalized communities (Henderson 2005). Gareth Shute has written an extensive biography of the New Zealand hip-hop scene and its relation with Polynesian and Māori culture titled *Hiphop Music in Aotearoa*. Schute outlines the most important cultural figures in New Zealand hip-hop and offers an extensive guide to the lineage of New Zealand hip-hop from Dean Hapeta to Ladi6 (as well as offering tips for writing hip-hop lyrics and music) (Shute 2004).

Locally produced New Zealand hip-hop reached its highest level of exposure in popular culture around 2005. In 2004, Scribe, a Samoan/New Zealand rapper from Christchurch won the APRA Silver Scrolls at the New Zealand Music Awards for the song 'Not Many'. 'Not Many' went to number one on the New Zealand Singles Chart, at which time the accompanying album *The Crusader* debuted at number one on the New Zealand Albums Chart. This was the first time in the history of New Zealand charts that one artist had held the top spot on the single and album charts at the same time (Crossan 2003). In the following year Gareth Shute received the Montana Book Prize, a national book award for his book chronicling NZ hip-hop. New Zealand hip-hop had grown to have an extreme presence in New Zealand popular culture, while still holding roots to the performance identity of Māori and Pacific Islanders. Dawn Raid Entertainment, a Polynesian-run record label was New Zealand hip-hops heavyweight. The name for Dawn Raid draws from the term given to police crackdowns of Pacific Island overstayers in Auckland in the mid-1970s to 1980s in which police would raid suspected houses at dawn. Savage, a rapper from Polynesian descent based in South Auckland and one of the proprietors of Dawn Raid, released the song 'Swing' in 2005. This catchy tune led to Savage becoming the first New Zealand hip-hop artist to achieve platinum certification status in the United States after the song was used in the 2007 United States comedy film 'Knocked Up'. While New Zealand hip-hop success appeared to be climbing, the pioneers who brought hip-hop to the forefront of New Zealand popular culture eventually succumbed to financial difficulties. In April 2007, Dawn Raid announced the closure of the label due to liquidation. Scribe's fall from grace has been more heavily documented in New Zealand media (NZH 2017). He fell into a pit of gambling and drug addiction, eventually needing to sell his platinum record to pay-off outstanding debt. While new hip-hop performers began to emerge in New Zealand, hip-hop has yet to reach the same level of local interest in the public eye that it once had.

Hip-hop communities still exist locally in geographic areas in New Zealand following a lineage of Polynesian and Māori communities. But without the commercial recognition in wider mainstream New Zealand music markets, many rappers have turned inward. Some contemporary New Zealand hip-hop artists have brought new and traditional ideas of indigenous culture into their identity as an artist. For

instance Māori rapper Rei embraces his Māori culture and uses it as a driving force conceptually in his music and his aesthetic. Drawing from the Māori idea of *turangawaewae* meaning 'the place I stand', Rei acknowledges he comes from a long line of Māori chiefs. He reflects on what it means to be Māori in a contemporary New Zealand. "I acknowledge that standing somewhere is something that does evolve. I know where I come from. I know my home. And I'm very proud of my roots and everything. In New Zealand, showing my culture, my Māori culture, that's a place to stand for me - but it's also about me finding myself in the music industry and forging out my niche" (pers. comm. 2016).

Despite relative success in New Zealand and winning several Māori Music Awards, Rei, and other rappers embracing new understandings of culture in their music, are yet to crack back into the mainstream New Zealand music scene. Hip-hop musicians in New Zealand broadly have struggled to reach the same level of exposure in wider media networks that was achieved in the early 2000s.

With the decline of hip-hop in mainstream media in New Zealand, the infrastructure of support for emerging hip-hop musicians locally is waning. Hip-hop-centric events do not receive widespread coverage locally, and there is yet to be a current New Zealand hip-hop label that generates enough capital to support local hip-hop growth and exposure. This has led to a DIY approach for many young artists, especially in Wellington. This has been documented in Geoff Stahl's article DIY vs. DIT' showcasing local artists producing music independently from music industry institutions (Stahl 2011). New Zealand hip-hop musicians are beginning to explore new methods of production which come through the use of digital technology and virtual networks. This allows artists to download music production software, and provides possibilities to publish music online. I place emphasis on a young generation using virtual networks but not drawing from concepts of indigenous culture. I do not intend to imply that this form of interaction with hip-hop is any more legitimate or illegitimate than other hip-hop communities in New Zealand. Although it does show how the contemporary use of virtual networks work as a mediator for hip-hop communities to be formed in various cultural settings globally. Virtual networks provide a connection to US-based communities for New Zealand hip-hop musicians which allow them to operate in US hip-hop cultures without attempting to connect marginalized experience.

3.2 Move to Virtual Networks

While hip-hop in the New Zealand mainstream has drifted out of the public gaze, virtual networks have given a younger generation of New Zealanders the ability to take part in hip-hop communities. This is in a different way to their predecessors. As technology consumption increased, so too did new methods of online interaction. In 2006, 69% of New Zealanders were internet users. By 2016

this number had risen to 89.4%. This is part of a global trend, as comparatively the United States grew from 68% to 88% over the same 10 year period (ILS 2018). In 2017 Statistics New Zealand published a document discussing New Zealanders' use of the internet. They revealed that in 2012, 93% of 15-24 year olds interacted online, 65% of online New Zealanders took part in social media, and 49% of all users listened to music online (Stats NZ 2018). It can be safe to assume that through increased connectivity and internet speed that these numbers have risen in the last six years. The biggest changes for hip-hop culture with increased internet connectivity has been the platforms of music dissemination. The increased accessibility of open-platform content sharers such as YouTube, SoundCloud, and social media have created new formations of communities online. These communities are not restricted by geographic location. Independent artists have begun releasing music in virtual networks, helping to foster communities of shared taste. These virtual networks allow hip-hop communities in New Zealand a resource to connect and promote hip-hop music online.

