

**"The 'Hood Comes First":
Race, Space, and Place in Rap Music and Hip Hop,
1978-1996**

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Abstract

This dissertation considers the evolution of Rap music and Hip Hop culture from the perspective of two spatial modalities. It first introduces theoretical concepts of geographic scale and the inscription of socio-spatial values in order to examine Rap and Hip Hop's geo-cultural expansions from their primary enclaves of urban black America. The dynamics between race, social space, and youth are assessed both individually and in tandem as crucial elements in the expression and practices of Hip Hop. The dissertation challenges and extends research in the prevailing Rap "canon" by analysing the processes and structuring logics through which Rap has been integrated into the commercial systems of localized music scenes and transnational music and media industries. It identifies the myriad forces that have either facilitated or constrained Rap's expansion at various moments in its history. The dissertation also focuses on the emergence of a pronounced spatial discourse in Rap music and Hip Hop. It isolates the articulation of spatial issues and an increasingly urgent emphasis on sites of significance and the home-place of "the 'hood" as a significant but characteristic element of the genre. The ancillary Hip Hop media, including radio, music videos, Rap press, and the cinematic "'Hood" genre, are examined as important factors in the reproduction of spatial sensibilities in Hip Hop culture.

Résumé

Cette dissertation aborde l'évolution de la musique Rap et de la culture Hip Hop dans la perspective de deux modalités spatiales. Cette perspective introduit, tout d'abord, des concepts théoriques d'échelle géographique et de l'inscription des valeurs socio-culturelles afin d'étudier les expansions géo-culturelles du Rap et du Hip Hop à partir de leurs enclaves primaires, à savoir les centres urbains de l'Amérique noire. Les dynamiques entre la race, l'espace social ainsi que les jeunes sont examinées aussi bien individuellement qu'en tandem comme étant des éléments cruciaux dans l'expression et la pratique du Hip Hop. La dissertation critique et contribue à la recherche dans le Rap "canon" en analysant les processus ainsi que les logiques de structuration à travers lesquelles le Rap a été intégré aussi bien au sein des systèmes commerciaux des scènes musicales locales que les industries trans-nationales des média et de la musique. Elle identifie les forces nombreuses qui ont facilité ou circonscrit l'expansion du Rap à travers différents moments de son histoire. De même, la dissertation met l'accent sur l'émergence d'un discours spatial prononcé dans la musique Rap et Hip Hop. Elle met en relief l'articulation entre l'aspect spatial et l'accent de plus en plus urgent mis sur les sites importants et le chez soi du voisinage "The Hood" comme éléments significatifs mais caractéristiques de ce genre. Les ancêtres média du Hip Hop, incluant la radio, les vidéos musicales, la presse spécialisée du Rap ainsi que le cinéma du genre Hood sont examinés comme étant des facteurs importants dans la reproduction de la sensibilité spatiale dans la culture du Hip Hop.

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"The 'Hood Comes First":
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Introduction

On a trip traversing almost a dozen states along America's eastern seaboard, I enjoyed having the opportunity to "surf" the local and regional radio stations, sampling broadcast formats and musical styles from one area to the next. The uniformity of "classic" stations (i.e., "timeless" classics from the 1940s and 50s, Classic Rock from the 60s and 70s, Pop hits from the 80s, etc.) and the relative homogeneity of Top 40 "hit" radio and of Country music stations, however, was at odds with the actual motion through space, reinforcing a sense of placelessness (that was, incidentally, also matched by the standardization of rest areas and gas, food, and lodging complexes along the interstate highways).¹ The radiophonic journey did not correspond to the physical journey through space, over distance; rather, it was constituted as a recurring array of formats, with the distance being measured in spaces on the dial, along the broadcast spectrum. Despite a mobility through disparate and distinct areas and regions, there was a prevailing sense of cultural stasis that overdetermined the experience. As Jody Berland points out, "The accelerating conquest of space through media is inseparable from the increasing disunity of our place in it, our relationship to it" (1988: 343). She suggests that this contributes to the formation of a "soundscape" that is commercially derived and conceived according to a rational logic based on a concept of demographically rather than geographically coherent listening audiences.

The point of this example lies in the exceptions that were encountered, particularly as I converged on the larger urban centers such as New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. In these cities, the crucial identifying distinction was the presence of at

¹ It should be noted, however, that there were notable shifts in frequency of format occurrences, with a general increase of Country music stations and religious/Gospel music programming in the Southern states.

least one Urban format station and, often, lively and upbeat campus stations that featured playlists with an abundance of contemporary Funk and Rap music. These stations stood out for several reasons: first, the music was exclusively black, emerging from an African-American cultural influence. It stood out distinctly from the Heartland Rock and Country music that dominated the radio throughout the journey. Second, in several instances the Urban format had been isolated and identified as the musical and cultural "Other." Classic and Contemporary Rock stations frequently announced *their* musical affiliations and defining programming formats in contrast to stations featuring "Urban" formats, broadcasting the station identification with the antagonistic slogans "no Rap, no crap," "no Funk, no junk," or "Classics...without the Rap." These explicit distinctions expose the underlying interwoven contexts of racial difference, cultural taste, and audience demographics that have been part of American popular music throughout this century. They simultaneously inscribe a racial and a spatial economy of meanings and values onto the broadcast spectrum in what can be seen as a segregation of the airwaves. This "othering" of Funk and Rap generally parallels the cultural and geographical ghettoization of black communities in American cities and, thus, can be re-imagined in terms of a cultural geography of the radio bandwidth and, by extension, of the entire contemporary music industry.

Throughout the journey another factor also emerged: stations whose formats either accommodate or prominently feature Rap in its various forms also tended to convey a much greater or more clearly enunciated sense of locality and place. The abstractions of classic or hit radio formats (which tend to elide spatial specificities in favor of more generalized broadcasting "styles" and appeals to an audience "out there," especially among syndicated programs) were not nearly so evident here as both DJs and audience callers made repeated "shout outs" and dedications to individuals, citing urban neighborhoods and various other "sites of significance" (including housing projects, schools, workplaces, and streets) by name. In this context, Urban format radio functioned as a hub, mediating not only culture

and taste, but also urban geographies, facilitating a funky musical and spoken dialogue within the various cities in the process. The stations communicated a certain social density that roughly reflected the density of urban living. Furthermore, this highly interactive broadcast style corresponds with other secular and religious practices that shape the historical past and the present of black popular culture, contributing to an elaborated sense of the black public sphere.

While it is true that other radio formats have in the past -- and may still also -- function in similar ways, they tend not to do so today to the same extent or degree. Stations with Urban formats and Rap or R & B programs (particularly those on weekend nights), actively acknowledge civic locality in ways that are generally unmatched by Classic Rock, Country, or Top 40 hit radio. Urban stations communicate through a range of expressive and vernacular forms that reflect and reinforce a youth culture and a black public sphere in which it coheres. As this example suggests, the music industry and accompanying commercial media structures are influential in the organization of popular music in America, affecting the production, dissemination, and reception of culture. It is, therefore, necessary to engage with both the social and institutional realms of Rap music in the process of explaining its various elements as a force and presence in American society over the past twenty years.

The language and discourse of audience call-ins, DJ voice overs, and the song lyrics themselves also coincide to convey a clearly African-American experience, albeit, one that is hybrid in its formations and highly mediated by the contemporary technologies that are brought to bear on it. Rap's lyrical constructions frequently display a particular emphasis on place and locality. This is evident, for instance, in Dr. Dre's references to Slauson Ave. in Los Angeles ("Let Me Ride," 1992, Death Row/Interscope Records) or Warren G's references to 21st St. and Lewis Ave. in Long Beach ("Regulate," 1994, Violator/Rush Associated Labels) which received massive national media exposure through their recordings. Whereas Blues, Rock, and R & B have commonly cited regions or cities

(i.e., "Dancing in the Street," initially popularized in 1964 by Martha and the Vandellas and "covered" by Rock acts Van Halen in 1982 and David Bowie and Mick Jagger in 1985), contemporary Rap is more inclined than other contemporary popular music forms to cite specific streets, boulevards and neighborhoods, telephone area codes and postal service zip codes or other spatial information. Rap artists draw inspiration from their regional affiliations as well as from a keen sense of what I call the *extreme local* upon which they base their constructions of spatial imagery.

I raise these issues anecdotally as a means of introducing a series of factors contributing to Rap music's unique "difference." Foremost among these is the intensely articulated emphases on space, place, and identity and the lyrical constructions that are rooted in wider circulating discourses of contemporary urban cultures and the complex geographies of the postmodern "global" city. Since its inception in the mid-1970s and its subsequent commercial eruption with the release of the Sugarhill Gang's 1979 release "Rapper's Delight" (Sugarhill Records), Rap has evolved as the dominant cultural voice of urban black youth. Rap's urban origins and continued urban orientation (in terms of performance, production, and the bulk of its consumption) have provided the frame and environment for the music's evolution. Just as importantly, the music's ubiquity and tactile qualities have also altered the sound of the city. The transformation of the urban soundscape since the early 1980s has been partially accomplished via the rolling bass beats of Hip Hop music booming from convertibles, Jeeps, and customized "low riders." The convergence of new car stereo technologies and the fetishization of bass and volume, in tandem, affect the sonic character of the city. As Rap emerges as the music of choice for large segments of mobile youth, their means and contexts of its enjoyment have altered the aural contours of the city. Rap's presence as a central facet of all North American cities today is unavoidable and, due in part to this intensified audibility, it has come under scrutiny from various institutional sites and has been exposed to numerous forms of critique and analysis.

Rap music takes the city and its multiple spaces as the foundation of its cultural production. In the music and lyrics, the city is an audible presence, explicitly cited and sonically sampled in the reproduction of the aural textures of the urban environment. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, however, the specificity of references to urban locale has become even more evident as rappers illustrate their awareness that the city is not an evenly structured space but one which is prone to a tangible unevenness with different places constituting distinct zones of activity. The Rap genre has provided an important site for the examination and critique of the distribution of power and authority in the urban context. This study, therefore, takes as one of its primary interests the rising *urgency* with which minority youth use Rap in the deployment of discourses of urban locality or "place." It examines in detail the ways through which members of the Hip Hop culture articulate notions of subjective and collective identity, urban experience and racial consciousness, and spatially structured patterns of power.

The music's emphasis on spatial discourses indicates a desire by its creators to describe what are often submerged facets of social experience and to provide a perspective on particular lived environments and the forces that either facilitate or constrain mobility within actual or symbolically circumscribed boundaries. In this study, then, key elements of locality and place in Rap are examined by isolating the narrativization of urban conditions of existence and the music's capacity to articulate an image of how individuals or communities in these locales live, how the micro-worlds they constitute are experienced, or how specifically located social relations are negotiated. Rap is also a crucial medium for the expression and portrayal of images that may or may not refer to actually existing spaces and places. Rap is therefore implicated within the repertoire of expressive forms through which minority youth define their individual and collective identities whether based in idealized or actual spaces, fictional or "real" places.

"The real" has emerged as a unique and increasingly powerful concept within Hip Hop culture and has, accordingly, been granted close attention here. In most cases it

stands as an ill-defined expression referring to combined aspects of racial essentialism, spatial location, and a basic adherence to the principles and practices of Hip Hop. It emerges with the most clarity following Rap's transitional phase from an underground or alternative musical form to a multi-platinum selling facet of the popular music industry. Yet the boundaries between real or authentic cultural identities and those deemed as inauthentic are carefully policed from within the Hip Hop culture and the delineations that define "the real" are taken deadly seriously by those who ascribe to Hip Hop's cultural influences. In the context of this study, the emphasis on "the real" can also be linked to a range of emergent spatial concerns, especially those that are sedimented within the geo-cultural construct of "the 'hood." The work that follows illustrates many of the complex manifestations of a place-based concept of "the real" and provides a culturally relevant explanation of its resonance within Hip Hop culture.

At the core of this study is the belief that, by examining and exploring the multiple articulations of the terms "the ghetto," "inner-city," and "the 'hood," as well as other key spatial configurations that emerge from Rap's discourses, the genre's implication in the cultural production of sites of significance can be illuminated. It is widely accepted that Rap is implicitly conjoined with spaces of urban poverty, existing as both a product and a legitimate voice of a minority teen constituency that is also demographically defined as part of the social "underclass." Although urban housing projects and areas of chronic economic depression do comprise major sites of Rap's production and consumption, Rap has evolved and the range of its influence has expanded, rendering its lingering status as "ghetto" music increasingly problematic. Today many top Rap acts, like their audiences, hail from middle-class or more affluent suburban enclaves, complicating the commonly-held impressions about the music, the artists who produce it, and its origins. In these pages, then, I will trace the ways in which several of the central elements of race, class, and national identification are recast and revised within a coherent if not entirely consistent spatial discourse, concluding with the spatial construct of "the 'hood."

Due to its pervasiveness, the term "the 'hood" warrants special attention. It is literally an abbreviated version of the word "neighborhood" and, as such, defines a territory that is geographically and socially particular to the speaking subject's social location. Quite simply stated, the 'hood exists as a "home" environment. It is enunciated in terms that elevate it as a primary site of significance. The correlative terms "homeboy," "homegirl," or "homies" that are regular components of the Hip Hop lexicon are similarly meaningful in spatial terms as they identify a highly particular social circle encompassing friends, neighbors or local cohorts who occupy the common site of the 'hood.² The term's usage is especially notable for its prevalence and ubiquity in Rap's lyrical structures and in various other textual forms produced concurrently with the music (such as the ancillary music press and black cinema that have emerged in the wake of Rap's popularity as signposts in the mapping of Hip Hop culture).³ In this study, these cultural texts constitute the objects of analysis and will be assessed for their role in the diffusion of new urban sensibilities.

The existing historiography of Rap is another matter, however, since it has been narrowly concerned with several primary interests. These include descriptions of the genre's emergence from the ghetto neighborhoods of New York with a focus on the cultural conditions within which its artistic elements acquired shape and definition; the development of a critique of Rap and Hip Hop practices such as they manifest contributing elements of a contemporary black aesthetic; or discussions of Rap's technological production and the prowess of its young black innovators. These are undoubtedly important issues and are accordingly taken up and assessed in this study. Music

² Pertaining to the term "Homie," Ronald Formisano points out that it was first implemented among native and middle class northern blacks in reference to "the mostly poor, rough-edged newcomers" from the south who poured into northern cities after 1945 (1991: 35).

³ While "the 'hood" remains the most prominent and frequently used term and constitutes the main referential structure within which discourses of place cohere, it is by no means the only one. Other expressions such as "around the way" are also used to describe the neighborhood environment in various contexts. The spatial discourse of the 'hood figures prominently in such magazines as *Rap Sheet* which features a regular section called "A Day in the 'Hood" as well as in the cinema where themes with a strong spatial orientation are common (including *Boyz in the Hood*, *South Central*, *Menace II Society*, and *Juice*).

journalists, cultural critics, and academics alike have been following Rap and Hip Hop through their evolutionary phases since they emerged, tracking their paths and commenting on their various transformations over the years. What has subsequently evolved is a sizeable body of work addressing the Hip Hop culture and its numerous facets, producing what can be reasonably defined as a Rap and Hip Hop canon.

There remain several prominent shortcomings in most explorations of the Rap genre. The links between ghetto or inner-city spaces and Rap are frequently drawn without significant interrogation of the discursively produced value systems that always influence our social perceptions of these spaces. Statements are regularly made about Hip Hop based in dominant assumptions that are unrigorously advanced and which fail to account for a range of underlying ideological and conceptual elements. These are perhaps best summed up by the T-shirt seen in the streets with regularity several years ago: "It's a black thing. You wouldn't understand." In some earlier instances, the "raw" reality of Hip Hop's formative spaces is valorized and mythologized, creating yet another range of misperceptions of Rap that position it as the organic product of a particular socio-spatial milieu. Even more conspicuous is the limited analytical rigor in describing and explaining the influential role of the music industry throughout Rap's history. Considering the abundance of research on Rap, there has been a relative paucity of critical study on the facilitating or constraining factors within the popular music industry that have in various ways and at various times aided or restricted Rap's development. This absence is addressed here in an attempt to reconnect Rap with the forms of industrial and cultural analysis that have been so important to Pop, Rock, and Jazz music scholarship. In this study I seek to challenge and intervene in the canonical body of work surrounding Rap and Hip Hop; I want to challenge many of the uncritical assumptions and unanswered generalities that, through the years, have had the effect of reifying the history of Rap and Hip Hop. By my intervention, I hope to introduce a corrective analysis that contributes greater specificity to the study of Hip Hop from a geo-cultural and spatial perspective.

There are two distinct but related aspects of Rap being scrutinized in the following pages, constituting two spatial modalities. The first involves the detailed examination of Rap's geo-cultural origins and its developmental trajectory as it expanded beyond its local enclaves outward onto the national and international stage. This is an achievement that is best understood within the institutional contexts of the wider music industry. The second aspect involves the rise and evolution of a unique spatial discourse in Rap that defines resonant social and cultural issues with increasing specificity and emphasis on local profiles and actually existing spaces and places.

Approaching the evolution of Rap as a process displaying temporally defined stages and historically specific characteristics allows for a more precise frame of analysis. Therefore, this study covers the early period of Rap and Hip Hop's emergence in the mid-1970s and documents several of the genre's prominent shifts that occurred throughout the 1980s until approximately 1992. I have established this time-frame purposely; Rap did not, as is often asserted, rise from "nowhere" with its first commercial recordings in 1979 but existed within an array of subcultural Hip Hop practices in the boroughs of New York for several years prior to this. In terms of Rap's spatial expansions as well as the development of a distinct spatial discourse, many of the dominant phenomena that continue until the present were firmly established by 1992 and have only recently begun to show signs of a new transformational phase. The cinematic portrayals of space and place produced by young black filmmakers with an unambiguous Hip Hop sensibility have, however, trailed Rap's lead. For this reason the final chapter on black cinema and the visual representations of the 'hood encompasses the slightly later period, between 1988 and 1996. By 1996, the 'Hood film and the gangsta ethic that dominated much of the cinematic output of young, black, male directors were in decline, making this an appropriate endpoint for the discussion of the "'Hood film" as a contemporary cinematic genre.

In order to properly explore the multiple forms of articulation and the patterned spatial discourses that permeate Rap and the Hip Hop culture, it is first necessary to delimit

the terrain of analysis. Chapters 1 and 2 together provide an overview of the relevant theoretical strands related to the social production of space and place, especially as they attempt to integrate the variables of race, class, gender, and age. Chapter 1, "Space, Place and Rap: Key Concepts" summarizes several spatially oriented theories from the fields of cultural geography and contemporary cultural studies, mapping them onto the general forms and practices of Rap music and Hip Hop culture. This section also explores the ways that spatial values of scale are organized within relations of locational difference and discusses Rap as a force in the cultural definition of urban spaces and places. Chapter 2, "Space Matters," focuses more intensely on America's urban environments and the social organization of race, youth, and class. In this chapter, the terms "ghetto," "inner-city" and "the 'hood" are analyzed as culturally meaningful and value-laden expressions that, within different temporal moments and competing social discourses, identify a common urban zone. In their articulated differences, they also lead us to imagine the spaces to which they refer differently, producing a series of separate and distinct spatial constructs that suggest a gradual generational disjuncture.

Rap's origins and the socio-economic factors that have regularly influenced its development are the subject of chapter 3, "Locating Hip Hop: Rap's Geo-cultural Sources." This chapter is intended to accentuate the historical conditions of Rap's emergence as a cultural phenomenon by identifying extramusical elements (including political and economic factors) that have impacted upon the genre's formation and evolution since its inception. Apart from the analysis of Rap's socio-spatial origins, Chapter 3 also deconstructs several of the dominant canonical accounts of Rap's emergence and examines the means through which its narrativization has had the effect of fixing the mythology of Hip Hop culture and reifying Rap's history. Chapter 4, "Emergence of a Cultural Form: Rap Music in Context" focuses on specific social contexts and Rap practices in New York City as the genre gained wider public attention and gradually acquired a commercial status in the local music scene. Transitions in commercial, technological, and discursive aspects

of the genre are examined here with particular attention to the lyrical construction of space and place in early Rap recordings.

The following two chapters shift the analytical focus to the music industry in order to document the geo-cultural circulation of Rap throughout the nation. Chapter 5, "Industry Geographies and Rap Expansions" examines the period of Rap's emergence and initial growth as a popular music form. It explores the formation of localized and nationally expansive commercial infrastructures that largely facilitated Rap's development between 1978 and 1986. Chapter 6, "Sub-Genres and Cultural Geographies: Rap Expansions in the Post-Platinum Era" continues this institutional focus with the analysis of active corporate interventions in Rap after 1986. This chapter also explains several of Rap's aesthetic transitions and shifting perspectives among artists in this period as the genre became more firmly established as a viable commercial entity in the industry. In these chapters the cultural expansions of the Rap phenomenon are linked to the rapid growth of nationwide Rap production and distribution systems and the multiple exigencies of locating and contractually securing local acts or constructing artists' place-based "identities" that conform to practices of publicity and marketing.

Chapter 7, "Boyz 'n the 'Hood: Rap, Region, and Place," discusses the rise of artist-owned record labels and regionally dispersed "production posses" and their influences on the proliferation of regionally distinct Rap styles. This section also examines several recorded examples that announce the emergence of a new localized spatial discourse and includes a thorough discussion of the 'hood as an important signifier of contemporary urban youth's spatial affiliations and identities.

In Chapter 8, "The 'Hood, the Nation, the World: Rap into the 1990s," Rap's entry into mainstream popular culture is discussed with an emphasis on the rise of Hip Hop's media exposure and the emergence of ancillary Rap media. The genre's ubiquitous media coverage is approached here as a relatively unexplored facet of its general geo-cultural expansion. Another element of this chapter involves the examination of spatial narratives

and the discursive construction of the 'hood that emerge in and through an emergent Rap press as artists acquired new forums for the articulation of Hip Hop's influential spatial logics. By accessing interviews and editorial commentary, the interaction between the music industry and the cultural practices of the 'hood as a primary site of significance are rendered more comprehensible.

Chapter 9, "The 'Hood Took Me Under: Urban Geographies of Danger in New Black Cinema," examines the connections between Rap, Hip Hop culture, and contemporary black cinema. In tandem, they display a certain cohesion that merges several foundational components of a contemporary black aesthetic, reinforcing the overall influence of black popular culture in America today. Rap music and the Hip Hop culture provide the dominant frame for several contemporary films through soundtracks, narrative themes, image, style and fashion, etc. Furthermore, whether explicitly cited or thematically implied, the 'hood as a zone of threat and danger is imagined in these texts as the major site of significance among urban black youths. Thus the portrayals of the 'hood as a central facet of the narrative structure of these films visually communicates a distinct arena of experience, reinforcing the importance of spatiality that permeates the Hip Hop culture.

The challenge in this undertaking is to draw together the materials and practices of Hip Hop in order to engage with questions relating to the formation of a politics of race, culture, and identity. By critically engaging with theoretical and practical problems upon which similarities and differences between discourses of race, nation, and the 'hood are based, the spatial component of Rap music and Hip Hop culture will be revealed as a crucial characteristic of one of the most influential areas of contemporary black popular culture.

Chapter 1

Space, Place and Rap Music: Key Concepts

Over roughly the past twenty-five years, space and place, as facets of a wider and more generally applied emphasis on spatiality, have acquired a prominent status in scholarly research. The intensified interest in spatial matters has touched numerous and disparate academic disciplines and, in some cases, it has provided the very links along which the development of transdisciplinarity in the university has been orchestrated. John Agnew's (1993) observations that spatiality is not new to the social sciences notwithstanding (having been implicitly rendered as an informing perspective that lacked sufficient explanation or acknowledgement), it is evident that space has acquired an enhanced relevance and is a central issue of contemporary social research.

While in many instances the emphasis on space, spatiality, or spatial matters has been generated with either a primary concern toward charting coordinates in the abstract numerical planes of geometry or physics or of charting the relations of objects as they exist in physical relation to one another (i.e., the demarcation of actual, existential space within the contours of a topographical or geographic sensibility), the *spatial turn* to which I refer suggests a shift toward a conceptual paradigm that is part of a project that seeks to examine and explain social and cultural phenomena as they occur in space. On this point, Henri Lefebvre (1991) notes that the category "space" has existed at various times under the primary purview of mathematicians, philosophers, anthropologists, and geographers with little concentrated overlap of theoretical discussion. It is only relatively recently that spatial imperatives have become a mainstay of critical cultural analyses, a result that Fredric Jameson (1984), David Harvey (1989), and Edward Soja (1989) attribute in part to the evolution of a "condition of postmodernity" and a shift from a preoccupation with time, that is associated with modernity, to a preoccupation with space.

This turn reflects both the influence of the social sciences on the field of geography (leading to the emergence of the sub-disciplines of human and cultural geography) as well as the geographical influence on the study of cultures and social practices (evident in the field of cultural studies with its emphases on theoretical "mapping," "terrains," "positioning," and "locations," etc., as well as on distinctly situated social phenomena). The convergence of scholarly interest around questions of geography is based on an emergent belief that human interrelations are simultaneously constituted by and constitutive of the spaces in which they occur. Social subjects ground their actions and their identities in the spaces and places in which they work and play, inhabiting these geographies at various levels of scale and personal intensity. Space is not an overdetermining factor, but it is influential in ways that have often remained unexplained. The scholarly interest in the profoundly social elements of spatial habitation and use illustrates an attempt to explore what Henri Lefebvre refers to as "spatial practices" that project space onto "all aspects, elements and moments of social practice" (1991: 8). This has resulted in the introduction of research featuring a spatial focus to a multitude of specialized fields of activity both within and external to the university; that is, the enhanced interest in spatial matters is not purely academic in its range or scope. In addition to this, widespread evidence of emergent vernaculars featuring spatially-oriented metaphors, expressions, and narratives may be considered as a crucial component of particular ways of articulating experiences, identities, practices, etc., within various cultural milieux, or "social spaces." From this perspective, it might be said that today space is everywhere.

Indeed, there is very little about today's society that does not, at some point or another, become imbued with a spatial character and this point is no less true for the emergence and production of spatial categories and identities in Rap music and the Hip Hop culture of which it is a central component.⁴ The construction of youth in general and

⁴ As an indication of the distinctions between Rap and the more encompassing Hip Hop culture, Rap artist KRS-One has said "rap is something you do, hip-hop is something you live" (quoted in *The Source*, June 1995: 40). Rap is the music of Hip Hop and provides the culture's central form of articulation and expression.

minority youth in particular has evolved as a highly charged component of post-war America. Key events emerge as historical turning points, whether it be the *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* ruling in 1954 or the April 1992 riots in Los Angeles (and elsewhere) in the aftermath of the Rodney King "incident." Each has represented a kind of cultural turning point upon which public discourses about youth, race, and space might pivot, a point which will be elaborated on in following chapters. Rap music also presents a case worthy of examination and provides a unique set of contexts for the analyses of public discourses pertaining to youth, race, and space. Rap is neither the authentic voice nor the official voice of minority youth, but its persistent influence and sedimented presence among youth and black youth in particular bestows it with a relevance that cannot be ignored.

Rap music is one of the main sources within popular culture of a sustained and indepth examination and analysis of the spatial partitioning of race and the diverse experiences of being young and black in America. It can be observed that space and place figure prominently as organizing concepts implicated in the delineation of a vast range of imaginary or actual social practices which are represented in narrative or lyric form. Youths who adhere to the styles, images and values of the Hip Hop culture (as a distinct formation featuring relatively coherent and identifiable characteristics) have demonstrated unique capacities to construct different spaces and, simultaneously, to construct spaces differently insofar as difference is a primary component of all spatial relations. The prioritization of spatial practices and spatial discourses that form a basis of the Hip Hop culture offers a means through which to view both the ways that spaces and places are constructed as well as the unique kinds of space or place that are constructed. A more pronounced level of spatial awareness is one of the key factors distinguishing Rap and the Hip Hop culture from the many other cultural and subcultural youth formations currently vying for attention. In Hip Hop, space is a dominant concern, occupying a central role in the organizing principles of value, meaning, and practice. How the dynamics of space, place, race, and cultural differences get taken up by Rap artists (as opposed to musical and

cultural producers working in other genres and media) as themes and topics or how they are located within a range of social discourses is a lingering question.

It is first necessary, however, to clarify what space and place mean in relation to each other and to identify the utility they both harbor for the cultural analysis of processes of social spatialization and the spatial articulations among young Rap artists and their audiences. It should be stated at the outset that spatial analyses and place studies do not share precisely the same history or trajectory, for although place clearly displays spatial characteristics, thus conforming to some elements of spatial analysis, its study has been shaped through its own unique developments. The relations between space and place are organized around differences in focus and object but they are also organized around differences of scale and value. Therefore, in order to account for these distinctions, space and place warrant separate attention.

Space and Spatiality

As Lefebvre has explained, space is "produced," or more precisely, "(social) space is a (social) product" (1991: 26). He qualifies this by noting that it is not a product or produced object, like a bar of soap; rather, "social space is produced and reproduced in connection with the forces of production (and with the relations of production)" (ibid: 77). His main criticism of earlier forays into spatial theorization and analysis is that space has traditionally been regarded as being "innocent" or unimplicated in the patterning of power, authority, and domination across the social spectrum. He writes that produced space also "serves as a tool of thought and action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control" (ibid: 26) and that it can and must be critically scrutinized to determine in whose interests it is produced and manipulated and by what social factions is it policed and dominated. For Lefebvre space is in different moments both the product of social practices and the motivating force of social phenomena, akin to a tool. This suggests that social practices are capable of fashioning spatial tools that are then wielded in the social

realm (i.e., the production of property laws that are subsequently maintained through contracts, licenses, and other legal means of regulation). The common, uncomplicated acceptance of "space" or spaces that exist in the absence of designated interests is challenged in Lefebvre's critical analysis as he attempts to identify the distribution of spatial practices (and the dissemination of spatial knowledges) that inform uses of the term "space" and the ways that space is itself produced.

Lefebvre states that "every society -- and hence every mode of production with its subvariants...produces a space, its own space" (ibid: 31). Within a critical cultural studies approach to contemporary American culture(s) that conceives of culture as a lived process and a site of ongoing struggle and negotiation, space (and place) can be regarded as constructions that are neither organic nor fixed for all time. Space is foremost a *cultural* construct. It is the "product of a sequence and set of operations" (ibid: 73) and as such, it is bound up in cultural tensions and conflicts that, in their inherent fluctuations, invariably display spatial attributes.

As these cultural negotiations evolve into territorial, bounded and often conflictual "positions" within historical conditions of change (meaning they occur in time and thus display a temporal specificity), it is clear that there is no pure, authentic, or "true" space to which social subjects are bound. Evidence of spatial heterogeneity can be found in the disparate works, for example, of Relph (1976), Joshua Meyrowitz (1985), J. Nicholas Entriken (1991) and Lefebvre (1991) who each explain that no single overarching concept of "space" provides the grounds for a generalized meaning and application of the term. Rather, space is the subject of a broad classificatory system whereby different spaces and different conceptualizations of space co-exist in an often multiply imbricated arrangement. This means that, even in theory, the question of space is a highly contestable construct produced according to various and often contradictory intellectual interests or disciplinary agendas.

Returning to the multiple, heterogeneous conceptualizations of space, Edward Relph (1976) outlines various kinds of culturally conceived space when he describes the distinctions between actual or physical space, symbolic space, cognitive space, sacred space, discursive space, etc., to which we might add the more recent phenomenon of cyberspace or electronic virtual spaces that exist within digital computer programs and expansive electronic communication networks. As Relph explains, the co-existence of a heterogeneity of "spatial forms" also contributes to their overlap and "intermixing," although his very reference to spatial *forms* can be misleading in its suggestion of some rigid entity. The fact remains that the range of applications makes it impossible to discuss "space" in homogeneous terms. Whether it be the mental spaces where ideas and ideals, dreams, fantasies or images congeal; discursive or textual spaces, where processes of signification, representation, ideological production and reproduction, and the production of meanings occur; or the "real," physical and material spaces of geo-social objects or phenomena, no single space nor single conception of space has authority over another.⁵

It should also be emphasized that space does not possess an inherent capacity to dominate, although spaces may be invested with power and, thus, become part of an apparatus of domination, as Foucault (1980) and Harvey (1989) have concluded. Simon Duncan and Mike Savage observe that, "space does not actually exist in the sense of being an object that can have effects on other objects," including social subjects and collectivities (1989: 179). For instance, to use a blunt example, a social "center" cannot impose its will on a social "margin," although this particular description of relational power and its spatial character is not uncommon. There is a certain allure to the idea of autonomous, active spaces such as "the center" or "the margin" that informs such a notion but this misrepresents the actual human motivations and agencies, not to mention historically established institutions and systems of authority, that are imbued with spatial

⁵ Noting, however, that this duality is itself a construct based on a lingering Cartesian model of mind/body distinctions. For a broader and more thorough discussion of the various spatialities that are the product of social processes, see Henri Lefebvre's (1991) *The Production of Space*.

characteristics. The social practices and relations among human agents that produce power or authority are effectively organized along territorial lines that are continually in flux, shifting and contingent. Space therefore appears to be mobilized as social boundaries are transformed or renegotiated (think, for example, of war-time terminology, especially until 1945, that regularly employs the concept of "advancing fronts"), but upon examination, it is clear that active social processes and relations in space have themselves been improperly attributed with spatial features through a kind of metonymic conferral.

This means that space is not, in and of itself, a causal force; it is influential but does not determine outcomes. It is not a self-motivated entity capable of action. Rather, returning to Lefebvre's terminology, it is a "product" that is shaped by human agency and the subsequent social practices that occur within some given frame of action or within some range of human relations. Duncan and Savage explain that notions of spatial determinism are fallacious and serve to conceal the institutional composition of "spatial patterns" in society that shape material practices and processes which, in turn, reproduce social life. Inculcated through systemic institutional processes that include acculturation and socialization, the spatial constructs around which we organize our lives become more and more patterned until they are, in effect, naturalized.

Space is, in this sense, an important facet of the hegemonic order as spatial relations are also organized along the lines of subordination and domination -- relations of power -- that are consensually and, when deemed necessary by those occupying positions of dominance (most frequently in the form of "the state"), coercively maintained. Social collectives construct and then inhabit the spaces in and through which they experience the world around them with "relative autonomy," consequently constructing the underlying differences that separate various cultural "milieux," "territories," "realms," "domains," or what have you. Critical research into social spatialization, such as that conducted by Lefebvre and Harvey, challenges prevalent tendencies toward the normalization of space and spatial differences and their status as "common sense" or as a cultural given. It refutes

the sedimentation of a simple attitude toward "space" that is, in fact, ensconced in the language and logic of capitalist societies (which encompass, among other prejudices, patriarchal and racist tendencies) and their particular mechanisms for the maintenance and extension of power and authority.

Spatial Frames and the Hip Hop Culture

In his insightful collection of essays *Black Studies, Rap, and the Academy*, Houston Baker, Jr. points to the presence of cultural conflict along particular socio-spatial lines when he writes: "The black urban beat goes on and on and on in the nineties. The beat continues to provide sometimes stunning territorial confrontations between black expressivity and white law-and-order" (1993: 33). The musical genre constituted as the "black urban beat" is Rap. The primary territory to which he refers is that of "public space," which is the space where, in the ideal sense, public cultures in their diversity and multiplicity define their identities, exert their proprietary rights to open self-representation, and enter debates germane to the structure and order of society. But the site of confrontation is more complex; where is this site and how is the territory demarcated? What are the social and cultural institutions that have been erected along the boundaries of conflict and how have they been historically maintained and reinforced? To what degree are the different territories either autonomous or mutually reliant and are the divisions between them insurmountable or are they relatively permeable?

Baker explores several of these questions by isolating numerous cultural phenomena in Hip Hop that display spatial components, revealing in the process subtle details of their socially produced character. As he notes, the spatial dimensions of experience and practice are thoroughly embedded in our understandings of the city. We explicitly and implicitly account for the differences that space makes when we consider urban phenomena; it is one of the key factors that modern citizens draw on to make sense of the urban worlds they inhabit daily and this is evident in the urban themes and narratives

of the Hip Hop culture as well. Tricia Rose elaborates on this point with a particular emphasis on forms of cultural production:

The politics of music involves the contestation over public space, the meanings, interpretations, and value of the lyrics and music, and the investment of cultural capital...Power and resistance are exercised through signs, language, and institutions. Consequently, popular pleasure involves physical, ideological, and territorial struggles. (Rose, 1994: 124).

The implication is that cultural conflict and struggle by necessity involve the drawing of boundaries; they are always, at some stage, spatially manifested, though at different scales and to different effect in each distinct context.

Within the Hip Hop culture, Rap artists have developed into sophisticated chroniclers of the disparate skirmishes in contemporary America, observing and narrating the spatially-oriented *conditions of existence* which inform this decidedly urban music. It is important to stress the word "existence" here, for as rappers themselves frequently suggest, their narrative descriptions of urban conditions are active attempts to express how individuals or communities in these locales live, how the micro-worlds they constitute are experienced, or how specifically located social relations are negotiated. It is the modes of existence, or what Massey (1992) has referred to as the "social content," that give Rap its vitality. Baker, for instance, focuses on the "simmering energies" of young black men and women that are "diffused over black cityscapes" (1993: 87) as an indicator of the apparent contradiction between the images and statistics of embattled urban existence and the vibrant responses of the youths who inhabit such locales.

In the face of dismal social reports, the fact remains that the urban spaces most reviled by the mainstream and elite social segments are lived spaces where acts of atrocity and conditions of desolation and desperation are often matched by more promising conditions steeped in optimism, charity and creativity. The latter, of course, frequently go unnoticed and thus remain under-reported in the social mainstream. These conditions of optimism and nihilism occur in a common spatial context, contributing to particular ways of experiencing the world and out of the prevailing contradictory tensions there is incredible

activity as youths attempt to produce spaces of their own making.⁶ This includes their enunciation of patterns of circulation and mobility, the renaming of neighborhoods and thoroughfares, the specific reference to city sites including nightclubs or subway stops, etc., and the "claiming" of space that makes existence, no matter how bleak or brutal, something with stakes, something worth fighting for.

Rose also defines Rap and its recuperative function in spatial terms, noting that, "Hip Hop gives voice to the tensions and contradictions in the public urban landscape during a period of substantial transformation...and attempts to seize the shifting urban terrain, to make it work on behalf of the dispossessed" (1994a: 72). As the songs and surrounding practices within the frames of Hip Hop cultural activity continue to demonstrate the creativity and dexterity of urban minority youth, it is increasingly evident that the issue of space and the careful explanation of its relevance to individuals and groups, whether from Los Angeles or Long Beach, Houston, Atlanta or the boroughs of New York, comprise a massively important element of the musical culture from which it emanates. The questions remain, however: Which spatial modes are of most significance to the cultural processes and social practices that underlie the Hip Hop culture and through what spatial apparatuses is their relative significance expressed and articulated?

Rap's Spatial Dimensions: Discourse, Text, and the "Real"

Pertaining to Rap music and the Hip Hop culture, there are several primary spatial "terrains" that can be identified. The first encompasses the discursive spaces (or discursive "fields," "regimes," etc.) within which Rap's lyrical structures cohere as well as the varied discursive sites that comprise both the expressivity of the wider Hip Hop culture and the negative articulations of Rap's detractors. Stuart Hall describes discourse as "sets of ready-made and preconstituted 'experiencings' displayed and arranged through language

⁶ In this instance, I am thinking of subcultural theories of youth and resistance (i.e., Chambers, 1986; Hebdige, 1988) but the emphasis on signification and "semiotic guerilla warfare" that characterizes much of the British research does not translate quite so easily in contemporary American contexts pertaining to the Hip Hop culture.

which fill out the ideological sphere" (1977: 322). Discourse, as the codified form enabling communication and the production of meaning, enacts the processes through which the conditions of human existence are thought and explained, how they are made sensible and bestowed with values and meanings in social terms. In Rap and the Hip Hop culture, the denotative and connotative representations in the form of both language and images of the urban terrain are rendered discursively to describe and narrate a perceived reality.

The emphasis on "experiencings" is also important to Hall's definition from a twofold perspective: First, it reinforces the interrelations between language and life or between the systems of symbolic representation and the social world (conceived as an arrangement of institutional and organizational patterns within which individual subjects and collective populations circulate). Second, it foregrounds the active element of language; that is to say, discourse consists primarily of sets of linguistic practices that are enacted or mobilized by social subjects who continually strive to make sense of the world around them. It is in and through discourse that the world of experience acquires meaning and it is likewise in and through patterned discourses that social subjects are "located" or "positioned," suggesting important implications for aspects of human agency (i.e., the range of what can be conceived or done) and identity formation that are fundamentally rooted in spatial relations. Thus, what gets said and who says what are of equal relevance to the enunciative location of the individual or groups in question, reinforcing the importance of where the speaking subject is positioned socially, culturally and ideologically.

This particular definition of Hall's, however, remains insufficiently flexible to account for ruptures and breaks in the discursive capacity to shape experience and perspective. In his reference to discourse's "ready-made or preconstituted" character, there is an unsettling suggestion of finality and closure, as if each ideological discourse is a

unified field of power that positions its subjects once and for all.⁷ In fact, discursive space is a stratified space where competing discourses collide and jostle with each other. The result is the establishment of a system of relations across disparate "fields." The "fields" or "regimes" (to enter into Foucault's spatial lexicon) are not closed and bounded territories, however, but are open and fluid, facilitating the flows of power across multiple social sectors (as Foucault has demonstrated with his meticulous historical genealogies of the clinic, the prison, sexuality, etc.).

Pertaining to the heterogeneous and stratified character of discourse, Robin Wagner-Pacifici argues against the notion of inherent discursive coherence or the idea of "internal fixity and insularity of given discourses," writing:

No one discourse can stand on its own; it will always be partial in the eyes of the differentiated audiences of the modern world. Thus an analyst will inevitably find alien images, stylistic flourishes, unanticipated lexical features, and so forth embedded within a given discourse that promises an intact, wholecloth worldview. (Wagner-Pacifici, 1994: 8)

He notes that, "the practical acknowledgement of the incompleteness, the partiality of a given discursive formation" (ibid: 146) forms the grounds for a progressive hybridity that is capable of producing "discursive flexibility to move back and forth across several discursive formations, to self-consciously cobble together speech acts through borrowings and reframings" (ibid.). The Rap form, musically and discursively, is constructed in ways that thwart absolute coherence and closure, instead remaining highly ambiguous, multivalent and open-ended.

Extending the scope of its meaning as it is implemented by Tricia Rose (1994), Rap music's "flow" is relevant to the discussion of discursive space, for Rap artists are actively and intentionally involved in what might be termed discursive *bricolage* that is enacted through the accumulation of fragments and shards from an array of social discourses and

⁷ It should be acknowledged that Hall's definition of ideological discourse is indicative of a particular stage or period of British Cultural Studies and of Hall's own theoretical development. There is an echo of Althusserian structuralism in Hall's formulation of discursive theory that he has since moved beyond, opting for more elaborative and encompassing theoretical approaches that account for the hybrid nature of the discursive production of subject identities.

stylistic elements of popular culture. The flow across and through multiple fields of discourse is, on the one hand, a strategy of refusal, a conscious rejection of discursive "lock-down." Or, on the other hand, sidestepping the rush to identify "resistance" everywhere, it may simply be a case of highly conscious play within the free-ranging signifiers of contemporary popular culture. In practice, Rap displays elements of each to varying effect. The lyrical speech acts of Rap artists, while meeting the prerequisites of the entertainment industry (i.e., supplying the content and commodity for sale and eventual consumption), also articulate disparate and apparently unrelated social phenomena toward each other (i.e., age, race, class, gender, location, and each artist's own stock of cultural capital), in the process establishing a unique and complex means of mounting what can at times be insightful commentary and withering critique of prevailing social relations. It can be said from this perspective that the discursive spaces of Rap are distinct, providing a unique arena for particular kinds of expression and articulation that in various instances reinforce, challenge, and play with the dominant social codes.

A second spatial component of Rap can be isolated in the textual spaces of its recorded form and other related and ancillary texts that either focus on Rap explicitly (such as the music press and teen-oriented fan magazines or television and radio broadcasts) or embrace it for thematic content or background (i.e., film and television). This aspect of Rap's spatial composition also encompasses the production/consumption dynamics of popular culture as they involve textual commodities. The textual "sites" of recordings, magazines, and music videos or films also comprise the material product that is disseminated regionally, nationally, and globally as a commodity and which is encountered by the audience member at the moment of consumption.

Like discourses, the text should not be approached as a unified, closed object for analysis, however, for as Graeme Turner cautions, "the point of textual analysis is not to set up a canon of rich and rewarding texts we can return to as privileged objects...analysis should not limit itself to the structures of individual texts, but should use such texts as the

site for examining the wider structures that produced them — those of culture itself" (1990: 23). This is why it is textual *space* rather than texts themselves that attains prominence from a theoretical point of view here, for the concept of space offers a means of isolating the point where a range of influential factors converge and interact, as well as accomodating intertextual and extratextual cultural elements that are crucial to our understanding of texts and their production, distribution and actual or potential uses.

Popular texts are polysemic in form, serving as a crossroads for a wealth of words, images, ideas and ideologies that are linked together to construct representations of social reality. Reality, conceived as the physical and material plane where actual social practices occur, exists at a crucial remove from the textual representations that circulate in its name, for while the representational forms are based in a foundation that can be identified as "reality," it is essential to recognize that this can only ever be partial. It is with this in mind that the limits to textual analyses must be acknowledged. The text exists as "a site where cultural meanings are accessible to us" (ibid), although it should be noted as well that the meanings are neither accessible solely in the text itself nor are they guaranteed in some pre-ordained, and thus, overdetermined manner.

From a cultural studies perspective, texts "cannot be the whole story" (Grossberg, 1992); rather, the "encoded" text, be it in the form of recorded music, printed articles, film, or radio and television programming becomes part of each individual's own economy of meaning upon its "decoding" and is consequently made meaningful according to each individual's frames of reference and "cultural capital" as the textual content is re-introduced to the social realm through interpretive practices (the act of making meaning) and social actions based upon interpretation. Texts can be studied as representations of reality, but the textual rendering can never guarantee the produced outcome, or the "reality effects" that result when they are swept up and into people's lives.

Grossberg suggests that textual and other elements of popular culture acquire their meanings when they are charted along individuals' "mattering maps" and are situated

within social practices that are charged with affective intensities. As an influential facet of popular culture in which individuals invest (both monetarily and affectively), Rap is highly implicated in this cartography of everyday life. For Grossberg, then, "affective investment" is the dominant factor in the process of making popular culture meaningful.

As he explains:

The image of mattering maps points to the constant attempt to organize moments of stable identity, sites at which people can, at least temporarily, find themselves "at home" with what they care about...But mattering maps also involve the lines that connect the different sites of investment; they define the possibilities for moving from one investment to another, of linking the various fragments of identity together. They define not only what sites (practices, effects, structures) matter but how they matter. And they construct a lived coherence for those enclosed within their spaces. (Grossberg, 1992: 84)

In a society prone to both excess and alienation, individuals chart their course and navigate their lives around sites of reproducible intensity which, like ports in the storm, provide a position or location to anchor oneself, a mooring of relative security.

None of this means that texts themselves are irrelevant for they remain the dominant standard form in which popular culture is packaged, distributed and sold. As social members, our contact with the popular is largely, though by no means exclusively, based on textual materials that we buy without necessarily buying into the full range of ideas they convey. To circumvent the risk of improperly anchoring meanings in the texts themselves and to consciously undermine the authority of the text, it is productive, following Grossberg's suggestion, to examine texts as intrinsic elements of social mapping that provide the coordinates for charting issues and practices within the broad terrains of popular culture.

According to Michel de Certeau in The Practice of Everyday Life, "narrative structures have the status of spatial syntaxes. By means of a whole panoply of codes, ordered ways of proceeding and constraints, they regulate change in spaces (or moves from one place to another) made by stories in the form of places put in linear or interlaced series...Every story is a travel story -- a spatial practice" (1984:115). De Certeau's

emphasis on the narrative as a crucial cultural influence in the imposition or delimitation of boundaries offers insights as to how the combined spheres of narrative space and spatial narratives rendered in textual form can be accessed. Especially as his observations continually indicate the ways that physical space is rendered narratively (described as tours and journeys) and recirculated as writing or stories into the social space of meanings where it might, in turn, inform people's common practices. In similar fashion, Rap music's textual forms provide spaces where stories cohere and where mobilities within its narratives can also be charted.

In Rap, the vocalist/MC constructs elaborate rhymes that interact with the electronic and digitally produced beats, telling stories that convey vivid depictions of contemporary life and that are laden with references to popular culture icons, people, situations, and sites. The Rap narrative is, in effect, a highly mobile form that ranges widely across our cultural spaces. For instance, in a thoughtful article about the ways that the voice and electronic technologies are interwoven in Rap, Rose (1989) makes repeated allusions to the various spaces that constitute the music as a form and which constitute its narrative structures, as stories. The space of the recording studio is a transformative space of technological innovation and production. Digital samplers and rhythm machines are merged with the narratives of the lyrics, which in tandem circulate in commodity form into the spaces of audience "communities." Rose frames these sites and spatial practices within a history of Hip Hop that foregrounds the impoverished locale of New York City's South Bronx borough and the generalized spaces of the ghetto. There is no single privileged space in her descriptions of the music and yet there can be no denying the centrality of spatial practices in the music's production and circulation as a textual genre.

Rap is not necessarily unique in these aspects, for any recorded music generally displays similar spatial elements. But Rap texts are the product of particular kinds of spatial relations and spatial histories and they therefore feature a distinct *spatial repertoire* that characterizes the music, identifying it as a unique genre without essentializing its

cultural meanings. This is why, to no small extent, it is crucial to approach Rap as a product and form with cultural roots in a decidedly black history of aesthetics and expressivity rather than as simply a genre within the general range of contemporary popular forms. This is as evident in terms of the vocal stylings and lyrical/narrative content as it is in the rhythmic "beats," for as Rap has evolved and become more sophisticated and its production centers more widely dispersed, there have emerged distinct local and regional rhythmic styles that also "speak" their origins in a spatial or geographic sense.⁸

Additionally, as the central expressive voice of the Hip Hop culture, Rap is, in its textual forms, extended through people's daily circulation (through the mobile listening practices enabled by car stereo systems or portable cassette and CD players) or through its retextualization and recontextualization (as it is grafted onto other media or infused into various common social settings). The sonic qualities of Rap texts transform the spaces into which they flood in ways that are quite distinct from other musical genres. It is not at all uncommon to hear ambient music of any style in one's daily circulation in the city and to process it quickly and almost absent-mindedly for cues about its relevance or appeal to one's own life. We hear music throughout the day from numerous sources over which we have literally no control and yet we continue to locate and position it according to our cultural knowledges or assumptions about how the music might be linked to particular audience formations, fan groups, or what Grossberg terms "affective alliances." For instance, the slow, rumbling bass of Rap, Hip Hop or Reggae Dancehall music alters and redefines space differently than the high pitched and frenetic guitar solos of Heavy Metal music, with each suggesting unique textual distinctions that we "read" from and which position us differently in relation to it.

⁸ For example, the East Coast/West Coast "sounds" are frequently compared in terms of regional stylistic and tonal differences. This has been exacerbated with the ascension of other regionally dispersed artists, although the East/West distinctions remain the most notable. As an example of the powerful regional definitions to which I am referring, I point to the production of the "G-Funk" sound that is generally associated with the area around Compton and Long Beach, California and the production work of Dr. Dre during his tenure with the group N.W.A. and the Death Row label in particular.

In this sense, returning to Grossberg's position, each musical genre provides a wide variety of relevant characteristic elements that can be organized (albeit in an initially perfunctory manner) cartographically according to individual and collective cultural "maps." The textual spaces of Rap can therefore be conceived as points on the mattering maps among various audience formations and fans (as well as having spatial and relational relevance to corporate and other institutional entities). They provide sites in which various disparate formations converge and are mobilized. In corresponding terms, Iain Chambers explains:

"...we all become nomads, migrating across a system that is too vast to be our own but in which we are fully involved, translating and transforming bits and elements into local instances of sense. It is this remaking, this transmutation, that makes such texts and languages -- the city, cinema, music, culture and the contemporary world -- habitable: as though they were a space borrowed for a moment by a transient, an immigrant, a nomad.
(Chambers, 1993: 193)

By examining Rap's narrativization as a process of inscription whereby social relations are reiterated within textual spaces which are themselves then returned to the public sphere, the recorded and performative texts are opened up as sites where social practices and their informing histories can subsequently be read.

The third space of central relevance to this study has already been referred to variously as actual space, physical space, natural space, or what Lefebvre calls "the space of experience." It is the space of the world around us, where social practices and relations are enacted. This is also the space of the senses and of sensual practices -- the space of activities which have tactile quality, where the human subject encounters everything else beyond the bodily frontier of the epidermis. It is the visceral space through which physical bodies roam, interact, and collide. Physical space is commonly taken for granted and infused with assumptions about its "natural" or organic characteristics, leading to what Lefebvre suggests is a passive and relatively unreflective use. Yet for all of its obviousness (for it surrounds us and demarcates each of our individual "worlds") it can also be the most elusive kind of space.

In general terms, physical space can apply to either vast, unmarked terrains (such as deserts or fields) or it can refer to smaller, discrete units (such as a house or even a room in a house, as Bachelard [1958/1992] suggests). In either case, space refers to more or less circumscribed areas. Following from Lefebvre's assertion that social space is socially produced, it is appropriate to think of the construction of space as an organizing process or as an ongoing arrangement of material objects and human relations that, in tandem, give the expanse of physical space human definition. This perspective spawns such conceptual terms as "spatial patterns" or "spatial order" which are indicative of attempts to provide explanatory tools for the ways in which power might be distributed and, thus, be capable of transforming physical spaces into institutional or bureaucratic spaces, such as the nation or the city, etc.

It is appropriate to once again reaffirm the fact that space is not an autonomous or self-motivated entity but a concept that emerges as an effect of object relations or social processes that give it definition and territorial character. Duncan and Savage note that it is not space *qua* space that has cultural relevance or social influence, but it is more precisely the complex patterns or orders that, once culturally established, evolve over time into more rigid structures: "Once these spatial patterns have been set up by social institutions they produce a certain physical fixity -- in the form of a built environment -- which tends to persist" (1989: 181). The physical environment that has been made over into urban spaces offers evidence of the social processes at work. The physical environment is transformed according to human social and cultural expediencies: need or caprice; function or stylistic flourish; work, rest and leisure all acquire spatial character as cultures make their cities over time. But, against the rather strict notion of "fixity...which tends to persist," we must also acknowledge the conditions of contemporary urban space where the products of this built environment begin to fall away and revert, once again, to spaces of relative emptiness. Thus, as suburban sprawl consumes arable land around the perimeters of major cities, the outdated buildings and structures that have surpassed their usefulness (for their owners)

and are now abandoned in many "inner-cities" are either razed or are condemned due to neglect. It is true, then, that the fixity persists if we are to focus on urban society and the urban environment at large, but it is also accompanied by persistent transformation and reproduction that are reflective of the contradictory values and interests that underlie prevailing social patterns.

In regular social contact, the physical spaces in which we live and work are frequently regarded unproblematically as "containers" for our experiences of the world. This perspective regards physical space as a kind of preceding emptiness that is filled by our human subjective presence. Produced and reproduced by statesmen and corporate leaders, architects and planners, and crucially, by each of us in our own daily peregrinations according to variances of scope, scale, ability, or autonomy, physical space is more or less unconsciously transformed into social space by the human interactions that demarcate parameters of existence. The "real" meanings are thought to reside in our actions and practices or their outcomes which, of course, have to happen "somewhere." Such an approach casts space as a setting or a backdrop to the important activities of "everyday life" without adequately taking up the question of the spatial composition of life's events, which, as I mentioned previously, has gradually become a central concern in the fields of cultural geography and cultural studies. In fact, physical space *is* a container of sorts but caution must be taken not to designate it as *simply* a container of social performance and practice.

The human cooptation of physical space occurs in many ways and involves the establishment of coordinates that have relational meaning and which have been rendered in readable forms, as in the creation of terrestrial and oceanic maps or even the descriptive tensions between "here" and "there." In Lefebvre's terms, this is a process of production, recovering natural space as the domain of human relations and rendering it useful and meaningful in cultural terms (and, also, exposing it to the systems of power and domination that saturate the social sphere). Through human action we attribute symbols

and signs to physical spaces, providing both visual (i.e., maps and cartography) and lexical (i.e. descriptive terminology) means for defining multiple spaces upon which society is structured. It also involves the introduction of built structure to physical landscapes; constructing buildings or highways and streets as routes of passage and flow or erecting signs as markers that help orient citizens. In an elaborative way, the process of rendering space meaningful in cultural terms involves more than just isolating distinct spaces or objects in space. It also encompasses the reproduction of society by defining spaces according to the ways they are inhabited and used, as lived, experiential space.

In the narratives of Rap music (constituted in the overlap of discursive and textual spaces) the authority of individual experience is generally structured upon what is conceived as the self-evident "truth" of natural or physical spaces where events occur and such experience is registered. To reduce the myriad of experiential testimonies (which will be taken up in greater detail later) to a basic formulation, the statement "this happened to me" is often and increasingly reinforced by the spatial qualifier "here." The "where" of experience has a powerful influence over the social meanings derived from the experiences themselves, for just as our actions and mobilities bring space into cultural relief, so, too, does socially produced space bring meaning to our actions. The category of space comprises the social arena in which individuals reproduce or challenge their experiential boundaries of action and interaction. Scale thus emerges as a crucial factor for the apprehension and understanding of spatial difference since it is also, like many other elements of the prevailing capitalist system, prone to uneven development and distribution among citizens of different social classes and groups. For example, the spatial patterns that define territorial boundaries and which frame circulation and mobility are structured unevenly between individuals and institutions, with the scale of the latter being much larger than that of the former. Similarly, age, class, race, or gender variables can be regarded as social factors that can affect scale and the range of physical space accessible to individuals as well as larger group formations.

The wealthy generally circulate within a wider, more elaborated socio-spatial realm than those of lesser economic means due to their varied capacities to extend their physical and experiential territories in a capitalist social system. Expanded spatial frontiers and increased mobility are in fact part of the reward for economic success in this system (an example of this may be seen in the accumulations of "air miles" and an emergent economy of travel points among a business class and professional elite). Men also tend to claim larger tracts of physical space than women do, although conceiving of the partial successes of the women's movements from a spatial perspective we can see that the struggles of feminist cultural politics have had a limited but lasting effect on the re-ordering of socio-spatial relations (whether in the home, in the work place, or in numerous other physical spaces of the public sphere).

The same can be said of social and cultural struggles waged by racial and ethnic minorities in America, for the legacy of spatially patterned racism is easily discerned in such artifacts as the photo images of "Whites Only" signs forbidding blacks entry into public washrooms, theatres, and other sites as recently as the mid-1960s. More recently, as Mike Davis (1992) and Ronald Formisano (1991) chronicle, spatial segregation remains evident in local school and housing arrangements that are both implicitly and explicitly organized along racial lines of exclusion. It can be unequivocally stated that racial difference is almost always linked to some form of spatial difference in America, a fact that maintains a strong, if lamentable, correspondence to Du Bois's observation at the turn of the century that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line" (1903/1994). Children and youths also confront spatial constraints as the parent culture commands greater freedom of mobility across social spaces than do its offspring, at least up until the teenage years. In each of these examples, the issue is one of scale, including the scale or extent of social interrelations through which individuals and collectivities express their autonomy and define their identities.

Encapsulating the influence of discursive, narrative, and physical spaces in Rap and Hip Hop, Rose's sketch of Rap's formation and growth is illuminating as she identifies their variegated influences, tracing a spatial arc through urban American cultural landscapes:

Out of a broader discursive climate in which the perspectives of younger Hispanic, Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans had been provided little social space, hip hop developed as part of a cross-cultural communication network. Trains carried graffiti tags through the five boroughs; flyers posted in black and Hispanic neighborhoods brought teenagers from all over New York to parks and clubs in the Bronx and eventually to events throughout the metropolitan area. And, characteristic in the age of high-tech telecommunications, stories with cultural and narrative resonance continued to spread at rapid pace. (Rose, 1994: 60)

Context and conjunctural forces can be discerned in the first segment of this description, with Rose isolating discourse and cultural spaces of enunciation simultaneously at Hip Hop and Rap's source. Through both physical and technological pathways, the Hip Hop culture was carried outward, disseminated more widely as its practices evolved away from the central spaces of their origin. Finally, through the circulation of textual materials and human mobilities, the culture took root in other spaces, undergoing subsequent transformations that suggest the influence of socio-spatial difference that produces adaptations and alternative inflections in dispersed and disparate locales.

The dynamic of scale is interesting in this evolutionary history of Hip Hop and Rap and it is worth quoting Rose once again at length:

It was not long before similarly marginalized black and Hispanic communities in other cities picked up on the tenor and energy of New York hip hop...Regional differentiation in hip hop has been solidifying and will continue to do so. In some cases those differences are established by references to local streets and events, neighborhoods and leisure activities; in other cases regional differences can be discerned by their preference for dance steps, clothing, musical samples and vocal accents. (ibid.)

From this description, a dual directionality operating at different levels of scale can be discerned: Hip Hop spreads out from a central, local source and effectively shifts in scale of influence and impact as it acquires regional and, eventually, national prominence. But as Rose explains, at that point where Hip Hop attains nation-wide diffusion and broad

familiarity among teenagers and the public at large, it also attains new regional and local character, reverting back to more localized scales of particularity and relevance in daily cultures as it is both produced and consumed. This dynamic of dimensions of scale is at the core of much of the spatial structure of the Hip Hop culture and can be heard in the themes of Rap music as well as in other popular texts relating to the culture. The spatial complexities of Hip Hop, far from being incidental or insignificant, are, I believe, central to all that emerges from it.

From Space to Place: The Production of Scale and Value

Like space, place has been the object of much thought and scholarly interrogation, emerging in numerous contexts as either an adjunct to the study of spatiality or as the central focus in the analyses of society and spatial processes. For example, Yi-Fu Tuan notes that "'space' is more abstract than 'place'," (1977: 6), whereas Edward Relph suggests that space "provides the context for places but derives its meaning from particular places" (1976: 8). Lawrence Grossberg expresses the distinction between space and place in terms of a "structured mobility," stating that "places are the sites of stability where people can stop and act, the markers of their affective investments," and "spaces are the parameters of the mobility of people and practices" (1992: 295). As each of these statements on space and place illustrate, the two concepts are mutually entwined and yet there is no easy agreement as to how they should be separated to explain their distinctions and what these distinctions might mean culturally. Two dominant themes emerge, however, which can be seen as primary points distinguishing place from space: scale and value.

According to John Agnew, scale "refers to the spatial *level*, local, national, global, at which the presumed effect of location is operative" (1993: 251). In a relational sense, place as a dimensional arena exists in contrast to the larger and more general scales of space (Tuan's position). It is a subset of space, a structuring spatiality (Relph's position) that

differs in size and form and, in terms of social relations, effect. Place defines the immediate locale of human interaction in the particular whereas space is the expanse of mobile trajectories through which subjects pass in their circulation between or among distinct and varied places (Grossberg's position). Throughout each of these brief definitions, the produced character of place remains evident; like space, it is a social construct, but one that is shaped according to different logics and meanings.

Place is structured along more narrowly circumscribed parameters than is space; it is defined by its closeness and proximity to individuals and groups and by its localized character that is distinguished in contrast to the distant and external character of abstracted space, or of other distinct places. Its reduced scale allows individuals to inhabit it more fully, permitting greater intimacy, awareness, and involvement with the particularities of its geographic and social composition. Recognition and affiliation grounded in place facilitate certain kinds of investments in those places of greatest familiarity or significance. This closeness introduces the further capacity to organize places in concrete and material ways as part of individuals' daily lives, leading David Ley (1989) to suggest that place is a more highly ordered concept than space. At reduced scales, however, it is clear that individuals are more capable of imagining lines of mobility and circulation routes from a perspective of close proximity. This subsequently influences one's awareness of the range of possible options and, in a literal sense, paths of action, giving material consequences to the often hazy affective and subjective sense of place that individuals carry within themselves.

Just as space and place are each produced according to differing logics of scale, so, too, is place subject to its own varied classifications. For some individuals or in some social contexts, sense of place as a site of significance may be grounded in the immediate environments of personal experience, such as the home or the near neighborhood. In other contexts place may be conceived more broadly, encompassing the entire city where one lives and works (an aspect that is often tied to civic pride and "booster" campaigns) or even the wider region depending upon levels of affiliation and identification with a given social

or natural terrain. This approach to place and scale returns us to the crucial notion that social relations produce and reproduce our comprehension of spatiality; there is no sense of place that can be derived in the absence of social processes that display their own particular characteristics of scale for it is these social processes themselves that ultimately inform our definitions of sites of significance.

In socio-spatial terms, as John Jeffries observes, it is the city that provides the frame for "the repertoires of black popular culture," including style, music, and "black popular culture's deliberate use of the body as canvas" (1992: 158). But the concept of the urban environment itself remains an abstraction composed of generalities (which Jeffries suggests include our preconceived ideas of what the urban is) for no city reveals itself in all of its complexities, nor is any city open and accessible to all, as is evident when considering the restricted range of spatial practices that individuals perform in contemporary American cities. Reference to "the city" is useful for certain analyses that seek to identify urban patterns or dynamics and to posit a distinction between other patterned constructs at geo-social scales of national or global scope.

The abstraction of "the city" can be productively reduced through additional clarification and qualification by making references to specific cities, for example, as well as to specific micro-spaces and places within any given urban environment. Thus, without disputing Jeffries's point that cities constitute a crucial element in the formation and expression of black popular culture in its multi-faceted idioms, it is necessary to further acknowledge and illuminate the diverse practices that produce distinct kinds of urban spaces in America's cities. The cultural histories as well as the cultural present of, for instance, New York, Miami, Detroit, Houston, or Los Angeles differ vastly and, despite similarities that might be shared at the scale of "the city" or "the American urban environment," the distinctions are pronounced as are the nuanced forms and expressions of popular culture that emerge from each urban locale. This is no less true of the distinctions and disparities that occur at the micro-levels of individual boroughs and neighborhoods,

whether this be in the Roxbury section of Boston, the South Bronx in New York, or Houston's Fifth Ward.

A refinement can be seen developing among young urban black cultural workers in the areas of music and film and who are most influenced by the Hip Hop culture as they introduce further reductions of scale, shifting focus from the larger spaces of the city to the more localized environment of the borough and city section or, by further reduction, to the scale of the neighborhood. This refinement should not be regarded as a simple reduction that, in its focus on particularity and local levels of experience, is capable of producing more authentically knowable spaces (although this claim is often made, a point to which I will return in following chapters). Even as an example of a highly localized and particular scale, the narrowed parameters of the neighborhood refuse totalization, offering instead a highly complex range of experiences that are shaped by the overlapping effects of internal and external influences (i.e., local and non-local forces). From an analytical perspective, however, it is appropriate to shift the emphasis from larger scales of the urban environment to reduced scales since these micro-levels of experience are receiving intensified attention through the many forms of black cultural expression today.

For Jeffries, black popular culture is undergoing a transition that is largely motivated by concurrent transformations of the late-capitalist, postmodern urban sphere. He writes:

The cultural signifiers that black popular culture employs [to continue its reaffirmation of black humanity in the upcoming century] may already be overdetermined -- overdetermined in the sense that the significance of place, and the presumed authenticity associated with the signifier "black," are both being displaced. (Jeffries, 1992: 162)

Rather than a once-and-for-all displacement, it seems more accurate that these preceding elements of significance -- place and "blackness" -- are being redefined at multiple levels of experience and meaning. While the global/local nexus, as described by Kevin Robins (1991), evolves into *the* primary frame of social interaction in late-twentieth century America, there is a renewed investment in the significance of place and new attempts to

revalorize and reinvigorate the places of social meaning. Similarly, it can be seen among examples emanating from the Hip Hop culture that new signifiers of blackness are also closely aligned with the revitalized significance of place as they are often, though by no means always, grafted onto one another. In the extreme and more publicly visible cases, this tendency is evident in the formation of, and explicit identification with neighborhood crews, cliques, and posses associated with the cultural forms and expressions of the Hip Hop culture. In less optimistic but no less significant ways, they can be discerned in the highly locational and place-bound practices of contemporary "gangsta-ism" and the activities of Gs, O.G.s, and Wannabes.

The active processes of making spatial sites significant -- or the active transformation of space into place -- involves the investment of subjective value and the attribution of meanings to components of the socially constructed environment. Generally reinforcing Lefebvre's notion of socially produced space, Tuan describes place as "a special kind of object...a concretion of values" (1977: 12). For him, place is rendered meaningful and, hence, significant precisely through the lived practices of circulation and habitation. It emerges as a meaningful domain through experience, perception, and visceral contact that occur as one interacts with the physical and social environment. In similar terms, Relph suggests that place is "not just the 'where' of something; it is the location plus everything that occupies that location seen as an integrated and meaningful phenomenon" (1976: 3). The sense of place is the product of a particular proximity and familiarity with the environment of one's routine circulation and is encompassing of those elements that are frequently described as the "practices of everyday life," accounting for the minutiae and subordinated details that may be overlooked due to their apparent *insignificance*.

This is to say that place is produced according to rhythms of movement and patterns of use. The dynamic apprehension of space through personal/subjective processes of meaning conferral consequently encompasses the overlapping duality of habitation *and* habituation. Habitation and habituation are themselves part of what I call a reiterative

process that includes locally repeated practices as well as recurrent narratives and discourses that are part of the explanatory and communicative apparatus of everyday life. Reiterative processes simultaneously influence the "real" and symbolic foundations of experience. They also involve the saying and the saying again (literally, rendering experience meaningful by introducing it into language) and the accompanying repetition of actions as well as the ensuing talk about them and about their real or potential implications, etc. The significance of place consequently acquires definition through discursive articulations and narrative descriptions that are formed within a myriad of contradictory and competing cultural forms, a variety of genres, and a wide array of expressive apparatuses. Both our subjective and collectively held senses of place begin to take shape and cohere once they are rendered into language, acquiring what Ryden (1993) refers to as a "discursive depth."

The "sense of place" that individuals acquire, however, is not based solely on a positive relation to a known environment, for as Tuan suggests, *topophilia* or "love of place" (1974) exists alongside and often in tandem with one's experience of "landscapes of fear" (1979) which are capable of producing what might be termed *topophobia*. For the Hip Hop culture, place may be significant for its familiarity, nurturing factors, and supportive infrastructures but it may also harbor other more menacing elements that are also centrally implicated in establishing criteria of significance. From this perspective, place is not always a close and positive spatial frame but one that may be threatening, alienating, and dangerous to its inhabitants.

It is also important to stress that neither the subjective or collective affiliation to place is a simple equivalent of community, despite the fact that community tends to cohere within the bounded parameters of place in the local context. As Deyan Sudjic argues, the overarching notion of community is a "myth" in the context of today's sprawling global cities that are characteristically diverse and prone to rapid transformation. The contemporary appeal to community values employed by many politicians as well as urban

planners often harkens back to an earlier, idealized notion of urban cooperation and place-based affiliations where the community is "presented as desirable in itself, a reflection of a natural order of life that is tampered with at society's peril," or understood as "the anchor of social stability" (Sudjic, 1992: 283).

Community is organized around a much more complicated and longstanding structure of interrelations, a relatively strong sense of common cause, and at least a modicum of localized cooperation that exceeds geo-social, place-bound affiliations. Yet the sense of community that coheres around localized issues and interests is still primarily grounded in a shared sense of place that accompanies either explicit or implicit mapping of community boundaries and a descriptive lexicon that is recognizable by the majority of community members. Herein lies an important element of place identification, for in order for a place to emerge as a social "product," there must be a point where the description of its attributes is rendered explicit or where the value invested in one's relations to place are communicated with others who may either share a high level of familiarity with it or, conversely, have little or no relation to it. This points to the necessary stage where language enters into the definition of place for it is in and through language that the values of places are shaped.

As a contemporary medium of cultural and aesthetic expression, Rap music provides a means for defining an enunciative position, accommodating the locational coordinates (both physical and cultural) of experience that enable young artists to articulate their emergent senses of place. The kind of place values to which I refer here constitute more than ephemeral positionings along a spectrum of possibilities. The investment of self in place and the concurrent identification of self within an economy of place-based factors ultimately shapes and influences the ways that subjective perspectives evolve.

The close relations of person and place that are structured around scale and value have important implications for the construction of the subject identities of the inhabitants of a given place. Evolved social norms have produced strong relational influences between

place and identity which is evident, for instance, in the common casual inquiry about where one is from or where one currently resides. This is an efficient way of filling in information about one's character and identity as a kind of shorthand and assumes a latent relationship between spatiality and identity. The overlapping axes of elements that connect social practices and the formation of social identities have received substantial scholarly attention for the ways that they emerge through a mutually influential nexus to produce or construct social bodies. This has been demonstrated mostly through the exploration of issues pertaining to constructions of race, gender, and sexuality. These constructions, however, are also spatially inscribed as they are placed in particular sets of social relations that have a spatial component and that acquire meaning through the ways that particular locational practices are conceived in differential relation to other practices that occur in other places. In the context of cultural politics, the construction of social identities is highly inflected by localized struggles that are waged in various social sites or terrains according to particularized patterns encompassing material (i.e., actual human needs) as well as affective facets of human existence (such as pleasures and desires).

Individual and collective identities are connected to place, although rarely to a single place and, due to contemporary influences such as increased travel as well as various global communication technologies, never in a pure or unmediated way. Individuals are more likely today to feel strong, value-laden affinities to several places at once rather than to a single unambiguous locale, although the identification with a dominant home environment still remains strong. This pattern of multiple identifications is largely a result of highly mobile and nomadic social patterns that produce new forms of mobile and nomadic identities, leading Iain Chambers to write that "our sense of being, of identity and language, is experienced and extrapolated from movement...identity is formed on the move" (1994: 24-25). This movement may be across an ambiguous and ill-defined mediascape in the realm of the popular, but it is also crucially encompassing of patterns of circulation and mobility that comprise our daily lives and which lead us across and through

socio-spatial boundaries in a process of endless encounters with different places and their accompanying localized discourses. Consequently, whether looking to the practices of subway train graffiti in the late 1970s and early 1980s or to the proliferation of territorial affiliations in the form of posses, crews, and cliques, it is evident that identity formation in the Hip Hop culture is substantially linked to spatiality and mobility.

Engaging with spatial discourses that elevate the significance of place-based allegiances therefore offers a useful means of isolating the dynamics, tensions, and practices through which place is given meaning. Rap music and the articulations of the Hip Hop youth culture consequently provide a lens through which to examine the spatial sensibilities of a particular milieu as it constitutes a relatively recent phenomenon that has had substantial impact on the social mechanisms of identity formation among predominantly urban youths of all races and ethnicities.

Hip Hop Culture as Structure of Feeling

In black popular culture⁹, most noticeably in the range of practices associated with Hip Hop, there is an "emergent" cultural sensibility that can be understood in terms of Williams's theory of "structures of feeling." As Williams explains, structures of feeling involve "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt...characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity" (1977: 132). These structures of feeling evolve as new lived experiences or practices which, although cognitively and affectively recognizable (Rutherford, 1990), remain ill-defined and difficult to articulate within existing terms. This means that with the evolution of structures of feeling that herald new and unforeseen cultural sensibilities there is a

⁹ For a discussion of this term and its implications for contemporary cultural studies, see Stuart Hall, 1992, "What is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture," in Black Popular Culture, Gina Dent (ed.). Seattle: Bay Press.

concurrent emergence of new and different ways of expressing one's experience of the world, of articulating experience. Williams further points out that it is frequently in the realm of the arts that "the very first evidence that a new structure is forming" (ibid: 133) can be observed. As the new structures of feeling emerge they are channeled through individual and collective systems of meaning and are more widely communicated through their introduction to representational apparatuses where language and practice meet.

The evolving structures of feeling and the emergent sensibilities of the Hip Hop culture offer two main departures: first, they follow generational lines of division that distinguish youth culture from the preceding parent culture. The attempts by youths to make sense of social and cultural experiences that are radically different than those of their parents has led many African-American and Latino youths to develop new forms of language. Through Hip Hop, an entirely new mode of communication and language has developed alongside a diverse range of practices that is alternately a reaction to, and force of change in the broader social transformations that have impacted most notably on urban minority youth since roughly the mid-1970s. This is not to say that there has been an absence of transition and change among non-urban/non-minority youth, but that there are historically specific and culturally informed factors that produce different effects and outcomes in the various milieux of contemporary youth culture.

Second, the emergent structures of feeling that are announced by the Hip Hop culture can be seen in contrast to the cultural dominance of the majority white, bourgeois American culture in a divergence that follows racial and ethnic as well as generational lines. Manifested in material and symbolic realms, new cultural sensibilities and the evolving structure of feeling are formed within a society in which, for a disproportionate percentage of urban minority youth, crack cocaine addiction is an unprecedented daily reality, as is chronic youth unemployment, HIV infection and AIDS, and gun violence (these being topics that regularly inform the themes and narratives of Rap music). The effects of these particular material facts are knowable and thus cognitively apprehended but they are also

deeply felt by many members of the Hip Hop culture as part of an affective economy of meaning and values. They are relatively recent forces that have transformed the daily experiences of countless black and Latino youths, their families, and their neighbors and which have necessitated a wide array of practical strategies for survival among these youths. Far removed from the sites of official public policy-making and of moral regulation, the common events of the micro-worlds of minority youths frequently necessitate rapid and unprecedented intellectual responses, not in order to make a better society, although they may do so over time¹⁰, but as Rap artists like Ice Cube, Ice-T, MC Eiht and others suggest, to simply make it through another day alive.

A new spatially inflected terminology that reflects the contours of the current historical moment and the conditions of existence within which the world is experienced and explained by urban black and Latino youths has developed and it is within this referential frame that subjective and group identities are increasingly located and defined. Place, cast within the accompanying discursive articulation of located identities has, since the early 1980s, become increasingly prevalent in the cultural lexicon and expressive repertoires of urban youth and has been rendered audible in the various forums of Rap and Hip Hop culture. Rap has publicized the many new ways that place has been invested with values that are crucial to the formation of identities and affiliations within black youth cultures and subcultures. It has emerged with such force and urgency, that it can be considered an important and relevant indicator of change and transition, a harbinger of a transformative mode that corresponds to the concept of cultural evolution and structures of feeling.

¹⁰ Virtually every large American city has active youth programs aimed toward finding solutions to many of the basic issues confronting urban minority youths today. One example is Boston's Teen Empowerment program which encourages peer guidance and teen leadership culminating in an annual Teen Peace conference.

Chapter 2

Space Matters

Theorizing Space 1: Imagining Space and Power

In the preface to Race Matters, Cornel West describes in detail an incident he experienced in New York city:

I dropped my wife off for an appointment on 60th Street between Lexington and Park avenues. I left my car -- a rather elegant one -- in a safe parking lot and stood on the corner of 60th Street and Park Avenue to catch a taxi. I felt relaxed since I had an hour until my next engagement. At 5:00 P.M. I had to meet a photographer who would take the picture for the cover of this book on the roof of an apartment building in East Harlem on 115th Street and 1st Avenue. I waited and I waited and I waited. After the ninth taxi refused me, my blood began to boil. The tenth taxi refused me and stopped for a kind, well-dressed, smiling female fellow citizen of European descent. As she stepped in the cab, she said, "This is really ridiculous, is it not?"
(West, 1993: x)

At the base of this description, West communicates the irony that even a well-dressed, professional and prominent intellectual of African-American heritage must confront the common systemic racism of American society. The words spoken to him by the "female fellow citizen" offer both truth and understatement as her utterance suggests a tacit shrug of regret and a tacit acceptance: after all, she still took the cab. But West's own words are also interesting in terms of what is explicitly stated and what is rendered implicit.

While exposing one or two things about race and class in America, his brief narrative exposes a geography of difference that underlies his experience as a black man standing on the street in New York. He has left his car, "a rather elegant one," in a safe parking lot in a relatively safe area of the city. The assumption is that taxis will not stop for him *because* he is black even though his dress and demeanor are completely normal for the upscale contexts of mid-town Manhattan. The attention to such details as street names, however, are an important facet of his story. They occupy a central role and are relevant in their capacity to provide additional information about the cultural locations through which

West circulates. His emphasis on local geographies is crucial to the sense or the meaning of his anecdote, for by relating street names and neighborhoods he effectively maps the cultural terrains of the city and their distinct and differential qualities along a spatial axis encompassing race and class. Race matters, but it is clear that space does too.

As this example illustrates, space is an influential, though often ignored factor in contemporary culture. It can be at once unifying (i.e., where "the local" serves as a spatial foundation for such microcosms as neighborhoods or communities) or differentiating (measured in a system of ordered hierarchies of power or influence) and is structured in and through numerous institutional agendas and public discourses. It has become obvious that the spaces we inhabit are generally susceptible to various bids for increased influence, authority and power, whether in terms of official policy, localized politics, the struggles among street gangs or those between youths and the police, etc. Spatial conflict involves conflicts of fluctuating intensities and, importantly, fluctuating scales as various transformative strategies are deployed in the attempt to extend control and domination over the social landscape. Power and authority are unevenly distributed throughout society with space emerging as one important vector among many for the expression of dominant/subordinate relations within the hegemonic order.

Edward Soja and Barbara Hooper describe the "brute fashionings" of socially constructed differences that feature a pronounced spatial character. For them, dominant hegemonic forms of authority and influence frequently display a vested interest in how geographies are ordered in relation to each other:

The cultural politics of difference, whether old or new, arise primarily from the workings of power -- in society and on space in both their material and imagined forms. Hegemonic power does not simply manipulate naively given differences between individuals and social groups; it actively *produces and reproduces difference* as a key strategy to create and maintain modes of social and spatial division that are advantageous to its continued empowerment. (Soja & Hooper, 1993: 184-185)

Hegemonic power, however, is extensive and dispersed throughout society, making it difficult to attach responsibility for the prevailing spatial ordering of society. The social

organization of power that is invested in space is not imposed by a ruling elite or faction maintaining supreme privilege and authority along the convergent axes of race, class, gender, and age. It is continually renegotiated in such ways that power and its sustaining ideological underpinnings are articulated toward the interests of the dominant social classes. The consensual element of the prevailing hegemonic relations, understood in Gramscian terms as "a certain collaboration, i.e., an active and voluntary (free) consent" (Gramsci, 1971: 271), works at all levels of society to affirm the reproduction of existing racial and spatial boundaries. Thus, even those who inhabit socially marginalized spaces are active in the reproduction of the inequal distribution of social powers and in the reinforcement of a hierarchy of difference that constructs their subordinate position. The mechanisms through which hegemony is secured and maintained are multiple, as are the effects. Yet the ways that these differentiating effects manifest themselves in various lived environments can be observed by gazing across the stratified social terrain and tracing the rolling topographies of power that can be apprehended in language and in practice within these environments.

It is through the complex dynamics of discourse and practice that race is spatialized and space is racialized: these are two sides of the same coin . Discourse sets the stage for practice, producing the conditions in which the world is actively perceived and apprehended by social subjects; practice or the active expression of agency and experience is drawn up into discourse, "talked into life" (Wagner-Pacifici, 1994), and infused with meaning within existing regimes of power and discipline. This said, it is also necessary to stress that this is not a simple or natural "fact" of contemporary life. Rather, it is part of a process of cultural negotiation or, to use a concept common to the field of cultural studies, spatial relations constitute a facet of ongoing "cultural struggle." The social construction of urban America is thus entwined with the social construction of race with debates on everything from the rights to quality public education to the uses of public space being shaped by the racial/spatial dynamic. Race is spatialized and space is racialized through the

explicit and implicit segregation of minority populations¹¹, the segregation of the services and activities upon which communities or neighborhoods are founded, and through the gradual public acceptance of this phenomenon within a general "common sense" repertoire, as the norm.

The theme of "the city" and urban space is central to this discussion. It holds a particular cultural value in society for as John Jeffries writes, "in black popular culture, the city is hip. It's the locale of cool. In order to be 'with it,' you must be in the city...the city is where black cultural styles are born" (1992: 159). In fact, urban spaces and places have figured prominently in various studies of African-American culture, with W.E.B. Du Bois's study of The Philadelphia Negro (1899/1967), with its sociological research on the community structures of black life in the wards or neighborhoods of Philadelphia at the end of the nineteenth century, providing an early example. With a highly specific spatial focus, Du Bois isolates a community within a community, or, as Charles Scruggs (1993) has suggested, an "invisible city...a city within a city," mapping the concentrations, lifestyles, and occupations of the city's black population:

The new immigrants usually settle in pretty well-defined localities in or near the slums, and thus get the worst possible introduction to city life...Today they are to be found partly in the slums and partly in those small streets with old houses, where there is a dangerous intermingling of good and bad elements fatal to growing children and unwholesome for adults. Such streets may be found in the Seventh Ward, between Tenth and Juniper streets, in parts of the Third and Fourth Wards and in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Wards. (Du Bois, 1899/1967: 81)

The localized references and the depiction of a highly concentrated black citizenry reach new and fearsome proportions by the mid-1980s as Mike Davis's City of Quartz (1992) reveals with its descriptions of a "carceral city" and the enforced military-style zoning of public and residential spaces according to criteria of race, class, and age. In Davis's

¹¹ For example, in 1994 it was reported that a major Boston taxi company maintained a "separate and unequal" policy differentiating between the predominantly "black" areas of Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan and the rest of Boston. The company was accused of operating two separate phone lines for "white" and "black" customers, offering regular preferential service to the "white" areas of the city while ignoring callers from the "black" line altogether. (Boston Globe, Feb 28, 1994). An official investigation later determined that the allegations were unfounded.

historical study of urban development in Los Angeles, the containment of what the dominant classes often consider to be "undesirables" or "aliens" (which include an inordinate proportion of blacks and Chicanos) is explicit. This illustrates that the contemporary city remains the primary space of racial division and racial tension and that, despite progress in some quarters, apparatuses of urban racial segregation have taken new, sophisticated, and highly technologized forms.

Theorizing Space 2: Perspectives on the "Global/Local Nexus"

In North American society today, there is a strong fascination with "space." Spatial metaphors and narratives proliferate as a means of stating where one stands in relation to concepts and ideas (i.e., one's "position" or "location") or in relation to the wider realm of objects, structures, and occurrences. In the social world where individuals and groups experience what de Certeau (1984) and others refer to as "everyday life," space is invested with great importance. It is embraced proudly, defended fiercely, and generally imbued with meanings and commitments that form the foundation of one's connection to a given space and which provide the deeper affiliations or affective bonds that can motivate the transformation of space into place, from the general to the particular.

Yet this approach to the cultural geographies of human interaction is contrasted by simultaneous shifts toward new global "flows." The concept of "flow" encompasses transnational economies and the exchange and transfer of huge volumes of manufactured goods, financial information, news and media images, and human bodies around the world according to a prevailing (il)logic of maximized efficiency and rational order. This is the cultural effect that can be discerned in such disparate examples as the rise of continental free trade agreements or economic unification strategies; the underlying theme of the 1985 USA for Africa song "We are the World;" or the Benetton advertising campaigns that amplify racial and cultural difference in the attempt to diminish it.

The massive scope and scale of contemporary popular culture leads to advertisements for Hollywood movies that open on a given date "everywhere;" Coca-Cola and its patented bottle shape and copyrighted corporate logo is as recognizable in Kuwait as it is in Kansas; MacDonald's fast food products are so uniform that a Big Mac in Muncie is technically identical to one in Moscow (and its regularly updated hamburger consumption figures speak of a ravenous hunger on a global scale). It is said that these and other factors of a "global culture" reduce the difference of space (i.e., Meyrowitz, 1985; Harvey, 1989). They draw the world and its dispersed peoples ever closer (for instance, through style, fashion and global taste), into ever more intimate contact (through telecommunications technologies, mass media, and popular culture). They link individuals and collectivities across what were once perceived as incommensurable cultural-spatial divisions. It can be seen that a diverse array of capitalist forces are in motion that introduce a transitional global sensibility. These examples point to the extension of economic power and the conquest (or in David Harvey's terms, "compression") of time and space. As we are beginning to realize, the impact is not solely one of spatial proportions but "also the stretching out over space of relations of power, and relations imbued with meaning and symbolism" (Massey, 1992: 4).

As we approach the end of the century and the end of the millenium, there is a dual pull in apparently opposite directions, toward the micro-spaces of particularized geographies and the vast, macro-spaces of a global scale. What, we might ask, is the relation between these two directionalities and what are the consequences of their divergences? How can this be understood "on the ground," where meanings are made within the systems and structures of social interaction? Where does "power" enter and exert itself within these social interactions and, pursuant to this, what stakes are involved? Who stands to win or lose? In either oblique, vague references or, by contrast, via explicit and articulate critique, contemporary cultural workers including Rap musicians and other

artists have encountered similar questions and have initiated their own intense debates on the topic within the expressive cultural spaces they build and inhabit.

These "competing centrifugal and centripetal forces that characterize the new geographical arena" (Robins, 1991: 24) have reorganized our sense of the world as well as the sense of self. The bases of subjective identities (i.e., the "I" through which individuals relates to the world and others) are changing as social systems are transformed at the macro-level. The cultural apparatuses that organize our individual and collective senses of social belongingness are being altered by the newly emergent "global/local nexus." This is defined by Kevin Robins as being "associated with new relations between space and place, fixity and mobility, centre and periphery, 'real' and 'virtual' space, 'inside' and 'outside', frontier and territory" (1991: 41). Within postmodern or poststructuralist theoretical approaches, this may be celebrated as an indication of the declining constraint of fixed boundaries and structured terrains (as well as the accompanying erosion of faith in the idea of fixed histories, unified centers, and coherent unmediated subjectivities). Advocates see the possibilities as leading toward the potential for a new radical hybridity formed in the limitless options of contingency (i.e., Bhabha, 1990; Chambers, 1994).

Indeed, there is much to value in the concept of multiple "empowered" margins for, at the least, the relations of domination and subordination within the hegemonic order that have traditionally sustained the authority of the "center" are exposed. By emphasizing the necessary presence of social "Others" so-called marginals assert their presence as a structuring force within the relations of power, challenging systems of oppression as they begin the process of cultural and political redefinition (hooks, 1990). It is important, however, to resist the conceptualization of pure or absolute structures, systems, and positions within them, for this denies the actual fluidity of human social interaction. There can be a tendency to isolate subjective agency and collective practices as series of positions (social, political, etc.) and to associate identities with these respective positions in a manner that renders them rigid, fixed or static. Furthermore, it is important to stress the plurality of

existing hierarchical relations as social phenomena that are multiply constituted and which are always historical and contextually specific. There are, in fact, many positions that can be accounted for in spatial terms and the dynamics and sustaining features from one set of conditions to the next should not be generalized. As I shall explain later, this can be seen in the different ways that Rap artists understand their cultural environments and articulate their perceptions of them in different cities and in different national regions.