The shift in technology coupled with a lack infrastructure to sustain an evolving hip-hop scene locally has changed the *genba* in New Zealand hip-hop for a younger generation. *Genba* has moved out of conversations happening locally, and embedded itself in globally accessed virtual networks. The way that many emerging New Zealand hip-hop artists forge an identity in hip-hop is through cultural navigations on the internet. Social hubs in social media have become a new form of *genba* for many New Zealand hip-hop artists. These hubs allow artists to take part in virtual communities and form relationships with fans and musicians alike. In doing so, the nature of studying this field of hip-hop has to be treated differently than a Japanese hip-hop scene. Although the Japanese hip-hop scene inspired via media networks, *genba* is formed in a physical reality. Virtual networks as places of musical interaction have created new demands for performers with an online presence, and thus requires new methods of studying these cultures.

3.3 Virtual Ethnography

In order to discuss new methods of community formation in virtual networks, I undertook a form of fieldwork that was not based in either Japanese or New Zealand geography. Virtual ethnography provides a method to focus on the importance of virtual networks that emerging New Zealand hip-hop artists operate in. As such, discourse surrounding virtual ethnography must be addressed. As I am focussing on New Zealand hip-hop musicians operating in communities based online, I focus towards the virtual networks themselves, rather than the networks effects. Just like the presence of virtual communities, virtual ethnography is a growing phenomenon in ethnomusicology, for good reason. With new subcultures being formed in distinct virtual parameters, our research must be steered towards this

site of focus. This is addressed in Cooley, Meizel, and Syed's 'Virtual Fieldwork' from a collection of methodological fieldwork essays in *Shadows in the Field*. The concept of virtuality as they define it, consists of 'technological mediation of human interaction & technologically communicated and constituted realities' (Cooley, Meizel & Syed 2008: 90). They address virtuality as a part of everyday life, as a socially embedded phenomena, focusing on how people experience and invest meaning into communicative technologies. In Christine Hines book *Virtual Ethnography* she posits the following questions regarding authenticity in the formation of online communities. What are the implications of the internet for authenticity and authority? How are identities performed and experienced, and how is authenticity judged? Is 'the virtual' experienced as radically different and separate from 'the real'? Is there a boundary between online and offline? (Hine 2000: 118) These are the main questions driving this section. In Dante Tanzi's 'Language, Music, and Resonance in Cyberspace'. Tanzi calls for analysis of what causes the *processes* of internet music. Tanzi writes that through each users differing contexts "the musical and audio contents can be repeatedly re-contextualised" (Tanzi 2005: 541). This implies a human agency in cyberspace that is not inherently connected to the makeup of cyberspace itself, but is manifested in the pre-existing context of the user. This agency is where I believe ethnomusicological study in cyberspace should be focussed towards. In determining agency amongst virtual technology users, the machine and the user cannot be separated. Hine writes that "where authenticity and identities are performed, a link between the offline and the online is also rendered" (Hine 2000: 114). She describes the construction of persona and rendering of experience as part of a 'strategic performance' by the user. Offline experiences, or even online experiences in separate communities, are 'woven into the fabric' of the online community we choose to address. This makes virtual ethnography an interesting field site of liminality as complete perspectives of internet culture cannot be fully understood. This is because the culture is constantly fragmentized by influences of the users context, culture, and identity. As Hine points out, "ethnographers have often settled for studying either online or offline contexts. To combine the two requires a rethinking of the relationship between ethnography and space, to take account of the internet as both culture and cultural artefact" (Hine 2000: 10). This shows that constructions of culture on the internet always arise from real-world realities and are not merely formulated through online connections.

In this section I draw influence from Thomas Turino's idea of the 'multiple layers of determination' to discuss the forces that led to the formation of online hip-hop communities. These communities have emerged from changing trends in the music industry and its capitalistic enterprise. Online structures of non-paid streaming services and the ability to download music have become more prominent to consumers and music fans. They have now overtaken CD sales as the main form of music dissemination. Although the original peer-to-peer free download site Napster has succumbed to lawsuits, the ability to download or listen to digital files freely online has opened doors for new music networks.

These networks, legal and illegal, give consumers access to hundreds of thousands of songs online (NYT 2014). The music industry has struggled to keep up. Major labels have focused their energy on lawsuits against piracy rather than embrace the new methods of musical exposure online.

The emergence of online music stores such as the Apple Store provides legal methods that users can download music online. Free-to-use streaming platforms such as Spotify provide catalogues of music to consumers without a subscription. Although platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music can be used freely, they do require payment to harness the full potential of the platform. This includes complete access to the database of songs, new releases, and interaction without advertisements (Kaufman 2018). Even with this payment, an economic shift has occurred. The profit made from digital sales does not come close to the amount of capital major music labels were making from CD sales in the 1990s and early 2000s. In simple terms, this means that the music industry is not garnering the same amount of capital income. Young hip-hop artists have looked for new ways to disseminate their music, create dialogues about hip-hop culture, and find fandom. Artists have begun embracing open-media streaming platforms such as YouTube and SoundCloud, bringing not just their music, but contexts of experience. These websites and others, such as message board based websites like Reddit and KTT, allow voices of dialogue across geographic borders. These sites enable users to discuss a manner of hip-hop themes such as hip-hop history, who is a rising star, what trends are currently sweeping hip-hop, and dialogue regarding questions of authenticity.

For many hip-hop artists based in the USA, this is just an extension of their scene. Stephen Graham outlines that major urban centers will still be the anchor for underground scenes "mainly due to these centers' unmatching affordance of resources such as venues, audiences, and money" (Graham 2016: 28). The internet provides new methods of music exposure and dialogue across borders but does not constitute the underground hip-hop community itself. There is a dense enough culture and amount of capital offline in most US hip-hop scenes to sustain an offline hip-hop community. But this is not the case for many New Zealand hip-hop musicians. There is a lack of structural support for emerging artists in the New Zealand hip-hop scene. For many young New Zealand hip-hop musicians, support comes through online media. This can be described as a form of 'technoculture'. This is drawn from Andrew Ross' concept describing the communities and cultural practices "that have emerged in response to changing media and information technologies, forms characterized by technological adaption, avoidance, subversion, or resistance" (Ross 1991: 3). Ross' definition implies a technoculture in which the agency is molded solely by the online personas in virtual networks. Hip-hop has become swept up in virtual networks but is not itself an actual virtual network. It is a popular culture phenomenon that flourishes in aesthetics and information that are easily transcended through media. Virtual networks allow hip-hop

tropes to be reaffirmed, new tropes to be contested, and dialogues around hip-hop culture to take place. Hip-hop technoculture is not the driving force of hip-hop itself, but posits a new branch of a hip-hop culture evolving in multimedia contexts.