The oppositional images of place that often spring forth on behalf of marginalized social formations in attempts to re-cast them within the global/local nexus are not, however, always progressive. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson explain that:

The irony of these times, however, is that as actual places and localities become ever more blurred and indeterminate, *ideas* of culturally and ethnically distinct places become perhaps even more salient. It is here that it becomes most visible how imagined communities come to be attached to imagined places, as displaced peoples cluster around remembered or imagined homelands, places, or communities in a world that seems increasingly to deny such firm territorialized anchors in their actuality...Territoriality is thus reinscribed at just the point it threatens to be erased. (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 10-11)

They caution that "often enough, as in the contemporary United States, the association of place with memory, loss, and nostalgia plays directly into the hands of reactionary popular movements" (ibid. 13). What they describe is a fundamentally reactionary posture that frequently arises from either a sense of encroaching loss or, displaying a conservative impulse, an attempt to preserve existing conditions and to thwart the onslaught of rapid change on a national or global scale. Similarly, Kevin Robins writes that "globalization is profoundly transforming our apprehension of the world: it is provoking a new experience of orientation and disorientation, new senses of placed and placeless identity...The driving imperative is to salvage centered, bounded, and coherent identities -- placed identities for placeless times" (1991: 40-41). As he sees it, there is a danger that, in the midst of a global trend that threatens to erase territorial divisions and the boundaries upon which national identities have been historically based, individuals and groups desperately seek to supplant this sense of loss and "disorientation." They urgently attempt to introduce either a

rejuvenated nationalism or, conversely, a hyper-localism that is framed within powerful notions of nostalgic pride, tradition, and racial or ethnic purity that might reaffirm or reify unified and unambiguous identities.¹²

These concerns also correspond with David Harvey's and Doreen Massey's views. Harvey writes that, "indeed, there are abundant signs that localism and nationalism have become stronger precisely because of the quest for the security that place offers in the midst of all the shifting that flexible accumulation implies" (1989:306). His Marxist analyses of the condition of postmodernity accommodate various geographical perspectives as he fluctuates between a critique of illusory ideals of large-scale nationalisms (citing the charismatic leadership of Ronald Reagan and the patriotism of the British Falklands War effort as two examples of how the image of nationalism has been advanced) or, in the reverse, of tendencies toward a disjunctive arrangement of fragmented and differentiated localities. The apparent indifference of capital and corporate investment that is guided by an endless search for the lowest labor expenditures coupled with attractive tax waivers (such as those offered by Mexico) motivates corporations to uproot regional and local manufacturing and distribution centers in the U.S., in the process decimating economies and casting thousands of workers and their families into a financial void. The rise of an urgent localism in this context is a response to the indifference of the corporate trend. The tendency is to re-invent localities as potentially lucrative manufacturing centers and to reassert their presence in terms of labor pools, services, etc., that might persuade commodity manufacturers to stay or to lure new industries to a given region of production.

Finally, Massey warns of the inward-turning and thus reductive responses that are the frequent result of a panicked reaction to the effects of globalization. She argues that

¹² Describing "a response to the forces of globalization," Robins describes a phenomenon whereby "purified identities are constructed through the purification of space, through the maintenance of territorial boundaries and frontiers" (1991: 42). This argument is also central to Paul Gilroy. 1987. There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation. Chicago: University of Chicago Press as it pertains to British nationalism(s), "the English," and U.K. blacks. See also Ronald Formisano. 1991. Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for an example of the notion of purified identities, defensive postures, and localized resistance to externally imposed authority.

"there is today all too much evidence of the emergence of disquieting forms of place-bound loyalties. There are the new nationalisms springing up in the east of Europe...There are also burgeoning exclusive localisms, the constructions of tightly bounded place-identities" that are "static, self-enclosing and defensive" (1992: 7). Relating specifically to Rap music and the Hip Hop culture, the "place-bound loyalties" and "localisms" described by Massey and others can at times be discerned in the discourses of space and place that are associated with the "inner-city" and subsumed in the pervasive articulations of "the ghetto" and, more recently, "the 'hood."

The "Inner-City" and the Ghetto

It is worth exploring the term "inner-city," for in the media and elsewhere it has attained a status of acceptability that tends to elide the complex assumptions accompanying its usage. Inner-city is, literally, a term that points to sites or spaces at the core of urban America. It occupies the opposite pole of the outer city, the suburbs and strip malls that surround the perimeters of all major cities.¹³ In this sense, it is purely geographic, delineating a set of spatialities. Beyond its spatial coordinates, however, the term has a resonance that reaches through the urban cores and the suburban and nonurban sectors of society, cutting to the very heart of the contemporary body politic.

Timothy Maliqalim Simone criticizes the practices of signification that can subtly influence social dialogue and meaning production:

In the aftermath of the civil rights movement of the sixties and seventies, American culture has discovered that racial effects are more efficiently achieved in a language cleansed of overt racial reference. Although conceptual precision in discussions about American social life demands that racial discourse employ racial categories, such categories may or may not make the explicit reference to perceivable and knowledgeable racial characteristics such as skin color. (Simone, 1989: 16-17)

¹³ Joel Garreau has also identified a further phenomenon called the "Edge City" which is the third stage of the trajectory from suburban housing areas, to malls and retail/consumption spaces, to fully functional cities which have sprouted at the frontier of older, traditional city boundaries (Joel Garreau. 1988. Edge City: Life on the New Frontier. New York: Doubleday.)

The common sense meanings of the expression "inner-city," especially when used as a prefix in constructions such as "inner-city youth" or "inner-city violence," cannot be left unexamined. To do so is to risk the gradual erosion of awareness about how race and class have been historically and systemically ordered in our urban environments and in the consciousness of the white, middle-class majority. That is to say, a term like inner-city youth, applied offhandedly by policy-makers, educators, and the media, refers almost exclusively to minority teenagers. It is a buzz-word that comes fully loaded with extenuating implications, assumptions, and stereotypical ideas of who occupies these spaces and in what ways.

This underlying principle is evident, for example, in a report released by the Heritage Foundation's Policy Review, a conservative American think-tank, that predicts a correlation between a growing urban black youth population and increases in urban crime over the next fifteen years (Whitmire, 1995).¹⁴ When mobilized in certain contexts, then, the term inner-city implicitly refers to images or conditions of danger, violence, and depravity which can be contrasted with ideals of calm, safety, and security of non-inner-city, suburban spaces. The term is also used in some contexts to signify an earlier mythical period when the modern city was ostensibly free of threat or danger, particularly from minorities and immigrants. In the temporal sense, this is often implicitly expressed by white conservative commentators as an historical moment that precedes the mass migrations of European ethnic groups and African-Americans to urban centers in the Northern U.S. This can be, and frequently is further reduced to the more blunt links that equate black youth with the danger of the city core.¹⁵ Discussions that attempt to understand or decipher inner-city constituents and the means through which urban core environments are

¹⁴ This claim has severe implications and is based on a questionable reading of contemporary crime trends in which blacks are more vigorously policed and more likely to be found guilty of crimes than other minorities and whites. For an overview of the subject, see Steven Donziger, ed. 1996. The Real War on Crime: The Report of the National Criminal Justice Commission. New York: Harper Perennial.

¹⁵ For an examination of popular perceptions of youth and violence, see Charles Acland. 1994. Youth, Murder, Spectacle: The Cultural Politics of "Youth in Crisis". Boulder: Westview Press.

constituted as communities of concentrated poverty often end up blaming the victims. This includes the castigation of welfare recipients, women as single mothers, substance abusers, etc. Less frequently accounted for are the impact and produced outcomes of inadequately funded and unresponsive educational systems, health services, police protection, or recreational services. Thus, the decontextualized and ahistorical uses of the term inner-city have a potentially negative, reductive, and neutralizing effect on those who actively comprise urban core communities.

The spatial distinctions implied by the term inner-city are important as they are figured into the logic of common center/margin paradigms. As Iain Chambers explains:

There is the emergence at the center of the previously peripheral and marginal. For the modern metropolitan figure is the migrant: she and he are the active formulators of metropolitan aesthetics and life styles, reinventing the languages and appropriating the streets of the master. This presence disturbs a previous order. Such an interruption enlarges the potential as the urban script is rewritten and an earlier social order and cultural authority is now turned inside out and dispersed. (Chambers, 1994: 23)

In spatial terms, the inner sanctums of elite and institutional dominance -- the central power bloc -- do indeed exist in what might be geographically identified as the city core, if not precisely the inner-city as I have discussed it above. Yet the buildings that house this cultural power bloc are shells at the end of the workday and on weekends; they are empty edifices that continue to articulate the authority of the "the power elite." They symbolize its presence in an ongoing way even when, or perhaps *especially* when they are vacant. By night, individuals (many of whom actually live in the inner-city) converge on the buildings as a virtually *invisible* "ethnic" labor force which cleans and maintains them, departing before the "real" workforce returns. The people who comprise the dominant hegemonic classes and who motivate the institutional discourses of authority in business, commerce, and politics, however, do not, *en masse*, inhabit the core.¹⁶ The suburbs continue to offer

¹⁶ It is appropriate to refer to the important exception of intensified gentrification projects that seek to lure young professionals back into the city in an attempt to reclaim those spaces which had been previously abandoned to urban dwellers with the onslaught of "white flight" from the city centers. This boomerang effect is interesting as it repositions those returning to the city to occupy high-security urban condominiums as pioneers. I would argue that, from this perspective and within the discourses of a fearsome inner-city that are in general circulation, the "inner-city" is in actuality the next frontier of

a safer haven or refuge from both the intensities of the urban professional work world (constituted in capitalist societies as a site of civilized threat and legitimate combat) as well as the dangers that emerge, in the popular imagination more than reality, on the streets after dark (constituted as zones of primitive, uncivilized, and illegitimate/unlawful combat).¹⁷

Displaying a considerably less optimistic view than that of Chambers, Ronald Formisano describes "white flight" or the gradual evacuation of America's urban cores in the post-war years and into the 1960s as "the greatest exodus in America's history. It drained the white population out of the city limits and engorged the near and far suburbs...the suburbs were almost entirely white, while blacks, Hispanics, and later Asians were ringed into the central city by the suburban noose" (1991:11-12). In 1980, the majority of the American population inhabited metropolitan areas. In Joe Darden's study of the role of race in neighborhood selection processes, the distribution of white and black metropolitan populations reveals the extent of racial separation and the formation of distinct segregated home environments:

Almost one-half of the white population lived in neighborhoods in the suburbs compared to less than one-quarter of the black population. On the other hand, more than half of the black population (57.8%) lived in neighborhoods in central cities, compared to exactly one-quarter of the white population. (Darden, 1987: 27)

The disturbance or "interruption" that Chambers valorizes seems at odds with statistics of location and other factors (i.e., employment and income). Formisano explains that, as new electronic industries and a service sector requiring education and skills emerged, the tendency was for companies to locate at the edges of the cities, nearer to the majority white populations who benefited most from the transition to a new form of economy. This combination of a predominantly white and middle-class commuter population that held the best-paying jobs in America's cities and a growing white middle-class suburban population

American domestic conquest as the nation turns inward on itself after several centuries of imagining the frontier as an external beyond. See also Neil Smith. 1996. The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City. New York: Routledge.

¹⁷ This is the operative logic that informs Tom Wolfe's best selling novel The Bonfire of the Vanities and which frames the central incident at the core of the story.

that increasingly relied on jobs and services among sprouting "edge cities" left many urban centers reeling.

The depression of America's cities in the period leading up to the 1980s resulted in a spatial variation in its geographic composition. Complicated by misguided urban renewal projects (sometimes referred to as "black removal" projects), unscrupulous development plans, and racially and ethnically motivated political struggles, these trends contributed to the decline of opportunity and quality of life for those in the central urban sectors. Contradicting Chambers, those in the "inner-city" actually appropriated very few of the "master's" streets in a real or tangible sense. The streets were surrendered and abandoned by departing white and middle-class families, for, "rather than repair the damage to our cities, it seemed simpler, and certainly less dangerous and more profitable, to rebuild the American city somewhere else" (Smith, 1994: 61).

Chambers is more accurate, however, when he suggests that the center/margin paradigm is disrupted in terms of aesthetics and life styles, at the level of popular culture. With the rise of Rap music, and subsequently through contemporary films and videos, young black artists have demonstrated an unprecedented capacity to influence language, style, and image among the wider youth population. Throughout the 1980s to the present, the linguistic, sartorial, and musical expressions of the "inner-city" have been unavoidable. The influences of urban Hip Hop culture, while adapted and refined in various contexts, occur with regularity across the social spectrum, emerging in rural and suburban spaces, as well, as a primary facet of an economy of "cool." This has been further facilitated by the expansion and ubiquity of such media as cable television and music channels (i.e. MTV and BET in the United States and MuchMusic and MusiquePlus in Canada) which regularly feature images of American cities via videos by Rap and Hip Hop artists. While, at one level, this extended range of influence can be credited to the power and scope of the mass media in all of its forms, it is also reflective of the complex cultural dynamics that identify hipness with black popular culture and which associate the urban core with "authenticity"

and the city's "streets" as a legitimating space of cultural value among youths, the discussion of which will be taken up in later chapters.¹⁸

Youth, Race, and Space

The cultural tensions that are produced through the convergence of issues of race and space are intensified when the variable "youth" is introduced as an active element (or complication, depending on one's perspective) in the organization and ordering of society. The image of youth that has pervaded the popular imaginary through film, television, and musical promotion since at least the 1950s when American youth culture (as we generally understand it today) came into full bloom is often either one of optimism and unbounded promise or, conversely, threat, danger, and crisis. In Lawrence Grossberg's assessment, youth was the designated demographic group that would in effect embody the ideals of the American dream and an unbounded future. Youth was invested with the nation's hope:

The baby boomers became the living promise of the possibility of actually achieving the American dream. They were to be the best-fed, best-dressed, best-educated generation in the history of the world. They were to be the living proof of the success of the American experiment. (Grossberg, 1994: 35-36)

Youth, in its post-war baby boom configuration, is also primarily coded as "white" and, more often than not, middle-class and suburban in the imagination of many social commentators. Thus, the clichéd images of young love, a car, expendable income, and a non-stop soundtrack of "hits" from yesterday or today (i.e., the image of 1950s/60s youth as represented in the 1973 George Lucas film *American Graffiti*) have a continuing resonance in the dominant popular conception of youth and what it is.

Youth continues to be framed against the American middle-class ideals of a liberated consumer culture, evident, for example, in Thomas Hine's *Populuxe* (1986) which sets out

¹⁸ Indeed, in Rap, the urban "street" is rhetorically linked to authenticity and reality (i.e. "keep it street"), the site where truth is lived and experience defined. Hardcore rappers acknowledge their debts to the street as a space where life's lessons are learned (in some permutations, even identifying paternal influences in the space itself, i.e. "the street is my father") and to turn one's back on the street is perceived at some level as a denial of community and, ultimately, a "sell out."

to examine "the look and life of America in the '50s and '60s." In this example, Hine betrays the common assumptions of what he refers to as America's "golden age" by erasing race from the historical social setting from which America's youth culture emerged:

The decade from 1954 to 1964 was one of history's greatest shopping sprees, as Americans went on a baroque bender and adorned their mass-produced houses, furniture and machines with accoutrements of the space age and of the American frontier...There was so much wealth it did not need to be shared. Each householder was able to have his own little Versailles along a cul-de-sac. (Hine, 1986: 3)

In this particular permutation -- and this is a standard image-ideal rather than an anomaly -- there is no acknowledgement of the fact that for millions of black Americans and poor whites, there was an entrenchment of spatial segregation in the form of massive urban housing projects (such as Chicago's infamous Cabrini-Green housing development or Toronto's Regent Park complex) and a complex system of racial/spacial redistribution. Even the conflicting images of more radical, sinister, and less idealistic white youth practices are all too frequently ignored in this kind of selective recollection. The political struggles of freedom summer and the civil rights movement or the violence of the war resistance and black power movements are either romantically reimagined or "disappeared" beneath the steamroller effects of mainstream revisionism. They are often reduced to a series of gestures, political positions without history or substance, or styles.

It is important to recognize that these historical moments produced some of the first and arguably most influential political/cultural engagements of a youth culture that embraced a new vision of hope and attempted to connect the values of both black and white Americans outside of formal institutional spaces. The category "youth" should not be cast in general terms that fail to account for "interlocking forms of oppression" that themselves have a pronounced spatial dimension. Referring to urban black youths, Venice Berry remarks on the distinct difference of cultural experience that informs not only racial or ethnic identities but also identities of youths in ghetto environments. According to Berry, "the term 'youth,' which came to mean a specific attitude including pleasure, excitement, hope, power, and invincibility, was not experienced by these kids. Their future was

mangled by racism, prejudice, discrimination, and economic and educational stagnation" (1994:170).

As many among the baby boom generation now confront their own middle-age with an uneasy combination of embarrassment or nostalgia and anxiously reshape their youthful hues through revisionism, they are also forced to confront a new generation -- their own offspring that constitute the current youth culture -- that they find largely incomprehensible.¹⁹ The predominant, mass-mediated image of contemporary youth seems to be of a generation composed of scared, scarred, mistrustful, angry, and apathetic "slackers" and "dead-end kids" who have given up on today, let alone tomorrow.²⁰ This is true across the color line and in the suburbs as well as in the city core, as Donna Gaines (1991) has pointed out. But the scope and intensity of economic duress and systemic racism, in tandem, set minority youth apart from white youth.

When W.E.B. Dubois wrote of a "double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity," he was describing the "two-ness" of being "an American and a Negro" (1903/1994: 2). He was right, of course, that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line."²¹ Despite massive transformations in society and general improvements in social well-being and the overall quality of life since Du Bois first wrote those words, the color-line remains a major and

¹⁹ In the Boston region, several incidents revealed this as civic officials, police departments, and other affiliated adults failed to understand activities in the mosh pit as anything other than violence. See the Boston Globe articles "Violence halts Green Day Concert: 70,000 angry fans spark mosh melee," Sept. 10, 1994, and "10 Arraigned in Plymouth Concert Uproar: Police say punk-rock show halted to avert dancing," Jan. 16, 1995.

²⁰ The "new" youth or Generation X has become something of a growth industry in the 1990s, as numerous magazines have dedicated issues to the topic. See Newsweek, Summer/Fall 1990 ("The New Teens: What Makes Them Different"); Time, July 16, 1990 ("Twentysomething"); Business Week, Aug. 19, 1991 ("Young Americans: The Under-30 Generation"); The Atlantic, June, 1990 ("Growing Up Scared") and Dec. 1992 ("The New Generation Gap: Twentysomethings and Fortysomethings"). Premiering in November, 1994, Swing, specifically targets "men and women in their 20s."

²¹ See, for example, the emphasis on race and society comprising the feature stories of Newsweek: "The New Politics of Race," May 6, 1991; "Tackling a Taboo: Spike Lee's Take on Interracial Romance," June 10, 1991; "Beyond Black & White," May 18, 1992; "The Hidden Rage of Successful Blacks," Nov. 15, 1993. See also Time, "The Two Americas: E Pluribus Unum?," May 18, 1992.

costly obstacle. Blacks and many other racial and ethnic minorities tend to benefit least or last from social improvements -- and they are often the first to feel the negative effects of cutbacks and decreases in social service spending -- while attitudes of bigotry and racist intolerance are still widely evident. But the "problem of the color-line" and the "double-consciousness" of which Du Bois wrote have been exacerbated by the subsequent emergence of the contemporary "problem" of youth.

In his detailed study on "youth in crisis," Charles Acland examines the ways that the distinct discourses of "youth" and "crisis" form a crucial conjunction that encompasses numerous social issues relating to moral decline or "trouble." As he explains, whereas "youth...is increasingly symbolically central as that internal Other defined as a threat to the stability of the social order but central in the composition of that order," (1994: 41) the situation is negatively magnified for black youth. Building on several of the themes found in Policing the Crisis (S. Hall, *et. al.*, 1978), Acland describes what he sees as "a crisis-in-process" or the continuance of "hegemony through crisis" involving the maintenance of the prevailing hegemonic order in the midst of a concurrent and overlapping *series* of crises.²² The emphasis on multiple and simultaneous crises that saturate society provides the proper context for the analysis of youth, race, and space, for by accessing the means through which each category is discursively constructed and socially organized, it becomes possible to more fully illuminate the extensive apparatuses of contemporary hegemonic power.

In the case of minority youth, the crisis can be seen as being discursively oriented toward the localized practices of certain social groups who cohere in specific social environments, i.e., the ghetto or the public housing projects. For the dominant hegemonic classes, the crisis lies not in the simple existence of minority youth. It is, rather, the potential for minority youth to extend its influences and expand in terms of influence and

²² Both Hall and Acland acknowledge Gramsci's perspective on "the crisis of authority." Pertaining to a generational divide, Gramsci notes that "the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (Gramsci, 1971: 276).

importance beyond the confines of the ghetto that constitutes a socially sanctioned area designated to the uses of minority populations. Fundamentally, it is a problem of containment; containment in a spatial and physical sense pertaining to the institution of "vertical ghettos" or public housing high-rise structures or, in broader cultural terms, a crisis founded in the inability to sustain the traditional authority of European-based value systems. The dual recognition of Hip Hop's cultural reach beyond the ghetto and its capacity to galvanize a sense of imminent crisis among members of both the white and black bourgeoisie has, in some cases, been exploited by Rap artists themselves as they orient their commentary toward the negative attitudes and social anxieties that the music raises. The title of Ice Cube's "The Nigga You Love to Hate" (1990, Priority Records) articulates an understanding of the fear and disdain involved. In another example, the cover of Ice-T's album "Home Invasion" (1993, Priority Records) graphically represents the means through which the black urban threat will enter the white suburban home: Rap music and the ears of white children.

In this regard, Rap is easily implicated by social authorities as an active factor in the crisis threatening mainstream society and the dominant white majority for it is among the most widely disseminated forms of contemporary black popular culture. Its impact is felt throughout society, including those enclaves that are traditionally defined as white and middle-class. As Acland writes:

Crisis operates as a *mobile signifier* that migrates from debate to debate and carries with it a field of connotations and referential indices. It implies a common set of standards, values, and ethical questions that set the debate in motion and guide the institutional responses. The discourse of crisis is a potential point of conjuncture of a series of such points; it is the logic of a form of hegemony. (Acland, 1994: 41)

The confluence of youth, race, and class that occurs within ghetto environments has been discursively constructed, from the outside, as a visible and "troubling" blight on American society. It has accordingly been nominated across numerous discursive fields as a profound threat to American core values, as a looming crisis of massive proportions. Of course, these core values are not unqualified foundations of an American ideal; they do not

exist in the form of inscribed tablets. Rather, they are highly contestable and are, as the so-called "culture wars" of this decade indicate, subject to diverse interpretations.

Yet in many cases the discursive patterning of race and youth in this country essentializes the general character image of the threatening force (black and poor, uneducated, undisciplined, and from single-parent homes, etc.) by simultaneously homogenizing and essentializing the dominant system of "standards, values, and ethical questions," writing them into the national body as the ideals upheld by the mainstream majority. This is racism in action, conducted within the patterns of social discourse. Discursively constructed as foundational components of the variegated social structure in what Acland refers to as a "common" frame of knowledge, these ideals also establish the grounds of society's stratified relations of domination and subordination; they are ideals that the internal Other has not and, in fact, cannot uphold once "it" is discursively constructed as "Other."²³ As the color-line continues to assert itself in contemporary America along with the accompanying crisis of youth, more recent attempts to remake American society (including California's controversial "Bill 187" and the Republican Congress's 1995 "Contract With America" through which, among other things, welfare programs, single-parent assistance, and affirmative action initiatives were all under attack) reflect a continuing racial disjuncture, contributing to new forms of exclusion and separatism that is deeply felt among the nation's minority *and* majority populations.

Constructed as the doubly threatening Other, young blacks and Latinos are exposed to thorough and intense regimes of discipline and surveillance by the parent culture of mainstream society. They are positioned defensively on a daily basis, knowing that they are the objects of socially inscribed fear, mistrust, and blame for many of the problems that comprise a widely perceived sense of social disorder. For instance, in his analysis of the coverage of "African-Americans according to TV news" in the Chicago area, Robert Entman notes a prevalent pattern of stereotyped representations of black youth and a high

²³ This point is convincingly argued by Paul Gilroy (1987) in relation to blacks in the United Kingdom.

frequency of cases in which black leaders as well are portrayed negatively compared to their white political counterparts. He notes further that "because television news offers only implicit information about the relationship between poverty, race and crime, viewers are left with no coherent explanation of poverty issues. Only indirectly does TV news suggest, for example, that racial discrimination might have something to do with poverty, which in turn may help explain all that crime" (1994: 35). Entman also explains that the tendency to show images of young black defendants in police mug shots with no identifying captions differs from portrayals of white defendants who are more frequently named and shown in an array of photos or video footage. He suggests that this has an additional negative influence on white perceptions of black youths who can, as a result, be more easily lumped together in the mainstream white imagination as a homogeneous criminal set, undifferentiated from one another in their racial and criminal composition.

As I have mentioned, statistics and empirically defined localized practices are merged, interpreted and then discursively reframed in a manner that reproduces an image of mayhem and which reinforces social fears and mistrust of minority youth (black males specifically) and the inner-city social sites with which they are associated. Indeed, the resultant discourse of impending catastrophe has similarities with those analysed in Britain by Hall, *et.al.* (1978) and Gilroy (1987) who isolate the dominant discourse on black youth and crime as a patterned response to a perceived "threat from within." Despite the different social histories of race relations in the U.K. and the U.S. there are many relevant lessons to be gleaned from Gilroy or Hall's research and analyses. As they explain, the discursive project linking minority youth to wider social and moral collapse provides a knowable (visible, familiar, institutionally coded) culprit. Having labelled the causal force of social ills it is then easier to generate support among the white majority as well as among the working classes (which often maintain a stronger sense of tradition and nostalgia for the "better days" of an idealized past) for increased policing, more prison facilities, capital punishment and other options.

By identifying the "enemy" and then mobilizing the forces of the state in a highly publicized series of counter-attacks such as the U.S. government's "War on Drugs," or the Los Angeles Police Department's "Operation Hammer" (Davis, 1992) the growing uneasiness of the majority population is temporarily allayed by the impression that "something" is being done. Increasingly, the white perception of black youths, isolated, redefined, and amplified as a threat via conduits of authority including the mainstream media is based on fear and anxiety. This is not the same fear and anxiety that white and middle-class America experienced in the wake of the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 70s, but a terror that is rooted in the apparent irrationality of black youth today. In the absence of any recognizable program or politic that informs actions, the image of black youth out of control is gradually emblazoned on the collective American mind. Members of America's minority populations have become major casualties in the discursive and systemic violence conducted by conservative political and cultural authorities throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with the 1992 election of a Republican Congress in the U.S. further empowering this reactionary mission.

How have the conditions of minority existence been described in academic critique? Young black males have been discursively rendered as one of the primary threats to "law and order" (Hall, *et. al*, 1978) in the city, a primary focal point of social anxiety in a rising "moral panic" (Cohen, 1972) that is fuelled by strong talk of deviance, delinquency and danger. Black youths are repeatedly cast as contemporary society's "folk devils" (*ibid.*) to which an array of negative consequences are attributed and which provide a visible presence toward which "official" retribution may be targeted. "Unwanted as workers, underfunded as students, and undermined as citizens, minority youth seems wanted only by the criminal justice system" (Lipsitz, 1994: 19). Lawrence Grossberg writes that, "youth is the last and almost always ignored category in the traditional list of subordinated populations (servants -- i.e., racial and colonized minorities, women and children) who, in the name of protection, are silenced" (1992: 176). This has not been lost on members of

the Hip Hop culture: Public Enemy's logo is fashioned in the image of a defiant black youth lined up in the crosshairs of a sniper's rifle scope. Public Enemy number one; the young black male; "It takes a nation of millions to hold us back;" "Countdown to Armageddon;" "Bring the noise": these are among the rallying cries enunciated and disseminated through the discourses and cultural forms of Rap.

How, one might ask, does mainstream society perceive the manifestations of black youth, and where, on the map of urban cultural differences, is it located? We might look at the recent U.S. study where the predicted growth of America's teenage population over the next ten years is tied to estimated increases in armed violence and crime, leading James Fox, Dean of the College of Criminal Justice at Northeastern University to state: "I truly believe we will have a bloodbath when all these kids grow up" (Globe and Mail, Feb. 18, 1995). With predictions of a more rapid population growth among black and Latino teen groups being associated with greater percentages of crime and violence, the study subsequently raises particular concerns about *these* youths. The report further identifies "inner-city areas" as the primary site of the worst violence due to the crack cocaine trade, referring to "black and Hispanic ghettos" as being the exceptional landscapes of danger and desolation, a virtual "black" hole in society.

In another context, Hement Shah and Michael Thornton examine American mainstream news magazines through the 1980s from the perspective of racial ideologies and black-Latino interaction. They observed that among the most common characteristics of reporting on minority populations:

the coverage of blacks and Latinos suggests that their interactions take place in a space distant and isolated from others. Numerous references were made to the problems of the 'inner-city,' the 'black ghetto' and the 'Hispanic [sic] districts,' which are isolated from other parts of the community...the references to territorial concepts such as ghettos and districts in combination with titles such as 'Browns vs. Blacks' add up to contentious black-Latino battles over space. (Shah and Thornton, 1994: 147-148)

The authors argue that the produced effect of cultural distancing and the concurrent creation of a symbolic physical distance (from the white majority population and readership) is a

temporal distancing that "has the effect of making the 'here and now' of black-Latino interaction the 'there and then' of the mostly white readers of mainstream magazines" (ibid: 149). This is interpreted as a discursive strategy which elides the vast distinctions between blacks and Latinos, homogenizing them under the sign of the racial/ethnic "Other," while metonymically reducing each to essentialist representations that suggest a certain backwardness if not an outright primitiveness.

Because blacks and Latinos are constructed as inhabitants of culturally and temporally distant spaces, Shah and Thornton suggest that "it is easier to imagine that social interaction there is limited to primordial struggle over territory...unseemly bickering over redistricting, and violent confrontation" (ibid: 150). Thus, to speak of the inner-city is to easily convey the accompanying images and meanings that encompass minority youth. Similarly, to talk about black or Latino youth, especially within the general contexts of violence, crime, the drug trade, gang activity, etc., is to summon the idea or the image of the urban core; hence, race is spatialized and space is racialized. These images and associations are part of America's "common sense" repertoire. The critical project, therefore, is to continually point out and challenge the ways that youth, race, and space are conflated in social discourse.

The image of young black men loudly occupying public spaces, pants sagging and hooded sweatshirts pulled close around their faces, has become a new symbol of intimidation and aggression in the white popular psyche. This can be seen, for example, in the May 18, 1992 issue of Canada's major news magazine, Maclean's (following violence and looting related to the acquittal of the L.A. police charged in the beating of Rodney King), where this very image is accompanied by the headline "Young, Black and Angry." It is, however, the volume and visibility that poses such a threat to the status quo of the social mainstream as Hebdige (1988) observes in his analysis of youth, surveillance, and display. It is easier for mainstream society, encompassing not only white America but also, increasingly, America's black middle-class and parent cultures, to perceive black

youth as unruly and undisciplined, for, in so doing, they do not have to understand what is before them. They have only to reform it *or* contain it.

The color-line remains a fundamental factor in how America approaches issues pertaining to its youth. For evidence, one needs only to consider the frequency with which elementary, secondary, and college and university institutions have been thrust to the foreground of conflicts and debates with overt racial overtones over the past 40 years. George Lipsitz observes that "since the 1970s, a series of moral panics about gangs, drug use, teenage pregnancy and 'wilding' assaults have demonized inner-city minority youths, making them the scapegoats for the chaos created in national life by deindustrialization and economic restructuring" (1994: 19). This demonization is discursively reproduced within issues and incidents that arise across numerous institutional and social domains of power and authority (education, unemployment, teen pregnancy, black-on-black violence, drugs, gang activity, etc.). Each locates minority youth uniquely within its discursive repertoires, bringing to bear its own distinct forms of evaluation and judgement, surveillance or containment.²⁴ These distinct discourses on youth also constitute sites or spaces where representations in the form of images and language are produced, creating the means for the social construction of minority youth in America.

Accompanying this construction of minority youth as scapegoat, demon, and folk devil is the sense that today's youth are somehow less caring and more vicious than earlier generations of their same age group, and the crime statistics for urban violence among youths are widely invoked to suggest that this is more so among black, Latino, and increasingly, Asian teenagers. As part of the process of social labelling, this makes it easier to address minority youth in the racist terminologies of savagery and provides public justification for the institution and instalment of new forces of power (such as the "three strikes and you're out" legislation for young criminal offenders in the U.S. as well as the stunning show of police might in Los Angeles as described by Mike Davis in *City of*

²⁴ It is important to acknowledge the positive images and representational constructions that are evident as well, which often pertain to achievement or personal industry as prime American virtues.

Quartz). In fact, white-collar corporate crime is much more costly to Americans than street crime and there are estimated to be up to "six times the number of work-related deaths as homicides" (Donziger, 1996: 66). It seems, then, that the American divisions along the color-line are also exacerbated by the other imperatives including class and corporate privilege and various phenomena specific to the adult social strata.

The cultural geographies of difference and the "embedded contexts" that help form identities become extremely important to the ways that youth exists as a stratified construct. It is multiply marked by the local conditions of daily life, for as Milbrey McLaughlin writes, "even within the same community, differences in neighborhood, history, families, and structural and spatial arrangements of parks, schools, and public transit create substantially distinct conditions for the evolving self" (1993: 38). As a social category, then, "youth" is highly susceptible to the difference within multiple systems of power that frame issues of race, class or gender and that reveal an ineluctable spatial dimension in the cities of America.

"Ready 2 Die": the Nihilist Impulse

The doubled Otherness that is shaped by subjective experiences and external social perceptions is a crucial reality for black youth who regularly live with the additional statistical reminders that they face a higher likelihood of being the victims of violent crimes than their white counterparts or that they cannot expect to earn as much as their white colleagues in the nation's workforce (Time, Jan. 30, 1995). If, as Du Bois put it, race creates a "veil" through which blacks viewed America, the dynamic of youth and race has created a shroud through which, for many, no light passes. As Cornel West (1993) suggests, the unforgiving conditions that result from "a cutthroat market morality" in contemporary American cities "generates a raw rage" among black youth which has become one of the defining factors of its social attitudes and cultural practices. It produces a phenomenon whereby youths wear hats inscribed with the logo "R2D" or Ready to Die,

which was also the name of the successful debut Rap album by The Notorious B.I.G. (1994, Arista Records) who was himself murdered in a drive-by shooting in April, 1997.

The idea and expression of nihilism and "black rage" has only served to reinforce mainstream social fears of young blacks. For instance, "star" lawyer William Kunstler introduced the possibility of a black rage/insanity defense for Colin Ferguson, who opened fire on white commuters in a Long Island commuter train, killing six and wounding nineteen passengers, in December, 1993. The site of this violent transgression is in itself fascinating, for Ferguson's eruption occurred in the contemporary white "middle passage" between the urban core and the suburbs. It is the terrain of daily transit for thousands of office workers and functionaries who reproduce the larger and more historically rooted tendencies of "white flight" on a daily basis. John Garvey notes that the incident produced a rupture in common perceptions of space and mobility, writing "the overall point is that this is not supposed to happen in Long Island...the whole point of Long Island is that it's not supposed to be like the city -- and in this case, the city means where black people live and die" (1996: 127).

Ferguson's unarguably reprehensible actions expose the complexity of the spatial disjuncture; the perceived irrationality and unpredictability of black-on-black violence or of the black-coded "inner-city" literally rode out of town with the white suburban dwellers and exploded in the transitional nexus between these distinct inner and outer realms. The fact that the violence took place in neither the city or the suburb offers a critical enunciation of the existing spatial disparities, focusing precisely on the the transitional mediation, the commuter train.²⁵ In this regard, all attention turns to the real issue at stake, namely, the fact that both the real and perceived threat of the inner-city are now, like never before, mobile, unhinged from the spatial confines with which they are most commonly associated.

²⁵ For a detailed and insightful discussion of the issues of race, place, and commuter mobility, see John Garvey. 1996. "Panic, Rage, and Reason on the Long Island Railroad," in *Race Traitor*, Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey, eds. New York: Routledge.

And through it all, the Colin Ferguson incident is profoundly laced with the antagonisms and contemporary manifestations of racial difference and hate.

The implications of the proposed black rage defense are that any and all black Americans who confront systemic racist oppression throughout the duration of their lives have the potential to erupt into spontaneous or premeditated violence. Rather than holding individuals responsible as self-motivated agents of their own actions, the black rage defense racializes the violence even as it attempts to define it as a symptom of social inequality. Among other problems, this argument incorrectly positions blacks beyond reason through a damaging attempt to introduce a rationale in which such senseless aggression might be grounded and justified as a viable response to prolonged conditions of subordination and socio-spatial containment. The damage it incurs as an argument is the reinforcement of the white fear of apparently irrational and unprovoked violence. This fear undoubtedly results in even greater levels of anxiety and mistrust of blacks among the white majority population. Of course, the looming question remains: what about all those black folks who, like Ferguson, have experienced the frustration and humiliation that racist oppression exerts but remained rational and non-violent? Ferguson may in fact have acted madly, but to defend his actions on the grounds of black rage is a gross injustice to the vast number of black citizens who opt for other legal or politically progressive modes of response.

The economic and moral depression of a large segment of this generation's young men and women of color has indeed produced conditions of despair and desperation; it has produced a prevalent nihilistic tendency which West describes as "the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness" (1993: 14). He further explains the consequences of nihilism in black America: "The frightening result is a numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world. Life without meaning, hope, and love breeds a

coldhearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individual and others" (ibid: 14-15).

The Spatial Logics of Rap and the Rise of "The 'Hood"

Rap music's shift toward a self-produced discourse introducing the 'hood as a new spatial concept delimiting an "arena of experience" can be weighed against larger trends currently restructuring global and national economies, transforming national and regional workforces, and, often, devastating urban localities. As Tricia Rose (1994), Michael Eric Dyson (1993), and others have noted, Rap emerges as a voice for black and Latino youth which, as a large subset of North America's socially disenfranchised population, is at risk of being lost in the combined transformations of domestic and global economies that are altering North America's urban cultures today. The discourse of space encompassed by the term "'hood" may in this context also be interpreted as an articulate response to conditions of change occurring at a meta-level, far beyond the scale of the local (and the influence of those who inhabit it). By symbolically representing the 'hood as a relatively stable enclave where localized identities might cohere, however, Rap artists risk falling into line with the conservative patterns of various nationalist movements that attempt to "fix the meaning of places, to enclose and defend them" by constructing "fixed and static identities for places...as bounded enclosed spaces defined through counterposition against the Other who is outside" (Massey, 1992: 12).

As an analytical point of departure, I cite Paul Gilroy's observation that, "today we are told that the boys, and the girls, are from the 'hood -- not from the race, and certainly not from the nation" (1992: 308). The emphasis on localized patterns of spatiality is understood here as a displacement of older, more established discursive frames in which black cultural and political identities are formed. His concern is, importantly, that the fragmentation into localized and particular patterns of identification reduces the expansive possibilities and the enabling potentials of a mobilized cultural politics of race. Gilroy's

apparent anxiety lies with the likelihood that, by defending territorial spaces and regional identities, black youths will continue to lose a political motivation that might add convergence, if not necessarily unity, to the black cause in America *as well as* in the extended international African diaspora.

Gilroy's assessment of the discourse of the 'hood is only partially correct, however, for those ensconced in the Hip Hop culture, which is also commonly described as the Hip Hop *nation*,²⁶ do not entirely ignore the earlier dominant themes of race and nation that were so central to black American intellectuals and leaders from W.E.B. Du Bois to Marcus Garvey to Malcolm X to Martin Luther King, Jr. (and which today includes Jesse Jackson and, to an even greater extent, Louis Farrakhan). The exceptions are demonstrated, for example, in the personae and political stances of rappers such as Paris, who reflects a political discourse and cultural agenda explicitly modeled after the Black Panther Party, or X Clan, a group that is strongly committed to an Afrocentric identity and pro-black Muslim ideologies. The often vague, even abstract notions of "race and nation" which are generally suggestive of something much more unified and cohesive than is actually the case are, in the absence of sustained institutional forms and coherent leadership (that have declined in relevance to many youths since the mid-1970s and are, as in the case of the NAACP, further threatening to unravel), difficult to imagine for many youths.

It is at this stage, then, that the 'hood may be conceived as something more than a reactionary or conservative response to larger fluctuations. The progressive potentials of a discourse of spatiality that is rooted in the terminologies of urban locality and the specific concerns of young blacks and Latinos must also be considered as an important topic for examination in the attempt to locate alternatives to the pervasive nihilism in black communities outlined by Cornel West. The 'hood subsequently offers an immediate, local frame of reference and relevance. As Rose suggests:

²⁶ I use the terms "Hip Hop culture" or "Hip Hop nation" because they are common to the subcultures that I am describing. The terms are also relevant in the same sense that Nelson George (1989) employs the term "R&B world" to explain musical and extramusical cultural phenomena.

Identity in Hip Hop is deeply rooted in the specific, the local experience and one's attachment to and status in a local group or alternative family. These crews are new kinds of families forged with intercultural bonds which, like the social formations of gangs, provide insulation and support in a complex, unyielding environment and may, in fact, contribute to the community-building networks which serve as the basis for new social movements.
(1994: 78)

The 'hood is constituted as a privileged realm of interaction and emerges through its connections to locality as a new "scale of analysis" for the definition of experience and identity in a world of diminishing opportunities and non-sustaining political and economic structures among minority youth. In its discursive constructions, it does not introduce an outright solution to the decentering of an expansive politics of race but it is indicative of an alternative spatially-oriented perspective that may be productive of other, new forms of progressive social movement.

Gilroy's further contention that "it's important that the 'hood stands in opposition to foreign things..." (1992: 308) is foundational to an analytical approach to the eroding political discourses of race and nation that have, in the past, formed the bonds of black identity. The new emphasis on the 'hood signifies a transition that is part of "a shift away from the notion of the ghetto, which is eminently exportable, and which carries its own interesting intercultural history..." (ibid). In a study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1985, members of the Committee on National Urban Policy use the terms "ghetto" and "poverty neighborhoods" in their analyses of urban conditions. For the purposes of their research, the ghetto was defined as "an area in which the overall census tract poverty rate is greater than 40 percent. We define the ghetto poor as those poor, of any race or ethnic group, who live in such high-poverty census tracts" (Jargowsky & Bane, 1990: 19-20). Despite their reliance on census findings and statistical evidence, however, the authors admit that the 40 percent poverty rate is "inherently arbitrary" and that they turned to various city and Census Bureau officials to aid their judgement of which areas could accurately be defined as ghettos (ibid: 20).

This reflects the extent to which the *image* and idea of what a ghetto is and where a ghetto lies inform and validate statistical data. The illusion of a carefully maintained scientific objectivity (which is primarily intended to conform to the requirements of government policymakers at the civic, state, and federal levels) is negated by this appeal for a legitimating affirmation. The biased input from civic or census officials who confirm that the images match the numbers tends to ignore the lived component of these spaces and the quality of life that can still be derived from economically depressed family and community contexts.²⁷ Quite simply stated, the numbers do not tell the story of these social landscapes nor do they account for the interactions and experiences that constitute their unique social character.

The social-scientific zeal that leads to the erasure of qualitative factors related to the human element that form the foundation of the social and cultural character of these spaces makes it easier to impose policies, plans, and programs from the institutionalized "outside" or, in a more stratified analogy, from a hierarchically structured "above." Yet, in a footnote to an article examining interracial relations, urban territory, and graffiti writing practices among New York city youth, Ivor Miller relates how one prominent graffiti artist, Phase 2, "doesn't like the term 'ghetto,' because he feels it is pejorative. For people who live in poor barrios and projects, this is their home and their community and he calls it just that" (Miller, 1994: 186). The point here is that, although ghetto regions and so-called "inner-city" neighborhoods frequently conform to the images and expectations of officials and the wider public, they also provide the site for a rich array of cultural creativity, social propriety, and nurture. And, as home environments or communities, these spaces are invested with value and are made meaningful by the citizens who live in them. As a

²⁷It is also important to note that the report disproves the notion that the majority of America's poor live in urban ghettos. Jargowsky and Banefound that "in 1980, there were 2.4 million poor people living in ghettos -- 8.9 percent of all U.S. poor people. Thus it is clearly not true that the typical poor person was a resident of an urban ghetto" (1990: 10). The passage goes on to state, however, that ghetto poverty impacts most heavily on black and Hispanic citizens: of the total number of America's poor whites, 2.0 percent are ghetto dwellers; of poor blacks 21.1 percent are ghetto dwellers; and of poor Hispanics, 15.9 percent are ghetto dwellers. Their findings conclude that "nearly two-thirds of the ghetto poor are black and most of the rest are Hispanic" (ibid).

dominant cultural referent, the use-value of the term has therefore also been negatively defined according to the expediencies of a self-interested social elite. Seen in this light, a shift to a new discourse based on the revised spatial frame of the 'hood introduces a potentially empowering conceptual transition. The discourse of the 'hood proposes an alternative to the sedimented meanings of the term ghetto which have, among other things, framed much of white America's popular perceptions of black urban dwellers, regardless of their class status.

This still does not account for the "space" of the 'hood, however. The 'hood does not replace the ghetto but is, rather, a displacement of a more discursive nature. In many instances, spaces commonly referred to as the 'hood exist in the same physical locale and urban environment that has been described as "the ghetto" by earlier generations for at least the past forty years, a point which will be taken up later. I want to argue that, as a discursive shift, the turn to the 'hood is part of a cultural recuperation of African-American and Latino dominated space enacted primarily by the urban minority youth segment. The ghetto has traditionally been understood as the unfortunate urban environment existing as a blight within the city. Coded as "ethnic" by urban white ruling majorities for over a hundred and fifty years, the ghetto as a geocultural enclave has always been cast as a spatial pariah, grudgingly ceded to ethnic or racial populations or, conversely, surrendered to them.

The 'hood implies the general spaces of the ghetto but it also allows greater flexibility as it is intoned to describe and delineate locality -- literally, one's neighborhood and the space to which one relates as a home environment. Thus, where the ghetto has been culturally shackled to a negative symbolic configuration of images and ideas, the 'hood offers a new terminology and discursive frame that can simultaneously address conditions in all "the 'hoods" everywhere or to individuated spaces, to particular sites of significance. The argument might be made that the 'hood "signifies" (in the black cultural sense of the term involving vernacular and linguistic traditions) on the resonant precursor

of the ghetto, displaying a new capacity to acknowledge, embrace, and extend some of the themes and concepts that the ghetto has traditionally encompassed as a representational term.

The 'hood, then, is a dually inflected term that refers inwardly to local sites and the specificities of place while, simultaneously, constituting a concept that isolates a real or imagined "here" from other places, from "there" (a relational basis for the establishment of a corresponding "us" and "them" dichotomy which will be taken up in later chapters). As Rob Shields explains, the discursive production of spatially inscribed values, achieved through the substantiation of "places and spaces...from the world of real space relations to the symbolic realm of cultural significations" (1991: 47), is one of the means by which social hierarchies are achieved and maintained. The value ascribed to place is excised from actual terrains, sites, environments, etc., and is consequently structured in and through discourse. Our "common sense" comprehension of the terms "ghetto" or "slum" is concretized through negative images pertaining to urban geographies and is based on previous usages and a spectrum of cultural norms and values. This amounts to a form of "cultural shorthand."

Mainstream *representations* of such spaces (including portrayals in newspapers, magazines, literature, or television programs) are closely aligned with the social construction of *reputations* that transgress the boundaries of the spaces and places in question and may overdetermine the actual daily practices of those who inhabit them. These "spatial myths" (Shields: 1991), which also introduce a means of labelling according to a loose system of spatial values, are not only disseminated through media mechanisms but are also a feature of discursive patterns at the local level. Rap music is influential in the rejection of certain social stereotypes and labels relating to spatial myths in some contexts, while simultaneously furthering the introduction and circulation of others.

The spaces and places that form the foundation of Rap's references to the 'hood are discursively produced from within a pre-existing system of relational differences organized

hierarchically and enforced through various institutional and cultural apparatuses. In Rap, "the 'hood" emerges as a meaningful term that is oriented toward, on the one hand, recognition of social and cultural idiosyncracies of the artist's immediate environment and, on the other hand, recognition of differences (real or perceived) that identify other places, whether they be similar socio-economic enclaves (i.e., other "hoods") or external spaces comprising the spheres of middle-class comfort, upper-class affluence, or higher concentrations of racial "Others."

Gilroy poses several relevant questions that revolve around the terminologies of the 'hood, indicating an attempt to understand the nature of the new historical conditions of youth, identity, and black cultural politics in contemporary America:

But, if the 'hood is the essence of where blackness can now be found, which 'hood are we talking about? How do we weigh the achievements of one 'hood against the achievements of another? How is black life in one 'hood connected to life in others? Can there be a blackness that connects, articulates, synchronizes experiences and histories across the diaspora space? (Gilroy, 1992: 308)

In response, it is useful to point to the dialogic character of Rap and to its unique capacities to focus conversation and debates within society in general and among black Americans in particular. Gilroy (1992) himself suggests this line of approach elsewhere when he cites the progressive and "democratic" possibilities of "antiphony" or call and response that is common to black musical forms and characteristic of a black cultural aesthetic. The call and response in Rap, whether referring to the "shout outs" or "disses", the use of sampled recordings, or response records does, in fact, offer a cultural connection across time and space. It also supports the argument that there is sufficient dialogue and shared interaction to realistically discuss Hip Hop in terms of a nation status. Rose also points to the dialogical and communicative strengths of Rap and Hip Hop:

Out of a broader discursive climate in which the perspectives and experiences of younger Hispanic, Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans had been provided little social space, hip hop developed as part of a cross-cultural communication network...And, characteristic of communication in the age of high-tech telecommunications, stories with cultural and narrative resonance continued to spread at a rapid pace. (Rose, 1994: 60)

Today's prevalent articulation of home environments in the 'hood situates Rap artists within an enunciative space (meaning, the space from which they articulate their sense of self and their relations to the world around them as they enter into various cultural discourses) that is summoned "in opposition to foreign things" but not always in a negative or defensive configuration.

In both the affirmative and negative configurations (i.e., *here* is good, *there* is less good or bad), the discourse of the 'hood is still part of a pattern of communication and is more often than not part of an open and ongoing local, regional, and national dialogue rather than a sort of punctuation signifying its end. Still, Gilroy's line of interrogation is well founded for it remains unclear precisely how such highly context-laden expressions of particular experience are able to create dialogue across the multivalent and shifting spaces of black popular culture -- not to mention the added complexities that occur when these dialogues cross over into the extended cultural realm consisting of a sizable audience of young white Rap fans. If Rap can in any way be equated with CNN as a communicative medium for black communities (as Chuck D of the influential group Public Enemy has asserted) then it is important, as Gilroy suggests, to ask what exactly is being communicated and how it might provide the foundations for grounded and informed dialogue among constituents of various dispersed localities.

Rap music offers an illustrative example of a cultural form that emerges from the dynamic convergence of the global and the local. Its international reputation and popularity and its global distribution is enabled by the transnational entertainment industry that is dominated by only a handful of major corporate labels. Yet its connections to local contexts, social environments, and sites of significance are also entwined in the cultural systems that form a foundation for the music's production. These include street corners and basket ball courts, schools, neighborhood night clubs and dance halls, as well as local or regional independent recording companies. These are often the sites unseen where youths, alone or in groups, hone their skills, practicing and developing their craft. They

are, by and large, anonymous spaces that are of little interest or relevance to the broader society and to much of the record buying public. Rap, however, stands out for the urgency with which its creators address the urban environment around them, describing in often painstaking detail the activities that occur there or mapping the cultural byways that delineate their localities and give space meaning.

Chapter 3

Locating Hip Hop: Rap's Geo-cultural Sources

Rap and the Discursive Arena

Since Rap music's popular and commercial debut it has undergone numerous transformations and developed several notable subgenres that reflect and announce various transitional social practices that may be only marginally related to the music itself. The music has evolved into a popular and public form of black youth expression with Rap artists addressing a range of cultural issues through their music that have commonly remained submerged within dominant discourse. In the same general time-frame there have been both radical and more subtly nuanced changes in "the black public sphere,"²⁸ that sphere within a sphere that has always existed as a facet of American society but which has been systematically and systemically rendered invisible, secondary, or problematic within dominant discourse and enquiry. It is not an empty claim to suggest that Rap music and the spectacularity of the extended Hip Hop culture have been central factors in the circulation of cultural counterdiscourses among many black and Latino teens and in the contemporary transformations of African-American cultural identities and politics that are formed within the public sphere. This is especially true in view of the fact that the music and various associated practices have provided a lightning rod for numerous heated debates about social values, moral and ethical parameters, gender inequality, sexism or misogyny, class conflict, intergenerational dissonance, and the ongoing antagonisms of racial disharmony in America today. Beyond this, Rap and the accompanying facets of Hip Hop have also been integral to the production of new stylistic sensibilities that have had an unavoidable impact on several facets of popular culture and which have extended far beyond their source within cultural domains of black urban youth.

²⁸ For a collection of analytical essays on "the Black Public Sphere," see the special issue of Public Culture (7:1, Fall 1994).

Nancy Fraser (1992) provides a useful theoretical model when she argues that subordinated social groups will out of necessity formulate resistant, oppositional or alternative "discursive arenas," constructing what she refers to as "subaltern counterpublics" that are founded upon "counterdiscourses." Fraser explores a spatial conceptualization of the "arena" where counterpublics converge through dialogue and discourse. Her theoretical formulation conveys a spatially expansive ideal as she argues for a multiplicity of discursive formations that, despite the common prevalence of contradictory agendas, are in mutual dialogue across disparate social settings and cultural contexts. She stresses the importance of articulated alternatives that are culturally and politically oriented and which conjoin different discourses and connect divergent positions. This is to say that she envisions an alternative discursive arena that encompasses and encourages forms of social action that can, under historically specific conditions, lead to coalition-based political aggregates. Although Fraser's theory does not address geography and social dispersion *per se*, it is obvious that the cultural and subcultural formations that comprise the objects of her analysis occupy separate social spaces and can be located upon a cultural map of difference.

Yet Fraser also acknowledges the multiple forms of existing social oppression and disenfranchisement and the ways that marginalized social factions maintain an active presence within the dominant public arenas and within the dominant social discourses where systemic oppression tends to be reproduced most consistently. "Marginality" is only ever partial and its geo-cultural conceptualization as a site at the edges of social power is often wrongly expressed as a tangible element, something that can actually be pointed to. The theoretical notion of margin/center dynamics must also acknowledge the particular ways that each are codependent and mutually influential as sets of social forces. This perspective refutes the simple and commonly misapplied oppositional bipolarity of margin/center relations, instead opting for a more connective and interrelated model that accepts these power differentials as relations in tension and struggle. From this view, then,

the arena of public discourse is seen to be hierarchically structured with centrality and marginality (or domination and subordination) co-existing within a structure of relational difference where, in fact, each relies on the presence and definition of an "Other."

Fraser's approach is consistent with that of black feminist scholar Angela Davis (1981, 1989) who points out that effective struggle against hegemonic hierarchies of domination must be founded on an integrative logic that emphasizes the various interlocking forms of oppression experienced by individuals and social groups across a broad spectrum of social experience. In a slightly different sense, throughout her work focusing on themes of resistance and cultural transformation, bell hooks (1988) advocates a cultural project that subscribes to the radical processes of "talking back" and "coming to voice" that initiates the articulation of personal or collective politics -- whether these be politics of resistance or of identity formation. None of these theoretical formulations are intended as precise programs for change, however, for society is an unruly amalgamation of competing and contradictory forces and the terrains of culture are characteristically prone to variation and unevenness. There are no guarantees that progressive change can be achieved, or that the kinds of desired changes will result (Grossberg, 1992). Yet, in each of these theoretical and practical propositions, there is a theme that conforms to the ways that Rap has been taken up, implemented, or deployed by members of the Hip Hop culture.

The articulation of experience and the influences of contemporary conditions that inform cultural identities frequently emerge within the arena of the Hip Hop culture as a series of counterdiscourses that represent the attempt to circumvent constraining and out-dated programs for social empowerment. While there are many examples of conservative and even regressive positions that are articulated within the Rap form (i.e., the reinforcement of restrictive patriarchal values; the expression of traditional notions of heterosexual masculinity; a preponderance of racist or anti-semitic sentiment; and a strong commitment to narrowly conceived capitalist ideals of wealth and power) they tend to generate the most controversy to the exclusion of other alternative positions. The

disjuncture produced by Rap's alternative or progressive counterdiscourses also illustrates the problems with identifying the black "voice" as homogeneous or the black public sphere as a unified concept when, in fact, they display several overlapping points of antagonism.

With Rap, black and Latino teenagers have established an identifiable discursive arena, a forum where the ideas and concerns as well as the expression of powerful strains of both nihilism and optimism of a generation can be heard in multiple articulative modes. Rap's young creators have located a cultural voice that is both an adaptation and a departure from prior voices of nationalism and black unity politics. An adaptation in the postmodern dialogic sense that the past is often revisited as an archival repository of ideas, discourses, symbols, or styles that continually resurface (albeit radically reworked) in contemporary contexts. Examples of this can be seen in the personae of rappers who expressly identify with the images and political stances of the Black Panther Party and other political facets of the earlier Black Power Movement.²⁹ It is a departure inasmuch as the dialogue between generations and between different classes of African-Americans is often strained, reflecting the extent to which evolving social and cultural conditions of existence often result in divergent rather than convergent cultural strategies.

Kristal Brent Zook offers a suggestive conceptual definition for the nationalistic discourses that can be heard in various forms in Rap music when she writes that "nationalism represents a necessary vision of safety, protection, and what I refer to as an empowering 'home'" (1992: 256). Agreeing with her description, I believe it is relevant to then introduce and interrogate the numerous spatialities that also inform the concept of "home" -- and the cultural apparatuses that make "home" recognizable as refuge and as political sanctuary -- as it is understood in the contemporary American context. In the popular music by black artists of the late 1960s and early 1970s the ghetto was the prioritized urban spatial site that emerged as the dominant construct of "home" and the

²⁹ One example of this is the 1995 Mario Van Peebles film *Panther* (1995) which spawned two Hip Hop albums and features rapper Nefertiti of the now defunct Islamic Rap posse Blackwatch Movement in a prominent role. In addition to the recorded soundtrack, a second album *Pump Ya Fist: Hip Hop Inspired by the Black Panthers* (1995, PolyGram) was issued to coincide with the film's release.

legitimate space of political and cultural fomentation. As the American ghetto has been transformed in the intervening years the discourses within which ghetto existence is defined have correspondingly undergone transitional shifts; the conceptual space and geo-cultural construct of the 'hood is the product of these shifts, especially among youth factions.

There are numerous examples of the previous generation's discourse of ghetto existence: Donny Hathaway recorded "The Ghetto" on his debut album "Everything is Everything" (Atlantic) in 1970 ; War's first self-titled album "The World is a Ghetto" (1973, United Artists) featured a hit single of the same title; The Spinners released "Ghetto Child" (Atlantic) which charted briefly in the U.K. in 1973. Preceding these, however, was Elvis Presley's 1969 hit recording "In The Ghetto" (RCA) which coincided with his return to live performances after an eight year hiatus from the stage. Presley's recording is free of explicitly critical commentary and stands as an observational expression framed in sentimentality. Yet it is indicative of a trend to foreground the existence of class and socio-spatial difference that had been shaping the composition of the nation's cities with particular intensity in the post-war period and which had achieved a new level of interest -- and concern -- across the social spectrum. The emphasis on "the ghetto" as a space and as a problem (frequently coded in public policy and the mainstream media as part of the "black problem") was undoubtedly a response to the combination of effective urban political organizing (and the accompanying visual impact of such urban activists as the Black Panthers); ghetto-centered violence that had escalated throughout the nation since the Watts riots of 1965; and a general awareness that America could no longer ignore the perils of a separate and unequal society.

The increase of government and university-sponsored studies of ghetto conditions (such as the controversial 1965 federal report on "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action" by Daniel Moynihan and numerous reports on the subject of America's "underclasses") basically reified the concept of a "problem." This scholarly activity was accompanied by increased media attention and accelerated television and press coverage

which had an extremely influential and affecting visual emphasis that publicized the "crisis" that was impacting America's inner-cities. Middle-class whites, many of whom had already fled the cities, could no longer turn a blind eye to the conditions of the urban cores as the black urban poor began making more urgent demands for civic change and community support. Because every large American city has its own black or minority ghetto, the issue was national in scope and this was an essential factor in the formation and successes of 1950s and 1960s black nationalist politics and the Black Power movement as well as in the shaping of black urban cultural identities throughout this period. These issues were taken up and mobilized within a spatial discourse that was formed within the representational constructions of the American post-war ghetto. They were also deeply embedded in political, economic, and artistic articulations of black cultural identity with a history, and the pro-black, Afrocentrist ideologies that ensued often mobilized the ghetto as a symbolic image of location and cultural struggle. In black popular music, the ghetto was the dominant spatial trope that symbolically referred to an urban terrain that was recognizable to the majority of black (and white) Americans whether they actually inhabited ghetto spaces or not. It was associated with a common currency of meanings and values, motivating images of cultural experience within a popular vernacular that was central in the communication of black cultural struggle.

By the early 1970s, the relative cohesiveness of the black power movement was also eroding³⁰ and the promises of either radical political empowerment or of economic progress were harder to accept for many people as anything more than rhetorical idealism. Addressing this period, Reebee Garofalo writes:

The Civil Rights Movement appeared to have run its course. Activists knew that the issues it raised would surface again in different contexts and new organizational forms, but for the time being the movement had been forceably rendered dormant, its 20-year history of peaks and valleys,

³⁰ I say "relative cohesiveness" because, despite a much wider base of sympathy and support, the discursive terrain of activism was, as now, highly fragmented. In more recent distillations (including numerous Rap tracks and Spike Lee's 1989 film *Do The Right Thing*), these differences have been reduced to the polarized political stances embodied by Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.

successes and failures, contradictions and divergent tendencies chronicled in popular music. (Garofalo, 1992: 239)

The decline of strong, progressive leadership and its by-product "progressive politics" (West, 1993: 45) as well as a deepening economic debilitation among urban minority populations contributed to a profound sense of social and cultural drift and widespread nihilism which have, over the years, gradually taken root among many black and Latino youths.

As Garofalo explains, the politicized and culturally informed songs that had been an important part of the popular music landscape toward the end of the 1960s up to roughly 1971 gradually disappeared. He writes:

Reflecting the 'quieter' mood of the early 1970s, the black popular music which came to the fore was the 'soft soul' sound pioneered by the Philadelphia-based writer-producer team of Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff, and producer-arranger Thom Bell...With the movement in disarray, civil rights themes were on the decline in popular music. (1992: 238-239)

Although the heavy Funk music in this period was anything but "quiet," it was generally devoid of any "real politic" and was geared more toward the unambiguous expression of the politics of pleasure and sexuality.

Within a very short time that paralleled the rise of Disco through the mid-1970s Rap began to flourish in the parks, street and house parties, and underground nightclubs of New York. These developments facilitated the emergence of a new form of black popular expression and the evolution of an alternative means of cultural articulation that, as Gilroy suggests, "set in train a process that was to transform black America's sense of itself and a large portion of the music industry as well" (1993: 125). These "organic" urban sites of the music's origin are significant for they constitute the starting point of Rap's particular history as well as informing the historiography of Hip Hop culture that has, in turn, been influential in publicizing characteristics of the lived environments and the various conditions of existence that comprise the black American ghetto.

Rap Music and Urban Economics in the 1980s

In the period leading up to and including the first wave of recorded Rap, the music was highly influenced by the economics of the primary locales of its invention and production. Examining the growth of Rap through a socio-economic lens, Clarence Lusane observes that the impact of 1980s "Reagonomic" policies contributed to the urgency with which urban minority youth sought new avenues for financial enrichment. As he notes:

For many of these youth, rap became not only an outlet for social and political discourse, but also an economic opportunity that required little investment other than boldness and a competitive edge. In a period when black labor was in low demand, if one could not shoot a basketball like Michael Jordan, then the entertainment industry was one of the few legal avenues available for the get-rich consciousness that dominated the social ethos of the 1980s. (Lusane, 1993: 43)

Cornel West (1989) argues, however, that entertainment has long been an option of hope (within the triad of enabling cultural practices emphasizing "the persona in performance" that include athletics and the "sermonic practices" of the clergy) in the struggle for upward economic mobility among African-Americans, especially throughout the late twentieth century.

Yet the options available and the means by which they might be accessed and exploited change across social spaces with the gradually fluctuating conditions of any given historical period. Thus, the effects of the transition to new global economies since the 1960s which span diverse economic sectors, combined with the constraints of conservative economic and social programs that emerged with particular intensity in the early 1980s, had a double-negative effect on America's urban youth populations. Addressing this phenomenon and its effects in New York City, Tricia Rose writes:

Shrinking federal funds and affordable housing, shifts in the occupational structure away from blue-collar manufacturing and toward corporate and information services, along with frayed local communication patterns, meant that new immigrant populations and the city's poorest residents paid the highest price for deindustrialization and economic restructuring. (Rose, 1994: 30)

As I have stressed, Rap music is an undeniably urban music emanating from city core regions that communicates many of the corresponding core themes of urban existence. In the functional logics currently guiding the evolution of modern cities (relating to, for example, urban planning and civic administration) urban black youth and minority immigrant populations generally constitute a vast labor resource for the ongoing operation and maintenance of city systems. They fill what are often the most menial of jobs for below-subsistence wages. Or, conversely, they are framed as a "problem," as a major factor contributing to the crises of the American city which require additional allocations for numerous basic services or for such budgetary items as urban policing.

It remains true, however, that contrary to prevailing images of minority youth as class members of the economically dispossessed, the individuals who comprise these social factions also constitute an influential and necessary force in an active economy. Their limited earnings still allow them to contribute to the vitality of localized ghetto and non-ghetto economies. It is both false and demeaning to consider individuals from America's economic "underclasses" as non-contributing members of society. Owing largely to the ways that grim statistics tend to speak on the behalf of individuals and social groups, their human presence and impact often remains unregistered except at local levels of interaction.

Furthermore, the existence of grey and black markets and the trade in contraband or illegal substances cannot be fully assessed for their local economic impacts. It is safe to assume, however, that the monetary flow from these sources constitutes an important aspect of many urban localities. Whites and blacks living in impoverished environments must confront the negative influences of prostitution, the street drug economy, and theft. Yet, in an unfortunate sense, these are also aspects of a local economy that flourish wherever people are faced with poverty and desperation. It is crucial to acknowledge this, and it is equally crucial not to isolate this as a racial phenomenon but a phenomenon of poverty economics that crosses all racial boundaries.

The reductive representation of various social formations based on biased measures of economic and consumer power devalues the struggles of those who, although financially hard-pressed, continue to reproduce the basic threads that can weave community into local neighborhoods. Through much of the 1970s and 80s, the widely documented "MacJob" syndrome became a common fact of urban city existence. Increasingly, "inner-city" youths with a high school education or less were asked to expect little more than service industry work. This was in marked contrast with the middle and late-eighties affluence of young urban professionals (who, both black and white, often earned grossly inflated incomes) and their capacities to purchase the material symbols of wealth and financial success. It is this imbalance, fraught as it is with material and symbolic representations of difference, that marks much of the tension among classes in larger American cities. The imbalance is further illustrated through phenomena such as neighborhood gentrification programs and various forms of civic rezoning and development that discriminate against low-wage earners, the unemployed, and those who rely on social assistance.

Against this bleak backdrop, "getting paid" or "making ends" emerged as common themes in the discourses of ghetto life and were clearly audible even prior to the message-oriented Rap that began with the release of "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five (Sugarhill) in 1982. For example, Jimmy Spicer's "Money (Dollar Bill, Y'All)" (1981, Rush Groove Music) was an ode to cash, weighing the expense of basic urban survival against the ideals of materialistic accumulation and unrestrained purchase power. The economic disenfranchisement of many young black urban Americans provided a grounding for the ideological articulation of class consciousness within capitalism and the symbolic representation of the experience of poverty as well as the desire to transcend it.

In the early and mid-1980s, for example, members of the Hip Hop culture expressed their recognition of these material disparities through a semiotic appropriation of the signs of wealth. In sartorial expression within the Hip Hop culture the exaggerated symbolic depiction of material prosperity signaled a shift away from the "leather and

feather" look of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five or Afrika Bambaataa's Rap-Funk units that had continued from the late 1970s. Instead, it took the form of massive gold chains or 24 Karat gold braided necklaces and diamond studded medallions replicating, among other things, Mercedes Benz hood ornaments which were worn over the name-brand sportswear that characterized the B-Boy style. In terms of a developing Rap discourse, "getting paid" can also be heard as the expression of an agenda for transgressing restrictive economic boundaries and, in practice, of finessing the music business in order to finance a departure from the ghetto. This is perhaps most notable in both the album cover image and title track of Eric B and Rakim's classic release *Paid in Full* (1987, Island Records). Conceived as an enabling creative practice, Rap was quickly framed as part of an emergent repertoire of cultural options that coincided with the ongoing quest for economic empowerment and enhanced social mobility among black and Latino youth constituencies.

Lusane is critical of this development among Rap artists, explaining that the commitment to capital accumulation among rappers actually maintains a system of enslavement "that requires an economic elite and mass deprivation" (1993: 45). As he notes, these trends reproduce the ideals of the capitalist system within the ghetto environment by reinforcing an ultimately restrictive desire for material wealth and its trappings. Lusane's assessment notwithstanding, these changes can also be envisioned in a more progressive and optimistic light. The articulation of renewed optimism and vitality that mid-1980s Rap carried in the context of ghetto existence also contributed to a partial (and often inconsistently applied) reversal of the dominant idea that the ghetto was effectively a dead-end for black and Latino youths.

Artists and producers in Rap and Hip Hop began to mobilize a relatively new discourse that identified the music's relationship to the ghetto environment as the source of new economic potentials that could only be fully realized in practice through an amalgamation with a larger industrial network. As Nelson and Gonzales explain, the shift

from free, impromptu performances in parks and other public spaces was largely due to the sudden commercial potential of Rap:

Back in the day, before rap became a recorded artform, these live shows were the few outlets where neighborhood youth could enjoy this new music; once the hip-hop crews realized there were mucho dollars to be made (popular groups made about \$150 per set), the street and park shows were limited. (1991: 204)

Interestingly, the general transition toward the mid-1980s when Rap finally attained a relatively stable position in the music business also presented a major contradiction in values within the Hip Hop culture that has never been fully or adequately resolved. This involves attempts by commercially successful Rap artists to remain "real" or true to the street while in some cases generating multi-million dollar sales and earning regal incomes that allowed them to move into toney neighborhoods such as Beverly Hills.

Lusane points out that "since 1960, black youth suffered the largest decline in employment of all component groups of all races. In 1986, in the middle of the Republican years, black teenage unemployment was officially as high as 43.7 per cent" (1993: 43). Guided by budding young artists and entrepreneurs who often had little or no experience with promotions or production but who were actively seeking alternative ways (both legal and illegal)³¹ of generating an income, the Rap scene began to "rise" from the underground in a culturally *and* spatially expansive way, merging with the wider music industry as individuals in and around the scene began to recognize a growing potential for financial reward. Rap's trajectory from the street corners and parks into the clubs and studios was also leading into the boardrooms of small, mid-sized, and (more tentatively) major record companies as the business side of the Hip Hop culture was exposed to its own micro-version of economic restructuring that eventually contributed to the mainstreaming of various core facets of the culture. These developments had the effect of recasting the ghetto as a new "milieux of innovation" (Castells, 1989) and, in the contexts of a transnational

³¹ It is important not to lose sight of the fact that Rap emerged not only from within the constrained economic conditions of the American ghetto landscape but, within these urban sites, it also evolved within the the developing narco-economy that was fueled by the growing crack cocaine trade.

industry dominated by corporate entertainment giants with ravenous appetites for new commodity product, Rap was elevated to a new plateau as a commercial form.

Locating Hip Hop

Describing the early stages of Rap music's emergence within the Hip Hop culture for an MTV "Rap-umentary" on the topic, Grandmaster Flash, one of the core DJs of the early scene, recalls the spatial distribution of sound systems and crews in metropolitan New York:

We had territories. It was like, Kool Herc had the west side. Bam had Bronx River. DJ Breakout had way uptown past Gun Hill. Myself, my area was like 138th Street, Cypress Avenue, up to Gun Hill, so that we all had our territories and we all had to respect each other.

The documentary's images embellish Flash's commentary, displaying a computer generated map of "The Bronx" with colored sections demarcating each DJ's territory as it is mentioned, graphically separating the enclaves that comprise the main area of operations for the competing sound systems. This emphasis on territoriality involves more than just a geographical arrangement of cultural workers and the regionalism of cultural practices. It illuminates a particular relationship to space or, more accurately, a relationship to particular spaces. As Flash conveys it, the sound systems that formed the backbone of the burgeoning Hip Hop scene were identified by their audiences and followers according to the overlapping influences of persona and turf. The territories were tentatively claimed through the ongoing practices that occurred within their bounds and were reinforced by the circulation and mobilities of those who recognized and accepted their perimeters. It is not at all insignificant that the dominant historical narratives pertaining to the emergence of Hip Hop identify a transition from gang-oriented affiliations (formed around crews or posses and their protection of turf) to music and break dance affiliations that maintained and in some cases intensified the important structuring systems of territoriality.

Flash's reference to the importance of "respect" is not primarily addressing a respect for the skills or character of his competitors (although, elsewhere [George, 1993]

he acknowledges this as well). Rather, his notion of respect is related to the geographies that he maps; it is based on the existence of circumscribed domains of authority and dominance that have been established by other DJs, as he has established his. These geographies are inhabited and bestowed with value. They are understood as lived places and sites of significance as well as being understood within the market logic that includes a product (the music in its various live or recorded forms) and a consumer base (various audience formations). The proprietary discourse also implies, therefore, that the Hip Hop cartography is to some extent shaped by a refined capitalist logic and the existence of market regions. Without sacrificing the basic geographic components of territory, possession, and group identity that play such an important role among gang-oriented activities, the content of New York's urban spaces was substantially revised as Hip Hop developed.

Clearly, however, the boundaries Flash describes and which are visually mapped in the documentary were never firm or immovable. They were cultural boundaries that were continually open to negotiation and renegotiation by those who inhabited their terrains and who circulated throughout the city's boroughs. As the main form of musical expression within the Hip Hop culture, the early DJ sound systems featured a series of practices that linked the music to other activities such as graffiti art and "tagging." Together, these overlapping practices and methods of constructing place-based identities and of inscribing and enunciating individual and collective presence created the bonds upon which affiliations were forged within specific social geographies. Hip Hop's distinct practices introduced new forms of expression that were contextually linked to conditions in a city comprised of an amalgamation of neighborhoods and boroughs with their own highly particularized social norms and cultural nuances.

While Rap's capacity to circumvent the constraints and limiting social conditions of young African-American and Latino youths has been examined and celebrated by cultural critics and scholars, there has been little attention granted to the many implications of Hip

Hop spatial logics. Tricia Rose goes the furthest in this direction when she details the ways that Hip Hop continually displays a clever transformative creativity that is endlessly capable of altering the implied or preferred uses of technologies and space. Her specific references to Hip Hop culture and space stress the importance of the "postindustrial city" as the central urban influence "which provided the context for creative development among hip hop's earliest innovators, shaped their cultural terrain, access to space, materials, and education" (1994: 34). Yet it should be noted that the particularities of urban space themselves are subjected to the deconstructive and reconstructive practices of Rap artists. Thus, when in another context Iain Chambers refers to Rap as "New York's 'sound system'...sonorial graffiti" with "the black youth culture of Harlem and the Bronx twisting technology into new cultural shape" (1985: 190), he overlooks the corresponding strategies that give rise to the radical transformation of the sites where these cultures cohere and converge or the spaces that are reimagined and, importantly, remapped. Hip Hop and the Rap artists who give it a voice emerge in yet another guise, in this case as alternative cartographers for what the Rap group Boo Yaa Tribe refers to as "a new funky nation."

Tracing Rap's Origins/Enshrining Historiography

It is by now common to "return to the source" when outlining Rap's development and current popularity, with the detailed *description* -- not analysis -- of spatial particulars becoming the norm of narrative histories that trace the emergence, evolution, and influences that informed and motivated Rap at its inception. These histories are often, in the first instance, geographical. They set the stage in a particular manner that highlights the flow of people and cultures through a defined environment -- the borough of the Bronx in New York. It is not, however, solely the geography of the city that makes the historical narratives of Rap's emergence unique. The history of the blues and jazz in the 1920s and 30s, for example, is also often structured around the importance of regional and local

geographies.³² With Rap, no matter how it is explained, the emphasis is always placed on the dominant geo-cultural component of its formation: the "inner-city."

This is evident, for instance, in David Toop's Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip Hop, which has for years provided one of the more concise historical overviews. Toop begins his narrative with references to New York streets and night spots, localizing the base of the music's roots:

Hip hop's home, the Bronx, is an area with a fearsome reputation caricatured by films such as *Bronx Warriors* and *Fort Apache: The Bronx*. Its grim project housing and burnt-out buildings have little of the political and cultural resonance of neighboring Harlem, let alone the material assets further downtown; it was within the Bronx and, to a lesser extent, Harlem that black youths developed their own alternative to gang warfare that had risen from the dead in the late 1960s to dominate and divide neighborhoods north of Central Park. (Toop, 1984: 12)

Encoded within a terminology that bespeaks "the ghetto," Toop describes architecture and geography, social structure and territory. The mapped spaces of the Bronx, Harlem and Central Park are identified by name precisely because those names speak of particular places in particular ways (although the veiled reference to a territory "further downtown" is easily decipherable as Manhattan). They already have meanings and, thus, significance that has been constructed (often) through the entertainment and news media. They are further made comparatively meaningful according to a general mapping of New York's interborough organization, with Toop both conveying basic information and assuming prior knowledge pertaining to the geo-cultural arrangement and spatial dimensions of the city. New York's iconic presence, its identity as a global city, allows Toop and others to implement a descriptive shorthand that facilitates the efficient communication of spatial and cultural coordinates. He relies on the general assumption that most people will know that Harlem and the South Bronx are black communities and this knowledge makes it easier to graft on further images (as well as stereotypes) pertaining to the cultures that cohere there.

³² See, for example, LeRoi Jones. 1963. Blues People: Negro Music in White America. N.Y.: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, (especially chapter 8).

Dick Hebdige's (1987) description of Rap's invention introduces a further extension of the cultural constituencies that cohere in local urban neighborhoods and acknowledges the crucial influences that were experienced over the years with the influx of various immigrant and ethnic groups. He demarcates the Bronx in more historically precise terms than does Toop, referring explicitly to the predominantly black and Latino cultural *melange* that has defined the experience of the borough for over sixty years:

Both reggae and rap also grew out of city slum environments. Rap started in the South Bronx of New York, which had been a mainly black and hispanic ghetto for decades. By 1930 nearly a quarter of the people who lived there were West Indian immigrants. And most of the Spanish speakers living in the Bronx nowadays either came originally from Caribbean islands like Puerto Rico and Cuba or are the children of Caribbean immigrants...There are now three million Puerto Ricans living in New York -- as many as live in Puerto Rico itself. The Bronx had never been prosperous. But in the 1960s it went into a sudden decline and by the end of the decade it had become the poorest, toughest neighborhood in the whole of New York. (Hebdige, 1987: 137)

This narrative delineates the Bronx and the local neighborhoods therein as a dynamic, if depressed environment that is the product of historical fluctuations of people and cultural *flavors*. It is represented here as a territory of cultural hybridity, formed along the cultural axes described by Trinh Minh-Ha when she points to "...a Third World in every First World..." (1987: 138-139). By foregrounding the historical and cultural elements of the borough, Hebdige mitigates the constraints that a closed narrative of urban decimation or economic decline might imply. He works against the sense of closure and containment that often accompanies popular imagery of the Bronx and which fuel the scripts of such films as those cited by Toop. The dominant image of the Bronx, reinforced by photographs or television and movie footage, is already one of poverty, disease, violence, and danger which are coded as black. Yet with a preliminary understanding of the vitality of the borough and its various communities and an attempt to locate the urban spaces of the South Bronx in an historical light, the linear narrative equation of Bronx=black=doomed wasteland is challenged.

Among the most indepth historical examinations of Rap's geographical origins is Tricia Rose's Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America. Noting that "rap's primary context for development is hip hop culture, the Afrodiasporic traditions it extends and revises, *and* the New York urban terrain in the 1970s" (1994: 26), Rose carefully analyses and assesses the postmodern/postindustrial city, first in the abstract (i.e., "the city"), and then in the particular, focused on the urban conditions of New York City and the South Bronx. Against a backdrop of economic and infrastructural decline and a prevailing sense of "loss and futility" among those who live there, Rose identifies a positive and progressive agency that refutes the conceptualization of the area as an architectural and human disaster.

Like Hebdige, she introduces a historical perspective that accounts for the flow and dynamic interrelations of diverse ethnic and racial groups. In fact, this point is developed with varying degrees of detail by virtually all chroniclers of Rap history when acknowledging the profound impact of the Jamaican cultural presence in the Bronx and Harlem neighborhoods, and of the influences of the Jamaican sound systems, such as Kool DJ Herc's, and lyrical "toastors" who had a crucial role in community-oriented leisure practices (i.e., Holman, 1984; Hager, 1985; Gilroy, 1987, 1993; Fernando, 1994). More recently, rappers themselves have begun to explicitly recuperate the previously overlooked Latino presence that has been evident and vital to the growth of Hip Hop from "back in the day," pointedly correcting erasures that have contributed to a generalized popular perception of Rap and Hip Hop as the invention solely of urban black youth.³³

Central to this discussion, however, is the emphasis Rose places on the relations between localized urban conditions and the rise of Rap as a response, dialogue, or statement by black and Latino teenagers. Rap does not spring forth from the South Bronx by accident; it emerges from within an *economically* limited context as a new means of

³³ This point is evident in Michael Holman's Breaking and the New York City Breakers (1984) which describes the ethnic and racial composition of early break dance crews while also offering an interesting introduction to the commercial development of breakdancing.

negotiating the immediate environment and of motivating individual and collective cultural practices of opportunity on a day-to-day basis. This was the case in the mid-1970s when Rap began to develop as an artistic medium and it continues to the present. From this perspective, it is clear that Rap was not simply founded in the organic creativity of a homogeneous American urban youth population, but emerged from within particular geographies of oppression where the interlocking forms of race and class (and, as Rose [1990,1994] explains, gender) often tend to reproduce the most intense conditions of lack. It thus becomes necessary to approach Rap's invention and evolution from within a matrix of influences that are most prevalent within high density urban localities that are, correspondingly, predominantly inhabited by black, Latino, and low-income populations. According to Rose:

Hip Hop culture emerged as a source for youth of alternative identity and social status in a community whose older local support institutions had been all but demolished along with large sectors of its built environment. (1994: 34)

As she suggests, the production of new, alternative forms of expression is a creative response to real social and material constraints that are most deeply felt in localized urban cultural spaces.

Citing the simultaneous erosion of political, cultural, and physical structures, Rose delineates the multi-faceted impact of economic and social decline that has negatively affected the lives of those who inhabit the core of many large American urban centers since the mid-1970s, and youth in particular. Hip Hop and Rap have, in tandem, been crucial in the redefinition of the American urban environment and, more pointedly, the redefinition of the relations among black youth and the American metropolis. The culture of Hip Hop embodies a range of activities that not only display but consciously foreground spatial characteristics, whether through the sonic appropriation of aural space, the appropriation of street corners (where at an earlier stage in Hip Hop's development, Rap improvisation and break dancing were common), or appropriation of the city's architecture through the

ubiquitous display of spray painted graffiti tags, burners, and pieces. Hip Hop is comprised of a *melange* of spatial practices and spatial discourses that are both constituted by and constitutive of the spaces and places in which its primary cultural producers live and work. Rap music has therefore been an exceedingly influential force in both the representation and transformation of the urban environment throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Representing the "Real": Ghetto Space, Ghetto Identities

The discourse of ghetto authenticity in 1980s Rap and what has evolved into a "real nigga" mentality in the 1990s is actually a continuation of discourses of difference that, as Malcolm X (1966) and others have noted, can be traced to attitudes relating to the inherently different social class positions such as those between the "house nigger" and the "field nigger" in the antebellum South. For Malcolm, the house nigger was the embodiment of black subservient passivity while the field nigger embodied a core militancy as the activist figure of disgruntled and resistant "masses" of black Americans. These are first and foremost spatial distinctions which are highly value-laden and carry the weight of a deeply ingrained caste system within the repressive structures of plantation slavery of the time. Their spatial demarcations are also implicated in the distribution of power as it was negotiated between the slave owner and the domestic servants and field laborers in his possession. Turning his point toward more contemporary expediencies, Malcolm X contrasted what he described as the "Uncle Tom" institutional structures of 1960s negro leadership (most notably CORE, the NAACP, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference) with what he perceived as the more authentic and radically politicized positions of blacks in the streets and ghettos of the nation who most resembled the resistant "field nigger."³⁴ Space and spatial variations across the black social spectrum continue to be

³⁴ The Boogie Down Productions track "House Niggas" (1991, Zomba) clearly renders the distinctions between the house nigger and the field nigger: "It's the concept of the house nigga, field nigga/the house nigga will sell you up the river/so to mess up, he'll look bigger/and when ya beat under the rock he'll slither/but I'll grab the tail of the house nigger...."

central to a comprehension of black identities (and this is no less true of other races and ethnicities) and the particular spatial discourses of contemporary Hip Hop culture reproduce the conceptualizations of spatially distributed power that frame the identities and experiences of black teenagers in contemporary America.

In the early phase of recorded Rap, the ghetto is essentially constructed as a symbolic center which anchors the narrative images portrayed. As Massey suggests (with particular regard for the relations between space, place, and gender), the symbolic meanings of spaces and places "both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood" (1994: 179). This idea applies as well to the dynamics between space and place and the interlocking social variables of race, class, or age for each configuration reveals sets of relations that are geographically distributed and spatially varied. Spatial narratives and the discursive reproduction of ghetto sensibilities thus derive their social meanings from the fact that ghettos *do* exist as knowable spaces and, as such, they constitute a *real* force of influence in human lives as part of a dialectical interaction of mutual influence.

In another context, Todd Boyd explores Rap's themes and what he terms "cultural authenticity" in an insightful essay that describes the locus of African-American authenticity and its expression in Rap as a primarily class-based phenomenon. He writes that "this emphasis on the working class, using the ghetto or the 'hood' as the dominant metaphor, has been most vividly presented in rap music" (1994: 292). Boyd accurately isolates the central importance of the formal tendency among Rap artists to conjoin class-oriented themes and spatial imagery although he misguages the period in which this articulation of class and authenticity began. He erroneously asserts that "with the advent of west coast (primarily, Los Angeles) rap, the life of a young African American male and his struggles to survive have become the recurrent theme in demonstrating one's firm entrenchment in the jungle-like setting known as the ghetto" (ibid: 293). By placing this evolution in the historical context of the emergence of west coast Rap, he locates this particular

phenomenon in approximately 1987-88, roughly coinciding with the release of Ice-T's "Rhyme Pays" (1987, Sire) and N.W.A.'s "Straight Outta Compton" (1988, Ruthless). In fact, the developments he describes had already begun taking hold in 1982 with the release of "The Message" and was fairly well established by 1987. His analysis falters mainly due to a failure to properly define the crucial distinctions between the spatial discourses of the ghetto and of the 'hood as well as the inability to distinguish their different moments of historical enunciation.

Boyd is basically correct in much of his criticism of the current clichéd "gangsta-ism" and the hypermasculinist sensibilities that identify the 'hood as a perceived social space of "hard-core" black cultural reality. Yet without acknowledging musical precursors such as "The Message" or "Street Justice," he misrepresents the spatial discourse and its accompanying relations to a discourse of urban reality. The spatial emphasis in Rap has, in fact, changed substantially through the 1980s and 1990s, announcing shifting perspectives on the lived environments which many (though by no means all) Rap artists call "home," as well as providing astute commentary on the intensification of ghetto poverty that displays historically and geographically precise characteristics.³⁵ The symbols and implied values associated with social geographies that form the basis of Rap's narratives did not remain static in this period. The changes in spatial discourse over time indicate the extent to which the repertoire of signs and symbols have been transformed with the evolution of the Hip Hop culture.

Furthermore, Boyd's reductionist assumption that the spatial elements of Rap narratives are *merely* "metaphors" fails to consider the crucial relations between the spatial character of working class environments and the lived conditions of working class

³⁵ For example, the release of "What's On My Mind" (1995, Po' Broke Records/Relativity Recordings) by The Dayton Family, a Rap act based in Flint, Michigan, features several cuts that refer directly and explicitly to the socio-economic conditions of Flint. The city has been subjected to a serious downturn in its local economy due to larger, extraneous conditions impacting the automobile industry and local employment (forming the subject of Michael Moore's scathing documentary film, *Roger and Me*, which is about life in Flint). In this context, there is a clear historical/geographical/social matrix that multiply inflects the articulation of race, class, and gender issues raised by Boyd.

existence. In practice, human experience is substantially influenced by the geographies of class difference (as well as by the geographic variations of race and gender with which Boyd is also concerned). The articulation of space and place-based perspectives involves the process of translating experience of various landscapes into words. It is a particular method of revealing the micro-worlds of experience in language and of making experience meaningful. As Ernest Allen, Jr., explains, "generally speaking, the core values articulated in a given rap message, no matter the origin of individual rappers, tend to be socially rooted in the daily lives of marginalized African-American youth..." (1996: 162).

Even as metaphor, whether simple or not, a spatial or place-based terminology cannot be dismissed as being inconsequential since metaphor functions according to a perceived relationship between one thing and another. Due to the capacity for metaphors to communicate the perceived nature of these relations, the language and thought behind any given Rap selection acquire greater relevance and importance. As an artistic means of expression (as opposed to a literal form of communication), Rap's use of metaphor is warranted, with metaphorical expressions, allegory, and allusion being indicators of an artist's skill and innovation. Still, Boyd's focus on a prevalent and problematic rhetoric of ghetto-oriented authenticity is compelling, but his reading largely ignores the symbolic functions of ghetto imagery and devalues narrative representations of space and place, regarding them as being somehow suspect.

Space and place are never simply employed metaphorically in Rap lyrics; they are also deployed discursively as part of a much more complex project of identity formation and cultural critique. When bound in tension with other circulating discourses they reproduce the form and shape of our social environments, providing a map upon which young black artists and wider audience formations might trace patterns of dominant hegemonic power and locate spaces where alternative or oppositional potentials can cohere and thrive. As I have noted, these expressions can be cast in either conservative or radical ideological forms.

The discursive construction of the ghetto as an authentic space framing black youth experience in both "The Message" and "Street Justice," for example, is part of the detailed process through which subject identities, social formations, and place-based meanings are defined and articulated in the emergent Rap form of the early 1980s. These early examples further established precedents for the spatial discourses in the genre that came later, leading Robin Kelly to write "to be a 'real Nigga' is to have been a product of the ghetto" (1996: 137). The ghetto, in all of its negative complexity, is still heralded as an idealized space for minority teens within Rap's cultural discourses precisely because it is considered as being somehow more "real" than other spaces and places.

Shields offers what might be an explanation for this in terms of spatial discourses and the production of an affective sense of belongingness:

people...ascribe to particular discourses about places as a mark of their "insider status" in particular groups and communities. This group affiliation through knowledge of discourses which locate places and areas as particular types of places, with particular relations to other places and people (outsiders) does not restrict the development of personal views of "the real situation." (Shields, 1991: 25)

Because blacks and Hispanics were disproportionately affected by economic downturns through the 1970s and 80s (Rose, 1994: 27-34), today they frequently occupy the lower end of the nation's economic spectrum as a demographic formation. These groups also tend to be disproportionately represented in most major urban ghettos in contemporary America, ghettos which have been transformed in ethnic and racial composition over the past century and a half. Yet black and Latino youths are also disproportionately active within Rap, dominating the industry and driving the genre's ongoing processes of innovation and reinvention. This results in a situation whereby the contemporary American ghetto can be relatively easily identified in Rap's popular narratives as a predominantly black realm, producing the different status contexts that revolve around a structured logic of insider/outsider presences.³⁶

³⁶ This is not always the case, however, as the urban working-class boroughs in Boston reflect. The equalizing forces of class impoverishment have led to frequent racially motivated antagonisms between Irish-American and black and Latino teenagers in the housing projects of Dorchester, Roxbury, and South

Rap's particular stylistic construction of the interconnections between spatial practices, place, and social character is part of a discursive act that, in the early phase of Message Rap (between roughly 1982 and 1984), articulates various existent symbols of the ghetto toward each other under the primary sign of *black male youth* authenticity. In the process this produces an enhanced proximity between the textual portrayal of life in the ghetto and actual experience within the lived spaces of the American ghetto. To resist stereotyped reproductions of all blacks and Latinos as ghetto dwellers, "gangstas," "hustlas," or "true playas" (which is what Boyd ultimately cautions against), however, it is essential that the constructions of the ghetto as a social space in Rap discourse not be perceived in a reductionist sense as the only set of place-images associated with contemporary black youth. Historically contextualized, Rap's pronounced shift toward an expressive ghettocentricity occurred at the same moment that its popular appeal and commercial distribution were accelerated. This resulted in the redirected focus toward neighborhoods and local sites of significance among artists working in the genre and has continually threatened to override other possible images of lived cultural space among Hip Hop's young audiences, both white and black.