3.4 Lil B and The Age of Information

The internet is a new playing field for many artists. It is changing traditional understandings of hip-hop culture being rooted in place with connection to geographically-based communities. This raises new questions of authentic performance. Lil B is a rapper that has been legitimised through contested dialogues of what hip-hop 'consists of' based online. The Californian rapper has made a successful career around subverting traditional hip-hop tropes through internet infrastructures. This has opened dialogues of what hip-hop, or even a song, is. He is an interesting online artist, blurring the line between the avant-garde and ridiculousness. Lil B has shed a revolutionary light on methods of creating an artistic persona and garnering exposure as a hip-hop musician on the internet. After starting out in the rap group 'The Pack', in 2007 Lil B has ventured out as an unsigned solo artist. He has incorporated a strange aesthetic that is equal parts parody as it is legitimate through comical lyrics and jocular tweets on his Twitter. By the end of 2008, Lil B had released hundreds of songs through 155 MySpace accounts that he had personally created. As of January 2018, Lil B 'The Based God' has single-handedly followed 1.69 million accounts (by hand) on his personal Twitter account. He has released over 2000 songs since 2007, with one album including a staggering 855 different songs (Battan 2012). These have all been released independently. His excessive distribution is a method of continual exposure for Lil B, and plays into the mass consumer ideology that exists in 21st century capitalism. He seeks out an audience that is not necessarily looking for him. He describes himself as 'based' and preaches positivity and love. While saturated in parody, his character is never broken. In an interview with Complex magazine he defines the principle of being 'based'.

"Based means being yourself. Not being scared of what people think about you. Not being afraid to do what you wanna do. Being positive. When I was younger, based was a negative term that meant like dopehead, or basehead. People used to make fun of me. They was like, "You're based." They'd use it as a negative. And what I did was turn that negative into a positive. I started embracing it like, "Yeah, I'm based." I made it mine. I embedded it in my head. Based is positive."(Baker 2010).

Through this quote we see Lil B representing positive principles, something he preaches in third person on his Twitter account. He also addresses a shifted meaning of a word that was used to deter him. By embracing the term as a public persona on the internet, Lil B was able to redefine the word through

his agency as an internet persona. As an artist, his music is more difficult to pinpoint. He has a song called 'Miley Cyrus' which consists of Lil B rapping "I'm Miley Cyrus / I'm Miley Cyrus" for the duration of the song. Another song is called 'Ellen DeGeneres' in which he raps "Ellen DeGeneres", similarly. On these songs he chooses to employ simplicity, and it is hard to say for what ends. He can be an elusive figure and is always difficult to describe. On his 2010 song 'The Age of Information' Lil B addresses his place as an 'internet artist'. "I'm on computers / Profusely / Searching on the internet for answers, given to me / It's like I'm married, I'm watching the the bloggers heavily / TV is ran by money, how am I supposed to be? / The truth is near me, I can hear it and I can feel it / But are we dumbing down for technology and the cost of living?" - 'The Age of Information' - Lil B (2010). Despite his apparent parodic nature, Lil B is acutely aware of the pipelines he operates in.

Lil B has shown a new method of operating as an artist on the internet, one which personality and interaction can overcome the musical craft. His entrenched irony as an online persona means often it is difficult to ascertain what is legitimate or not. This raises further questions for defining internet personas. Lil B's online presence demonstrates how traditional understandings of hip-hop culture can be challenged through virtual networks. This opens up new methods for artists to embrace the pipelines of virtual technology as well as challenging rap sensibilities. In this way, Lil B has become a particular source of inspiration for New Zealand hip-hop artists operating on the internet. He shows that hip-hop artists can be authentic hip-hop performers within virtual connections, not based in a physical reality. Lil B has shown that by combining intriguing aesthetic choices and engaging in the infrastructure of virtual networks to promote music, hip-hop performers can base their artistic persona online and still be authentic. Without the reliance on a geographic scene, New Zealand performers harness similar methods as Lil B to build as aesthetic artistic profile. In the next section I talk about how Lil B influenced New Zealand artist Stevie Franchise who implores similar uses of irony in his aesthetics. Pope Flamez from New Zealand follows Lil B's pursuit of blending irony in authentic performance. YouTube channel Astari run by a New Zealander encompasses similar usage of creating multiple social networking accounts to expand his reach.

3.5 SoundCloud Rap

SoundCloud is a prominent internet streaming platform that has spawned new communities of underground hip-hop. The site was launched in 2008 by Alexander Ljung and Eric Walhforss, and has since become the market-leader for audio-only content aggregators (Allington, Dueck & Jordanous 2015: 212). The infrastructure of the site allows users to post 'tracks', including original recordings, remixes, DJ mixes and podcasts, and listen to posted tracks from other users. The agency to engage with other users

through the website's framework include 'following' users, 'favouriting' tracks, commenting on tracks, reposting users tracks, or private messaging users themselves. As independent hip-hop musicians began harnessing new technological developments seeking exposure through online networks, SoundClouds structural usability has made it an important site of hip-hop production. Considering the site exists outside of the lenses of popular culture, the formation of hip-hop communities on SoundCloud have often considered to be 'underground'. Contemporary music producers are able to download Digital Audio Workstations (DAW) online and do not need access to studio equipment. Because of this, SoundCloud features much self-produced and self-promoted music. The website demonstrates an important relationship with reconciling locality and global influence in music style. In a study carried out by Allington, Dueck & Jordanous, the authors explore constructions value in electronic dance music networks on SoundCloud. The authors found that users felt a connection to specific geographic scenes by creating in the same virtual communities as prominent cultural actors from the scene. "Digital media makes a difference not by eroding the importance of place, but by connecting people to places that they do not physically inhabit" (Allington, Dueck & Jordanous 2015: 214). This liminality of place has allowed cross-collaboration between artists through shared understandings of musical culture. We see this in underground hip-hop, as demonstrated in the next section on Stevie Franchise.