Finally, the unnerving consequences of ghettocentric authenticity were fully realized in the early 1990s with white Rap artist Vanilla Ice's unsuccessful attempt to rewrite his personal biography through the media, re-imagining his origins and recasting his identity in a false composite: a white youth who emerged from the black ghetto. This forgery of identity was conducted across a socio-spatial divide. As a strategic move to reinforce his popular viability, Vanilla Ice (whose LP *To the Extreme* [1990, SBK] was the fastest selling Rap album of all time upon its release) attempted to strengthen his ghetto profile of legitimacy and credibility. His prospects for securing a place in the Rap pantheon were

Boston or "Southie." The racial overlaps have also produced the cultural frame for creative amalgamations such as that of rapper Marky Mark (and his group the Funky Bunch) who hails from Dorchester. In Canada, Toronto's successful Reggae rapper Snow represents another example of the meeting of Irish and black Caribbean working class cultures. For a detailed ethnographic study of this phenomenon, see Simon Jones. 1988. *Black Culture, White Youth: The Reggae Tradition From JA to UK*. London: MacMillan.

dashed (his uneven skills and confused terminology notwithstanding) when the truth about his middle-class background and the schools and neighborhoods from which he actually emerged were revealed. In other cases, the legitimacy of white rappers Pete Nice and MC Serch (who formed the nucleus of the now-defunct Third Bass) or of Toronto-based Reggae rapper Snow, is located in their documented connections with the ghetto and the black youth culture of the housing projects and high schools where they were raised and educated. The tendency is no less significant for many black Rap artists who, like Run-D.M.C., attempt to tap into the image of ghetto-chic, seeking street credibility while hailing from neighborhoods slightly removed from the "inner-city." For them, the projection of ghetto associations is less difficult and less contentious since the dominant social perspective "always already" interpellates black youths, especially males, as ghetto citizens if not ghetto "thugs."³⁷ The image and expression of ghetto authenticity in Rap continue to meet success in the market. Yet, while rappers reinforce their identities as qualified chroniclers of social reality and ghetto conditions they also extend a plethora of negative stereotypes that ultimately hobble and restrict black youth in society.

³⁷ The unambiguously open association with suburban or non-urban sites of origin was not entirely unheard of, however, as Rap supergroup Run-D.M.C., hailing from Hollis/Queens, and later, groups such as Public Enemy and De La Soul from Long Island, demonstrated.

Chapter 4

Emergence of a Cultural Form:

Rap Music in Context

*Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge, I'm trying not to lose my head,
It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder how I keep from going under*
"The Message," Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five (1982, Sugarhill Records)

The Popular Emergence of Rap

The story of Rap's rise from the black ghettos of America is by now common lore, told and retold in both mainstream and marginal media. It has been historically framed as part of a surge of artistic creativity formed at street level and is frequently described within the notion of radical innovation under duress (i.e., Hager, 1984; Toop, 1984; Rose, 1994) which further points to the cultural vitality and inventiveness of various black youth subcultures. In the intervening years as Rap has grown in terms of its scope of influence in popular culture this narrative has had a powerful effect on how the music, the artists who produce it, and its audiences have been perceived within the system of mainstream values. For instance, eleven years after Rap's commercial breakthrough, a much criticized article on Rap in Newsweek (March 19, 1990) continued to define the genre for a broad, mainstream (middle-aged, middle-class, and white) audience which may never have had contact with its young producers or heard the music at all. Like this particular article, much of Rap's journalistic coverage has been inaccurate, dismissive or heavily biased against the form or its informing cultural practices. The mainstream media's diffusion of images of the scene into the American mainstream consciousness continues to be uneven at best. The spatial specificities of Rap's origins, which include the twin factors of where the music actually emanated from and how that social space has been constructed within critical discourse by various social commentators (including academics), can thus be regarded as an enduring facet of how the music's contemporary character is defined and understood.

Whether represented in positive or negative light these competing perspectives have influenced popular conceptions of the genre in relation to other forces of popular culture.

Havelock Nelson and Michael Gonzales recount their initial exposure to the new music by citing the ways that Rap was integrated into the lifestyles and practices of urban youth while altering the cadences through which they experienced the city: "after that black noise attack first invaded my earholes, my eyes were wide open to the changes rap music was causing in the neighborhood" (1991: xvii). As they note, Rap produced a radical sensory experience while providing a cultural form that was easily adapted to, or absorbed by existing infrastructures, channeled into the general "flow" in the urban black community. From a more theoretically conceived angle, this corresponds with Elizabeth Grosz's perspectives on the "interface" between social subjects and their environments. As she writes "the form, structure, and norms of the city seep into and effect all other elements that go into the constitution of corporeality and/or subjectivity. It effects the way the subject sees others...as well as the subject's understanding of, alignment with, and positioning in space" (1992: 249). This explicit recognition of the mutually influential relations between space and self or space and one's social/subjective identity is often missing from analyses of Rap as an urban artform that in a fairly short time swept through America's major cities.

Nelson and Gonzales explicitly stress the *locality* of their initial experience with Rap, recalling that the spatial frame of the local comprises a territorial frontline of contact. Their sense of locality is dually conceived for, on the one hand, it summons place-based images of their own idiosyncratic experience with Rap on the home front, yet, on the other hand, they imply that Rap presented opportunities for expansive spatial identification with other localities where Rap was similarly embraced. I previously explained some of the complexities and problems of "locality" in relation to studies addressing national and international popular culture. Yet when it is framed within the twin coordinates of scale and value, the local as a structuring concept has a valid role in how we come to understand

certain aspects of the world around us that may not be of our making. As a culturally influential force, music is seen here to be centrally implicated in the processes by which space is made into place and the ways that locality is bound to notions of subjective experience and personal identification with narrowly demarcated zones of human existence.

Quite literally Rap and the Hip Hop culture have redefined and redesigned these spaces and the way we use them as they have been integrated into the lives and social circulations of thousands upon thousands of people. Rap has always been much more than a simple reflection of the urban soundscape yet it is difficult to ascertain the complexities that lie between reality and the representation of the urban condition and the ways that the music itself has, in its perseverance and ubiquity, had a transformative impact on the city as an experiential environment. While the production of major Rap recordings is conducted exclusively in North America's larger urban centres and the city as a conceptual space remains a dominant factor in the music's thematic content, the fact is that, rather than Rap being inflected by the city in a one-way flow of influence, due to its sustained popularity and ongoing innovation it has actually had a profound sensual impact on the urban environment. Rap is today an unavoidable facet of the sound of the city and its pervasiveness has radically altered the city soundscape and the character of certain sites or places where it is heard. It is therefore not only based on the sonic character of the city, but the flows and tones of the city are themselves gradually being reconstructed through the rhythms of Rap and Hip Hop.

Clearly, any music can be a factor in how individuals or groups experience a situation or a place, how they locate themselves in various contexts, and how they find meaning in them. The manufacturers of Muzak have demonstrated this. But like any kind of music, Rap is an expressive form existing within its own elaborate system of styles, codes, and images that foregrounds particular sounds and rhythms that can, in turn, affect our sense of space and place. Rap and Hip Hop have changed the ways that particular places are perceived, whether it be a clothing store with Rap jams on the sound system or a

street where cars doing the slow cruise are blasting Hip Hop beats at mega-volumes. In its formative stages, Rap's impact was first registered at the micro-levels of the local as it circulated primarily through informal social conduits such as house and block parties or school gymnasium dances as well as through the important (though largely undocumented) practice of cassette tape exchange between DJs and their burgeoning audiences (Toop, 1991: 78). Its influence grew rapidly and, within a few years of its origins, it was a dominant facet of the sound of young, black America, and could be heard in numerous social contexts as the backbeat to the practices of work and leisure among minority teenagers.

Isolating the then locally emergent phenomenon that became Rap, Billboard magazine's first coverage of the music in 1978 focuses on the turntable technique of "rocking the beat," describing Kool DJ Herc's growing acclaim in the Bronx and the role of Bronx-based retailer Downstairs Records in supplying him with "obscure r&b cutouts" that formed the core of his extended club mixes. The story is written with an emphasis on the emergent Bronx "B-Beat" or break beat scene that spawned the Hip Hop DJ, which at the time was particular to the Bronx. The popularity and rapid expansion of Herc's innovation is evident as Robert Ford, Jr. (who co-wrote and financed pioneer rapper Kurtis Blow's first charting single "Christmas Rappin'") reported that "other Bronx DJs have picked up the practice and now B-beats are the rage all over the borough and the practice is spreading rapidly" (July 1, 1978: 65).

Almost a year later under the headline "Jive Talking: N.Y. DJs Rapping Away in Black Discos," Ford described the rise of "rapping DJs" as an outgrowth of the mobile DJ business, simultaneously identifying Rap's dominant socio-spatial milieu as the black club scene. Profiling some of the more influential innovators of the style, he writes that DJ Hollywood "is now so popular that he has played the Apollo with billing as a support act. It is not uncommon to hear Hollywood's voice coming from one of the countless portable tape players carried through the city's streets" (Billboard, May 5, 1979: 3). With its focus

on the mobility of the DJ, the relevance of the black dance club circuit and other performance venues, and Rap's sonic dissemination through cassettes this early coverage chronicles a crucial historical moment. Even at this stage it can be seen that Rap's capacity to develop and extend its influence was being cast in geographic or spatial terms, not simply in terms of popular appeal or commercial viability. Furthermore, this coverage provides information and documentation about who was making the music, who its audiences were, and the primary contexts for the music's consumption and enjoyment.

Perceived by industry insiders who had their "ears to the street" and by the artists themselves as a marginal "underground" phenomenon the idea of Rap breaking out of the local scene in the boroughs of New York primarily involved extending familiarity and recognition rather than selling units. Rap was at this stage generally diffused through live performances or informally distributed cassette recordings (i.e., sold from the stage at shows, out of briefcases or car trunks on the street or, eventually, on the racks in small "mom and pop" record stores). Few innovators at the time expressed a strong sense of Rap's future potentials; for example, Ford's coverage in Billboard reveals that in the late 1970s before Rap was a commercial recorded phenomenon, pioneers Eddie Cheeba and DJ Hollywood envisioned Rap as a means of entering into careers as radio DJs. They were not thinking of their musical contributions in business terms or of extending Rap's popular appeal within the music industry. Nor did they foresee its potentials as a recorded genre. According to David Toop, "the lack of industry connections in the Bronx, the young age group involved in hip hop and the radical primitivism of the music itself conspired to produce an island of relatively undisturbed invention in a sea of go-getter commerce" (1984: 78). With the move from the small parties and nightclubs in the Bronx toward larger and more prestigious venues in Harlem (America's black cultural mecca) and elsewhere, the music and the associated Hip Hop culture underwent substantial transformation and growth.

Without subtracting from the significance of disparate factors such as technical advances affecting the quality and efficiency of DJ sound systems, the creative enhancement of DJ turntable skills, or the introduction of rapping MCs between 1978 and 1980, the crucial influence of DJ mobility needs to be stressed. It is a central factor that facilitated the publicity and exposure of the early break beat styles that gave birth to Rap and carried it outward to larger and more diverse audiences. Whereas house DJs helped to establish certain venues as bonafide Hip Hop clubs and drew people toward them, the mobility of the various DJs and their crews took the music outward, enabling many more people to experience the burgeoning scene within the contexts of their own home-sites, within their own localities. In the city, territory and turf were (and remain) powerful elements of social identity and affiliation among urban youth in the period. As DJ acts began circulating throughout New York and spawning a whole generation of DJs and rappers, there was a wave of localized adaptation as individuals and crews sought to develop their own styles that were locally relevant but still remained true to the Hip Hop scene at large. This adaptive tendency also enhanced the vitality of the scene by infusing it with new and hybrid elements that kept it fresh, interesting, and commercially attractive at these micro-scales.

According to a report in Billboard (Feb. 16, 1980), it was the appearances of Bronx-born DJ Hollywood at the Apollo Theatre in 1978 that introduced the potentials of the music to a wider segment of the black public, subsequently reflecting the enduring importance of Harlem as a barometer of black cultural taste. Significantly, DJ Hollywood's Apollo performance introduced Jerry Thomas (co-producer of the Fatback Band) to the music, resulting in the band's recording and release of the first charting Rap single, "King Tim III: Personality Jock" (1979, Polydor Records). As this illustrates, Rap was by 1978 already developing into a powerful cultural and commercial force among black teens in New York, following a trajectory from the South Bronx to Harlem and then (via club and high school performances, cassette tape distribution, and community radio

broadcasting) throughout the other New York boroughs to New Jersey and beyond. Rap's spatial dimensions were consequently being extended while local artists and promoters introduced the genre as an emergent option for pleasure and leisure in public spaces catering specifically to the Hip Hop scene, including clubs such as Disco Fever, the Latin Quarter, Negril, and the Roxy which evolved into predominantly Rap venues.

As Kurtis Blow recalls, "a whole new cultural thing was growing up around rap...The b-boy culture spread all over the city, and by early 1979 we were all working bus rides to Philadelphia and Baltimore. The whole East Coast was rocking" (George, *et. al.*, 1985: xii). After Fatback's "King Tim III" and the first certified Rap hit "Rapper's Delight," by the Sugarhill Gang (1979, Sugarhill Records), entered the Hot Soul Single charts in October of 1979, Billboard noted that Rap "has since escalated in popularity to such major cities as Detroit, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Chicago and Atlanta" (R. Joe & N. George, Nov. 3, 1979: 4). As reflected by its coverage in Billboard, Rap rapidly garnered national attention and as it did, consistent, reproducible elements of the Hip Hop culture began taking hold in virtually every major urban American center. This spread was first facilitated by the human traffic between New York and other major cities and, later it was aided by the additional influence of early Hip Hop films such as Charles Ahearn's *Wild Style* (1983) or Stan Lathan's *Beat Street* (1984).

In addition, overlapping contact between the gradually expanding Hip Hop scene and the New York avant garde art scene in this general period (with its own attempts at alternative or oppositional political and aesthetic articulation) extended the influences of Rap, graffiti art, and breakdancing, introducing them to a larger and often more economically empowered public faction (i.e., white audiences). This led to wider exposure and produced some interesting alliances. For example, British Punk Rock impresario Malcolm MacLaren was an early fan and supporter of New York Rap, booking acts to open for his then-fledgling Post-Punk proteges, Bow Wow Wow. As Rap grew in popularity, it successfully surpassed many (though by no means all) ethnic, racial, and class boundaries.

It was at this point perceived as a distinctly New York phenomenon (as opposed to being "simply" from the South Bronx) that, while dominated by black and Latino artists and audiences, was attracting attention across a diverse social range.

In 1980-1981, the particular confluence of cultures resulted in the release of successful Funk and Hip Hop-influenced tracks by white New York bands Blondie ("Rapture," 1980, [Chrysalis Records]) and the Tom-Tom Club ("Wordy Rappinghood," and "Genius of Love," [1981, Island Records]) whose members were familiar with the uptown Rap club scene. The crossing of cultural and musical boundaries mapped out along class and racial lines was further encouraged through performances by Hip Hop DJs such as Afrika Bambaataa (who, with Soul Sonic Force, appeared at the third annual New Music Seminar in July, 1982, at which MacLaren was a keynote speaker) in galleries and clubs of the Soho district. Following the complex interrelations of musical and cultural influences is a difficult project but there are several clear examples of cultural cross-pollination in this period. Afrika Bambaataa regularly peppered his repertoire of hard-boiled electro-Funk with snippets of Rock, New Wave, and Punk musics (from the Soul of James Brown to British progressive Rock by Babe Ruth to German techno-Rock by Kraftwerk), displaying a broad musical knowledge and familiarity with different styles and genres. The Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five release "It's Nasty" (1981, Sugarhill Records) and Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde's "Genius Rap" (1981, Profile Records) are both structured around the Tom-Tom Club's "Genius of Love," which was itself based on the rhythmic structures of the earlier Zapp recording "More Bounce to the Ounce" (1980, Warner). The rhythm and melodic hook that these songs are built around have since been taken up and adapted countless times, most recently surfacing as a sample on Mariah Carey's top-charting hit "Fantasy" (1995, Columbia).

Although white and black musical exchange in America has a long and chequered past, the basis of such exchange varies in different historical and musical contexts with appropriative and recuperative strategies being exercised according to the needs and

possibilities of a given era. As George Lipsitz explains, Hip Hop DJ's conscious use of "bifocality, juxtaposition of multiple realities, intertextuality, inter-referentiality, and comparison through families of resemblance" is part of the active "struggle to assemble a 'historical bloc' capable of challenging the ideological hegemony of Anglo cultural domination" (1990: 152). The cultural geographies of a nightclub scene and the accompanying media diffusion of localizable cultural practices provide a structuring influence for these musical linkages. They introduce the mechanisms for transcultural interaction and exchange within subcultures enabling such affinities within casual or informal patterns whereas institutional forces (such as the music industry) follow more formally organized and economically rationalized patterns. In New York, the gradual dissemination of Rap, graffiti and break dancing as the cornerstones of Hip Hop culture involved the transgressing of distinct social spaces that were historically shaped by segregated cultural practices that were evident well before rapping DJs ever picked up a microphone. As Hip Hop branched out both stylistically and spatially, the formal and informal distributional apparatuses enabled communication across numerous cultural domains, frequently producing the foundation for unique forms of musical hybridity.

The cumulative effect of such hybridity was the production of new zones of cultural transmission that, at least briefly, offered the possibility of interracial solidarity as well as a tentative co-mingling across class cultures. This was aided by the role played by white female promoters such as Patti Astor and Cool Lady Blue. Astor opened the East Village artspace Fun Gallery that displayed (and one would assume sold) graffiti "pieces" and Cool Lady Blue booked a weekly Hip Hop event at the Negril club on the lower east side in New York that brought "uptown kids downtown and rap music to white hipsters" (George, 1992: 20). These events and others like them constitute a unique moment in the evolution of the Hip Hop culture for as Rap's discourses later acquired a more pronounced ghettocentric edge or became more explicitly Afrocentric/nationalistic, the loose-knit alliances of the period between 1978 and 1984 became more tenuous. Today, it is largely

through the expansive project of the Worldwide Zulu Nation (founded by Afrika Bambaataa among others) that Hip Hop's elaborative counterhegemonic alliance finds its most consistent expression, although this, too, is a minor force.

While Rap cuts by Afrika Bambaataa and Soul Sonic Force, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, Kurtis Blow, The Sugarhill Gang, and Felix and Jarvis slowly continued to chart on Billboard's Hot Soul Singles and Disco Top 100 charts³⁸, many critics at the time were caught unawares, describing Rap as if it sprang from a vacuum or was disgorged from a deep, dark hole in the social structure.³⁹ There seemed to be little mainstream awareness of its roots or the fact that its foundations were already well-established in the local cultures in and around metropolitan New York. After the music first debuted on the Billboard Hot Soul Singles charts⁴⁰, however, the magazine acknowledged that "in New York the phenomenon is at least seven years old in its current form" (Feb 16, 1980: 57), thus locating its roots in an earlier musical and cultural era.

Live to Tape: The Rise of Commercial Rap

Writing in 1985, Nelson George noted the shift between Rap's initial phase of development and its sudden rise in popularity when it was observed that "what was once a fluid, quick-changing, live art is now defined by the recorded version. Where a live rap once consisted of a series of catch-phrases cleverly ad-libbed and strung together, today's recorded raps tend to be story-oriented" (1985: 18). The rise of recorded commercial Rap

³⁸ In the spring of 1982, Billboard's Disco Top 100 was renamed the Dance/Disco Top 80 and in the summer of that year the Hot Soul Singles and LP charts were renamed Black Singles and Black LPs in order to reflect "the diverse nature of music that field now encompasses" (June 26, 1982: 3).

³⁹ Despite being reported in the music trade journal Billboard as early as July 1, 1978 ("B-Beats Bombarding Bronx: Mobile DJ Starts Something With Oldie R&B Disks") this attitude has prevailed in academic circles and in much of the popular press. For example, Dick Hebdige writes that the Rap records "King Tim III" and "Rapper's Delight" "appeared from nowhere" in 1979 (1987: 142). Eleven years after their release, Newsweek (March 19, 1990) published an unevenly reported feature story that failed to acknowledge the music's longevity and depth of history.

⁴⁰ The Fatback Band's "King Tim III" entered the chart on Oct. 6, 1979, at number 88 followed a week later by the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" which entered at number 81 and eventually reached number four on the Hot Soul Singles chart, number fourteen on the Disco Top 100 chart, and number thirty-six on the Hot 100 chart.

music in 1979 and the music's gradual commercial growth through the early 1980s introduced a new spatial dimension to the music that can be regarded as influential in the changes referred to by George. Despite a cautionary skepticism, evident in the Billboard headline "Rap Records: Are They Fad or Permanent?" (Feb. 16, 1980: 57), Rap's entry into the recording studio and eventually into the commercial music stream extended the reach and influence of the Rap scene that had grown in and around New York. The dimension of commercial recording introduced a new space for its production as well as introducing new means of consuming the music (via twelve-inch singles and record albums, radio, and later, music video broadcasting) in new ways and in new places.

In its early stages prior to the introduction of the MC (masters of ceremonies, microphone controllers, mic checkers, etc.) the Hip Hop DJ was the main attraction at clubs and parties. It was the DJ who initially rapped over the record tracks and break beats with a series of simple shouts and phrases akin to the style of boisterous radio DJs or Jamaican dancehall "toastmasters." The DJ was essentially the main event. A live microphone next to the turntables enabled the mobile DJ to connect with the audience while spinning disks. This performative mode enhanced the live component of the event, adding an extra element to the overall entertainment factor -- the DJ not only spun the records for the dancers but was also evolving into a showman in his own right. It was at this point that Billboard's reporters acknowledged that mobile DJs were a fixture in the Bronx party scene.

As the turntable mixing became more sophisticated, MCs were gradually introduced to "get hype" and it was they who developed a Rap style implementing simple rhyme schemes and word games spiced with exhortations to the audience to "raise your hands in the air and wave them like you just don't care," etc. As frontmen, the MCs projected personality and in the performance mode gave attendees a new focus for their attentions. In a fairly brief period following the widespread introduction of the rapping MC, the MC (or MC ensembles) joined the DJ as headliners and the status and profile of

the DJ, while still absolutely crucial, gradually declined as the 1980s progressed. This transition was also emphasized with the turn to the studio and commercial industry as the rappers rose to the fore and were marketed as the main event.

Once familiar with the dynamics of the DJ/MC performance format and the absence of a band as such, New York audiences proved to be receptive to the direct modes of address that, among other things, reproduced black cultural traditions of antiphony. As common performative traits, many of these practices were sustained in the first recorded Rap songs which initially carried over the most familiar and characteristic elements from the live performance setting. This also involved the important fact that Rap was first and foremost a form of dance music that had strong yet different appeal for break dance crews and the general club-going public. The lyrical forms, styles, and themes of the live setting set the basic standard by which early recorded Rap was measured. This was visually reflected, for example, in the advertising for the first full length album released by the Sugarhill Gang which featured a photograph of the group, onstage with microphones in hand, performing before an audience in a dance club setting (Billboard, Feb. 2, 1980). Likewise, the accompanying video for their hit single "Rapper's Delight" was set in a discotheque environment with disco dancers arrayed around the group.

The space of the recording studio facilitates and demands certain musical production practices that render it distinct from the live performance mode. Exploring the relations between performance and recording in Rock music, Theodore Gracyk writes:

The recording creates a 'virtual' space and time in which a performance is represented as taking place...Realism may prevail for classical, jazz, folk, country, and other musics where fidelity to performance is still the goal. Under the conventions of rock the realist relationship between musical work, performances, and recording is moot; in part, thanks to rock's ongoing exploitation of the recording process itself. (Gracyk, 1996:53)

For Gracyk, "*songs* are never the causal source of sound recording. Performances are" (ibid: 46). In Rap, turntable composition implementing prerecorded selections highlights the technical aspects of song construction, a factor that is often rendered more audible by sounds that are in most recording contexts perceived as being undesirable (such as pops

and scratches on the original archival recordings that find their way onto the completed Rap recording). In many cases this is also a testament to the authenticity of the original recorded product, with the patina or sheen of age being transferred to the new recorded version. The space of the recording studio therefore mediates the relation between the reality of the performance and the completed material that, once labelled and packaged as a musical product, is shipped to record stores for consumption. As studio recording became a standard practice in Rap, the creative processes were necessarily expanded to include new levels and forms of technical expertise. Among the considerations at this stage of Rap's development was the question of how best to reproduce the desirable qualities of live Rap performance.

With the move into the studio, Rap artists were able to exploit recording technologies in new ways, not least of which included the use of multiple tracks and studio editing techniques. The rational logic of the recording, engineering, and mixing processes meant that songs could be more carefully organized and structured in the studio than they had been in the context of the informal street jam or the live club performance. Artists had the option of using the technical attributes of the studio space to develop more complex beats and rhythms as well as scripting more detailed lyrical narratives. This explanation does not subscribe to the concept of technological determinism, however, for it would be inaccurate to overly emphasize the role of recording studio technologies in Rap's transitional development. It is more clearly a case of technology serving an enabling function whereby Rap artists and producers were able to utilize the studio technologies (and, by the mid-1980s, instruments such as the Roland TR 808 drum machine and digital sound samplers) in the interests of creative innovation.

Like the radical re-assignment of the turntable which was made over into a tool of musical production (Chambers, 1985; Hebdige, 1987) the apparatus of the recording studio was exposed to an entirely different set of expectations and demands than were initially intended. For instance, expensive digital sound samplers became a studio staple in the

early and mid-1980s largely as a cost-cutting technology that circumvented the need for extra studio musicians playing a range of instruments. Rap artists quickly appropriated the sampler's possibilities, swiping and splicing beats and melodies from prerecorded material, simultaneously challenging copyright laws in unprecedented ways. The transition of Rap's lyrical and narrative forms toward longer or more "serious" raps also reoriented the relationship between sites of production and sites of consumption or between artists and audiences. This signaled the emergence of a new musical product -- essentially a new style of Rap -- that further distinguished it from Disco and what Rickey Vincent (1996) refers to as "Dance Funk" and "Monster Funk" (which remained strong on the Black charts at the time). Retrospective analysis reveals that these changes were also catalysts in the expansion of the genre's commercial potentials as Rap broke into the wider music industry.

The question of space as a construction in early Rap music can be taken up in several ways. Considering Rap's aural qualities and the aesthetic tone that studios procedures permitted, Rap producers were able to maintain the sonic elements of club performances. For instance, "Freedom" (1980, Sugarhill Records) by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, features a continuous buzz of voices throughout the track, audible behind the lead vocals and rhythm in the studio mix. Like earlier recordings, such as Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On," (1971, Motown), Willie "Little Beaver" Hale's "Party Down" (1974, TK Productions) or The Fatback Band's "Mister Bass Man" (1974, Ace Records) before it, the cacophony of voices in "Freedom" implies a space other than the recording studio. In the thematic context of Gaye's "What's Going On," the background voices do not point to any particular space; rather, in keeping with the theme and content of the song, they confer a general sense of public space, a zone where dialogue and discussion occur such as a bar or restaurant. "Party Down" and "Mister Bass Man" correspond more closely to the production effects underlying "Freedom" as these selections are more space-specific, eliciting a notion of a party in session, producing an aural

construction of the nightclub or discotheque and reproducing the atmosphere of the band in a live, medium-sized performance setting.

Referring to "a sense of musical space" in popular music, Simon Frith explains that most forms of rock and pop "bear the traces of their construction (of their ideal, imagined, construction, that is to say). Even on record a concerto means a concert hall, a chamber piece a drawing room, an opera an opera house; just as jazz means a jazz club, a big band a dance hall, a rock band a pub back-room or a stadium" (1996: 6-7). Recorded Rap's "ideal, imagined construction" in this period bears the traces of the public night spot and the implied spatial character of the discotheque was carefully constructed as a primary referent in the composition and production processes of the music. The studio construction of a spatial aura is therefore based on a sense of performative space, adhering to an overarching spatial logic that is realized as a sonic component in the finished recording.

The addition of an ambient audience track also reinforces the party-oriented themes of these songs, contributing an element of enhancement or more precisely, enlargement to the overall sense of space conveyed. This is achieved in other dance tracks as well (such as KC and the Sunshine Band's "Get Down Tonight" [1975, TK Productions]) through studio recording techniques that compress the lead vocals and guitar or add an echo effect that creates a widened sense of space, as if the song were being performed in a sizeable club.⁴¹ By replicating the sonic experience of a live show (albeit in a sanitized and perfected form that remains distortion free) and evoking a notion of artist and audience practices that commonly converge within the live performance context the sense of space is foregrounded, drawing attention to the interaction that takes place between the band and its audiences in these environments. These and other recording techniques not only construct a sense of enhanced space but they also communicate a spatiality that becomes a core element of the recorded song within the Rap genre at this stage.

⁴¹ I thank Keir Keightley for drawing this technical point to my attention.

Grandmaster Flash's "Freedom" also suggests an important temporal perspective in its attempt to reproduce the atmosphere of the discotheque since, in 1980 when the song was released, this was still the primary site in which to see and hear Rap acts. Nelson George cites the transition to vinyl as a positive progression toward wider recognition of the form, but he acknowledges that the underlying skills and techniques "were developed and refined in basements and clubs around the Apple over the past five years" (1992: 73). As an early example of recorded Rap music, however, "Freedom" reflects the way that the public performance space of the discotheque functions as a dominant signifier of spatial authority at this stage in the music's development.

Out of the Disco and Into the Street: The Rise of Message Rap

The release of "The Message" (1982, Sugarhill Records) by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five introduced a new element to the narrative and thematic focus of Rap music. Entering Billboard's Black Singles chart on July 24, 1982 at number eighty-five, it eventually attained certified hit status, climbing to number four on the chart and eventually selling gold. It also met with substantial international success, charting in the U.K., Canada, and Europe. More important than its hit status, however, is the fact that the song was a bold departure from most other successful commercial Rap releases up to that point, with their sing-song rhyme patterns and playful, boasting lyrics. Recalling the song's impact on a BBC television documentary about Rap entitled "In Search of the Perfect Beat," its co-writer Melle Mel has stated, "what started as a party movement became a protest movement and the rhymes followed suit."

All subsequent Rap recordings dealing with socio-political concerns or spatially-oriented themes relating to black cultural frames of experience owe a debt to "The Message." As the first major example of what became known as "Knowledge Rap" or "Message Rap," the song altered the evolving genre through the authoritative power of its vocal presentation and critical tone that, together, introduced a new intensity and an

alternative mode of address that stimulated a younger generation of Rap enthusiasts.⁴² Without sacrificing commercial success, "The Message" paved the way for youths who showed some skill and a commitment to conveying what contemporary rapper and producer KRS-1 has described as "ghetto street knowledge."

"The Message" shifted the Rap form toward a harder-edged lyrical content, introducing what eventually became a standard and dominating Rap discourse that maintained a pronounced ghettocentric sensibility. With "The Message," Rap's discursive focus extended the genre's thematic boundaries that were up to this point predominantly isolated in the conceptual loci of the party, nightclub or roller rink. Rap's spatial discourse was evolving toward a more intense and concentrated focus on the socio-spatial character of the city in general and the ghetto or inner-city spaces in particular.

Yet even with the introduction of a new spatially-oriented urban discourse and critical observations of city strife, the "party jams" did not simply disappear as the emergent Message Rap gained popularity. The two styles flourished in tandem, providing an interesting -- even sustaining -- counterpoint as well as an indication that the music as a form was capable of growth and diversification. As Roy Shuker observes, "like much subsequent rap, while 'The Message' is lyrically negative it is set to a compelling dance beat" (1994: 161). Of course, his comment points to the often ironic disjunctures between lyrical and rhythmic structures or between texts and their uses by audiences. The romantic notion that "The Message" was simultaneously funky and political (based partly in rave reviews by critics in the white music press who publicized it to white teen audiences) has its limitations based in other responses to its themes. For instance, Russell Simmons recalls an incident in the Bronx nightclub Disco Fever where the DJ Junebug was spinning "New York, New York" by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five:

⁴² For example, referring to the authority of voice and conviction of the lyrics, Kid of the Rap duo Kid-N-Play cites Melle Mel of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five as being the primary influence on his own decision to enter the music business (Rose, 1994: 54-55). The influence of previous rappers is commonly acknowledged in interviews and profiles in the pages of Rap-oriented publications.

This dude runs up to the DJ booth, smashed the record, then put a gun to Junebug's head, sayin', "if ya play that record again, I'm go'n kill ya. I don't wanna come in here *ever* and hear that record or you're dead." Junebug asked the brother if he was mad at Flash or something, and the dude said, "No. I'm just tired of hearing that ghetto shit". (Nelson and Gonzales, 1991: 204).

Still, "The Message" reinforced the viability of the Rap genre as a whole in both commercial and cultural terms, announcing a new depth and substance that many (predominantly, though by no means exclusively white) critics and observers had believed were absent and unlikely.

This discursive transition generated a new means for the articulation of social analysis and critique from a young black perspective. To enter into this particular analytic realm is to enter into what became known as Message Rap's evolving spatial discourse at a particular moment of its formation. While remaining mindful of Gilroy's cautions against critical reductionism that, as he suggests, transforms the world into text (1994: 52), the historical account of the music's evolution toward a new discursive frame provides a more concise understanding of how Rap developed and how certain subsequent subgenres, perhaps most notably Gangsta Rap, have acquired their contemporary social resonance. Therefore, as Gilroy warns, the analytical thrust cannot be located in the search for true or authentic textual meanings. In the interrogation of an emergent spatiality as a dominating issue in Rap, an approach focused on discursive tendencies can displace the usual mainstream assessments that tend to isolate more sensationalist (but by no means irrelevant) issues such as violence or misogyny within Rap content. Furthermore, it might also displace the common response among contemporary rappers that they are "simply" expressing the reality of the conditions and experiences in their micro-worlds.

As Frith explains, the study of popular music's lyrical forms can and should at some point be assessed for the ways that they function within language. Language operates at the inter- and extratextual levels simultaneously as a substantive element of the

song text and as a function of a broader economy of social meanings. Expressing this succinctly, Frith writes:

The pleasure of pop is that we can "feel" tunes, perform them, in imagination, for ourselves. In a culture in which few people make music but everyone makes conversation, access to songs is primarily through their words. If music gives lyrics their linguistic vitality, lyrics give songs their social use. (1988: 123)

Rap has been influential in popular terms as a commercial force in the music market but it has also been effective as a force for mapping affective and discursive space within the contemporary American cultural scene. Although it is not rare to hear that someone dislikes the sound of Rap beats, its "monotonous" rhythms or ground-shaking bass, it is the *words* of Rap songs that are most frequently the source of moral outrage and public calls for censure, if not outright censorship.

The condensations of African-American cultural traditions, merged with the resounding impact and influence of current social conditions of urban existence (neither one more than the other) provide the informing elements of Rap's varied discourses. According to George Lipsitz:

The popularity of hip hop reflects more than cultural compensation for political and economic domination, more than an outlet for energies and emotions repressed by power relations. Hip hop expresses a form of politics perfectly suited to the post-colonial era. It brings a community into being through performance, and it maps out real and imagined relations between people that speak to the realities of displacement, disillusion, and despair created by the austerity economy of post-industrial capitalism.
(1994a: 36)

The shifts in the discursive frames within Rap are therefore not solely of interest within a study of popular music texts or even within the study of Rap as a musical genre; rather, these shifts throughout Rap's relatively brief history should be seen as dialogical interventions in an ongoing, extensive dynamic of cultural interaction.

The urban scene which was centered in and around New York in the early 1980s provided the backdrop for the exploding Hip Hop culture but it was "The Message" that placed the emphasis directly upon the socio-spatial structures within which this culture flourished. Despite the fact that musicians such as The Last Poets, Gil Scott Heron, James

Brown, and Curtis Mayfield had earlier deployed politicized cultural discourses (within forms that merged social commentary and explicitly urban perspectives with Jazz, Funk, and Soul) or that Brother D and Collective Effort had released a "serious," politically-oriented Rap recording in 1980 ("How We Gonna Make the Black Nation Rise," [Clappers]), "The Message" offers a different form of cultural critique and urban emphasis. As musical and cultural precedents, these earlier artists frequently displayed a radical socio-political focus and voiced what were often poignant critical attacks on the injustices of American society. But their efforts were generally bound to an older political and cultural sensibility founded in an expansive counterhegemonic project involving nationwide social struggle that can be traced to the efforts of the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s and to the black nationalisms that were pervasive throughout much of the 1960s and early 1970s.⁴³

The primary distinction between Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five and the above-mentioned musical predecessors is generational. Rising rapidly as one of the most prominent groups of the New York Rap scene, Flash and his crew were able to redefine the style and content of the music by drawing on their ample abilities as leading-edge innovators working within an emergent musical genre. The group broke new ground in a form of expression that was becoming a crucial force in the daily lives of young black and Latino teenagers in the 1980s. This was the new music of black urban youth and as such it entered into the cultural antagonisms of difference whereby intergenerational distinctions, among others, attain particular meanings for young fans and consumers. Put quite simply, Rap was for kids and the earlier Soul and R&B was parents' music (although R&B, Funk, and Soul from parental record collections have made an impressive comeback via Hip Hop as have new stylings based on earlier R&B and Doo-Wop forms). "The Message," however, revealed that the kids weren't without a critical edge.

⁴³ For an interesting critical assessment of this period and after see Michael C. Dawson's "A Black Counterpublic?: Economic Earthquakes, Racial Agenda(s), and Black Politics," in *Public Culture*, 7:1, Fall 1994.

Flash's turntable dexterity and inventiveness also propelled changes in the way that Hip Hop rhythms were organized and manipulated (it was he who perfected and popularized precision needle-drop, phasing, and scratching techniques) while the MCs that made up the Furious Five (Melle Mel, Scorpio, Cowboy, Kid Creole, and Raheem) extended the scope of lyrical composition and forms of delivery. With the success of Grandmaster Flash and his crew and other Hip Hop recording pioneers, including Afrika Bambaataa and Kurtis Blow, the music was effectively publicized in a literal sense as it was made available and familiar to a growing spectrum of the overall teen demographic through a range of media.

Within the black music industry, the song also generated a renewed interest in the Rap genre. George (1992) points out that the "across-the-board acceptance" of "The Message" was an influential factor in the gradual erosion of the Rap market hegemony of Sugarhill Records as the single's commercial and creative success produced favorable conditions for the rapid proliferation of competitive upstart independent labels catering almost exclusively to Rap acts. Furthermore, the track's aggressive style with Melle Mel virtually spitting out the lyrics touched a chord among music critics and the record buying public. Its notable sales drew renewed attention to the genre among the recording industry's corporate "majors" which had not paid much attention to Rap up to that point. Although slow to recognize the commercial potentials of Rap, by the early to mid-1980s major record companies were beginning to explore Rap as a commercial venture.

As an indication of this development, a year after the release of "The Message" Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five had disbanded, with Flash, Raheem and Kid Creole signing with the major Elektra label where subsequent releases failed to match their earlier successes with Sugarhill. While the industry majors eventually acknowledged Rap's market potentials by hiring savvy A&R men and signing promising talent, their involvement in Rap mainly took the form of manufacturing and distribution arrangements with the smaller independents. This enabled black-owned production companies and

record labels to maintain greater control and autonomy over their operations at various levels including searching out new talent and expanding their label rosters while gaining access to an extensive national and international distribution system (which will be taken up in greater detail in following chapters).

The favorable consumer response to "The Message" was primarily based in the appeal of the song's lyrical content and vocal presentation. The main element of innovation was in its lyrical emphasis on the portrayal of an ostensible ghetto "reality."

It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder
How I keep from going under
It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder
How I keep from going under

Broken glass everywhere
People pissing on the stairs, you know they just don't care
I can't take the smell, can't take the noise
Got no money to move out, guess I got no choice
Rats in the frontroom, roaches in the back
Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat
I tried to get away but I couldn't get far
'Cause the man with the tow truck repossessed my car

(chorus) Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge
I'm trying not to lose my head
It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder
How I keep from going under

Featuring an angry narrative description of a swath of American city culture, "The Message" creates a montage of social scenarios that are set within a contemporary urban geography. References to several specific cultural indicators (such as TV sitcoms or well-publicized incidents) and to documented social issues help to locate the song in an historical present as the social scenarios and urban phenomena that comprise the song's thematic frame identify a decidedly contemporary array of conditions. This was important to the song's success and influence among the youth of New York at the time of its release since nowhere was the human damage and social devastation of late 1970s and early 1980s America more evident than in the city's borough of the South Bronx, home to Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five.

For many of Rap's urban consumers the imagery presented in "The Message" correlated with what was before them every day:

My brother's doing bad, stole my mother's TV
 Says she watches too much, its just not healthy
 "All My Children" in the daytime, "Dallas" at night
 Can't even see the game or the Sugar Ray fight
 The bill collectors, they ring my phone
 And scare my wife when I'm not at home
 Got a bum education, double-digit inflation
 Can't train to the job, there's a strike at the station
 Neon King Kong, standing on my back
 Can't stop to turn around, broke my sacroiliac
 A mid-range migraine, cancered membrane
 Sometimes I think I'm going insane
 I swear, I might hijack a plane

(chorus) Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge
 I'm trying not to lose my head
 It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder
 How I keep from going under

Citing the Bronx's desolation, Rose writes that "depictions of black and Hispanic neighborhoods were drained of life, energy, and vitality. The message was loud and clear: to be stuck here was to be lost" (1994: 33). This was powerfully reinforced and globally disseminated elsewhere in the 1981 film *Fort Apache, the Bronx*, starring Ed Asner and Paul Newman, which negatively portrayed the borough as an embattled war zone and its inhabitants as little more than savages.⁴⁴ Despite the fact that "The Message" also reinforces negative portrayals by reproducing a particular place-image of the Bronx and other black ghetto enclaves, it also helped transform Rap as a whole into a powerful cultural vehicle for the description of particular urban conditions of existence. Clearly, "The Message" dropped into the midst of varied social contexts (at the level of private and public consumption and aural apprehension, whether through home listening, radio broadcast or club play) but the link between the song text and its urban audiences is especially relevant. Its combination of engaged observation and palpable tension, frustration, and anger were central to the introduction of a new means of elevating social

⁴⁴ For a compelling and detailed overview of the filming in the Bronx and resultant community protest against the film's production and release, see Richie Perez. 1985. "Committee Against Fort Apache," in *Cultures in Contention*, D. Kahn and D. Neumaier, (eds.). Seattle: Real Comet Press.

issues of direct relevance to the many city-dwelling teenagers who were actively forming the foundations of the emergent Hip Hop culture.

The spatial impact of poverty and desolation cannot be denied but it is important not to lose sight of the fact that even though the origins of the Hip Hop culture and the music at its center are historically specific to the borough of the South Bronx, the myriad of social and cultural forces that impact on the spaces of the Bronx (or other "ghetto" environments) were not necessarily rooted there. The articulation of a youth-oriented ghetto consciousness and social commentary by Bronx-based rappers was a reactive response emerging in the late 1970s and early 1980s simultaneously with the downturn of black nationalist political influence and the rise of the national economic discourse of Reaganomics. "The Message's" lyrical references to "bum education" and "double-digit inflation" reflect failures on a grander scale. They pointed to the fact that prevailing promises of self-improvement and personal application that help form the cornerstone of "the American dream" (albeit with different inflections within white and black cultural enclaves) had been all but exhausted in the midst of more widespread structural erosion with its origins far beyond the boundaries of the ghetto.

"The Message" reflects a keen social awareness and familiarity with the myriad manifestations of ghetto impoverishment which were being gradually intensified under the Reagan government's conservative economic agenda at the time. The helplessness and sense of narrowed life options are unambiguously portrayed in the lyrics:

A child is born with no state of mind
 Blind to the ways of mankind
 God is smiling on you but he's frowning too
 Because only God knows what you go through
 You grow in the ghetto, living second rate
 And your eyes will sing a song of deep hate
 The place that you play and where you stay
 Looks like one great big alleyway
 You'll admire all the number book-takers
 Thugs, pimps, and pushers and the big money makers
 Driving big cars, spending twenties and tens
 And you wanna grow up to be just like them
 Smugglers, scramblers, burglars, gamblers
 Pickpockets, peddlers, even panhandlers

You say "I'm cool, huh, I'm no fool"
 But then you wind up dropping out of high school
 Now you're unemployed, all nonvoid
 Walking around like Pretty Boy Floyd
 Turned stick-up kid but look what you done did
 Got sent up for an eight-year bid
 Now your manhood is took and you're a Maytag
 Spend the next two years as a undercover fag
 Being used and abused to serve like hell
 'Til one day you was found hung dead in the cell
 It was plain to see that your life was lost
 You was cold and your body swung back and forth
 But now your eyes sing the sad sad song
 Of how ya lived so fast and died so young

(chorus) Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge
 I'm trying not to lose my head
 It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder
 How I keep from going under

"The Message" communicates a particular social perspective, illustrating that urban minority youth were not blind to the results of reduced spending on social services. They were not unattuned to the fact that assistance programs in American cities were either being slashed or eradicated completely, intensifying the damage for those of the economic "underclasses" who were already most in need. The essence of threat inscribed in the chorus, "Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge/I'm trying not to lose my head/It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder how I keep from going under," which has become a cultural touchstone in the history of Hip Hop, is encompassing in its scope. The threat is levelled at the local scale within the ghetto environment but also includes the wider, more amorphous American social system that reproduces the conditions of poverty and inequality on a larger scale.

In Steven Hager's assessment of "The Message," "the persona in the song was that of a typical South Bronx resident pressured to the point of desperation by his environment...Appropriately, the song that represented one of hip hop's finest moments described the South Bronx, the territory where hip hop began" (1984: 93). Despite Hager's assertion, however, the South Bronx is never mentioned by name although it is undoubtedly true that it provided the material conditions that inform the song's narrative.

As a site characterized as being dangerous and dilapidated in both myth and fact, the South Bronx symbolized contemporary urban decay, its streets and vacant tenements being "central popular cultural icons" (Rose, 1994: 33) signifying the worst imaginable conditions of existence. Yet while the home environment of numerous rappers may have provided the inspiration behind "The Message," the song is most compelling for its capacity to reproduce an abstract construction of urban space, rendering a general portrayal or representational composite from an array of descriptive images.

"The Message" does not present a picture of a specific place (i.e., the South Bronx) but reproduces an image-idea of ghetto space that is widely recognizable in the American urban context. This construction of ghetto space corresponds to Shields's (1991) notion of "marginal places," which are constituted as "sites for socially marginal activities" or as "zones of Otherness." In the spatial constructions of "The Message," the ghetto is reproduced as a site of poverty and human devastation through the mobilization of specific signifying traits (communicated through the narrative description of representational images of a particular social milieu and a corresponding urban environment). This is achieved along with the concurrent mobilization of a discourse of social spatialization which, as Shields notes, is formed within the tensions of spatial difference and the urban configuration of power, influence, and authority. According to Shields, place-images "are the various discrete meanings associated with real places or regions regardless of their character in reality...A set of core images forms a widely disseminated and commonly held set of images of a place or space. These form a relatively stable group of ideas in currency, reinforced by their communication value as conventions in a discursive economy (1991: 60-61). The accumulation of place-images consequently reinforces the foundation upon which socially accepted "space-myths" are structured, although such myths are a manifestation of historically specific phenomena and are constantly renegotiated, thus remaining in a continual state of flux and transition.

Spatial Constructs and the Urban Image in "The Message"

In "The Message," MC Melle Mel's chorus, with its reference to the jungle, mobilizes a common, even clichéd idea of urban dystopia. Theodore Gracyk briefly examines the use of the term, citing comments by John Lennon and Mick Jagger who referred to early Rock'n'Roll in terms of primitivism, tribal origins and jungle rhythms. Gracyk states that "the 'jungle label' must have been widespread, particularly in England with its colonial heritage...But the jungle idea is not just a British perception. It dates back to the earliest days of American rock: witness Warren Smith's 1956 rockabilly classic 'Ubangi Stomp,' and Hank Mizzel's 1957 'Jungle Rock'" (1996: 130). Addressing Rap aesthetics, Richard Schusterman states that the genre "can be traced back to African roots, to jungle rhythms which were taken up by rock and disco and reappropriated by the rap DJs -- musical cannibals of the urban jungle" (1991: 615). His argument then makes a questionable leap, shifting to a description of New York City ghetto spaces as if to close the circle between primitive Africa and inner-city America.

There are numerous instances of the mobilization of the trope of the urban jungle in various media contexts throughout the century. For instance, Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel The Jungle (N.Y.: Signet) portrays turn of the century Chicago and the urban terrors confronting European immigrant labor; Sidney Poitier portrayed a troubled ghetto teen in the 1955 MGM film *The Blackboard Jungle*; In The Autobiography of Malcolm X, Malcolm recalls his days as a young hoodlum in the streets of Boston and New York, writing, "for a hustler in our sidewalk jungle world, 'face' and 'honor' were important" (1966: 127); Bob Marley and the Wailers created a popular Reggae anthem of Rastafarian resistance with "Concrete Jungle" (1973, Island Records); The Four Tops' recording "Are You Man Enough?" (1973, Dunhill) which was featured on the soundtrack of the MGM "blaxploitation" film *Shaft In Africa* also draws this equivalence, referring to the threat, danger, and paranoia of urban life with the line "it's like a jungle outside the door." Invoking the concept of the jungle in music or literature is a strategic decision that seeks to

interrogate or expose society's sense of civic order and social propriety. The underlying implication is that in the ghettos of America's cities, the law of the jungle with its crude survival ethic remains a dominant structuring force influencing social existence.

The deployment of the discourse of poverty, struggle and survival in the urban jungle succeeds in contexts such as "The Message" not because it reconnects Rap with its African origins (which as Gracyk notes, is an enterprise of questionable ethnomusicological value). Rather, it is because it retains a familiar paradigm within which the song's elaborated narrative vignettes make sense. As a lyrical and narrative strategy, the implementation of the urban jungle as a metaphor for the black American ghetto effectively facilitates a broad, nation-wide comprehension of the imagery and urgency of the song. By operating within the discursive field of a social common-place that has achieved unqualified status as a "space-myth," the song is assumed to speak a certain, verifiable truth.

The metaphor resonates as well with the Melle Mel and Duke Bootee composition "Message II (Survival)" (1982, Sugarhill Records) released later the same year in which the chorus returns to the Darwinian ethic of the jungle when it suggests that "only the strong can survive." The limitations of the metaphor are apparent, however, and the simple yet provocative tensions between native primitivism and cultured civilization that it implies actually sustain racist stereotypes while failing to acknowledge the highly technical and sophisticated elements of Rap music itself. The trope of the urban jungle has certainly not disappeared, yet over time it has been usurped by other powerful metaphors and descriptive terms as subsequent message-oriented Rap songs moved toward more complex and detailed formulations of the city.

As a narrative construction of urban imagery, "The Message" features a strong story-line comprised of a series of gritty scenarios describing the city from the perspective of the urban poor who inhabit it. The image of urban ghetto space is carefully organized through an amalgamation of embittered references to sites and characters: the housing

project and the subway platform, the junkie, prostitute, homeless person, pimp, hustler, and victim of violent crime. The characters stand in for a range of cultural contexts according to perceived typologies that link certain social actors with discrete social spaces. This description of individuals of various castes produces a series of associations that infer particular spatial practices that occur therein (reflecting another dimension of space-images, representation and reputation, and labelling as outlined by Shields).

The song's narrative descriptions allow little room for positive agency as the characters portrayed are acted upon by external forces, cast as powerless monads which are unable to alter the negative effects of urban existence. The desperate warning of the song's chorus, "don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge/ I'm trying not to lose my head," reinforces the sense that, in the face of relentless struggle, individuals are pressed to the limits of their capacity to cope and their limited responses will almost inevitably tend to be violent and destructive. The question of control is formed as an internal, individualistic struggle since the outer spaces of the city remain beyond the scope of personal influence or power. This is a basic case of negative fatalism that displays a noticeable nihilistic undercurrent. There is no sense of an elaborative political project in "The Message;" there is no explicit appeal to collective action or expansive processes of coalition building here (although they exist in numerous instances within the actual community spaces of the urban ghetto) as the containment and enclosures of the ghetto space are framed as tensions impacting the human subject. Thus, the effort to maintain a sense of self and to exercise authority over one's personal destiny is depicted as one of the paramount problems of the urban conflict that are defined by spatial practices.

There is also an accompanying sense of constrained mobility as the musical and lyrical flow leads the listener through the distinct scenes of action. Shuker writes that the "interplay of synth. and sharp percussion initially sounds merely bouncy and unobtrusive, but as it goes on and on throughout the song -- some seven minutes in its extended play release version -- it starts to have a more disturbing and irritating quality, becoming a

metaphor for being trapped in the ghetto and tenement life" (1994: 161). In this interpretation, the rhythmic and narrative qualities meet in a mutually referential convergence while encoding a permeating tension within the recorded text. As the repeated rhythmic loop produces this closed tension, each verse introduces a new conceptual or imagined space, generally fluctuating between narrative representations of external, public spaces (the street, the subway) and internal, private spaces (the domestic spaces of the home or tenement apartment and, in the final verse, the desperate loneliness of the prison cell).

The lyrics reflect what Hager (1984) describes as "sharp, cinematic imagery," effectively communicating a sense of stratified (as opposed to homogeneous and undifferentiated) ghetto space. Through the arrangement of successive and mutually reinforcing images in the lyrical narrative, the social constraints are inscribed along an economic axis that locks individuals into negative and debilitating domestic situations. Even the sense of mobility implied by the music and lyrics in tandem is qualified and rendered as being compressed and restricted, reaffirming a notion of a bounded perimeter that cannot be easily breached.

Although "The Message" is hailed for its break from previous Rap styles and the adoption of a narrative structure with Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five being identified as the first prominent example of young urban griots, the song does not actually unfold as a story. It describes hypothetical scenarios and conditions that cohere in multiple sites, creating an accumulation of urban images that isolate and define several realms of social containment. Donald Warren's assessment of the social organization of ghetto environments has a particular resonance with the ghetto images in "The Message" when he writes:

Ghetto means complexity of group structure. It refers to a series of cultures (subcultures) existing side-by-side. Ghetto, if it has any significance as an abstraction refers to a pattern of compression, the capacity of many status groups in a restricted physical environment. (Warren, 1975: 26-27)

Each verse constructs a sense of space where the desperation and stress of poverty is uniquely felt and lived. The descriptive language conveys a graphic image of the underside of the urban environment, yet the organization of the verses also suggests that the pressures of economic disenfranchisement and urban stress are multiply inflected, affecting individuals differently in each social context. The shared or common elements of ghetto life that comprise the content in the song's lyrics conform to the containment and restrictions identified by Warren. The further description of numerous social practices that are framed within a ghettocentric worldview challenges the frequent tendencies to define economic oppression and social disenfranchisement in singular terms. This underlines the reality that class oppression is not monolithic but is, rather, a fragmented phenomenon experienced in numerous contexts as a complex set of relations.

While economic class and the social experience of poverty and need provide the dominant frame in "The Message," race is largely absent from the song's critique. Yet this suggests a point where the spatial *discourse* and the narrative *forms* of Rap and Hip Hop music effectively communicate an African-American cultural perspective. By reproducing aesthetic forms, discourses, and image-ideas that have evolved as common facets of African-American literary, artistic, and musical traditions, Rap lyrics need not be explicit in their racial emphasis to communicate a relatively unambiguous black social position. The thematic components of the song, however, are not beyond access by other cultural groups including white youths who have, over the years, been active consumers of Rap and have been influential in ensuring its commercial successes. Clearly, whites and other ethnic and racial groups also struggle within and against the oppression of poverty and disenfranchisement, although the spatial landscapes that the white and black poor call home are not necessarily the same. Describing his sense of locale and class structures, Ice-T notes that "the ghetto is set up like a concentration camp. The government has broken the system down to a series of financially segregated villages. South Central is not a black

community, it's a poor community. You live there because you're broke, not because you're black" (1994: 7)

Furthermore, the element of danger and threat that is clearly articulated in "The Message" falls within the long-standing economy of exoticism, thrill-seeking, and "cool" that has led many whites to enter into the representational -- if not physical -- sites of black expressiveness. This can be traced, for example, in the musical education of white Chicago jazz musicians such as Bix Biederbecke and Benny Goodman who ventured into that city's black and tan nightclubs in the 1920s. Later, this was evident in the cultural tourism of Jack Kerouac and the Beat Poets whose literary style and content was profoundly influenced by drug and alcohol-saturated forays into black jazz clubs across the country in the 1950s and 60s.

Reflecting on "The Message's" impact and influence for BBC television, Grandmaster Flash states that "as far as 'The Message' is concerned, all the records prior to that were frivolous, happy-go-lucky, party, let's get down...this particular record had to be created by somebody who lived in and understood urban America." The lyrics do not address issues of race and class within clearly racialized terms although the ghettocentric focus of the narrative and the discursive construction of American urban space, in combination with the funk and flow of the music itself, are firmly established elements of a particular black cultural expressive tradition, having been long reproduced in other artistic media such as the literature of Claude McKay, Carl van Vechten, Richard Wright or Ralph Ellison.

Grandmaster Flash's perspective on subjective locations and spatial authority is revealing of his understanding of the relations between people and places. His comment imposes an authority of voice that is spatially grounded and assumes that the speaking subject can accurately convey the underlying truth of the site of articulation. This is echoed as well by Kristal Brent Zook when she writes, "what was immediately clear about this cultural movement (which came to be called hip hop...) was that it expressed certain

sentiments that genuinely reflected the lives of working-class Black and Puerto Rican male youths in a way that the more romanticized disco scene, popularized by middle-class whites, did not" (1992: 257). The sentiment continues to this day with rapper MC Eiht stating "I just talk about the hood. That's just spittin' the real" (The Source, June 1994: 67).

While the question of veracity, experience, and their lyrical articulation remain part of a complex array of deeply embedded cultural issues, many Rap artists continue to speak of their capacity as cultural workers to express a reality of existence. As many will note, they narrate ostensibly "true" experiences within the social domains of black America or else they create fictional narratives that are grounded in these experiences and that are, thus, at least within the realm of possibility (a point I will take up later in my discussion of hardcore "Gangsta" Rap). Citing "The Message" as an example, Zook has written that "part of rap's streetwise edge came, undoubtedly, from the fact that most of its participants were from the 'hood,' that is, the neighborhoods of New York which required this edge for day-to-day survival, such as the South Bronx" (1992: 257). Although her use of the term "the 'hood'" enters into a particular spatial discourse that post-dates the period she is addressing, she accurately acknowledges the dual relationship between actual physical space and Rap's musical expressions of a spatial sensibility.

The music video version of "The Message" further reinforces Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's authority of presence by locating the band in a ghetto environment. The images of the group congregated on the street or on the stoop of a brownstone apartment unit add a complementary visual context to the lyrics and by intersplicing the group's performance with images of urban congestion or of poor and homeless blacks in the streets, the ultimate "message" that the urban economic underclass is barely functioning under the pressure of civic neglect is enhanced. Although the video received little play on the existing cable networks at the time, the single played at many urban format radio stations and received substantial attention in the music press. The uncompromising

commitment to the "realistic" representation of urban experience in "The Message" confirmed the outlaw status of the band (and arguably the Rap genre as a whole) upon its release, immediately winning fans across the color line who were growing increasingly disturbed by what many perceived as a political bankruptcy in American Pop music and Disco. This latter factor, however, also attracted the attentions of many critics who, seeking a waning politicization in Rock at the time, eagerly welcomed the arrival of the single as an ostensibly authentic expression of racial and class consciousness.

With hindsight, it may seem easy and perhaps obvious to isolate the ghetto imagery exploited by the band, but in the context of the period, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five were taking a bold step by reintroducing a series of unwelcome images of contemporary America through their recording and video. The song's huge success, which as Zook suggests was unquestionably related to the apparent "reality" portrayed by the lyrical and visual representations as much as the music itself, also served a function by opening the door for others to both exploit the trend or, in a less cynical view, to explore the relations between Rap and reality.

After "The Message": The Rise of a New Subgenre

"The Message's" emphasis on an ostensible ghetto *reality* and the *truthful* representation of urban space introduced a new standard form that evolved into a distinct Rap subgenre, the resonant impact of which can be traced in numerous recordings that followed its release. Describing this development, Toop notes that in this period a flurry of recordings of dubious quality were released in the attempt to cash in on the trend initiated by "The Message." He writes:

The contradictions of a money-minded craze for gory social realism and criticism of the Reagan administration, with its callous cutbacks in social programs, are hard to resolve. The juxtaposition of protests about rape victims with rampant machismo or hard-times lyrics sung by kids in expensive leather outfits and gold chains can be hard to stomach. (Toop, 1984: 124)

Toop raises an important point for the separate agendas of political conscientization or the elevation of cultural awareness and the commercial imperatives of the music industry are often conflicting and contradictory. The cleavage between progressive political intent and commercial opportunism was made evident when former member of the Furious Five, Melle Mel (with Duke Bootee) recorded and released "The Message II (Survival)" in late 1982. As an ill-conceived sequel, it bore considerable thematic resemblance to the original but added little to the evolution of a new subgenre.

The release of "Street Justice" (1983, Profile Records) by The Rake (Keith Rose) the following year offers a better example of how the rhythmic and vocal structures of "The Message" as well as its thematic content were further developed as the subgenre took root in the Hip Hop culture. Debuting on the Billboard Black Singles chart at number 90 on August 6, 1983, "Street Justice's" narrative closely resembles the general scenarios and vigilante revenge themes introduced by the films *Death Wish* (1972) and *Death Wish II* (1982), starring Charles Bronson. While the thematic influence of these films is evident, they are not the dominant referent for the song. "Street Justice" can be more accurately regarded as a response to Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message" as it works within the emergent story-based style while thematically addressing the potential consequences that can result if one is eventually pushed "to the edge," if one does "lose his head." The cartographic constructions of "Street Justice" and its demarcation of urban space are slightly more pronounced in their detail and are what ultimately identify the recording as an extension of the message-oriented subgenre that began with "The Message." Additional emphasis on negative elements relating to the interlocking influences of race, class, and generational differences also identifies forces within which the black ghetto experience is constructed.

Featuring a sinister, slashing rhythm track that builds an eerie suspension while an oddly melodic vibraphone riff provides a musical counterpoint to the lyrical flow and harsh vocalization, "Street Justice" displays a tonal similarity to "The Message." The Rake/Keith

Rose (who had previously been a backup singer for Dionne Warwick) has a deep voice that, while similar in range to Melle Mel's, is characterized by a steady, menacing calmness that is in contrast to the more boisterous party-oriented Rap of the Sugarhill Gang or the sharp attack characteristic of the Furious Five's ensemble-style flow. This vocal quality is a crucial accompaniment to the lyrical content which details the unravelling of calm and the eruption of hypermasculine violence in an orgy of revenge and retribution for the beating and rape of the central character's wife.

The justice of the title is described as something to be meted out with methodical control and dispassionate numbness. As an attitude, it is presented as being the byproduct of an ineffectual criminal justice system and the everyday stress and violence that regularly and unavoidably afflicts the American urban underclasses:

You can see it any night on the nightly news
 Some punks think they're big bad dudes
 Commit some crimes and power dues
 Those punks that think they're big bad dudes
 Don't serve a day, don't do no time
 They get away and that's a crime
 You call that justice, you call that fair?
 Now dig me brother, listen here
 The only way the workingman will ever get his justice
 Is on the street

(Chorus) Gotta meet the punk on the battlefield
 Gotta beat the punk
 Street justice
 Gotta meet the punk on the battlefield
 Gotta beat the punk
 Street Justice

The lyrics tap into the discomforting reality of systemic racism and unequal treatment for blacks in the American social justice system and rhetorically appeals to the listener's understanding that, in America, the minority population is frequently at a disadvantage and must often circumvent the system on a local or personal level for justice to be served.

Where "The Message" adopts the discourse of the city as a hostile jungle, "Street Justice" deploys a similar but more complicated discourse of urban class war with the chorus repeating the refrain "Gotta meet the punks on the battlefield/gotta beat the punks/street

justice." The battlefield is the undisciplined space — what the song refers to as a "no man's land" — that has been taken over by angry and violent youths operating according to the codes of the street. In keeping with the song's general thrust, it is these same codes (of power through aggression or of enforced authority and spatial dominance) that must be enacted if true justice is to be attained. The street as a conceptual space is cast as a primary definer of black ghetto experience; it is the connective construct that runs through the core of poor minority communities and throughout the 1970s and 80s its profile as a social site that is prone to risk and danger was further reinforced through representational images of "blaxploitation" films, Rap lyrics, and other popular media.

Told from The Rake's subjective position, the lyrical narrative describes an archetypal character in the central protagonist who is a responsible, upright family man with full employment, creating the aura of virtue that is eventually transgressed through raw human rage. The descriptive portrayal of common sites of social activity establishes the normative image-ideals of controlled domestic and public environments:

When I left for work I thought things were cool
 With the wife at home and the kids at school
 I walked down the street, got on the bus
 Put the coin in the box, in God we trust
 I'm a working man and I do my job
 I pull my weight and I work real hard
 For the things I have I have paid the price
 In sweat, in blood, in sacrifice
 I call that justice, I call that fair
 Now dig me brother, listen here

The track offers a brief descriptive segment that constructs the image of a particular kind of socio-spatial landscape:

I ran past the trucks unloading in the alley,
 I ran as fast as my legs would carry me,
 I ran through the streets of no man's land,
 burned out places where tenements stand...

Like "The Message" before it, the image of ghetto dilapidation is clear, but in this particular construction there is a pervasive emptiness that is in contrast with the relative fullness and cacophony of the various social settings described in "The Message." Hager's reference to

the cinematic qualities of "The Message" notwithstanding, "Street Justice" is much more explicit in its cinematic structuring, displaying a rational, carefully scripted flow that leads from one spatial scene to another (as opposed to "The Message" which constructs a series of spatially linked vignettes). The narrative in "Street Justice" is much more coherent and unified in a traditional sense than that of "The Message," but it, too, is organized around the description of several distinct social sites, demarcating a set of cultural territories such as the home, the workplace and of particular relevance to the song's title and theme, the contrasting spaces of the courtroom and the "street."

Unlike "The Message," the tension of the track's lyrical message is produced through the juxtaposition of conflicting generations and the assigned spaces they inhabit, in this case the relatively secure (and idealized) domestic sphere, the adult masculine domain of the workplace, the courtroom, and the comparatively lawless streets that constitute the war zone in the battle between adult respectability and unruly and indiscriminate teenage mayhem. Curiously, the song's lyrics express perspectives associated with the threatened and embattled adult even though its primary listening audience would more accurately be represented by the opposing teenage antagonists. Its critical commentary fails to fully engage with this intergenerational dissonance, however, opting instead for a spatially oriented commentary that is rooted in the distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate spatial practices and the social values with which they are laden. In "Street Justice" the ideal of mobility and escape from the ghetto is presented as an attainable goal that can be realized only through the traditional virtues of hard work and stable family relations. The conditions of ghetto society that are so negatively portrayed in "Street Justice" consequently emerge as an ongoing threat posed by teenagers to the normative forces of a capitalistic, parental, and patriarchal authority complex. There is no prevailing sense that joy and success can ever be achieved from within the ghetto itself. "Street Justice" adopts a conservative formulation of cultural values and political ideology that rejects the potentials for positive personal or community attainment within the neighborhoods of the inner-city.

Rather than following the structure of "The Message" which demarcates a variety of ghetto spaces through the mobilization of numerous place-images introduced in succession, "Street Justice" establishes a dynamic of spatial polarities that isolates the socio-spatial geographies and accompanying practices in a more clearly divisive manner. Still, the lyrics do more than just establish the settings and the polarities, for they also enter into a conservative socio-spatial discourse that defines a repertoire of weighted values that are then attributed to each space along the social spectrum. In this regard, where "The Message" constitutes an attempt to engage with social disparities from a relatively radical and politically progressive position, "Street Justice" reflects a reactionary impulse.

As in the *Death Wish* films, the rap tale in "Street Justice" appeals to the notion of urban frontier individualism as The Rake indicts both the unjust legal system and violent black ghetto youth as being twin elements of threat and constraint, the former exerting its negative force from above while the latter rises from below, from the outlaw underground. The lyrics construct an image of the black working poor who are trapped between these twinned elements which, vice-like, press in on them without relief. Yet the contradictions in the song's morality tale are rife since the problem and the solution are presented as being virtually identical. Justice denied through legitimate means is attained as a result of an autonomous outlaw act. The conveyed message is supportive of illegitimate practices of unaccountable vigilantism while denying the values of, amongst other options, the appeal to community activism and collective mobilization. The potentials of radically empowered organization are evacuated from the text and the lyrical prescription for violent retribution and revenge maintains an apparent commitment to black-on-black violence. This raises a questionable model for agency and action that, despite being presented as a satisfying solution ("...and finally I saw justice served"), can only undermine neighborhoods and communities if actually enacted.

The core of the song -- its message -- is revealed in the passage portraying a conversation between the father/husband and a "brother cop" in the aftermath of a violent

and brutalizing home invasion by young ghetto "punks." This conversation between two black men, "brothers," introduces multiple distinctions between positions of "us" and "them" that hinge on the complicated notion of racial fraternity⁴⁵ and the accompanying values of employment and social propriety versus lawless criminality (with the aforementioned generational tension between adults and youths). These multiple social loci also represent actually existing social antagonisms between blacks and whites, economic haves and have-nots, and between the popular constructed images of justice in America and the less optimistic perspectives of those who inhabit the bottom rungs of the social ladder:

Well the next thing that happened was the cops arrived
 This brother cop comes and pulls me aside
 And says "brother, I'm sorry" and he looked real sincere
 "Now dig what I'm saying, make sure you read me clear
 For you this here is something that is terrible and cruel
 But it ain't no exception, it's more like the rule
 Go to the precinct and you know what they'll say
 This happens here twenty-four hours a day
 No one was killed, ain't no big deal
 Some lady was raped but her scars will heal
 Let's say, brother, that we catch the punk
 And you take him to court and all that junk
 Think about it brother, think about it good,
 this here ain't like Hollywood,
 we're living in the U.S. of Hypocrisy,
 where the innocent pay and the criminals go free...

The reference to Hollywood draws attention to the image machinery of the American film industry and sarcastically scoffs at cinematic tendencies toward "the happy ending." More interesting is the "here" of the passage, for it is posited as a locus of truth that stands in contradistinction to the fictional and correspondingly artificial spaces of the cinematic world. Despite its negative portrayal as an unburnished sphere of fear and danger the ghetto is also constructed in this context as a privileged space that can be defined as a zone of authenticity or reality. This claim is more easily defended by pointing to the apparent artifice and superficiality of either Hollywood's images of America or to racialized and

⁴⁵ For an examination of the limits of the trope of kinship among citizens of the black diaspora, see Paul Gilroy, 1992. "It's a Family Affair," in *Black Popular Culture*, Gina Dent, ed. Seattle: Bay Press.

class influenced perceptions of the artifice of other primarily white social landscapes such as the suburb.

The apparent conflation which posits ghetto zones of experience as zones of lived authenticity continues as a factor in Rap music and Hip Hop culture and is ultimately founded on a highly charged set of racial and class distinctions that adhere to a socio-spatial logic. It simultaneously merges blackness and poverty with the locus of authentic black identity, circumscribing difference not only in relation to middle-class whites who inhabit other zones of experience but in relation to blacks who have managed to successfully "get over" in terms of professional and economic mobility.

"The Message" and "Street Justice" present two very different expressions of ghetto reality with each subscribing to distinct modes of articulation that maintain a spatial emphasis within the lyrical arrangement of place-images and locational scenarios. They are exemplary of the emergent message-oriented Rap that became a standard of the genre with their differences illustrating the divergent ideological positions that have continued as the subgenre developed. Describing the political shortcomings of the subgenre, Ernest Allen, Jr., writes that "overall, the message tends to portray, in vivid and urgent terms, the contours of existing social breakdown, and in the best of cases may offer a vision of a new and more just way of life. But all too frequently these youthful assertions of social identity and envisioned social order degenerate into a malevolent disparaging of other groups..." (1996: 180). The tendency among many critics and commentators to conceive of Message Rap as a relatively progressive form at this stage of its emergence misconstrues the strong conservative and reactionary strands that were also evident at its inception. As an outgrowth of Message Rap, "Reality" Rap, which emphasizes a conceptual connection with real situations and actual places, gradually evolved into one of the genre's dominant forms, engendering "Gangsta" Rap that is today among the genre's most controversial and commercially successful facets.

Rap's Emergent Specificity

With the new focus on symbolic and discursive representations of ghetto authenticity following Message Rap's rise as a distinctive subgenre, the music's narratives began to display an enhanced emphasis on the portrayal of actually existing social landscapes. This resulted in a shift away from the description of abstract or fictional geographies toward the naming of specific spaces and places that is today the norm. In its initial phase, this process tended to reinforce the centrality of New York as the "true" home of Rap and Hip Hop. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "New York, New York" (1983, Sugarhill) offers an illustrative example of the emergent spatial component. Released in the spring of 1983, the song eventually climbed to number seventeen on Billboard's black singles charts and was, after "The Message," the group's most commercially successful single.

Already fully acknowledged as the source of the expanding Hip Hop scene, New York was frequently cast as the backdrop or setting for much of the lyrical content in message-oriented Rap. Again, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five influenced the trend, consolidating the pattern of naming specific places and further validating the group's identity at the time as the consummate New York City rappers. Although the title promises a strong emphasis on New York, most of the track's lyrics adhere to the discursive forms established with "The Message" and "The Message II (Survival)" before it by featuring an array of generalized scenarios and urban vignettes that could refer to locations in any large city. Tacking between detailed descriptions of urban individuals, urban structures, and the spatial practices of a complex and difficult city life, "New York, New York" focuses on the city's pressure and a resultant sense of isolation, paranoia, and powerlessness. Alienation and anomie emerge as the dominant themes of this dystopian place-image and there is an accompanying world-weariness pervading the lyrics. Despite the abstract and fictional images that constitute much of the song's spatial narrative, the title and chorus return the

emphasis to New York itself, reinforcing the source images of this particular urban landscape:

New York, New York, big city of dreams,
 But everything in New York ain't always what it seems,
 You might get fooled if you come from out of town,
 But I'm down by law and I know my way around,
 Too much, too many people, too much,
 Too much, too many people, too much...

Here, the inside/outside distinction is apparent, as is the notion that an insider's perspective is privileged and therefore closer to the actual "truth" of the place. The idea that outsiders cannot expect to see and know what lies behind New York's urban facade is introduced by situating the Furious Five as individual field reporters (or, less likely, tour guides) who each "knows his way around." The discourse of reality evident in the chorus is a marker of reliability that is grafted onto the rapper who, as the speaking subject, knows the "truth" of the city that remains invisible to those whose origins lie elsewhere.

The twinned factors of experience and location are introduced here in oblique terms, but they remain discernable. The assertion is that, over time, we become experts on our environment and are subsequently capable of knowing the "truth" behind the images constituting the popular terrains of everyday urban life. This rather modernist view retains the notion that there is in fact an underlying truth that can somehow be isolated and apprehended, but it also indicates that space is stratified and that there is a varied economy of place-images that convey multiple meanings for individuals of different social positions or who occupy different social spaces. The strategy in "New York, New York" is to construct the terms upon which the speaking subject and commercial artist, who are one in the same, can be relied upon as a valid reference, as one who is capable of leading the listener toward a set of images that best represent his sphere of social "reality." Although this discursive strategy is common practice in contemporary Rap, it was not yet the norm when "New York, New York" was released, making it an overlooked benchmark in the development of Rap's spatial discourse.

Although much of the track's lyrical composition constructs a narrative that is mostly consistent with an earlier spatial format describing abstract, unsourced sites (i.e. "the urban") the stress on "real" places emerges with particular clarity. Specifically referring to Greenwich Village and Forty-Second street, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five introduce actually existing or knowable sites that are already heavily coded with social significance -- the very reference to them evokes certain images of their "social content" or the practices that have earned them a reputation. Of the two references, the one relating to "the Village" is by far the most compelling in the context of the entire track:

Down in the Village, you might think I'm silly,
 But you can't tell the women from the men sometimes,
 They're sugar and spice and everything nice,
 But when you get 'em home ain't no telling what you'll find...

Here, the transgender and tranvestite culture that is common to the gay district in and around Greenwich Village is referenced as a cultural fact of this particular locale even though it is only one, highly visible facet of the area. Isolating this set of localized images as part of the representative or definitive place-image is not particularly inspired or insightful, straying into the realm of cultural stereotyping while reinforcing negative spatial reputations. It remains effective as a site reference in this context, however, because of its status as a verifiable image that conforms to the strategy of articulating reality-based messages. The verse also reconnects in a subtle way with the hook which, as I mentioned, introduces the dichotomies of insider vs. outsider and the experienced city dweller vs. the tourist as rube.

The surface deception of the cross-dressing male may or may not be part of the tourist's cultural capital and the scenario of revelation exists almost as a popular urban myth perpetuated by knowing urbanites who reaffirm their own sense of superiority at the expense of less experienced suburban or rural folk. The masculinist and latent homophobic sentiments that underscore the references to transgener and tranvestite presences also provide a problematic cultural coding of what a "real" woman -- or man -- is. Finally, the image of transgender display portrayed as a knowable fact of "the village" consequently

takes on the added form of a metaphor for New York where, in the dystopic visions of the Furious Five, the message is ultimately that due to a myriad of complex cultural mediations all surfaces are suspect and nothing is what it seems to be.

By 1984 Rap's stylistic and thematic trends began to change as did its commercial prospects and industry role. The Rap of the following period, between 1984 and 1987, retained its emphasis on spatiality and themes of a grounded reality although these characteristics of the genre were reworked as the music was produced in regions beyond New York and the northeast seaboard and began reaching new audiences. In the following chapter, the industry factors that facilitated Rap's growth and development in this period will be examined in order to more vividly illustrate the convergent influences on the music's spatial expansions.

Chapter 5

Industry Geographies and Rap Expansions

In Rap's growth and expansion as a popular musical form throughout the 1980s there exists a recurrent geographical and cultural aspect that remains at the forefront of its history. As the newest and most influential form of black musical expression to emerge in the decade, its development is relatively easy to track, yet the means by which its position in the music industry was established are more obscure. Much of the music industry is based upon distinctions that to varying degrees encompass geo-cultural considerations, with marketing and promotional strategies and sales monitoring being broken down into national, regional, and local sectors and demographic data being geared towards the production of character profiles and purchase patterns of consumers in their respective home areas. Additionally, Rap's evolution has been marked by internal transformations in sound, style, and theme that in many instances can be directly credited to localized cultural inflections that inform a sense and image of place as pockets of production activity have sprung up throughout North America.

Rap's rise in the industry should not be seen as a simple achievement or a result of natural evolution in the market, for to do so would elide the processes of the music business that at different junctures either constrained or elevated the genre. For instance, Tricia Rose suggests that Rap was exposed to powerful appropriative mechanisms that were motivated by an insidious profit imperative. She writes that after the 1979 release of "Rapper's Delight," Rap music was exposed to the recuperative influences of the media and fashion industries, "each of which hurried to cash in on what was assumed to be a passing fad" (1994: 3). Rose is generalizing here, since it is obvious that industries do not act as either monolithic or self-guiding entities. What's more, the industrial expansions of Rap were frequently engineered from within the Hip Hop culture as Rap was deliberately

merged with the larger industrial operations of the respective media and fashion institutions. Through specific maneuvers within existing commercial mechanisms and industry practices, Rap has become a nationally recognized form with considerable market impact (not to mention its accompanying social impacts). What follows is an attempt to add specificity to the general trends influencing Rap's evolution and to isolate and assess several of the more pertinent factors affecting Rap's industry growth and market expansion in a manner that illuminates the geo-cultural elements of the genre and provides a socio-spatial analysis of its history.

Before embarking on this particular analysis, however, mention should be made of the primary source for much of what is included here, namely Billboard magazine. As the commercial music industry's main trade magazine, Billboard's influence is substantial. It is where emergent trends in terms of both aesthetics (i.e., elements of sound or genre) or issues relating to the business of locating fresh talent, producing, marketing, distributing, and performing music are noted and where general industry shifts (both large and small) are announced, discussed, and monitored. It covers music's placement across the media -- recordings, radio, video, and performance venue -- and measures the rise and fall of sales with careful attention to regional detail. Finally, Billboard is influential in defining genres and categorizing musical forms through its extensive chart system, reproducing an informing system upon which the wider industry and audiences alike can gauge and compare sales of songs, albums, and artists.

While Rap's emergence and development as a regular facet of the music industry were reported in the magazine throughout the 1980s, Nelson George, who was the Black music editor for seven years, exerted significant influence as a supporter of the genre. He chronicled America's Black music for most of the 1980s, the decade in which Rap matured. He also had the added benefit of a weekly column, "the Rhythm and the Blues," through which to praise or castigate cultural workers in the Rap scene and where he regularly drew insightful connections between Rap and the wider array of black musical

forms and practices. Other writers have also covered Rap at the magazine at various times. Robert Ford, Jr. wrote several key articles in the late 1970s and Janine McAdams replaced George as The Rhythm and the Blues columnist in mid-1989. Havelock Nelson was appointed columnist of The Rap Column which debuted on Feb. 1, 1992. Following in the tradition of James A. Jackson, who in 1920 became the first black reporter to cover black members of the music and theater industry for a white trade journal with his Billboard column "J.A. Jackson's Page,"⁴⁶ George provided a point of focus for industry attention on black music as it underwent numerous transitions.

Rap journalism is rarely taken into account within academic or historical studies on the genre and nowhere is George's writing at Billboard referred to and yet his was the most consistently applied voice within the industry's own news organ.⁴⁷ Writing about her research on Rap for the influential book Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America, Tricia Rose describes her use of Billboard to "trace rap's appearance on the black music charts. I couldn't believe that this music that seemed so local, so particular could capture the attention of so many people around the country" (1994: xii). It is undeniably necessary to review these charts in order to understand Rap's entry and rise in the music industry and also to gauge it in relation to other styles and genres in a corresponding period. But ignoring the editorial reporting that framed the chart action misses much of the internal industry analysis at the time, analysis that helps to explain and contextualize the chart figures and to illuminate some of the commercial means through which Rap did eventually "capture the attention of so many people around the country." The charts don't always speak for themselves and the Billboard writers were also explaining this new and unfamiliar music to industry executives, interpreting its significance while defining it within the wider industry.

⁴⁶ For a detailed history of Jackson and his term with Billboard, see Anthony Hill's "A Voice for Black Performance," in Billboard: 100th Anniversary Issue, Nov. 1, 1994.

⁴⁷ During his tenure at the magazine he also co-wrote Fresh: Hip Hop Don't Stop, (Nelson George, Sally Banes, Susan Flinker, Patty Romanowski. 1985. New York: Random House.), a Rap primer aimed at a general audience that remains a valuable source of information on the New York Hip Hop scene up to 1984.

As Simon Frith observes, critics' claims about a music's relative value -- as being either "good" or "bad" -- are also linked to issues of authority or, more precisely, their "public sanction" to state opinions authoritatively (1996: 9). For Frith, the role of the critic is a unique and uniquely powerful one. The critic is more than a simple mediator but, through various means of selection and assessment, he or she is also a fully functional arbiter, deciding publicly what should or shouldn't warrant attention, despite the frequent and often vocal disagreement of fans. Yet Frith is primarily addressing the issue within a prevailing antagonism between fans and critics. Billboard, however, is not a fan-oriented magazine, standing in stark contrast to popular music publications such as Rolling Stone, Spin, or The Source. The question arises, then, as to whether the critic's role changes in the case where the critic, reviewer, or inside reporter is not so much addressing the wider public but, rather, is writing for, to, and about the industry itself.

I would argue that this factor does change the relevance of the writer's position since the authoritative voice is articulated within a corporate space, closer to the domain where industry strategies for expansion are enacted. The stakes are quite different in this context than they are, for example, where a popular music magazine aimed at a more general readership is concerned. As an industry spokesperson for the the Hip Hop culture, George and the other Billboard reporters on what can be termed the Hip Hop "beat" were able to establish the relational qualities of Rap as part of an evolving tradition of black musical aesthetics, defining its characteristics in terms that responded to the prevailing values and expediencies within the music industry itself. Billboard's Rap coverage therefore provides a valuable set of documents for a more thorough understanding of how the industry perceived the emergent genre from a commercial and corporate vantage point and how Rap's expansion was either hampered and enabled at various stages.

Locating Sugarhill Records

Following the initial success of the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" in 1979 and several hit recordings by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five between 1980-1983, Sugarhill Records was at the forefront of the Rap music industry. Its reputation as the first label to record and distribute Rap successfully suggests that it was a crucial force within New York's Hip Hop and B-Boy scene at the time, functioning in a key role at the epicenter of the exploding culture that encompassed the triad of Rap, breakdancing, and graffiti art. Yet Sylvia Robinson, a black business woman and the main force behind the label's foray into Rap, remained a relative stranger to the club and street scene where Rap was tried and tested.

This is graphically rendered in an early article on Hip Hop featured in Rolling Stone (May 26, 1983) where Robinson is photographed in the opulence of her "twenty-two room home in Englewood, New Jersey" while artists including Grandmaster Flash, the Cold Crush Brothers, Sequence (who were all on the Sugarhill label at the time), and DJ Starsky are pictured in nightclubs such as Disco Fever and The Roxy where Rap was regularly featured. Her familiarity with industry operations and her marketing and promotional savvy proved to be indispensable, however, as the label quickly capitalized on the "freshness" of the music by committing the emergent genre to vinyl in the commodity form most favored by DJs -- the twelve-inch single -- and subsequently selling directly to small and mid-sized record retailers and DJ shops in predominantly black neighborhoods in New York, New Jersey and elsewhere along the east coast. With the recording of "Rapper's Delight," Sugarhill Records changed the trajectory of the New York-based Hip Hop scene and a new commercialism was introduced that lifted the music out of the localized cultural enclaves within which it had been gestating for several years.

In terms of locale and Rap's outward growth, S.H. Fernando, Jr. recounts the story that, in various versions, is now a standard facet of Rap's popular lore:

Rap's sudden explosion from the underground occurred quite accidentally, when Sylvia Robinson, a former singer and co-owner of the Englewood,

New Jersey-based Sugarhill Records, heard one of these bootleg tapes and decided to make a rap record. A club bouncer named Hank was rapping along to a performance by rapper Grandmaster Caz while working at a pizza parlor near Robinson's home. Immediately intrigued with what she heard, she approached Hank about being the third member of an outfit she was putting together called the Sugarhill Gang. (Fernando, Jr., 1994: 12)

This account reveals the disparities between generations and between socio-spatial locations within the music scene itself as it grew into a more commercially lucrative form. Sylvia Robinson stumbled onto Rap in her own neighborhood and heard something that made sense to her in business terms and she then assembled the group, rather than tapping into a pre-existent performing unit. The corporate manipulation of talent is not unprecedented in popular music but it reveals a lack of consideration for the integrity of the emergent form and for the pioneers who were nurturing its development. Henry Jackson (or Big Bank Hank as he became known) was responding to something he was hearing on a regular basis while working and partying in New York's uptown clubs although, like Robinson, he was more of an interloper than an innovator. Between these two positions were those artists in the uptown boroughs who were composing and performing the music without concern or thought of the commercial potential or wider appeal that Rap might have. They were actively carving reputations for themselves within the localities of their home boroughs and neighborhoods and within the limited spaces of leisure and pleasure that were available to them as ghetto teenagers.

Rising Hip Hop DJs who worked in and around the club and concert scene maintained a close connection to "the street," monitoring the continual shifts and producing cassette tapes on a weekly basis that reflected the transitions as they occurred. Somewhat later, producers such as Arthur Baker (Gwen McRae's "Funky Sensation," Afrika Bambaataa's "Planet Rock," and "I.O.U." by Freeeze as well as the *Beat Street* soundtrack) continued this tradition by taking new tracks to mid-town clubs (most frequently The Fun House in Baker's case, where John "Jellybean" Benitez was the house DJ) to try them out with the DJs and the audiences: not coincidentally, Baker's production company was called Streetwise.

These distinctly local geographies are of course interrelated through the mobility of performing artists, audience members, and producers and have overlapping influences yet there remains an undeniable effect of spatial variation that facilitates or encourages different practices within each separate domain. In this stage of its evolution, Rap was highly influenced by its connections to neighborhoods or to the boroughs in which it was being performed and enjoyed as an increasingly central leisure option. In terms of scale, Rap was primarily a local phenomenon with local impact but it was expanding in ways that connected diverse localities, presenting unifying results (the extension of a more cohesive, city-wide Hip Hop "scene") as well as conflict (based in neighborhood and inter-borough competition and combat among sound system DJs, break dance crews, and graffiti artists).

Sugarhill Records attracted many early Rap artists through its initial willingness to take a risk on the new music when few other labels would and, following the success of "Rapper's Delight," because it was the biggest and most recognizable name in Rap recording. The label's investment in recorded Rap was quickly rewarded even though many of the artists on the label's roster did not see the royalties they were due. Even with the label's successes, Sylvia Robinson was ultimately disadvantaged by her professional distance from the scene, a factor that inhibited her capacity to stay abreast of new and breaking artists and styles and complicated her capacity to knowledgeably assess their skills and talents. Even Sugarhill's New Jersey-based operation was a source of scepticism among many in the midst of the New York Rap scene; in the early days when the Hip Hop culture was still isolated primarily in the Bronx and Harlem, New Jersey was perceived by "insiders" as being outside of the loop or beyond the scene and, so it was reasoned, adult label executives based there couldn't possibly comprehend Hip Hop's rapid changes as the music evolved from week to week in New York's uptown boroughs. Despite their initial surprise (and displeasure) at the fact that a Rap song had been produced and released by individual's affiliated with Sugarhill who were at best only peripheral to the simmering scene, many of the Rap artists and DJs who were most active in the genre's development

were impressed to hear "their" music on radios and in clubs in recorded form for the first time.

The struggle among Rap artists and producers in cultural terms was not rooted in the issue of whether or not Rap should be economically channeled or remade in commercial forms. It was already moving in that direction as early as 1978 through the steerage of local promoters booking multi-act shows throughout the Bronx and Harlem or Rap artists themselves who, adhering to the "DIY" ethic, often enjoyed brisk sales of self-produced cassette tapes sold without the benefits of formal commercial merchandising or distribution apparatuses. The issue, then and now, involves questions of artistic and financial control: who can legitimately represent the business side of the music and what are their connections to the scene in general? In this light, the first Hip Hop practitioners displayed a certain proprietary logic that was ghettocentric in its geo-cultural composition and Afrocentric in terms of its generally applied core racial identity. In its earliest stages of development and emergence as a popular musical form, Rap was situated as a black music, made for and by black (and Latino) youths who lived primarily in America's urban environments. As white label owners, producers, and musicians gradually entered the scene and as the music was targeted toward new commercial markets and shipped to broader regional and national audiences, defining the music solely in terms of an African-American context became more problematic.