The use of SoundCloud in underground hip-hop communities has spawned the term 'SoundCloud Rap'. This term has been featured on prominent hip-hop media such as Complex, and in articles from the New York Times and Forbes Magazine. The term arises from the use of the SoundCloud platform itself, but also indicates the formation of fandom around these artists being based in virtual networks. SoundCloud Rap is often characterized as lo-fi. Sonically it employs the use of trap music, electronic, and some old school hip-hop. Often lyricism comes secondary in SoundCloud Rap, with the most important element being the aesthetic style or 'mood' it portrays. Unfortunately there is a lack of a documented history on SoundCloud Rap. However we see the progression of the style through promotion in major hip-hop media. SoundCloud artists began receiving more exposure through users sharing SoundCloud artists among virtual networks. Importantly, these are social networks, not pipelines controlled by music industry. SoundCloud artists began appearing on prominent hip-hop media such as online magazines and blog sites. As an emerging phenomenon and by embracing aspects of the already popular trap music, SoundCloud artists have started being offered contracts from music industry labels. These labels are eager to capitalise on the success and growing value of the performances generated in populated online communities. Successful US rapper Lil Pump has grown from SoundCloud fandom to having his song 'Gucci Gang' reach number 3 on the US Billboard Top 100 (Suarez 2017). This has led Lil Pump to be featured extensively in a range of global hip-hop media, including Japanese hip-hop media. While in Japan, I heard 'Gucci Gang' at 11 of the 17 performances I attended (usually played by

the DJ to excite the crowd). However, the music industry's promotion of these artists happens after the artist is already established. Through the performance of identity in virtual networks, fans of an artist have an acute sense of the artists personality. This comes through the illumination of a rappers identity and aesthetic through multiple social media accounts (such as Twitter and Facebook). This gives these artists an illusionary transparency. Illusionary, as it is what the artist chooses to portray. Transparency, as whatever information they portray appears as a direct representation of the artist. This can become problematic when the themes that the artist chooses to portray are featured in mass commercial markets. There exists heavy use of opioids in the underground hip-hop scene in the United States, such as 'lean', and an increasingly more prominent drug, xanax. With a lack of censorship in virtual networks, when rappers employ drug-related themes in their lyrics or videos they evidently romanticize the drug use. In some ways, it shows new understandings of 'real' in the hip-hop underground. Artists are still rapping about their realities. But it is also potentially problematic when these themes move across cultural borders and appear without consequence to foreign audiences.

Although SoundCloud is one of the most important sites for underground hip-hop dissemination in virtual networks it is not the only one. Various other platforms are used by the same community for different means. For instance, YouTube channels provide a hub of underground hip-hop music videos. Specific channels are associated to the same form of underground rap as SoundCloud. One of the most important underground hip-hop YouTube channels is デーモンAstari. The use of Japanese characters plays into the aesthetic of Astari's channel, interestingly implying a form of foreignness. The channel has 350,000 subscribers as of February 2018 and consistently posts music videos from underground rappers. Lil Peep was featured on Astari before receiving mainstream attention. Astari, an important cultural actor in the virtual underground hip-hop scene, is from Wellington, New Zealand. Despite his geographic removal from the most prominent SoundCloud Rap performers, he has harnessed the use of virtual networks to provide methods of exposure for these artists. Other than a few local musicians, none Astari has actually met personally. Astari points to an ongoing theme for youth in New Zealand inspired by hip-hop style by connecting with musicians across the globe that he has not personally met.

### 3.6 Stevie Franchise and New Cultural Capital

"if Internet communication is based on what some might consider the illusion of presence… can it nevertheless support contemporaneous social collectivity?" (Lysloff 2003: 32).

New Zealand artist Carew Meyer has explored these opportunities now afforded to artists in a multimedia playing field. Carew goes by the name Stevie Franchise, an ironic allusion to former NBA

player Steve Francis' nickname. The use of this name points to a common theme in contemporary online underground hip-hop of ironicizing well-known pop culture tropes. Carew is from Hawkes Bay, New Zealand and spends most of his time between the Hawkes Bay and Wellington. He was first exposed to hip-hop music through his older brother and American sport video game soundtracks. The use of video games as a disseminator of hip-hop music is something I do not delve into in this thesis, although it points to another facet of multimedia that hip-hop travels through. As Carew told me, "the culture and image of NBA and NFL tie into each other" (pers. comm. 2017). He says that he first began his own journey into hip-hop in 2009. He began listening to artists such as Kanye West, J Cole, Big Sean and Curren$y, all successful USA hip-hop artists. These artists are some of the last generation of hip-hop to achieve success through industry pipelines of exposure (in the form of CDs and music videos that would reach New Zealand shores). A marker of Carew's tastes that would forge a path for his online persona came from exposure to US hip-hop artist, Lil B. "Around the time Lil B popped up I was like what the fuck, this guy is stupid as hell. But as I kept watching it I was more intrigued. I was mesmerized just at what the hell is he doing?". He began following Lil B's online persona. He was not necessarily listening to his music, but he was intrigued by the aesthetic of Lil B as an artist. "I was really in the hip-hop zone - and then a whole other side of hip-hop was exposed to me through Lil B". Through Lil B, Carew started seeking out websites devoted to this 'other side' of hip-hop. He found himself on the website 'Kanye To The Now' - a message board website set up by Kanye West's management. Kanye To The Now that allowed fans to communicate to each other across geographic borders through virtual networks. As the website grew, it became a tool for wider discussions of hip-hop music. Without industry-driven emphasis on particular artists or styles, KTT (Kanye To The Now) became a site of discussion around underground hip-hop, particularly in underground-themed threads. The dialogue around a niche genre of music being discussed online is a participatory culture, shaped by human agency within 'deterministic technical constraints' (Bakardjieva & Feenberg 2004: 15-17). The site allows voices to project information of equal magnitude, contesting and reaffirming what users felt to be the 'underground'. Attracted to the underground artists he was hearing and seeing in these threads, Carew followed the pipelines of underground hip-hop aesthetics across a manner of websites, eventually building his own profiles and artistic aesthetic.

In late 2009, Carew began to produce his own content. He downloaded a pirated copy of Photoshop and began mocking up album covers inspired by the 'Pen & Pixel' era of Southern hip-hop art. At the same time, he was studying hip-hop history from online sources, following lineages, listening to discographies, and connecting with artists. In 2012 he first started releasing music under the name 'Stevie Franchise'. Although an important facet to his artistry, he does not consider himself "that much of a musician" (pers. comm. 2017).
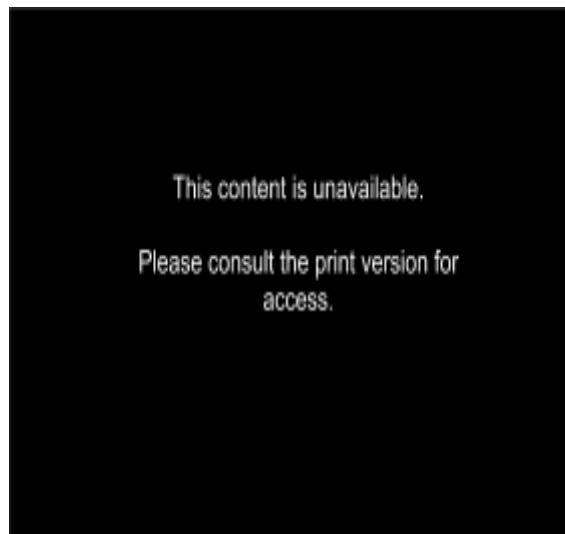
'Pen and Pixels' artwork by Stevie Franchise (Carew) for the song 'Killa Killa' by Black Kray & Lil Yachty

Carew describes himself as a content creator. He has built up various profiles on various social media and music websites, creating a cross-platform aesthetic. His websites of choice include visual-based mediums Tumblr, Instagram, and Youtube, text-based medium Twitter, and music-based medium SoundCloud. Currently he does graphic design for artists' album covers, single art, flyers, and clothing companies. He also raps, mixes (DJs), and shoots and edits YouTube videos. "I just create content. And help artists. Give them a platform". In his growing presence as an online persona and content creator, Carew has generated cultural capital in online networks through working with various underground artists. Of these artists, few Carew has actually met. He worked with a few local artists, but these are artists he knows personally. The majority of his connections have been with artists overseas. This shows that common understandings of underground hip-hop style in virtual networks can be used to foster artistic relationships.

Through continued collaboration with a manner of underground artists, and taking particular care in his aesthetic portrayal in online communities, Carew demonstrates the importance of virtual networks for New Zealand underground hip-hop musicians. In 2017 he bought plane tickets to the United States. "I was just like, I'm just gonna go to NY and see what happens. And I bought the tickets. I knew people living in Jersey, and I knew people that were willing to come to NY to see me. So it was just 'yeah, see what happens'. There was no one to really, like house me when I bought the tickets, must of been like February when I FaceTimed BootyChain and Lagoony for like 3 hours and they were like, 'yeah once you get to LA we'll look after you'. That's when I really knew that shit was gonna be okay. Because they're real people, they're like a little bit older, and they'd been through a lot of bullshit. They've been on it since the beginning". Through this phone call, the virtual barriers that Carew was operating in had turned into a

pathway for future physical connections. By fostering relationships online, earning capital by working with artists, and demonstrating his knowledge of the culture, Carew was able to connect physically with some of underground hip-hops most important cultural actors.

When Carew was in the USA he spent time in LA, New York, and New Jersey. He spent a lot of his time with New Jersey based underground hip-hop group '2oo4'. 2oo4 are affiliates of rapper Tay-K. Tay-K is a young artist from Texas that has since been incarcerated for affiliation with a murder. While on house arrest, Tay-K cut off his ankle bracelet and went on the run from the police. During this time he recorded the song 'The Race'. A week after Tay-K's arrest, Carew was hanging out at the same studio where Tay-K was eventually found by police. He says that if he was there when Tay-K was arrested, he would have most likely been deported as an accomplice to harbour a fugitive. Although Carew is yet to meet Tay-K, he has spent a lot of his time with Tay-K's manager and friends who profess Tay-K's innocence. In order to raise funds for Tay-K's legal fees, in July 2017 2oo4 and Carew created a pop-up store in Los Angeles. Carew created posters for the event and was involved in selling 'Free Tay-K' t-shirts. At the same time the song 'The Race' was beginning to gain traction as an underground hip-hop hit on 2oo4's SoundCloud account. Tay-K's manager began to receive consistent calls from music industry label executives offering to pay for Tay-K's legal fees if he was to sign to their company. But they have stayed independent, and it has paid off. In January 2018, Tay-K's 'The Race' reached platinum status, moving over 1 million units since its initial release on June 30, 2017 (India 2018). The song has had remixes by prominent mainstream US rappers 21 Savage, Lil Yachty, Kodak Black and Meek Mill. The accompanying video for the song has reached 113.7 million views on YouTube. As with the Tokyo scene, the United States remains the most important center of hip-hop for the New Zealand underground hip-hop community. Carew has shown how connections can be created between the dominant hip-hop culture of the United States, and smaller, geographically detached hip-hop communities in New Zealand. Ethical questions aside, Carew's ability to link with underground musicians that have gone on to achieve widespread success shows that geographic barriers are being broken down through shared understandings of hip-hop culture exchanged in virtual networks.

When asked about the most important facet to connect with underground hip-hop musicians in the United States, Carew said it is respect and knowledge. "If you're coming from New Zealand you've really gotta have knowledge. I really had more knowledge than people over there. People thought I was crazy because I knew all this shit. You've gotta have respect for the culture, respect for the people, like they've [underground hip-hop artists] actually been through some fucked up shit, they really have and like, all they're doing is just trying to make a way". Having knowledge of the underground hip-hop scene was so profusely important to Carew because of the immediacy of the connections. He was dealing with

real people who have faced their own personal struggles. To connect with these individuals requires cultural and personal respect of the real-world differences that artists in New Zealand most likely have not been exposed to. It differs from the Japanese hip-hop scene, which to an extent, is able to survive on its own local processes. Japanese hip-hop musicians are not seeking out connections with contemporary underground cultures in the United States because their scene exists grounded in Japan. It is inspired by overseas styles and emerging underground dynamics, but lacks the immediacy of the real-world connections. As New Zealand does not have a structurally supported underground hip-hop scene, Carew sought US-based underground scenes through virtual networks. With respect, knowledge, and increasing interconnectivity online, Carew was able to collaborate and exchange cultural products with underground American artists.