There is a latent connection here with the economic visions espoused in 1920s Harlem through the Garveyist movement which was founded on the commitment to keep the wealth in the black community, although "community" in this contemporary instance does not singularly revolve around race and a shared African heritage (or the kinship ties to which Gilroy [1992] refers). After the Funk and Soul musics of the 1960s and 1970s had been diluted and mass marketed to increasingly white audiences⁴⁸ many black youths were

⁴⁸ Noting the ways, for example, that Disco became identified with and fell under the purview of the predominantly white jet-set crowds associated with clubs like New York's Studio 54 or the manner in which the Motown songbook was repositioned as the soundtrack to depictions of white nostalgia in the Lawrence Kasdan film *The Big Chill*.

of the mind that Rap was theirs and, as such, was something worth protecting.⁴⁹ Addressing the threat of culture industry appropriation, Tricia Rose locates Rap within a tradition of black musical forms and styles which have been created according to African-American cultural contexts and later "discovered" by capital interests and the wider (i.e., white) public. She sees parallels between 1950s and 60s Be Bop and 1980s Rap, in each case identifying examples of corporate maneuvering and commercial exploitation of black popular music. Rather than assuming a singularly detrimental outcome, she suggests that these industry machinations have the potential to engender new forms of cultural resistance:

The process of incorporation and marginalization of black practitioners has also fostered the development of black forms and practices that are less and less accessible, forms that require knowledge of black language and styles in order to participate...In addition to the sheer pleasure black musicians derive from developing a new and exciting style, these black cultural reactions to American culture suggest a reclaiming of the definition of blackness and an attempt to retain aesthetic control over black cultural forms. (Rose, 1994: 6)

This notion of ownership and possessiveness in relation to the multiple facets of the Hip Hop culture is consequently related to the particular logics of authenticity that slowly emerged in Rap's discourses following the release of "The Message" and numerous other commercial releases. As the ghetto has been articulated as the privileged site of authentic black experience, Rap has gradually been imbued with a similar character, as the authentic soundtrack to contemporary black *youth* experience. The thematic influences of ghectocentric signification effectively reinforce the relations between "inner-city" space and "inner-city" youth. This connective line is traced along an axis of authenticity of experience and cultural identity that have, with few exceptions, proven difficult for white artists (and major record companies) to appropriate to the same extent as earlier forms such as R&B or Rock'n'Roll.

⁴⁹ For a description of this proprietary logic in practice, see Nelson George. 1992. "Rappin' with Russell: Eddie Murphying the Flak-Catchers," in Buppies, B-Boys, Baps and Bohos: Notes on Post-Soul Black Culture. New York: Harper and Collins.

Within the geographies of difference and exclusion that are informed by multiple relational factors, the Hip Hop culture demonstrated tendencies toward the privileging of insider status. This has included a corresponding ingrained suspicion of outsiders who were perceived as exploitive opportunists seeking to subvert the art and culture of ghetto youth according to their own corporate economic interests. In a relatively unambiguous sense, this is a product of geo-cultural "othering" but one which runs in the reverse of the dominant social systems of othering that generally position black and Latino youths as the undesirable Others. The locales of the ghetto and the dynamics of age, race and class initially cut the music and its primary producers off from the collective social mainstream. This had the effect of reinforcing the underground marginality of the music in relation to the wider industry while, simultaneously, contributing to the notion among many ghetto and urban youth that this was, in fact, "their" music. Thus, while the designation "street" music that was later grafted onto Rap by industry executives had a certain marketing utility that was alternately derogatory and romantic, among many Rap artists, "the street" became the official source of the music's authenticity and cultural value, its marginality functioning as a protective factor in its formative stages.

David Toop describes eager middle-aged entrepreneurs, among them Bobby Robinson of Enjoy Records and Paul Winley of Paul Winley Records, who heard Rap and, despite their disconnection from the core activities of the scene itself, were well-positioned to see its effects and to gauge its commercial potential. Toop writes:

With Sugarhill proving that there was a new market for streetcorner sounds, the old-time entrepreneurs dusted off the ancient contracts and moved in...The early records are confusing, partly because they transferred a sound-system-based music onto disc and partly because some of the artists were recorded not so much for their talent but because they happened to hang out down the block from the record company. (1984: 100)

The local role and status of record producers was an important factor in this early developmental stage of Rap. Rap's origins, once removed from the parks and street parties, remained closely bound to New York's black communities. Even after "Rapper's Delight" began attracting wider industry attention (as articles in Billboard reveal) virtually

every record label working in the genre was black-owned and operated. Even as the music developed formally and expanded its range of public dissemination, it was inscribed and shaped by a conjunction of localized cultural forces that were anchored in the black neighborhoods of New York City. This prevailing connection to black community influenced Rap's creative and innovative evolution *as well as* inhibiting the speed and manner in which it was commercially exploited. Although this aspect of the business was subject to radical change over the next several years, in its earliest stages the revenues and returns earned with Rap stayed mainly within the black community.

Before "Rapper's Delight" began its ascent on the black music and pop charts it was spinning in the roller rinks, discos and dance clubs in New York that were mainstays of the night scene for young blacks and Latinos. Sugarhill Records had a well-established distribution system in place at the end of the 1970s that serviced the black retail and consumer sectors throughout the U.S. This distribution network was extremely important in the success of "Rapper's Delight" since the label was able to reach a wider market spectrum. Of further relevance, Sugarhill was able to meet wholesale and retail orders with relative efficiency (which can be uneven among small indie labels). Shortly after its release the track could be heard throughout North America and it soon appeared as a regular selection on Billboard's "Disco Action" club-play charts that featured the choice DJ selections that were garnering regular play in dance clubs across the U.S. and Canada. There was little thought at this point of packaging Rap in LP album format since few acts had sufficient material to fill an album (and keep it interesting) and, as many industry insiders believed, the music was too "new" to the ears of mainstream America to warrant LP release. Even after the initial success of "Rapper's Delight" major record labels maintained a casual wait-and-see attitude toward Rap.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ In the February 16, 1980 issue of Billboard (pg. 57-59), an article entitled "Rap Records: Are They Fad or Permanent?" poses the question in terms of market sustainability. The article ultimately fails to adequately respond to the question, instead offering an overview of the development of the genre and a brief account of current activity among independent record labels which are building their Rap rosters.

Sugarhill Records released a full length album by The Sugarhill Gang consisting of an uneven compilation of singles in an attempt to exploit the success of "Rapper's Delight" but the release was commercially inert, charting only briefly on Billboard's Soul LPs chart. The distribution of early Rap twelve-inch singles within predominantly black urban communities reflected the prevailing assumptions about Rap's consumer audiences and where they lived. The interconnections between nightclubs and music outlets catering to black neighborhoods and communities offers an important geo-economic nexus that facilitated Rap's rapid growth and dissemination among black and Latino teens as well as adventurous white teenagers (a group which has, incidentally, been under-analysed in terms of consumption and listening patterns pertaining to Rap music⁵¹).

Despite the fact that between 1978 and 1982 Rap spread at a steady pace throughout metropolitan New York it was still primarily considered within the industry as a regional phenomenon, produced by Northeastern artists for Northeastern audiences. While several releases attained hit status that indicated wider popular appeal based on nation-wide sales and club play, there was no corresponding indication of a fully developed scene within which the music could be located beyond the East Coast. This is illustrated, for example, in a 1983 Billboard article that refers to a positive consumer response to recordings by New York-based artist Kurtis Blow that enabled him to perform in California "where rap had never had that much impact" (May 28, 1983: 50). It should also be noted, however, that Blow was uniquely positioned within the Rap industry at the time since he was signed to a major label, Mercury Records, providing access to a larger promotional budget that would have included expenses to cover his appearances throughout the country. Few of his contemporaries enjoyed the benefits of major label affiliation and their careers were subsequently constrained due to restricted promotional budgets and virtually no tour support.

⁵¹ One article addressing this phenomenon can be accessed in David Samuels's article "The Rap on Rap," The New Republic, Nov. 11, 1991. Samuels attempts to account for the broader implications of white youth consumption of Rap, however, by basing most of his analysis on only the most hyper-masculine, racist, and aggressive examples within the genre.

This reference to Rap's lack of pronounced influence in California stands as an important temporal marker and helps to establish a more precise time-line for its geographic expansion across the nation and to dispersed regional markets. In some cases, Rap was disseminated through patterns of migration between the East and West coasts and other locales with records, tapes, and the B-boy persona circulating as part of the regular human flow between different zones. Brian Cross's (1993) detailed study of the Los Angeles Rap scene describes the early influence of established New York Hip Hop DJs who had migrated to L.A. to work on various other projects in 1982-83.; the significance of Radio (an all-ages club that became the official home to the emergent L.A. Hip Hop subculture); and infrequent appearances by important trend-setting New York acts. Cross explains that, before 1983, access to new material was severely restricted on the West Coast:

Much of the early or old-school hip hop was recorded on independent labels (Uni, Sugarhill, Enjoy, Tuff City) which were hard to find. This lack of access led to the development of a split in LA hiphop between those that had access and those who stayed with the electropop and West coast funk. Those on the street who had access generally had it through New York relatives or friends. (Cross, 1993: 21)

As this suggests, the informal mechanisms of social mobility and geographic perignations throughout the U.S. were still the primary means through which Rap was disseminated. In its commercial infancy, it was still generally considered by industry executives as being too marginal to be realistically considered for national distribution which, as Cross suggests, stilted its growth while producing interesting cultural and stylistic cleavages that, in retrospect, have created a more diverse range of Rap subgenres.

Sugarhill's legacy lies in the fact that it introduced the nation at large to a recorded version of what was occurring with great vitality in and around the Big Apple. It provided the impetus not only for others to enter the commercial fray at a higher level of involvement but it also motivated a nation of young black and Latino teens to integrate the sartorial and discursive styles of Hip Hop into their own lives according to their own regional and local contexts. Sugarhill's reign over recorded Rap spanned roughly from 1979 to 1983, although the label's later influence was mainly based on the commercial might of its most

enduring acts, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five and Grandmaster Melle Mel (who stayed with the label after the group dissolved). In this period, numerous other labels (most notably Tommy Boy Records and Profile Records) entered the industry on a competitive footing as they began mining the rich vein of Rap talent in New York's uptown boroughs.

With the advent of a more entrenched and established industrial infrastructure, Rap's influence was gradually extended beyond New York and the northeastern seaboard. Sales of recorded Rap slowly escalated through the years 1982-1984 and Rap appeared on Billboard's black music charts with increasing regularity. In this phase, Rap periodically crossed over to the pop music charts as the genre continued to post consistent sales figures despite its constraining image within the industry as an "underground" music or novelty. It is significant to note, however, that the concept of crossover itself underwent a transformation in this period with the massive success of Michael Jackson's "Thriller" (1983, CBC/Epic) and Prince's *1999* (1983, Warner) and *Purple Rain* (1984, Warner). Commenting on this general phase of Hip Hop's evolution, Reebee Garofalo wryly states that "more than five years after the subculture had come into being, hip hop was 'discovered' in turn, by the music business, the print media, and the film industry. Though the first wave of the movement had long since peaked, hip hop was accorded all the flash of the new 'in thing'" (1990: 112).

On the same theme, but suggesting a subtle and pertinent geographic emphasis, Nelson George explains that a combination of separated circles of activity and enterprise and the overbearing rigidity of the corporate music world blinded the major labels and contributed to their slow acknowledgement of Rap's artistic and commercial potentials:

The New York-based talent scouts were so office-bound, taking meetings with managers and listening to tapes from song publishers, that they failed to venture up the road to Harlem and the South Bronx where, in the middle of the nation's most depressing urban rot, something wonderful was happening. Because the big boys were asleep at the wheel, rap would spend most of its young life promoted and recorded by independent labels run by hustling entrepreneurs. (George, 1989: 189)

The rapid proliferation of small, independent labels (such as Enjoy, Jive, Profile, Select, Sleeping Bag, Streetwise, Sugarhill, Tommy Boy, and Tuff City) catering to the growing Rap consumer audience helped to establish the institutional structures within the Hip Hop culture for discovering and promoting new talent and for distributing artist's recordings, although this was eventually aided through the interventions of major labels which provided the necessary distribution apparatuses to ship the music nationwide.

Headlines in Billboard reflect some of the developments influencing Rap at the time. Covering the Rap beat, Nelson George described the emergence of a new Rap-oriented production sector ("Rap Disks Open Doors For New Breed of Producers," June 5, 1982: 10) and the following month an article appeared under the headline "Indies Keep Rap Product Popping: Despite Sales Slowdown, Genre Maintains Steady Profile" (July 17, 1982: 6). In these instances, the fact that Rap was almost exclusively under the purview of independent producers within the industry is explicitly acknowledged. In a special review of the state of the black music industry throughout 1984 and the first half of 1985, Billboard reported on the central role of independent labels in Rap's artistic and commercial development. Appearing under the headline "Indies Stake in Street and Third World Music May Prove a Goldmine," the magazine described a situation in which "independent labels fathered rap, a genre whose timely arrival created a new piece of the market pie for indies when the majors stepped heavily onto the dance floor in 1983" (June 15, 1985: BM 2).

While minor independent recording labels explored the developing genre and carefully nurtured its growth, the major labels still maintained a cautious distance with the exception of Mercury records which had signed pioneer Kurtis Blow who had an early hit with "The Breaks" (1980, Mercury) and quickly became one of the genre's first reliably bankable stars. Even as late as 1985, there was surprisingly little direct major label involvement in Rap. Profiling the success of the Boogie Boys release "A Fly Girl" (1985, Capitol), Billboard reported on the irony that, "the fact that this catchy rap record made the black top 10 is not as surprising as the fact that it's on a major label, Capitol Records."

The article quotes Capitol's Vice-President for Black Music Promotion, Ronnie Jones, who states "most conglomerate labels haven't gotten into rap because they don't have the tools — that is, street people with the knowledge of the market to work it properly" (Sept. 28, 1985: 63).

The competition among small labels to push artists and recordings into the spotlight led to numerous skirmishes in the struggle to establish market superiority. Indeed, it has been speculated that Sugarhill's desire to dominate was so intense that the label indiscriminately signed as many artists as it could in an attempt to take the competition off the streets and to ultimately corner the market on New York's most viable Rap artists. Among the artists themselves, the earlier form of inter-borough market competition framed within territorial struggles between *DJs* and their sound system crews was being rapidly replaced by a new zone of competition as the core site of conflict was refocused on the studio. With recording, the desire to beat other artists and to be first with a single in retail outlets and clubs became a dominant motivation among artists. Record contracts and club or radio play became a new symbol of Rap supremacy.

The spatial dynamics of the Rap scene were dramatically altered as the recording studio rose as a central site of cultural labor and production, displacing the parks or street parties and emerging alongside the clubs and concert stages as the main places where Rap was performed. Describing the impact of the shift to recorded Rap, Afrika Bambaataa states that "everybody was nervous. It took the excitement away. We didn't have the parties. Everyone could go out and buy the record" (George, 1993: 50). Grandmaster Flash also describes the transformation of the scene, noting that the emphasis on extended DJ performances was disrupted by the new celebrity status that recording brought to artists: "the street thing flipped. Like one DJ would play eight different clubs in one night and not really have an audience anymore. You lost your home champion because there was nobody there. I personally would like to have stayed away from records a little longer" (ibid.).

The reference to the loss of a "home champion" reinforces the point that, with recording, Rap's foundational structures that had previously been linked to neighborhoods or select nightclubs and which were organized around localized territorial affiliations experienced an erosion that undermined the connectiveness between Rap DJs and MCs and their originary locales. Artists became public figures in a broadly elaborated sense who had responsibilities to a wider constituency -- hence the taxing demand to perform throughout the club circuit in a single evening or, as Cross notes, the draw of performances in distant cities that, again, undermined the strong local identities of the more prominent acts. These changes also reflect the lucrative economic dimension that arose fairly quickly as Rap's popularity expanded and DJs (and MCs) could command appearance fees from each club for their brief performances.

The competitive stakes between independent labels rapidly intensified in this period as the music became an established facet of the black music and pop charts. An example of this is the dispute in 1983 between Sugarhill and Tommy Boy Records over Keith LeBlanc's "No Sell Out." The rights to the record were contested by Sugarhill which claimed proprietary authority based on the fact that LeBlanc was employed as a session musician at the label and the song's producer, Marshall Chess, was manager of a division of the Sugarhill label, Chess Records. In the end, a court decision awarded Tommy Boy the rights to the single and the record's release subsequently boosted Tommy Boy's industry profile as Sugarhill's dominance was challenged and diminished.

In the rush to capitalize on Rap's commercial potentials, the hegemony of black-owned labels was also undermined as numerous white producers including Arthur Baker (Streetwise), Aaron Fuchs (Tuff City), and Tommy Silverman (Tommy Boy) entered the business. Although lingering resentments about this development prevail⁵², in many instances the Rap scene in general may have benefited from their involvement as numerous

⁵² See "Hip Hop's Founding Fathers Speak the Truth" in which Nelson George discusses Rap's formative years with Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash, and Kool DJ Herc (*The Source*, Nov. 1993, no. 50, pp. 44-50).

white-owned labels became important players in Rap's elevation in the music industry. It should also be stressed, however, that the systemic racism that was (and arguably remains) rampant throughout the industry at large undoubtedly played a part in the capacity for white-owned labels to secure a foothold in the industry. It is difficult to assess the extent of the phenomenon, but many among them were able to establish distribution and marketing arrangements with major labels in a manner that strengthened their positions in relation to black-owned and operated "street music" competitors.

Harmonizing Rap and the Music Industry

With Rap's continuing entrenchment within the industry there was a corresponding refinement of its definition according to the range of industry categories. This period saw the rise of many of the dominant descriptive terms and a general terminology developing around Rap and the youth subcultures from which it emerged as a plethora of independent Rap-oriented labels introducing new artists and material were formed. For example, Billboard's writers and other industry spokesmen often used the terms Rap and Hip Hop interchangeably when referring to the genre, eventually settling on the cultural/spatial descriptor "street music" and "street labels" in 1984 to describe Rap and its independent producers. The irony of this is that the music was actually moving away from the production and performance domains of the street at the time. Despite its spatial orientation, the term "street music" was not singularly linked with source descriptions of the music's urban geographies. Rather, it was coined in the attempt to isolate and identify a particular subgenre of the wider catalogue of black music (that was itself eventually designated as "urban music" in radio formats) which, as Keith Negus observes, places it "not on the margins or bursting out from the periphery but central to development of the practices and aesthetics of the contemporary music industry" (1997).

Urban or black music generally encompassed a wide range of black musical styles and musicians that included harder Funk-based units such as George Clinton (and his

various bands), Bootsy Collins, Gap Band, Graham Central Station, Cameo, Fatback, or Kool and the Gang; mid-range Funk, R&B and Soul artists that might include the Ohio Players, Rufus and Chaka Khan, the Commodores, and Earth, Wind and Fire; and Pop-oriented artists such as Michael Jackson, Prince, Lionel Richie or Tina Turner. The latter were crossover artists but several "white" groups including Culture Club, Hall and Oates, and Michael McDonald attained "reverse crossover" success, appearing on black music charts and black radio playlists with increasing frequency.⁵³ As a distinguishing term, street music as it was employed at this stage referred exclusively to Rap.

Negus notes that there is a spatial dichotomy that arises when the market term "street" is presented in spatial contrast with the domain of "the executive suite:"

..."the street" operates as a metonym for a particular type of knowledge which is deployed by executives throughout the music industry; a type of knowledge which legitimates the belief which maintains that rap *is* and *should be* outside the corporate suite...One consequence is that this maintains a distanciated separation of experiences which contribute to the ongoing reproduction of the broader economic, cultural and racialized divisions across which r'n'b and rap have been and continue to be made.

(Negus, 1997)

This is an accurate reading of the deployment of the street designation, for it fully grasps the relational implications of the industry's structures in which senior black executives are rare and black artists are numerous -- and lucrative. Beyond Negus's explanation is a secondary level of meaning that, in practice, formed the basis of the industry's public articulations of space and race. The term's descriptive value draws on an economy of meaning focused around an image of the ghetto. As an industry market designation, "street music" implicitly refers to elements of rawness and urban intensity which ostensibly constitute the "real" or true locus of cultural production for many black and Latino youths. As such, it resonates with the problematic and arguably racist themes of authenticity that identify black youth exclusively with inner-city or ghetto environments. In basic terms, the industry's use of the trope of the street involves the recirculation of existing stereotypes and

⁵³ The phenomenon of "reverse crossover" caused considerable consternation among many blacks in the business. For a discussion of the issue at the time, see the special section on "The World of Black Music" in Billboard, June 16, 1984.

assumptions about urban experience while effectively demarcating the music in relation to other musical forms and genres. It remains, however, that in the early stages of its entry into the recording industry, Rap's musical identity was constructed through discursive processes of spatial othering that isolated the music and its creators within a zone of difference, reproducing exclusionary and biased socio-cultural practices that segregate minority youth from the social mainstream.

"Street music" was used to simultaneously accommodate the racial and spatial dimensions of young consumer demographics, radio formatting, and the presumed taste distinctions upon which they were based. This emergent lexicon within the music industry also provided terms that reveal generational distinctions since "black" and "street" also indicated certain consumer delineations, with the former referring to a general black audience formation or consumer group including adult consumers of Soul, R&B, and Funk and the latter referring primarily to an urban youth segment within the larger black formation. As such, it is also part of fragmentive discourse, one that sections off segments of urban and black constituencies and separates them from a larger mass consumer bloc, introducing a discursive division among black consumer audiences as well.

Foremost among the difficulties in harmonizing Rap with dominant industry practices was the major labels' general unfamiliarity with the music and the scene which spawned it and their slow start in developing distribution deals with the smaller labels and in signing new talent. If the distance between New Jersey-based Sugarhill and the vibrancy of the uptown/Bronx-based Rap scene was regarded by some artists as being a hindrance to the music's growth, it seemed clear that the major labels had an even less proximate relationship to Rap's "street" sources (as Capitol's Ronnie Jones acknowledged). The majors failed to fully grasp the significance of Rap's popularity among black and Latino teenagers, ceding the responsibility of locating new talent to the independent labels and, consequently, forgoing the rewards. Similarities can be drawn with conditions in the recording industry of the 1920s when independent "Race" records

dominated the lucrative market for blues and some forms of jazz or with the 1950s when an array of small enterprising producers capitalized on R&B and, later, the Rock'n'Roll phenomenon well ahead of the majors. George Lipsitz identifies a convergence of race and class-based characteristics in this phenomenon, noting that:

Before RCA's purchase of Elvis Presley's contract from Sun Records in 1955, the major studios ignored the music emanating from working-class neighborhoods, leaving the field to the more than four hundred independent labels that came into existence after the war. Existing outside of corporate channels, the smaller firms in working-class areas produced records geared to local audiences, especially in minority communities. (Lipsitz, 1990: 138)

The larger commercial labels initially ignored these musics until their commercial viability (enhanced by increased wealth among minority populations and growing interest among white audiences) could no longer be denied, a pattern that was generally reproduced with Rap.

As Russell Simmons, founder of Rush Productions and co-founder of Def Jam records, stated in Billboard, "I don't think the major record companies understand this music. The a&r people there are old" (April 20, 1985: R2). According to Simmons the major labels missed the opportunity to exploit Rap's potentials, allowing independents to define the market and its product. Simmons also offers an interesting opinion on why he believes older blacks rejected Rap at the time:

Why don't some people like rap? It's too black for some people and too noisy for others. It's like the first wave of rock'n'roll or like heavy metal today...it just so happens that the best rap music is probably the most offensive to adults, especially black adults. Rap reminds them of the corner, and they want to be as far away from that as they can be. (ibid.)

The geo-cultural logic underlying this explanation is compelling in its racial and generational assumptions for the statement once again falls into the complex conflation that merges youth, blackness, and the street into a symbiotic whole that is representative of some innate authoritative identity. What Simmons perceives as the rejection of Rap by older blacks due to their incapacity to understand and enjoy it is constructed as a cultural shortcoming on their part: that it is expressed within a culturally mapped geography of

difference illustrates yet another of the "sites" in which cultural elements including taste are problematically rationalized within terms of spatial exclusion.

The "corner" to which Simmons refers is a metaphor of considerable weight, for it is constitutive of a socio-economic boundary demarcating the point from which middle and upper class blacks depart on their economic sojourn of "getting up and getting over." By April, 1985, a graphic representation offered a telling interpretation of Simmons's "corner:" appearing in a Billboard special tribute to his Rush Productions agency was an image of street signs reading Rush Productions and Profile Records. Next to this was the slogan "the corner, where the hottest sounds on the street, meet." For Simmons, the "corner" was also a source of black identification, ghetto authenticity, and a new site of vast commercial potential that facilitated *his* upward economic mobility.

Rap introduced a marketing dilemma for the industry majors that was initially avoided *en masse*. Their reluctance to work with the genre was a reflection of the tendency among major label executives to either approach Rap as a passing fad or to consider its primary consumers as an insufficiently large or economically empowered sector to warrant their investment. Most early Rap was popularized through the informal modes of word-of-mouth hype, club play, or live performance. Sales were often poorly tracked and monitored and the circulation of bootleg tapes made it difficult to gauge consumer interest from a commercial perspective. Neither white youths or black adults initially showed a large or favorable response to the genre at its inception: the music's core audience base consisted of minority teens from urban communities and, for many major label executives, this demographic was perceived as being among the poorest and most economically repressed in the nation. Furthermore, the persistence of novelty recordings by comedians such as Rich Little ("President's Rap," 1982, Boardwalk), Rodney Dangerfield ("Rappin' Rodney," 1984, RCA) or Joe Piscopo ("Honeymooner's Rap," 1985, Columbia) did little to strengthen Rap's reputation as a legitimate and sustainable genre.

Pop radio was largely cool to Rap and black radio was indifferent at best (despite reports illustrating the massive appeal of "street music" when it was programmed on urban formats⁵⁴). Prominent exceptions were New York's WBLS (and several low-wattage or campus radio stations extending from Long Island to New Jersey) which regularly programmed Rap and Los Angeles AM station KDAY which shifted to an all-Hip Hop format in 1984. In each of these cases, Rap programming helped to focus the local scene and in L.A., KDAY became a central cultural influence on the growth and development of West coast Rap, playing the newest records by New York artists and helping to break local acts. Despite MTV's growing presence as a staple of home cable (growing from roughly 2.5 million homes in 1981 to almost 30 million homes in 1986), Rap fell outside of the network's narrow programming definition of Rock music.

Since the emergence of MTV on the American music and entertainment scene coincides with Rap's first stage of development, it is appropriate to consider their relations. According to Philip Brian Harper (1989), the establishment of black artists, including Michael Jackson or Prince, as mainstays among white teen consumers was enabled by MTV's begrudging addition of their videos to regular rotation. Run-D.M.C.'s video for "King of Rock" (1984, Profile), which features a humorous portrayal of Rap's bumrush on an imaginary Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame, did enter the network's video rotation but this should be expected since the track falls more easily within the stylistic parameters of Rock classification than did most of Jackson's material at the time. Describing MTV's reluctance to screen videos that failed to meet the network's rigid format requirements, Harper writes:

Unlike "commercial" television, whose appeal to financial backers is based on its ability to "broadcast" programs to the widest possible audience, the MTV of the early '80s banked on its ability to target a sizable yet necessarily homogeneous viewership, an audience whose affinity for "rock music" -- that difficult to define entity -- is only one of its demographic traits; it is also relatively young -- 12-34, predominantly male, and overwhelmingly white.

⁵⁴ In a special section on "The World of Black Music" appearing in *Billboard*, Harry Weinger reported on crossover trends on stations featuring Rap, writing: "There is a noted increase in the white audience's acceptance of contemporary rap and funk as the grassroots efforts of Tommy Boy and Profile Records pounded their way into the mainstream...the suburban spread of rap and the new found life of the war horse ballad form bode well for artists and programmers alike" (June 16, 1984: BM4-BM10).

MTV's development of narrowcasting policy was *necessary*, to a large degree, because, as late as the early '80s, cable television was available primarily in white rural and suburban communities. (1989: 112).

A generation of white listeners who, as the network's popular ad campaign suggested, wanted their MTV, remained generally underexposed to Rap through the exclusionary practices of cable music television apparatuses at the time. Yet as the restrictive definition of "Rock" was loosened to include first black music and, later, Rap, MTV also quickly became instrumental in the popularization of the genre among diverse audiences, enhancing the rate of its popular dissemination across geographical distances and cultural divisions.

As Rap or "street" music became more prevalent, its rhythmic and vocal nuances also were appropriated by numerous top Pop acts (i.e., Michael Jackson, Chaka Khan or Prince) which had easy access to both Pop and urban radio formats. As a result of the influence of what Nelson George in 1985 described as the "the beat box generation," crossover patterns were regularly upended with the more radio-friendly Rap-oriented releases often breaking on Top 40 radio *before* they received play on black stations. MTV was also influential in this pattern, since videos proved to be influential catalysts in the acceleration of single releases among non-black teen audiences. This was a reversal of normal trends in establishing hits by black artists that reflected the black establishmentarian resistance to the genre that prevailed among radio programming directors. As Nelson George explained in Billboard:

Until recently, there has been some curiosity, but little enthusiasm. A profound generation gap between the black promotion and a&r men at the majors and the younger people making this music has stifled its movement into the black mainstream -- but, surprisingly, not its access to white buyers. (Mar. 30, 1985: 57)

Music industry executives-- both black and white -- were initially stymied by an unfamiliarity with the Rap market which, from their perspective, made the genre seem less predictable and, thus, a less attractive option for investment.

Since they couldn't comprehend its potentials or understand what motivating forces were driving the market, they remained dormant. Many successful black executives in the

music industry were focused on the still-lucrative returns to be garnered from more established Soul and Pop acts or in developing new talent within these genres. Rap was quite literally foreign to many among them, if not necessarily in a cultural sense, in commercial terms. It had no commercial history and no established patterns and there was little intense market research that focused on Rap's main consumer demographic or its community locales.

Yet, as Reebee Garofalo writes, generational difference was only one factor involved in black radio's stubborn refusal to promote Rap:

Black radio has often been caught between "rock" and a hard place in the struggle for viable listenership. But in these instances, black stations were exhibiting a reluctance to play cuts that were clearly outselling other selections on their playlists. Beyond a simple generation gap, the split between rap and other forms of popular black music may also be an indicator of the increasing importance of class divisions within the black community. (Garofalo, 1990: 114)

Radio program directors acknowledged the success of Rap and its sales potentials but argued that advertisers were generally less interested in the stations' capacity to deliver audiences from the urban minority teen demographic. This demo segment simply fell outside of the radio and advertising industry's "preferred" audience profile. In retrospect, however, the reluctance to playlist Rap was shortsighted for, despite having less economic spending power per capita, the black and Latino Rap audience had sophisticated consumer tastes. Their active desire for, and consumption of high-end commodities, in combination with their influential role as cultural trend setters among the teen population, made them an excellent target demographic. It is only in more recent years that the advertising and corporate worlds have acknowledged this, providing another example of corporate misassessment of the Hip Hop culture's potential impact.

With major labels servicing the priority requirements of the nation's mainstream radio outlets, independent labels had greater difficulty in reaching them and introducing their product for consideration, further reducing their material's exposure to wider markets. In addition to this, long before the late 1970s the majors had organized their operations

according to a set of marketing principles that favored the Rock and Pop genres. Dance music was regarded as being less durable, less "serious," and single-driven and, by the early 1980s, album-length releases (which tend to have an extended chart durability) received much more corporate thrust in terms of publicity and marketing support than did singles (which have minimal chart durability). Dance music was also more closely associated with the creative artistry of the producer than with musicians and although Rap featured DJs and MCs as the musical focal point of the genre, in its infancy there were simply too few notable "star" names for the industry to back. Rap subsequently blurred the definitional boundaries, falling between the Rock and Dance genres and the major labels misperceived the contexts of its performance and use which, until 1983-84 generally favored singles or cassette tapes. The resulting lack of certainty was yet another contributing factor to major label and radio broadcasters' reluctance to embrace the Rap genre.

In a 1980 article appearing under the headline "Value of 12-Inch Single From LP Questioned" (Feb 16, 1980: 51), Billboard describes industry differentiation between Dance-oriented singles for club play and those that were released for album promotion mainly at radio. Citing a bottom-line economic rationale, company spokesmen explained that if an album had the likelihood of selling without additional support in the form of a single pre-release, then the single was perceived as an expensive redundancy, especially since FM radio programmers often selected several cuts from an album and many DJs preferred choosing an album's "hit" songs themselves.

The combined factors of Dance music's continued influence among black teenagers in the early 1980s and the emergent innovative role of Hip Hop DJs reinforced the supremacy of the twelve-inch single in the Rap genre and, consequently, the earliest recordings were *only* available in this form. The twelve-inch single's advantage as the main commodity unit effectively coincided with the cultural practices of club DJs who, collectively, constituted one of Hip Hop's primary consumer groups. Their role in

introducing and popularizing the emergent genre was crucial and with discos still being immensely influential in the establishment of dance hits, the club DJ occupied a central position in the flow between artists, producers, and audiences.

By the late 1970s most major labels had recognized that they had missed the opportunity to capitalize on the explosive Disco craze, allowing several independent labels such as Henry Stone's Miami-based TK Records (featuring KC and the Sunshine Band) and Neil Bogart's Casablanca Records (which elevated Donna Summer to Disco diva status) to dominate. Despite their early reluctance to work with Rap, in the early 1980s the majors were gradually returning to the production of twelve-inch singles in an attempt to recapture market shares that had been lost to the smaller independent Disco and Dance-oriented labels. This resulted in a glutted market for twelve-inch releases and threatened the independent labels whose product was also destined for club play and whose main sales volume was in that format.

In June, 1984, a *Billboard* Spotlight on "The World of Black Music," noted that "twelve-inch disks continue to play a major role for black retailers. The big difference in '83 was the strength of 12-inch releases by the majors and in-roads by pop artists into the once exclusively independent, urban dominated configuration" (June 16, 1984: BM 12). In a cover story the following month, *Billboard* reported a growing nervousness among independent labels as majors increased their production of twelve-inch singles:

A glut of product and increasingly conservative club DJs are combining to give major labels the upper hand in the 12-inch single market...The street-sharp independents who invented the 12-inch game are finding themselves with a shrinking field. (July 28, 1984: 1)

Larger and more established independent Hip Hop labels like Profile, Streetwise or Tommy Boy which had confirmed their status and their product (or their "street" *and* industry credibility) were not as vulnerable to the major label onslaught despite having to offer greater incentives and more lucrative contracts to rappers. Nonetheless, these conditions led Tommy Silverman of Tommy Boy to voice his concern that the major label incursions

could reduce the already minimal independent label share of the twelve-inch market from approximately 5% to 2%.

Due partly to industry perceptions of Rap's localized or regional popularity, it was deemed as being inconsistent with the dominant methods of handling Rock or Pop musics. For somewhat different reasons, it was also thought to be inconsistent with the general industry approaches to mainstream black music or Funk that, in fact, reached many of the same audiences which purchased Rap. Prior to 1984, Rap singles were generally regarded as isolated products -- one-offs -- that were marketed according to each single's saleability and commercial appeal. There was little effort or interest in developing artists beyond the next "hit" or of creating a commercial demand for an individual artist or group's extended work. The few existing Rap "stars" were still judged on their capacity to survive from single to single although some, such as Kurtis Blow and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, had gradually transcended these constraints based on the respectable sales of their recorded singles prior to 1984.

Phillip Brian Harper explains that Billboard's influential "Rock Tracks" chart also revealed an implicit devaluation of black music's history and importance in relation to white Rock:

The implication is that a "rock track," though technically a single song, is part of a larger artistic work comprised in an album and that, although for airplay purposes singles must be used to represent the whole work, the album ought not be dissected into its constituent songs if one is to appreciate the artistic integrity of the whole. This, apparently, is not true of the other categories for which singles charts are published, and certainly not for "Black" songs, which evidently do not cohere as conceptually integrated albums, and thus are easily charted as discrete "singles" whose rise up the charts is always contingent and anomalous. (Harper, 1989: 116)

This general emphasis on singles and hits in the industry was both a benefit and a hindrance to Rap: on the one hand small labels could, with one successful release, generate substantial sales and revenues with which to finance further projects and expand their operations, especially since singles were much less costly to produce, manufacture, and promote. On the other hand, it constituted an obstacle against which independent labels

and their artists struggled since albums were regarded by the industry as an indicator of greater cultural value, importance, and "seriousness."

An example of this dichotomy is illustrated by the case of Profile Records which was founded in 1981. The 1982 release of "Genius Rap" by Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde was made for \$750 but the single sold over 150,000 copies and actually kept the label afloat through the following year. In 1983, Run-D.M.C.'s "It's Like That/Sucker MCs" became the label's biggest seller and effectively underwrote the production of the group's first full-length album *Run-D.M.C.* which was a benchmark in Rap's history and which boosted Profile's role in the industry as well as the career of the genre's fastest rising act. The label's release in 1984 of Run-D.M.C.'s second album, *King of Rock* confirmed the group's superstar status primarily as a *Rock* act and proved definitively that with proper handling, Rap could be successfully recorded and packaged in the LP format. This success, engineered by the production team of Rick Rubin and Russell Simmons, navigated the prevailing market and format demarcations and was formulated as part of a bid to elevate Rap as a more serious and sustainable genre.

Mobilizing for Crossover

Measured against Rock and Pop, Rap was a minor force yet the industry at large was in dire need of new product. The market was still recovering from dismal sales through the late 1970s which had been debilitating to black music generally as several major labels had scaled back their commitment to internal departments handling R&B, Soul, and Funk acts (although they increasingly hired blacks to head these downsized sections). For the 1980s, Rap constituted a new and promising (or, as Harper suggests, "progressive") musical form for exploitation and despite prevailing industry disdain, by 1984 the increased number and the more optimistic tone of articles in Billboard began to reflect a subtle turn indicating a new interest in Rap's commercial potential among the major labels. Rap's industry growth after 1984 signals a transitional trend as it expanded from a

relatively contained micro-market to a macro-market of diverse and dispersed consumers. Rap had demonstrated the capacity to grow and enlarge its audience base while reinventing itself at several junctures in a process of ongoing innovation and development. Artists were developing more consistently applied professional skills in performance and recording contexts and, crucially, the independent labels and agents were honing important business skills that allowed them to function more productively in the industry and market.

With inconsistent exposure at urban or Top 40 radio and virtual invisibility on MTV⁵⁵, Rap was still substantially reliant on live presentation as a means of promoting artists' images and new recorded material. Among the more significant events in this period was the 1984 "Swatch Watch New York City Fresh Fest Tour," which was booked into twenty-seven major urban centers and featured Run-D.M.C, Whodini, the Fat Boys, Newcleus, the Dynamic Breakers, Magnificent Force, Uptown Express, Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde, and T. La Rock with host Kurtis Blow. Based on positive audience response to Rap package concerts earlier in the year⁵⁶ the tour was organized by a consortium of promoters from Atlanta, Cleveland, Miami, and Houston (with artist representation by New York-based Rush Productions and national booking by Norby Walters Associates which housed offices in Los Angeles and New York). The tour, which is commonly referred to as "Fresh Fest," followed the same general structure as major Rock tours, even managing to harness the corporate sponsorship of the Swatch Watch company. The national cooperation behind the tour suggests that Rap was by this time becoming a recognizable force in regions beyond New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania and regional promoters were beginning to witness the emergent traits of the Hip Hop subculture in their home markets. An additional, but often overlooked detail of the tour was the organizers' decision to earmark five per cent of the proceeds for donation to the United

⁵⁵ Although Rap, like much black music in general, was vastly underrepresented on MTV in relation to its growing sales and influence, it rapidly became a staple of the cable network Black Entertainment Television (BET) which serviced major urban centers and regions with sizeable black consumer demographics.

⁵⁶ Billboard reported that, in 1984, Rap shows had sold out the 9,000-seat Greensboro Coliseum and the 14,000-seat Atlanta Omni performance center.

Negro College Fund in acknowledgement of the music's role and importance within black cultural communities.

Billboard reported the tour's announcement under the headline "Hip-Hop Heading for Huge Halls" (Sept.29, 1984: 40), describing the importance of Rap's first full-fledged entry into major performance centers and concert halls on a national level. Russell Simmons, whose Rush Productions agency represented most of the artists on the bill, is quoted as saying that "the industry has yet to realize that audiences are coming to hear the groups, not just the record. This is the next step for sure" (ibid.). In a similar vein, Mark Seigel of Norby Walters Associates (which was at the time the concert production company promoting the largest roster of black artists) optimistically suggests that "now the companies will start believing" (ibid.), making reference to the fact that major labels were still unconvinced of Rap's staying power and market potential. Fresh Fest was an ambitious experiment to more fully gauge Rap's audience base and the extent of interest and appeal in regions beyond the Northeast, which as the tour's full name reveals, was still identified as the genre's main center of activities (even though New York was not a tour stop). The Fresh Fest tours of 1984 and subsequent years introduced the genre as a professional form, lifting it out of the singularly defined ghetto terrains with which it was associated. Fresh Fest also influenced a new generation of nationally dispersed black youths who, as Compton, California rapper MC Eiht explains, soon regarded Rap as a realistic career option: "After I saw the Fresh Fest concert in 1984, it made me figure that maybe I could get paid for rhyming too. That's how I started making my way out of the gang-banging lifestyle" (The Source, Feb. 1995: 56).

The tour was deemed a success both organizationally and financially by industry standards, repeatedly selling out large (15,000-20,000 seat) venues and netting \$3.5 million in total profits. Yet more important was the tour's success in introducing Rap to diverse audiences across middle-America, which as Nelson George reported was "highly integrated...as much as 35% white in some markets" (Billboard Mar. 30, 1985: 57). In the

tour's wake releases by concert headliners the Fat Boys, Run-D.M.C., and Whodini all sold certified gold with unit sales in excess of 500,000 while Kurtis Blow had unit sales in the 300,000 range, serving notice to the industry that Rap's commercial potential was expanding. Rap rapidly accelerated as a crossover force, coinciding with white and minority youth tastes simultaneously and, in 1985, a second New York Fresh Fest tour was mounted with almost double the number of dates and an itinerary that included New York City as well as areas that, as Billboard phrased it, "had been resistant to Rap."⁵⁷ These nation-wide arena appearances by Rap's top recording acts also produced new contexts of exposure that offered the artists insights onto regionally dispersed social practices and locally specific vernaculars beyond their own limited range of experience.

Other events and performance contexts also extended the reach and influence of Rap in this period. Among these were tours linking teen-oriented R&B acts with Rap acts, such as that featuring New Edition, the Fat Boys and Whodini which was listed among the top-grossing engagements in Billboard's "BoxScore" column (March 9, 1985). As a late addition to the line-up for the internationally broadcast Live Aid concert on July 13, 1985, Run-D.M.C. were the only Rap act to appear at either the Philadelphia or London performance sites, effectively introducing the group and the genre to an estimated audience of two billion people world-wide. Finally, by the end of 1985 plans were also in place for the live satellite telecast to 58 markets of the "Krush Groove Party" (held at Madison Square Garden in New York), which was a carefully orchestrated concert tie-in with the Warner Brothers film *Krush Groove* (dir. Michael Schultz) featuring prominent Rap acts. In each of these contexts, Rap's unique live performance format (i.e., the absence of a band *per se*) was being rapidly popularized throughout North America and the world, enhancing audience familiarity with the genre while reinforcing artist recognizability among teen fans.

⁵⁷ The success of the second New York Fresh Fest Tour in the summer of 1985 can be seen, for example, in Billboard's list of the top forty concert grosses which identified the tour's stop in Philadelphia on July 6-7 as the second highest grossing engagement of the month. At \$12.50 a ticket, the concert was also listed as being the least expensive event in the BoxScore column (July 20, 1985: 39).

The commercial and critical successes of several Rap recordings in the early 1980s demonstrated to the music industry that Rap could have a sizable and sustainable market appeal. Once this was established, Rap and the Hip Hop culture in general were exposed in new ways and with greater intensity to the attention of mainstream popular media and the appropriative interventions of capitalist investment. By 1985, Rap and breakdancing had provided the content for numerous print articles, television programs (such as *Miami Vice*, to which Grandmaster Melle Mel contributed the single "Vice" [1985, Sugarhill]) and feature length films. Even though the images and essence of the scene were frequently diluted, the basic elements (the music, the dancing) reached white and black youths outside of the relatively close confines of New York's boroughs where Hip Hop was regarded as "a way of life" rather than as a series of unconnected practices. Despite (or, perhaps more accurately, *because of*) exploitive tendencies among executive producers at this time (especially in the film industry where the visual aspects of the Hip Hop culture were most easily appropriated and re-presented)⁵⁸, the popularization of breakdancing and Rap established new audiences in far-flung and, importantly, non-urban regions across the nation, facilitating the music's crossover.

As external players including record executives and movie producers attempted to cash in on the scene's lucrative potentials, many in the Rap music business grew wary and defensive. They complained that, despite the opportunities offered by expansion into the mainstream entertainment industry, the potential existed for a diminution of the "true" nature of the music and the raw energies that permitted Rap to evolve and develop as a facet of black youth culture. Some of these fears were realized with the release of films such as *Flash Dance* (1983) and *Breakin'* (1984) which exposed millions of Americans to break dancing and rudimentary facets of the Hip Hop culture but which evacuated much of the vitality that spawned it. Mainstream America was given a glimpse onto the styles and

⁵⁸ Examples of this are the Joel Silberg films *Breakin'* (1984) and *Rappin'* (1985) in which Hollywood scriptwriters grafted some of the more superficial elements from the Hip Hop culture together in a manner that reinforces the logics of representation and narrative in mainstream film but fails to capture the range or intensity of Hip Hop's social practices.

practices of the Hip Hop culture, but the often harsh conditions of urban existence, of life on the streets, that comprised central and formative elements of the scene were elided. The informing black cultural practices and sustaining elements of daily existence within black and Latino neighborhoods and communities were largely evacuated from these representations of Hip Hop.

As Rap demonstrated its staying power, commercial viability, and expansive potentials in regional markets throughout North America the industry majors slowly began strengthening the Rap market through distribution deals with indie labels. For example, in an article appearing under the headline "'Street Music' Label: Tuff City Rapping Via Epic Tie" (Feb. 11, 1984: 35), the unprecedented (and ultimately short-lived) distribution agreement between the independent "street label" Tuff City and industry major Epic records (the only such arrangement existing at the time) is defined in market terms that emphasize future growth and development in the genre. However, the markets are also delineated along a convergent axis addressing distinct taste cultures and encompassing the overlapping variables of race, age, and musical categories, suggesting a more complicated geo-cultural context. Tuff City president Aaron Fuchs is quoted as saying "there is a generational and racial split between older blacks and whites and the young black people who support this music." The Tuff City label is not simply defined as a comparatively smaller company but, rather, as a label in a proximate position in relation to "the street" and the young black artists and audiences which inhabit the urban spaces evoked by the term. The focus of the deal with Epic was ultimately turned to Tuff City's locus of operations and its connections to the Hip Hop scene.