Carew is an important cultural actor for the New Zealand underground hip-hop scene. Since travelling to the States, he has had several other New Zealand hip-hop artists follow in his wake. Wellington rapper Pope Flamez ventured to the US shortly after Carew. With the pipelines already open, he was able to connect with the same underground musicians. Fellow Wellington rapper Avito has achieved success through online music streaming reaching 500,000 plays of his songs on Spotify by February 2018. Avito travelled to Los Angeles, connected with underground musicians he met online, and forged his own path as a cross-continent hip-hop musician. Avito has since created a collaborative EP with Los Angeles rapper C-Roy (mixed by Pope Flamez). These artists demonstrate that by fostering connections through virtual networks, artists can grow from just the 'illusion of presence' of their online persona, and connect with underground hip-hop cultures on the other side of the world. All of these artists are of mixed heritage, but identify themselves as New ZealandersThey have challenged perspectives of underground communities being geographically based, pointing to emerging methods of collaboration in hip-hop music. Shared style, knowledge, and respect can create opportunities for future artists to operate in scenes that are not limited by geographic location.

3.7 Virtual Realities

In this chapter I have shown a new method of hip-hop community formation that is affecting the New Zealand hip-hop scene. It is one which takes place predominantly online as a new *genba* for underground hip-hop in New Zealand. Dialogues about what hip-hop consists of are infused with the virtual networks that users are increasingly operating in. Through a discussion of Lil B, I have shown that the internet's infrastructure allows artists to contest hip-hop sensibilities in online networks. This has provided paths for contemporary hip-hop musicians to employ new methodological approaches to build an identity as an artist. It allows artists that are geographically and culturally removed from US hip-hop

contexts to participate in the same networks as US-based underground hip-hop communities. The importance of SoundCloud as a site (both web and place) for underground hip-hop culture shows demonstrations of global connectivity through hip-hop style. While the inference of people on the internet has been considered an 'illusionary presence' (Lysloff 2003: 32), I have shown that through shared understandings of hip-hop, cultural actors can connect to hip-hop communities outside of their local scene.

The independence artists have to represent themselves in online communities embraces a new understanding of 'real' in hip-hop, one which includes no censorship. This online underground hip-hop community has begun receiving attention and hype from music fans by sharing the artists content in virtual networks. Because of this, music industry labels have begun signing SoundCloud artists, promoting them in mass media pipelines. This means that aspects of the artists aesthetic that may have generally considered inappropriate in popular culture (such as overt drug use), become prominent identity markers of these musicians. They are then riskily romanticized for global audiences. It cannot be forgotten that artists did not consciously create a drug-related hip-hop community. Rather, the changing social context of the artists changed the genres themes. Hip-hop music still acts as a tool in the expression of everyday realities. Virtual networks now heighten the presence of hip-hop tropes in media, in which the raw and uncut realities of hip-hop musicians are presented.

Chapter Four - Conclusions

4.0 Same Pathways, Different Formations

Two contrasting cultural climates of Japan and New Zealand have been presented in this thesis, both of which embrace contemporary virtual network flows in the formation of local hip-hop communities. The scenes in Tokyo and in Wellington show influence from US-driven hip-hop styles through pipelines of virtual networks and media. These networks allow artists from each setting to create a local hip-hop community through different methods, underscoring the various ways hip-hop culture is exchanged in virtual networks. Despite shared connections through musical genre, independent formations of local hip-hop scenes have emerged. In Tokyo, we see virtual networks used as a method to connect with US-based hip-hop tropes and to promote Japanese hip-hop internally. These networks emphasise the exchange of hip-hop style, but a local hip-hop scene is maintained within Japan. Whereas in Wellington, these networks are used to connect with US-based underground cultures. This enables New Zealand artists to operate in online hip-hop networks, taking part in a decentralized underground hip-hop scene. This demonstrates the multiple ways that hip-hop interpretation is mediated and expanded through virtual networks. Through hip-hop's proliferation in Japan and in New Zealand, we see how virtual networks and media have become an integral part in the formation of hip-hop identities.

The two contrasting uses through virtual technology in Japanese and New Zealand settings illustrate the various ways hip-hop cultures can proliferate while being inspired by the dominant USA scene. This underscores the multiple ways that virtual technology is embraced in different social contexts, and as such, requires multiple lenses of engagement in ethnographic study. We see contrasting constructions and operations of scenes based around the same musical markers, yet organised through different emphasis on virtual possibilities. As such, the same methods of analysis for virtual networks are not directly transferable and must be analysed on their own terms depending on the scene.

For instance, the Japanese scene draws from hip-hop tropes and trends in media filtered through gatekeepers of blogs, social media accounts, music videos, and television from the most dominant USA-based hip-hop networks. These tropes are then projected within Japanese media and culture on a surface level as 'what hip-hop is', usually accentuating the dominant themes in hip-hop from the United States. It takes cultural actors and musicians from within the Japanese scene to contest dialogues of what Japanese hip-hop is locally, and what is acceptable 'Japan hip-hop'. Japanese hip-hop media promotes the most highly regarded essences of hip-hop culture internationally, and the scene in Japan is mostly based

around these themes. Current Japanese hip-hop has an outward gaze formed through virtual media, but an internal meaning is fostered within a localized scene.

Current New Zealand hip-hop on the other hand lacks a centralized idea of what New Zealand hip-hop is. Although early New Zealand hip-hop was based around Māori and Pasifika communities fostering a sense of identity through connective marginalities, this was only sustained and identified through the success of the artists in a commercial New Zealand music landscape. As I have discussed, the biggest players in the NZ hip-hop scene succumbed to financial difficulty. This has led to a changing face of what NZ hip-hop is, as the scene lacks the infrastructure and capital support to build upon the themes of its Māori and Pasifika predecessors. As contemporary New Zealand hip-hop artists harness the ability to connect and network through increased exposure and operation in virtual mediums, we see evidence of artists operating in a virtual hip-hop scene, but forming real relationships. This illuminates how virtual media plays a vital role in the construction of the contemporary hip-hop scene in New Zealand, albeit, in a strategically different way than that of its Japanese counterparts.

Japan and New Zealand hip-hop scenes have shown how virtual networks are being harnessed as a tool to exchange cultural ideas and products globally. In *Globalization and Culture,* Tomlinson identifies that a cultural product is not merely assimilated into a new culture. Cultural flows exist within "interpretation, translation, mutation, adaptation, and 'indigenization' as the receiving culture brings its own cultural resources to bear, in dialectical fashion, upon 'cultural imports'" (Tomlinson 1999: 84). The different cultural resources of local support, traditional history, and contemporary social make-up in Japan and New Zealand hip-hop cultures show contrasting methods of local hip-hop interpretation. It is a specific point of difference between the Tokyo and a Wellington scene. Japan has the density, capital and population to support an underground scene that can come to its own internal understandings of authentic hip-hop. The Tokyo hip-hop scene has evolved within its own local parameters, but its growth is infused with dominant understandings of a global hip-hop culture filtered through contemporary virtual networks and media. Whereas in Wellington, those that operate in 'underground' hip-hop scenes are often doing so via virtual networks because there is not the infrastructure to support a local scene.

At the beginning of chapter three I quoted a question from Rene Lysloff regarding technocultures, "if Internet communication is based on what some might consider the illusion of presence… can it nevertheless support contemporaneous social collectivity?" (Lysloff 2003: 32). In this thesis I have shown that the 'illusion of presence' can be fostered to build real relationships that can take place offline in real communities through cross-cultural exchange. Using the example of Carew Meyer's connections to underground communities in the United States, I have shown that while the illusion of

presence implies an artificial connection, real human agency dictates the formation of relationships in online communities. Virtual networks allows users 'interpretive flexibility' in which online cultural actors exercise their intentions online within 'deterministic technical constraints' (Bakardjieva & Feenberg 2004: 17). This allows users to connect and maintain relationships with different users. The same 'illusion of presence' provides the Japanese hip-hop scene immediacy to wider networks of hip-hop. The illusion implies decontextualization, which allows foreign audiences to embrace style without necessary connecting to the roots of hip-hop culture. This is harnessed in different ways in different settings. Cultural actors such as Stevie Franchise in New Zealand embraced the illusionary presence to create an online hip-hop identity and form offline relationships. Cz Tiger in Japan used the decontextualization of the illusion to employ receptive aesthetics into his style as an artist to show a connection with popular hip-hop culture.

When so much emphasis is placed on the use of virtual networks themselves, we must remain acutely aware ethical questions that concern offline, real-world issues. Questions of race lie intrinsically within hip-hop's movement across borders. With the proliferation of hip-hop as a global phenomenon existing in the pipelines of the culture industry, Halifu Osumare writes that "black expressive culture has become a major cultural force to be interpreted by the mainstream" (Osumare 2001: 177). Essences of culture risk being decontextualized when driven by capital-controlled cultural pipelines. The culture industry promote the most marketable and therefore accessible performances for capital gain. The circumstances that spawn dominant hip-hop tropes do not transfer as easily as their cultural product. Information often comes without context. When a rapper from a marginalized USA community raps about 'sipping lean', the contextual basis of an emerging opioid epidemic is missing. A culture of youth turning to illicit substances as an escape from depression is not represented in the image of the rapper. This shows that the illusion of presence does not always include the full picture.

In the case of Cz Tiger, his appropriation of drug culture can lead to real-world ramifications outside of hip-hop culture. He risks promoting illegal drug use and unhealthy lifestyles that rappers may feel they have to embody to be a legitimate hip-hop artist. This raises a flurry of ethical questions regarding cultural depictions through media. Hip-hop culture has been long been associated with drug culture - evident in the case of 'Trap Music' being a term at all. However it has always spawned from a specific social context. As the presence of drugs in hip-hop culture proliferates in mass media, it riskily romanticizes the drug use itself. It appears the only figures poised in a position to fundamentally challenge these flows are the prominent cultural figures themselves. In 2017, underground rapper Lil Peep died from a xanax overdose. This caused an outburst from other artists in the hip-hop community to advocate for the stop of drug-use and promotion in hip-hop music. SoundCloud-turn-mainstream rapper Lil Pump

published an Instagram post stating "I don't take xanz no more fuck Xanax 2018". Smokepurpp also tweeted "we leaving Xanax in 2017". These posts received positive responses within the hip-hop community. Many began advocating for a change. Successful mainstream US rapper Travis Scott responded to Smokepurpp's tweet saying "This tweet made me happy !!!". It is through affirmative action by prominent cultural workers that allows change in hip hop's representation. But despite its presence as a global cultural phenomenon, hip-hop culture from the USA has always been concerned with being 'from the streets', i.e., from the community of the artists themselves. It is a socially complex issue. For themes in US hip-hop to fundamentally change, so to does the social context it draws from. But with increased understanding on how virtual networks build aspects of hip-hop culture, hopefully we can shed a light on how musical styles evolve. Ethnographers and social actors can address these problematic issues and work with local communities to assist the culture and therefore the music.

4.1 Narratives in Contemporary Hip-Hop Flows

Since beginning this research I have had a realisation that comes from understanding hip-hop as deeply intertwined with issues of race. In the preface I posited that I do not feel inauthentic if I perform hip-hop music with my friends, but on deeper study I realise it is a shortcoming in my own understanding of the genre. As Ian Condry asked of Japanese fans listening to hip-hop music, 'are they doing their homework?' (Condry 2006: 3), and it turns out I was not. When the pipelines of media filters out contextual bases of a musical culture, often the important relationship that musics have with race is also absent. This is a process that I fell victim to. As media presence progresses, the immediate social contexts which spawn popular cultural styles are removed. This means it becomes harder to understand the musical culture as a whole. Images are romanticized and realities are blurred when produced for dissemination in mass music markets. That leaves the question - does hip-hop performance without understanding the legacies race-based discrimination make it inauthentic? It is a question I am still wrestling with.

Although I project a history of hip-hop culture relative to my research, my narrative is one alone. There are many lineages to such a broadly affecting cultural movement. As with my discussions on the genre, hip-hop is a liminal study. Different communities of hip-hop come to different understandings of the culture when travelled across borders in virtual networks and media. The detachment between cultures causes a space in which ideas are contested about the importance of global tropes and local processes. As such a broad phenomenon in the way it continues to affect popular culture, and its presence in documented media, I worry that future hip-hop scholars may potentially cherry pick archived instances. Specific contexts may be misread as a whole or be potentially overly emphasised. Houston

Baker has demonstrated that often controversy surrounding rap have risen from media ignorance. Baker argues that cultural critics of hip-hop, including hip-hop defenders are inadequately informed about hip-hop culture (Baker 1993: 49). At times, was also a worry in my own approach. As a white man in a small country at the bottom of the world, no matter my knowledge of the hip-hop genre, can I truly comprehend a movement so wide and complex without existing in its epicenter? But this is what makes hip-hop culture such an interesting scope of study. It is a contemporary movement in flux, and the reason someone from my geographical location can take part in. Doors are opened through the wake of a globalized landscape, and complex cultural and ethical ideas become challenged in an internationally connected social sphere. We must look forward in our scope of music culture studies as technology and globalization form new connections through music.

In January 2018 the Chinese government announced a ban on anything related to hip-hop or hip-hop culture to be permitted on Chinese television. This indicates that despite increased visibility for hip-hop internationally, themes associated with the style remains controversial. It is an important time for hip-hop culture. Hip-hop was once intrinsically associated with drawing attention to socially conscious issues, being a vehicle of voice for marginalized people to protest disparities. But the themes of hip-hop contemporaneously seem hedonistic when propelled through the most marketable hip-hop tropes. Hip-hop as a vehicle for protest seems to be a concept of the past. With increased dissemination of information (and disinformation) in media networks socio-political issues are increasingly visible. It seems time for hip-hop to take a step back to its roots, and push important messages that used to be so integral for the genre. As I have indicated in this work, media is always controlled by the user, "those with power are those who define the cultural models propagated worldwide through the ubiquitous mass media" (Hagedorn 2009: 91). The hip-hop 'underground' now exists out of a definable underground at all, yet it still remains one of the main driving forces of hip-hop culture. It is my hope that through increased interconnectivity and awareness of political issues, new connective marginalities will emerge in the underground as voices to challenge political realities.

GLOSSARY

B-Boy

Refers to male breakdancer, or someone who follows fashion associated with breakdance.

B-Girl

Refers to female breakdancer, or someone who follows fashion associated with breakdance.

Bling

Flashy or ostentatious jewelry or diamonds. Associated with 2000s era hip-hop. Usually used as a marker of success.

Boombap

A style of hip-hop production with a tough snare on the third beat and hard bass drum on the first beat. Usually sampled drums. A feature of 1990s hip-hop instrumentals.

Breakdance

Athletic form of street dancing. Using different body movements rhymically. One of the four original elements of hip-hop.

Connective marginalities

Resonances between cultures connecting with Black expressive culture within its contextual political history. Often tied to anxious youthful social rebellion.

Cultural Capital

Social assets of a person. Knowledge, education, style, behaviour allowing social respect.

DJ

Disc Jockey - Controller of turntables and a mixer. Usually cueing songs, or selecting a playlist for parties or performances. Often manipulated in the form of scratching. One of the four original elements of hip-hop.

Dochaku

Japanese - the process of making global products fit into local markets

Genba

Japanese - 'The real place' - where value is created. The focal point in generation of meaning.

Graffiti

Artworks, usually unapproved created through spraypaint or markers. Murals sometimes called 'pieces'. One form are 'tags' - a signature of an individual.

Heterophony

A textural variation of a single melodic line simultaneously.

Hokoten

Japanese - 'pedestrian paradise' - streets that are closed off to traffic so pedestrians can walk freely on the road listening to live music, watching breakdancers, etc.

J Pop

Mainstream pop music made in Japan. Roots in traditional Japanese music, fused with electro synth pop.

J Rap

A hip-hop version of J Pop - mainstream hip-hop with pop music tropes.

Ma

Japanese - 'Negative Space' - a spatial concept in music, suggesting intervals through spatial designation.

Mainstream

Common or popular style. Usually disseminated extensively in mass media. Popular culture trends or performers.

MC

Master of Ceremonies - In hip-hop, a performer/host who keeps up energy, talks/raps over the DJ.

New Media

Contemporary mass communication technologies, encompassing models of social media, applications, and blogs.

Oricon

Japanese music charts. Also a company with power over mass media entertainment in Japan.

Pen & Pixel

A Texas-based graphics firm that specializes in album covers. Usually collage-based pictures with hip-hop based imagery. Prominent in mainstream hip-hop USA between the 1990s and 2000s.

Rap

Speaking/Singing rhythmically within a rhyme-scheme. Usually to a beat-driven instrumental. One of the four original elements of hip-hop.

Real

In Hip-hop, being an authentic performer. Associated with being true to oneself, and the streets.

Receptive Aesthetic

Employing tropes that connect to wider hip-hop culture semantics, exemplifying connection and legitimacy.

Sample

Using a previous recording or song and altering it, or reusing it in new ways for a new song.

Scene

Formation of a certain music community, generally relegated by one style in particular. Usually geographically based.

Scratching

A DJ manually moving a record or LP on turntables to give off percussive effects.

Shakuhaci

Japanese - A Japanese end-blown flute tuned in the minor pentatonic scale.

SNS

Social Networking Services - forms of online social media. Often abbreviated to SNS in Japan. In Japan, LINE is the main SNS - a form of instant messenger and profile.

Streets

Local neighbourhoods. Associated with lower-decile communities.

Trap Music

A southern hip-hop style with influence from Atlanta. Usually around 135-160 bpm but feels at half time. Usually has a deep 808 bass drum that alternates on beat depending of the groove of the song. Contemporary hip-hop trend.

Underground

Hip-hop subcultures that do not attempt overt commercial success. Usually artists are unwilling to change their style to be more commercially appealing.

Virtual Networks

Connections between computers or internet-connected accessories in which file-sharing and information exchange can take place.

Yakuza

Japanese - Japanese organised crime syndicate, mafia.

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