By entering into a distribution arrangement with Epic Records, material recorded on Tuff City could be more effectively introduced to the vast market serviced by the major label, enabling more opportunities for song and artist exposure and increased sales. The enhanced distribution network meant that Tuff City would have the capacity to reach consumers in new markets and, crucially, to expand toward new audience groups which in

this context meant white teen record buyers. Spatially, then, Epic and the other corporate giants that followed were extending their reach into the ghetto while simultaneously extending the reach of the independent's product, introducing the Rap genre to larger audiences which inhabit other urban and non-urban spaces. By the end of 1985, two of the top indie labels, Tommy Boy and Def Jam, had also signed lucrative deals with major labels (Tommy Boy with Warner Brothers, Def Jam with Columbia) which guaranteed them access to substantially increased promotional budgets and broader distribution networks. As one prophetic distributor suggested at the time, the Tommy Boy/Warner deal came as no surprise and quite possibly heralded "the wave of the future" (*Billboard*, Dec. 28, 1985: 91).

Despite the announced intentions by most major labels to boost their commitment to black artists (with intensified marketing and promotion, videos, etc.) or to infuse their black music departments with more human and economic resources (*Billboard*, June 15, 1985: BM2-14) once they began entering the "street music" market the prior air of caution still prevailed. By way of comparison, the majors entered the Dance and crossover Pop markets in 1983-84 with markedly greater confidence. The more prominent independent labels were at this stage all attempting to establish rosters of Hip Hop artists who could be nurtured and relied upon to produce saleable product over an extended period. In 1984-85, Russell Simmons emerged as a key force in Rap's expansion, managing a stable of successful touring and recording artists through his talent agency Rush Productions and, with Rick Rubin, the influential Def Jam label.

Rush Productions and Def Jam Records

The geographic expansion of Rap and the extension of its impact as a cultural force in 1983-86 can be isolated in three distinct and related factors: the ongoing processes of institutional and entrepreneurial structuring of Rap within the music business; transitions in Rap's musical form and lyrical content; and the continued success of large-scale Rap tours (either package tours structured along the lines of the Fresh Fest tour or promotional

concert tours by top recording "stars"). These elements, accompanied by changes in Rap styles and fashions embodied in the street image of the B-Boy and B-Girl, were influential in guiding Rap toward wider popular acceptance nationally and globally. While each of these factors can be assessed individually, as is often the case (i.e., Fernando, Jr., 1994), their geo-cultural components are often insufficiently contextualized. Examining them in tandem and in tension reveals the means through which Rap and Hip Hop rose as important cultural and commercial forces on a broader scale. In this light, it is appropriate to focus on the emergence of Rush Productions (later Rush Artists Management) and Def Jam Records for their central significance as Rap slowly underwent transition within the music industry. While they stand as exemplars of activity taking place in a wider or more general way as Rap became an integrated commercial aspect in popular music they also present several unique elements that illuminate the complexities of race in America. The "story" of Rush and Def Jam consequently describe a pivotal point in Rap music and the entire genre's development through this era.

Under the guidance of Rap impresario Russell Simmons, Rush Productions played a constructive role in Rap music's establishment as a permanent facet in contemporary popular music. Recounting Simmons's introduction to Rap, S.H. Fernando, Jr. reconstructs the image of a twenty year old City College of New York student hearing rapper Eddie Cheeba on 125th St. in the heart of Harlem:

...he spent more time soaking up Harlem nightlife than at school. Disco was all the rage, but one night in 1977 at the Charles Gallery, a club on 125th Street, near the Apollo Theater, he got his first taste of something new....Russell, like everyone in attendance, was completely bowled over, and as the coursing blood tingled in his veins he realized something that the hip uptown crowd already knew: A rapper is the life of the party. In the fall of 1977, with his crew at CCNY, he decided to throw a party of his own.
(Fernando, Jr., 1994: 154-55)

On first examination, this narrative follows the standard "great men/great works" approach to history, with the details of where and when Simmons first encountered Rap being of central relevance. In this telling, there is a double faceted image of authenticity, organized spatially and temporally, that reinforces the point that Simmons was a participant and a Rap

"fan," a member of the evolving Hip Hop scene "back in the day" before Rap was a popular commercial form. What is most interesting, however, is the consistency of spatial detail with which the story is presented, indicating that geography, space, and place *mean something*, that they have an important bearing on the identities of the main figures involved and, beyond that, on our understanding of the evolution of the Rap form. The *where* of this encounter manifests a deeper sense of place that is structured through the naming of architectural landmarks, street names and other sites of social significance.

For example, it is pertinent that this revelatory moment occurs in Harlem and not in the Bronx (Rap's birthplace) or Queens (Simmons's birthplace) since Harlem has long been a real and imaginary core for African-American cultural identification. It is a cultural crossroads, an urban space in which the cross-pollination of black cultural practices from various regions (or, on a more localized scale, various city boroughs) is achieved. Clearly, Harlem has a deep cultural resonance and prominent cultural locales have a powerful and enduring affect on the constitution of individual and group identities. Harlem has an inbuilt symbolic value that, when motivated in a narrative of individual accomplishment, imbues the individual in question with some degree of prestige steeped in a place-based aura. The Apollo Theater and 125th St. similarly function as familiar markers of black cultural tradition and affirmative cultural identity. This element of the story thus aids the construction of Simmons as a legendary figure, locating him within a continuum of black cultural leadership that has traditionally emanated from Harlem and the upper boroughs of New York City.

Simmons began as a small to medium-scale concert promoter in New York, booking Rap into high school gymnasiums, university fraternity houses, and various neighborhood community centers and forging city-wide connections under the banner of Rush Productions. His reputation as a high-energy, fast-talking "nightfly" -- hence "Rush" -- preceded him and his regular presence in the early Hip Hop scene gave him an insider's knowledge of many of the unique aspects of the Rap concert from a performance and venue

angle. This provided an advantageous perspective on the requirements for a successful event. Simmons was a rapid convert to Rap and Hip Hop, but as Fernando, Jr. explains, his cultural background is incongruous with the prevailing assumptions about Hip Hop and its relations to the ghetto:

Russell Simmons's neighborhood of Hollis, in the reaches of Queens, was an area in transition while he was growing up. He saw Hollis go from being predominantly white when his family first moved there in 1964 to all black by the time he was in high school. Thus, from an early age, Russell learned to walk the line between the middle-class mentality of his parents, both college-educated professionals, and the mercenary activity of the streets, where you were either "down" or a "sucker." (1994: 154)

Fernando locates Simmons's background in a geo-cultural middle, implying that his origins positioned him between two dispersed poles of cultural experience from which he drew inspiration in equal doses, as a middle-class Rap entrepreneur with ghetto familiarity and street credentials. Simmons himself is quoted as saying that "in Queens you could hang out on the corner but there was safety in the house; in Queens, one could be part of a gang, but it was just part of a growing-up process -- in the ghetto it's a lifestyle" (Nelson and Gonzales, 1991: 203).

Implicitly articulated in his description of social space and cultural origins are a series of assumptions about class and racial influences. Although the narrative is based on facts about Simmons's background, race remains a core or determining element. Stereotypical representations of race, space, and place are mobilized by entering the discourse of difference and Simmons is cast as a human byproduct of convergent cultural influences and the interrelations between the stable and resource-rich environment of the suburbs and the more volatile and, ultimately, enriching forces of the ghetto. Yet this particular historiography suggests that, had either dimension of Simmons's geo-cultural background dominated (i.e., if he was too urban/"too black" or, conversely, too suburban), he would likely *not* have become a "mogul of Rap" (as he was described by the Wall St. Journal in December, 1984).

The mythologization of his past and the particular way that his background has been articulated toward his future successes remains virtually uncritiqued, allowing the underlying logic of the "story" of his racial and cultural hybridity to stand as a determining factor in his ascendance in the Rap music industry. At a deeper level of analytical refinement, Simmons can be regarded as a contemporary embodiment of W.E.B. DuBois's "double consciousness" that is the foundational concept underlying the construction of the African-American identity. Perhaps at even closer range, Simmons is the embodiment of the hyphen that straddles cultural sensibilities in terms of racial and class-based cultural identity. His narrativized past is full of rich details that, far from simply profiling the rise of an influential character, offer important insights onto the manner in which race and class are understood where black entrepreneurial achievement is concerned. The spatial elements of his personal history are problematically inscribed within an array of complex social relations that are rooted in the complicated geographies of race and class difference in the contemporary metropolis. This particular narrative, however, constructs an ideal image based on the convergence of the "best" elements of each socio-cultural space, positioning Simmons as an entrepreneurial and cultural innovator who was able to transgress the borders of racial and cultural difference or, more to the point, to make difference into a positive and productive force, to make it *work* for him.

Underlying the narrativization of Simmons's rise in the music industry lies a more interesting tale of American social reality. Although he has been heralded for his accomplishments in the industry and for elevating Rap music, he is also celebrated as an example of black American enterprise waged through an ability to finesse the rigid spatial definitions of difference and to fluidly cross over and pass through the traditional territories of white and black social interaction. Simmons's primary achievement from the perspective of most commentators is in the manner in which he was able to navigate implicitly *and* explicitly enforced geographical boundaries and to merge the (black) cultural practices of Hip Hop with the (white) business practices of the music industry.

From 1977 to 1982, Simmons was perhaps the most successful entrepreneur among a small contingent of agents and promoters who helped to establish a regular local circuit for Rap acts, following common small-scale promotional practices such as posting advertisements throughout New York's black communities and the blanket distribution of flyers and handbills. In this regard, he maintained close connections with "the street," keeping in contact with shifting tastes and demands among young and often fickle audiences with which he was intimately familiar. By harmonizing Rap with various standard professional practices, even at this early stage, the music was drawn closer to the institutional structures of the wider music industry which was figuratively, if not literally, miles away from the Hip Hop culture. As the Rap scene itself became more coherent (i.e., demonstrating a certain consistency in terms of frequency of performance events, developing a relatively loyal fan base, and spawning several central "celebrity" figures who could regularly draw crowds), these practices were logical and efficient expressions of minor-level business savvy. Gradually improving his skills as a promotor, Simmons's efforts, and those of other local promoters operating at a similar scale, can be identified as a factor in the very construction of this consistency. The Rap music scene and the outgrowth of the Hip Hop culture were spontaneous only up to a point, but by the early 1980s they had entered a new phase that was more clearly commercial.

Exploiting his "inside" familiarity with both the uptown Hip Hop scene and the Manhattan nightclubs, Simmons successfully moved his parties downtown to the larger clubs and concert halls which were more racially and culturally mixed. The effects of this mobility can be discerned in a 1983 Billboard article that posed the question "is rap music now as much a part of the new wave scene as pointy shoes and streaked hair?" (May 28, 1983: 50). Simmons's dominance in Rap promotion was partly due to the effectiveness with which he was able to position Rap acts for maximum crossover with the predominantly white Post-Punk and New Wave audiences. This proved to be crucial move for Simmons from a business angle and by reproducing this crossover trend on a larger

commercial scale between 1984-88, his greatest successes were in fact based on his ability to facilitate the broadened appeal of Rush acts. Beyond its advantages for Rush Productions, the crossover trend was also influential in ensuring Rap's sustained success as a genre. Independent labels were the primary motivators of Rap's crossover in a period when, among major labels, the music's capacity for growth and development was perceived as being constrained by its localized, parochial, and spatially segregated character. The organized structure that Simmons helped to install in the New York Rap scene was an important factor in the process of establishing the necessary conduits for Rap to reach national and international markets and expand its listenership.

Noting Rap's appeal beyond the narrowly demarcated black youth audience, Simmons stated that "the newer Rap artists have more in common musically with rock'n'roll than any commercial r&b since the days when r&b was rock'n'roll" (ibid.). This evaluation, while expressive of a particular view on the history of contemporary popular music in America, is clearly formed within the subtle and implicit articulation of racial and class distinctions. Simmons is speaking about music but he is also speaking about audience formations and listening contexts that actually have much more to do with the dynamics of a racially diverse America than with musical genres *per se*. Afrika Bambaataa and others have also explained how their early fan base included white teens who were associated with the Manhattan Punk and New Wave scenes that converged around night spots like the Mudd Club or Danceteria (the influences of which can be seen in photographs of Bambaataa's bands bedecked in multi-hued mohawk hairstyles and elaborate leather costumes which later became the target of derisive commentary by "second wave" rappers Run-D.M.C.). By moving Rap into clubs other than those that catered to predominantly black and Latino patrons and steering Rap toward venues with more racially and economically diverse audiences, Simmons was gradually laying the groundwork for Rap's expansion and his own rising influence within the industry.

By 1984, Simmons had an established track record in the New York concert scene working exclusively with Rap acts and Rush Productions became the main booking agency for many of the top artists in the city. During the period between roughly 1984 and 1987 the Rap scene produced its first bona fide superstars, among them Run-D.M.C., the Fat Boys, LL Cool J, Whodini, and the Beastie Boys, all of whom were represented by Simmons.⁵⁹ When Brian Cross (1993) describes the impact and influence of New York acts that toured California throughout the 1980s as they carried the vestiges of the New York scene with them, most of the groups he mentions were on the Rush roster. Indeed, between 1983 and 1987 the extent to which acts represented by Rush Productions dominated the genre can be seen in the pages of Billboard where scores of articles and columns dedicated to Rap either feature Rush proteges or mention them.

Simmons aggressively booked his acts into clubs and concert halls throughout the Northeast region as well as managing their recording contracts as he assigned the rights to various labels, most notably Profile Records which had substantial success with its top recording act, Run-D.M.C. Record sales for Run-D.M.C., Whodini, the Fat Boys, and LL Cool J drew massive attention to Rush while the agency actively reinforced the popular profile of its main clients. For example, Rush artists were prominently featured in the film *Krush Groove* (which was loosely based on Simmons's biography) and the Fresh Fest tours, and Simmons negotiated commercial endorsement contracts with Swatch Watches (the Fat Boys) and Adidas footwear (Run-D.M.C.). These endeavors brought Rap more directly into line with prevailing practices within the industry's Rock music sector. Forming Def Jam records with Rick Rubin in 1984, Simmons confirmed his role as a dominant force in Rap's creative and commercial evolution and the label's formation was a logical step in a Rap enterprise that merged a "street" sensibility with the keen awareness that Rap was not solely of interest to the black music buying public.

⁵⁹ Among other prominent artists in the era were UTFO, the Real Roxanne, Melle Mel, and former Treacherous Three member Kool Moe Dee.

Like that of Simmons, Rick Rubin's personal history is frequently conveyed with a strong emphasis on his geo-cultural background and the social contexts of his introduction to the Hip Hop culture. Rubin had grown up in a middle-class home on Long Island where he developed a love of Heavy Metal and Punk music, having performed briefly in a Punk band in New York. But he is also described as having been a teen rebel whose tastes encompassed Rap as an alternative to the mainstream fare that seemed to be identified with his suburban background and his racial and class origins (Farr, 1994). When he met Simmons through the club culture of the New York Hip Hop scene Rubin was living in a student dormitory at New York University (which briefly served as Def Jam's main office), and together they decided to form Def Jam as an outlet for the hard-edged, street-oriented Rap that they were hearing in the clubs. Rubin is also easily positioned within a continuum, in this case as a white teenager who, like his father, was fascinated and influenced by "underground" black cultural practices that have traditionally emerged from New York's uptown boroughs.⁶⁰ In profile, Rubin is encoded as a hip explorer who, like Simmons, bridged the culture gap between white and black spaces and between white and black aesthetic sensibilities. Together, Simmons and Rubin embody Rap's expansive tendency; they represent the extent to which the genre had conceptually if not yet altogether commercially expanded beyond the borders of the ghetto neighborhoods of the Bronx and Brooklyn, extending into suburban and non-urban spaces and middle-class realms.

*Establishing Sustainable Crossover:
Rap's Sound of Gold and Platinum*

The process of consolidating Rap in the business realm was only one aspect of the changes influencing the genre at this stage. Tricia Rose writes that:

Like many groundbreaking musical genres, rap has expanded popular and aural territory. Bringing together sound elements from a wide range of sources and styles and relying heavily on rich Afrodiasporic music, rap

⁶⁰ Describing his father's youth, Rubin states that "he grew up in Brooklyn and the Bronx and he listened to jazz. When he was growing up, he'd go to black jazz clubs and be the only white guy in the place." (Farr, Jory. 1994. Moguls and Madmen: The Pursuit of Power in Popular Music. New York: Simon and Schuster.)

musician's technological in(ter)ventions are not ends in and of themselves, they are means to cultural ends, new contexts in which priorities are shaped and expressed. (1994: 95)

Her assessment accurately indicates the reality of Rap's sonic constructions which have since its inception drawn widely from an array of sources including Jamaican musical and cultural traditions, the deep archive of American black popular music since the early 1960s, and the spoken words of politics and poetry that are part of a rich oral tradition. Nonetheless, there is ample evidence upon which to base an argument for the commercially motivated imperatives that informed the melding of styles and musical sources that contradicts Rose's sense of Rap's hybridity.

Describing Rap's crossover with white audiences, Rose remains critical of explanations offered by the music press, suggesting "that by using rock music, rap was maturing (e.g., moving beyond the 'ghetto') and expanding its repertoire" (1994: 51). Citing the huge crossover success of Run-D.M.C.'s "Walk This Way" (1986, Profile), which featured Steve Tyler and Joe Perry of the Arena-Rock band Aerosmith accompanying the rappers in the studio (and the video) with the familiar riffs of Aerosmith's 1976 hit release of the same name, Rose maintains that the song "brought these strategies of intertextuality into the commercial spotlight and into the hands of white consumers. Not only had rock samples always been reimbedded in rap music, but also Run DMC recorded live rock guitar on *King of Rock* several years earlier" (ibid: 51-52).

While her initial assessment is valid -- Rock has, in fact, always been an audible element of Rap -- she does not explain how the intertextual nuances of Rap were actually "brought" to white listeners, failing to fully explore the accompanying fact that Rap had not, up to this point, been a major part of white teen patterns of musical consumption. The more interesting question lies in how crossover was achieved and what conditions facilitated it. Crossover success is, in a basic sense, transcultural. The very term carries racial and commercial connotations but in a racially segregated America the connotations are also geographically arranged, encompassing social spaces such as points of purchase or

primary locales of listening and leisure that are associated with the music. While most cultural analysts emphasize Rap's crossover to white teen consumers, this demographic group only constitutes one segment of the wider audience formation reached through the genre's expansionist tendencies. The commercial apparatuses of the period not only positioned Rap within white market areas with greater concentration but also ensured that it would reach a greater number of black markets, coast to coast and border to border.

The analyses of Rap's expansion in this temporal moment is so often focused on the implications of white crossover trends that the equally amazing saturation of the black teen market with increased product volume is overlooked. Rap was pouring into the black teen communities of America in a deluge of creativity and grass roots entrepreneurialism. Mix tapes by local DJs were extremely important commodities in the Hip Hop world and the growing number of evening and late-night Rap radio shows on campus or community stations provided a constant source of new material for home tapers. In 1985, the year that LL Cool J's hit "I Can't Live Without My Radio" (Def Jam) was released, prerecorded cassette tapes became the dominant configuration, surpassing vinyl recordings in terms of sales orders for the first time (Billboard, Mar. 29, 1986). Home-made and pirate cassettes had been prevalent among black and Latino youths within Hip Hop circles for years, but their listenability was often hampered by poor reproduction quality. Tapes of this nature were cheaply reproduced, easily distributed and offered maximized mobility for consumers with battery powered beat boxes. As Rap gained industry support and independent labels established manufacturing and distribution deals with major labels, the flow of higher quality cassette products was enhanced. In many cities, the beat box (also referred to by the pejorative term "ghetto blaster") was the medium of choice for mobile youths who "brought the noise" of Rap with them as they navigated their urban environments. Simplified consumer access to a wider selection of Rap recordings in multiple formats subsequently strengthened the transcultural appeal of the genre throughout the country.

At issue is the further manner in which Rose locates innovation and authority with DJs and MCs themselves. What she does not ascertain is the directive role of the various producers and label executives who continue to have considerable influence on who and what gets recorded and distributed as well as how these artists are positioned in relation to their genre or the broader system of categorization. Achieving crossover is never simply a commercial endeavor; rather, it involves the merging of signs and codes that are assumed to represent audience formations of different races.

With crossover, there is a point where the sense of difference, which has spatial connotations, becomes blurred, permitting a weakening or collapse of constructed boundaries. Moreover, these boundaries are discursively maintained and it stands to reason that their erosion is also a discursive project. Rap's crossover to a sizable white teen consumer audience can, therefore, also be seen as a discursive process in which the socially invested values of Rock and Rap were articulated toward each other in such a way that they made sense to white teen listeners who may have had only a passing familiarity with the genre based on the *occasional crossover* of single hits. This passing familiarity is important, since the larger *sustainable crossover* successes that came about in 1986 were dependent on a certain prior awareness of Rap as an option for consumption and enjoyment among new consumers of the genre. Industry executives of independent and major labels aggressively marketed Rap within an already existant relational structure and the discursive constructions of the genre as "black" music had the effect of distancing many potential white teen consumers. Conversely, by recasting Rap as an offshoot or subcategory of Rock music as Def Jam did, the music was effectively repositioned in ways that maximized its crossover potentials.

Within the industry, executives who were uncertain how to position Rap often, wrongly, regarded it as a natural extension of Disco and Dance musics, due in part to the fact that until 1983-84 (roughly coinciding with Run-D.M.C.'s eponymous debut LP), each of these genre's were club-oriented and were distributed mainly in the twelve-inch

single format and targeted toward black teen consumers. LPs tend to be granted greater importance among industry executives, retailers, critics, and arguably, consumers and by 1986 Rap albums were common. Rap recordings distributed in the LP format were more likely to be critically reviewed or prominently displayed in retail outlets. Additionally, as Billboard reported in 1986, the previous year's album sales were at a five year high with the sale of singles falling off dramatically since 1984 and Rap was being better positioned to benefit from this market trend.

Music is not always evaluated in terms of what it is (or what it is like) but in terms of what it isn't. Rose's position leaves little room to account for the fact that the Rock/Rap hybrid also involved an aesthetic articulation *away* from the earlier Disco/Rap hybrid which is constitutive of quite different assumptions that have been mapped onto the organization of audience formations and patterns of consumption and use. The acceleration of Rap's corporate and commercial harmonization coincided with aesthetic transitions in the music's construction as Rap's sound began to show the influences of Heavy Rock with greater frequency, a sound that is audible on Kurtis Blow's "8 Million Stories" (1984, PolyGram), Run-D.M.C.'s "Rock Box" (1984, Profile), or the Beastie Boys "Rock Hard" (1984, Def Jam). The rhythmic drift away from Disco (i.e., Chic's "Good Times" that had provided the bed track for "Rapper's Delight") towards a more pronounced Rock backbeat (and the necessary spatial adjustments that re-oriented Rap performance toward arenas as opposed to discotheques) made Rap accessible to white teens in new ways.

The discursive and aesthetic distancing of Rap from Disco and its alignment with Rock constructs a radically different sense of its character. Accordingly, this realignment also affected the attitudes of the record buying public who began to consider it in different relational terms and associated it with different listening contexts. The transformative sound was manifested through the merging of slashing Rock power chords (or, as in "8 Million Stories," the rare inclusion of a screaming guitar solo) and "Arena Rock" postures accompanied by a deep Funk beat, producing a musical hybrid that further facilitated a

powerful crossover effect and brought white teen audiences to the music in droves.⁶¹ In cases such as "A Fly Girl" (1985, Capitol) by the Boogie Boys, the rhythm owed more to Rock than to Funk, in this case successfully adapting the general sonic qualities and time signature of Queen's hit "Another One Bites the Dust" (1980, Elektra).

Rick Rubin is frequently isolated by many Rap historians (Rose excluded) for his role as co-producer (with Russell Simmons) of Run-D.M.C.'s *Raising Hell* (1986, Profile) and for introducing the Beastie Boys as the first significant white Rap act by streamlining their Punk influences and Punk-oriented mayhem toward Rap forms. Reflecting on Def Jam's market potential in relation to multi-racial record buying fans in *Billboard*, Rubin stated that "rap's appeal is mostly to black teens right now but it's getting bigger and attracting more rockers every day" (April 20, 1985: R-6). It was Rubin who, as a producer for Rush artists and for the upstart label, was mainly responsible for the intensified melding of Rock and Rap, leading David Toop to observe that "Rick's philosophy was that music should be hardcore" (1991: 159), more in line with his own publicly confirmed taste affinities with the music of AC/DC, Aerosmith, Led Zeppelin, or Billy Squire.

His production and taste influences extended the tendencies toward musical hybridity that had been the trademark of artists such as Afrika Bambaataa by foregrounding the Rock influences to the exclusion of everything except the Hip Hop beat, creating a sound that was the antithesis of mainstream commercial Pop but which still appealed to a wide swath of black and white teenagers who were, like Rubin himself, seeking alternatives and buying from the margins. This particular use of Rock was substantially different than its prior implementation in Rap (more explicit, more relentless) and, although Rose seeks to minimize the aesthetic implications of Rock's influences on crossover effect, there is no avoiding the fact that it had been deployed in a manner that more fully conformed to the shifting tastes among white teen male listeners.

⁶¹ The melding of styles and genres that attracted white listeners to Rap should not be regarded as a simple, uni-directional feat. Numerous Rap artists acknowledge their fandom and familiarity with a generation of Rock acts such as Aerosmith and Led Zeppelin, to name two guitar-oriented acts whose pronounced styles have been integrated into Rap.

Run-D.M.C.'s massive success with "Walk This Way" from *Raising Hell* was achieved by more than simply appropriating a familiar chord progression here or a vocal chorus there and it involved more than the act of capturing a recognizable sample upon which to expand. "Walk This Way" constituted a textual site where two sets of musicians who unambiguously represented their respective genres met.⁶² It culminated a pattern that, as Rose notes, had been audible for years and which had been commercially exploited previously by Run-D.M.C. and others. Heavy Rock was also showing strong commercial activity between 1985-88 ("Heavy Metal Bands are Rocking Top 40 Playlists," *Billboard*, June 20, 1987: 1) and, with Rap, it constituted one of the faster growing genres to emerge in this period, although its primary consumer base was generally assumed to consist of white, suburban males.

As Simmons and Rubin correctly speculated, this particular teen consumer demographic would also support Rap and groups represented by Rush Productions (especially Run-D.M.C. and The Beastie Boys) were central in redefining the Rap style by foregrounding Rock guitar styles and radically implementing developing technologies including the Roland TR 808 drum machine and digital samplers. There is ample evidence in *Billboard* interviews with industry executives between 1984 and 1987 to illustrate that Rap's crossover trend was engineered much more consciously than Rose and others seem willing to acknowledge and, furthermore, its success was of a magnitude so large that the dominant construction of the music and the accompanying scene shifted substantially.

Rap's access to North American audiences through large-venue concerts and nation-wide package tours is also entirely consistent with the music industry's established practices of sending Rock artists out in support of recordings and the Rock embellishments displayed with the "new" Rap also reproduced many of the standard features of Rock. Rap

⁶² The success of "Walk This Way," which helped to rekindle lagging interest in aging rockers Aerosmith, was undoubtedly behind the decision that led to the Fat Boys' collaborations with the Beach Boys in 1987 ("Wipeout," Tin Pan Apple) and Chubbie Checker in 1988 ("The Twist (Yo Twist)," Tin Pan Apple), both of which charted in the U.S. and the U.K.. It was also likely the inspiration for the 1988 collaboration on Elektra Records between Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five and Steppenwolf on the latter's classic rock hit from 1968, "Magic Carpet Ride."

was, in effect, made more suitable for this particular mode of exhibition that favored performances in a mass audience forum as opposed to its prior existence solely at the level of clubs and smaller concert halls. Rap's transformed sound -- the tradition of bass-heavy volume of the Jamaican sound systems exemplified by Kool DJ Herc notwithstanding -- literally filled space differently and in ways that made it more amenable to the arena venues that had been, up to this point, primarily associated with Rock. In this regard, the achievement is isolated less in the hybrid constructions of Rap form or style than in its sonic capacities, its potential to have an aural impact in another kind of space where it had not previously been heard.

According to Alan Light, "with its stripped-to-the-bone sound, crunching beats, and such accessible but street smart narratives as "Hard Times" and "It's Like That," in addition to more conventional rap boasting, the album *Run-D.M.C.* was the real breakthrough from the underground" (1992: 223). Note how the notion of "the underground" is spatially coded and how crossover is explained as a rise up and out of a vaguely expressed netherworld, which in popular vernacular tends to mean the marginal realm of non-commercial musics. Light's description itself reflects a discursive dimension that invites interrogation and which quickly moves beyond Rose's critical speculations on the commercial manipulations of the industry. Light explains that, apart from proving to major record company executives that Rap LPs were viable, the band's "street" look and tough, urgent, even abrasive vocal delivery "was enough to impress an unprecedented, widespread white audience..." (ibid: 224). Here, Rap's non-commerciality is also vaguely equated with its blackness and the shift from an underground status to a more commercial viability is encoded as a racial transition, from predominantly black consumers to a dispersed and mixed agglomeration.

Rap is also held up to a separate standard in this configuration since, as Theodore Gracyk (1996) explains, in the Rock tradition, the rise from the underground is also often associated with the negative notions of "selling out," or of making a crude but deliberate

bid for commercial pop appeal that neutralizes what fans perceive as the alternative character of the music which had ostensibly made it appealing to audiences in the first place. When alternative white Rock acts become hit-makers and popular icons (i.e., the Clash, Nirvana) they are held under intense scrutiny by their fans and in many cases are abandoned for compromising their commitment to marginality, which is also seen as a commitment to the habitation of spaces of assumed authenticity. Rap's success at this point was not regarded as a sell-out or as a dilution of its authenticity. As the top Rap act at the time, Run-D.M.C. were cast in an image of raw intensity that represented the image-ideal of the street hardened B-boy (despite their roots in Hollis) and Rap's widespread commercial appeal was an affirmation of money-making empowerment that increased the group's profile in a positive rather than a negative way.

As all of this suggests, there is more to the crossover success of the group than the music alone. The carefully orchestrated posturing and posing and the blue jeans, black leather jackets, and name-brand footwear combine to signify an authentic ghetto-identified blackness. These sartorial expressions, when taken in tandem with the Rock edge and Funk beats, create an overall effect that taps into Rock traditions and longstanding notions of teen rebellion to which white consumers have responded since at least the early 1950s through the rise of R&B and Rock'n'Roll. This Rock tradition is, furthermore, a realm of male authority that functions through the primary signification of masculinity and the expression of masculine desires. It is significant to note that, although female rappers have been active participants in the scene from its beginnings, between 1984 and 1986 their influence was minor. For example, there were no female acts on the Fresh Fest tours and it was not until Rap began its major crossover trend (mainly after 1986) that female rappers began to attain greater recognition and unit sales. In a word, the new male Rap acts were seen to embody an innate *badness* that fit white teen expectations of its Rock stars. The argument might be made that Rap's crossover movement signaled another confirmation of

Rock's hegemony since it is the codes of Rock and its symbolic reproduction that, when grafted onto Rap, finally boosted it into the upper echelons of the music charts.

Other changes were occurring as well as the vocal flow was transforming (becoming more complex and less rigidly fixed on the beat after 1986) and several new styles of delivery emerged. Lyrical content (which will be taken up later) also revealed shifting thematic trends, as Message Raps, Love Raps, Party Raps, and boasts all co-existed. In this regard, the genre's repertoire was expanding although the music's underlying "ghetto" sensibilities were still identifiable as a source of innovation with major stylistic changes in the genre continuing to take shape within smaller, more localized settings (clubs, etc.) before emerging as a larger trend. The sartorial B-boy image of Run-D.M.C., the punk-influenced image of the Beastie Boys, or the smooth lover-man image of Whodini and LL Cool J all combined to illustrate the widening breadth of styles that fell within the Rap category and, in tandem, these shifts effectively rerouted the trajectory of Rap and Hip Hop. By 1985, it was impossible for industry detractors to refer to Rap in singular terms and by 1986, Rap's sales were skyrocketing, led by Run-D.M.C.'s LP release *Raising Hell* which, on the strength of the singles "Walk This Way" and "My Adidas," became the genre's first certified platinum LP, and the Beastie Boys *License to Ill* (Def Jam) which went on to sell in excess of 4 million units, "a standard unsurpassed in rap until 1990" (George, 1992: 27).

Chapter 6

Sub-Genres and Cultural Geographies: Rap Expansions in the Post-Platinum Era

Corporate Intervention as Cultural Devaluation: Interrogating the Charts

Rap's unprecedented successes, especially for artists recording with Profile, Def Jam, and Tommy Boy Records had a massive impact on the music industry and helped to stimulate sales in the entire black music market. Ironically, the genre's sales were lifted by the Beastie Boys who, on the strength of *Licensed to Ill*, had the first Rap album ever to reach number one on the Billboard Pop Album chart, selling triple platinum (in excess of three million units) in less than eight months. The concept of a white act surpassing sales of other acts in a black-dominated genre was not remotely foreign as the history of American popular music from Big Band Jazz to Rock'n'Roll illustrates at numerous junctures. Nor was it an accident as Def Jam consciously positioned the album in the market to reach a white teenaged consumer majority with greater per capita disposable income. The group's blend of Rap and Punk Rock and their persona as hip urban "party animals" appealed to a cross-section that drew from several audience taste formations, especially on college and university campuses with alternative campus-based radio stations where they received regular airplay. Even with the sales dominance of the Beastie Boys at this stage Rap did not succumb to an onslaught of white opportunists eager to exploit the trend and very few white artists have subsequently been able to establish a sustained profile in the genre.

In early 1986, Billboard reported that "the widening success of rap and street music made by artists like Run-D.M.C., the Fat Boys and Whodini hasn't been lost on the majors...While lines between black and white artists are being blurred in the pop market, major labels are also taking a closer look at rap and other strictly urban styles" (George and Goodman, Jan. 25, 1986: 1). Black music was "booming" and the major labels were not

always at the center of the market activity, having fallen behind in certain black market sectors. They continued to forge distribution deals with the independents working in Rap in the post-platinum period of the mid-1980s while simultaneously attempting to consolidate their internal resources in black A&R, increasing their commitment to black artists, responding to consumer trends, and driving sales through better promotion and artist support.

At the same time, black culture, identity, and musical expression were also central issues to community elders and national leaders who had fought long and hard throughout the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the 1950s, 60s, and early 70s. Between 1985 and 1986, discriminatory music industry practices attracted the attention and critical scrutiny of Jesse Jackson as well as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and in January 1987 the NAACP released a report condemning the industry for racial discrimination throughout its ranks. Along with these allegations the report assailed the industry for racial exploitation for having concentrated its efforts on crossover sales by black artists. Thus, even as black music was reaching a commercial peak, it was perceived by many cultural critics as being in a morass as its cultural traditions were being threatened by industry interventions and its capacity to mobilize political awareness or to provide cultural adhesion was at risk across generations. Many cultural critics begrudgingly acknowledged that Rap offered a unique and valuable alternative since the industry manipulations of black music and talent were mainly concentrated on Pop music. Despite its multi-platinum sales, Rap was still largely free of mainstream industry interventions and was considered as a purer expression of black cultural identity and youth experience by progressive (and usually younger) analysts.

As the NAACP study claimed, the thrust for crossover which brought many previously obscure black artists to a much larger and more culturally diverse social spectrum also had negative effects within the black musical community. Billboard's optimistic report is ultimately misleading for not all forms of black music were benefiting

from increased marketing and sales promotion by the major labels. For instance, while many Pop and R&B acts willingly positioned themselves for maximum crossover exposure, other black artists were frustrated by the major label push for crossover and were subtly encouraged to alter (or bleach) their sound and style to accommodate wider audience tastes. As the NAACP correctly noted, the major corporate entities themselves were often responsible for assembling and grooming favored crossover acts which would transcend the Black Singles or Black Albums charts, creating a two-tier system within black music consisting of those who were targeted primarily toward the black charts and those who were positioned for crossover to the Pop charts and the larger white audience base.

This was not unique to the period, having become an established practice at least since the 1950s when R&B and Rock'n'Roll gained massive popularity. In the 1980s the trend was much more aggressively driven due to the enhanced economic stakes involved. Lionel Richie is one example of an artist who crossed over with relative ease: a founding member of the successful R&B group The Commodores (which had a string of Top Ten Pop hits but were more consistently represented on the R&B/Soul chart hits in the mid-1970s), Richie embarked on a solo career in 1981 and through careful orchestration by his label (Motown), established himself as an Adult Contemporary and Pop hitmaker, following in the steps of Motown's earlier superstars, Marvin Gaye and Smokey Robinson. Far too frequently, acts whose recordings reached number one on the black charts would languish in the mid-ranges of the Pop charts, often as a result of the failure for labels to provide market push for the release or the artist involved. The deeper cultural influences that were associated with Soul and Funk in the 1960s and 70s, however, were often absent from the material of 1980s black crossover artists. This absence was regarded by many as having a diluting effect on the connective and culturally sustaining role that these musical forms once served in their prime. Politicized content and more radically-oriented musical aesthetics (evident, for example, in the crossover Marvin Gaye hits

"What's Going On" or "Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology), 1971, Tamla/Motown) became increasingly rare as black Pop was streamlined for more a general mainstream audience.

The plight of many black R&B and Soul singers was further complicated by competition from talented white artists such as George Michael who worked in traditionally black dominated idioms. For example, several of Michael's releases were in high rotation on black radio and urban format stations across the nation. *Faith* (1988, Columbia) reached number one on the Top Black Albums chart in May, 1988, earning him accolades and awards as a Soul/R&B artist. This white encroachment on a cornerstone of black cultural expression subsequently caused a major furor within black musical and cultural debates although this was neither the first nor the last of the issue.

While Rap and (especially) black Pop were experiencing a market surge in 1986-87, this period also saw the overall market decline of Funk and with it the declining influence of a particular musical and cultural era that had engendered Rap. Despite the continued popularity of Funk-oriented Dance music; the unwavering commitment to Funk demonstrated by artists including Rick James or Roger Troutman's Zapp in the early eighties; the ongoing Funk influences that remained central to Prince's compositions (and those of his Minneapolis proteges The Time) throughout the decade or to Cameo, whose 1986 release "Word Up" (PolyGram) was their best-selling release ever (eventually reaching the Billboard Top Ten), original Funk-based mainstays such as George Clinton and Kool and the Gang faded from the charts. This is not an insignificant development for at the same moment that traditional Funk waned, it began to be appropriated by young Rap producers who found a treasure trove of familiar sounds and beats that formed the backdrop for some of Rap's most exciting and important recordings.

The use of digital samplers, which were a common feature of recorded Rap by 1986, effectively maintained many of the earlier Funk influences in black popular music, making select beats from songs such as James Brown's "Funky Drummer" into Hip Hop standards. Despite numerous legal copyright battles along the way, by the early 1990s

several of the musicians whose work provided this sampling archive saw their careers reinvigorated, most notably George Clinton who after a career hiatus (and several uninspired record releases) has returned to regular touring, even appearing on the much-hyped Lollapalooza alternative music tour in 1994. Hip Hop culture and the Rap that flows within it consist of an array of cultural expressions that connect black traditions with contemporary social practices. This interaction between a cultural past and present is of considerable importance to black youths working in the genre, having been crucial to its development in the same general period that the dynamic articulation of black nationalistic ideologies rose to the fore in the post-platinum era.

The Top Black Albums chart in mid-1987 provides an appropriate site for assessing the shifting terrain of black music and the competing strains within it at the time. The charts reflect an interesting split in terms of artists and genre. Sharing chart-space are Pop and R&B artists (Jody Watley, Luther Vandross, Smokey Robinson, and Anita Baker), Funk-oriented artists (such as Prince, Cameo, and The System), and Rap artists (including The Beastie Boys, Run-D.M.C., Kool Moe Dee, Salt 'n' Pepa, D.J. Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince, 2 Live Crew, and Public Enemy). As Billboard noted, as many as 14 of the mid-year chart albums were by rappers (June 6, 1987:26). Both white and black consumers in the over-25 demographic were responding well to the Soul-oriented sounds of Anita Baker, Maze and Frankie Beverly, Freddie Jackson, or Luther Vandross (all of whom were prominent components of playlists on the influential Quiet Storm radio format that, like Rap, matured in the mid-eighties) while independent Rap labels reaped massive sales among both white and black *teens*.

The Hot Black singles chart of November 7, 1987 reflects a somewhat different phenomenon, however, as contemporary Rap and Pop artists were matched by recording mainstays from the 1960s and 1970s: The O'Jays, Michael Jackson, Marlon Jackson, The Temptations, and Stevie Wonder occupied five of the top ten spots. Clearly, black radio's rejection of Rap is responsible for its poor showing in this list. As Nelson George and

many independent label executives postulated in the pages of Billboard, the older and middle-class interests controlling many black "hit" stations sought a more upscale listenership to deliver to advertisers and, perhaps more centrally, they generally preferred the more familiar sounds and styles of established Soul and R&B acts. This suggests that transcultural listener patterns and crossover dynamics were not of sole importance within the black musical community, but the generational split that defined market distinctions was also responsible for many characteristics of the black music charts and market sales action.

Cultural responsibility on the part of black radio program directors seemed to be an underlying issue as Rap struggled for consistent airplay on black radio. There was a prevalent discourse that cast reluctant programmers as being insufficiently sensitive to their cultural role despite the counter argument suggesting that "an audience, not a musical form's cultural roots, dictates what a station should play" (Olson, Billboard, June 18, 1988: 69). Black radio's general lack of commitment to Rap stymied many independent Rap label executives who had assumed that resistance to the genre would decrease after it had attained a certain level of acceptance and success. They argued against Rap's ongoing marginalization, suggesting that its market strength alone qualified it for inclusion on mainstream black radio stations and rejected program directors' rationalizations that the genre wasn't commercially viable for radio.

After years of exclusion on black radio and in the aftermath of Run-D.M.C.'s massive hits "Walk This Way" and "My Adidas," many Rap labels actually began turning away from black radio. Instead they concentrated their efforts on Top 40 radio which had been instrumental in breaking several Rap hits and seemed better able to accommodate a flexible format. Ice-T's track "Radio Suckers" from the 1988 LP *Power* (Rhyme Syndicate/Sire) directly castigates black radio program directors with the lines:

...Look, check out the sales charts,
My record's kickin', I'm breakin' P.D.'s hearts,
They banned me from their shows,
Because they said I'm too hard,

But no sell-out, I guess I'm just barred!

...Radio Suckers Never Play Me!
 "Tone it down" is what they said to me,
 "The FCC will not allow profanity,
 Your subject matter's too hard, make a love song,"
 You better get real, come on,
 I ain't no lover, I'm a fighter...
 Radio Suckers Never Play Me!

The album liner notes also offer special thanks "to all the radio stations with brains and guts." Further defining his position, he stated "I don't think the negative propaganda about rap comes from the true black community -- it comes from the bourgeois black community, which I hate... The bourgeois blacks term Freddie Jackson 'good R&B' and rap as 'nigger music, too black.' The black bourgeois middle class don't want their kids to listen to this 'nigger music'" (Billboard, Dec. 24, 1988: R 5).

Even with the negative examples of industry manipulation in Pop and R&B genres, Nelson George and others speculated on the virtues of major label participation in Rap. The latent belief was that, if the majors were to take a more aggressive role in Rap rather than functioning at arm's length from the scene, their considerable heft and influence would leverage Rap onto black radio playlists and give it exposure commensurate with its sales and market impact. Of course, these were hypothetical postulations for although the major's had proven effective in boosting Rap's commercial profile by bringing it to a varied urban and suburban market through lucrative distribution arrangements their direct impact on radio programming remained negligible. Looking back at this stage, it is obvious that non-commercial campus and community radio, along with several key urban commercial stations (including L.A.'s all-Rap format station KDAY and New York's WKSS and WBLS, which regularly programmed Rap and featured Rap day-parts) were leading the charge in Rap broadcasting, fulfilling their broadcast mandates while bringing the newest Hip Hop jams to audiences in major broadcast areas. As Rap's hardcore edge (that included the music of Public Enemy, Boogie Down Productions, and N.W.A.) emerged in 1987-88, campus and community radio offered one of the few opportunities to regularly

hear recordings without actually purchasing them since product by these artists was deemed unacceptable for mainstream broadcasting. Mainstream black radio's virtual absence from the scene was even more apparent in view of the fact that they often only played the biggest hits *after* these major releases had broken on Top 40 or free-form stations. As a result black radio stations were no longer perceived as cultural taste leaders in new black youth music and teen listeners tuned out in search of more consistent Rap programming. In New York and L.A., the two largest Rap radio markets, stations that regularly featured Rap day-parts or that switched formats completely to accommodate a steady playlist of Hip Hop music often had the best "books," making sizeable gains in listener shares.

Writing in Billboard, Nelson George retrospectively assesses Rap's positive influence within a generally declining quality of black music over the previous ten years, identifying the culprit as "corporate black music." He defines this as "product that had its raw edges rubbed off, that took the mellow side of black music as the standard by which all the music should be measured" (July 26, 1986: 23). While George presents these corporate market-driven expediencies as the negative result of industry intervention, the crossover trend was perceived by many (predominantly white) executives within the industry itself as a sign that tastes across racial demographics were in fact converging. Pointing to the increased number of black artists reaching the Top Ten charts and achieving gold and platinum sales, the industry leaders had what they considered to be reliable evidence that their support of black music was positive and reaching fruition. In an industry context, however, success is measured monetarily; cultural aesthetics, history, and tradition are of minor, if any, concern.

Rap was conceived at this point as a renegade force within the music industry, running over the charts with an unforeseen market strength as black and white teenagers embraced it in all of its various forms and styles. As the main black musical form carrying the harder and more "raw-edged" elements of Funk forward into the mid-eighties, Rap actually had a recuperative effect, sustaining the Funk core while adapting it to

contemporary expressions of black cultural identity. Rap was regarded by many younger critics as a bastion against the further erosion of black music's cultural relevance, leading George to state that "from its lyrics to its beat, it is as true an expression of the sensibility of urban black America as anything since soul" (ibid.).

In this lies the affirmative logic that was gradually adopted among many Rap artists themselves for it was becoming the dominant belief among black youth that true black identity could only be forged from the convergence of funky beats and experiences of contemporary ghetto existence which Rap addressed with growing frequency. White teens, with very few exceptions, were "eavesdroppers" (according to Ice Cube) as black youths undertook the project of reconstructing their social and political identities that were articulated within Rap's rhythms and discourses with greater urgency in the post-platinum era. By 1988, the socially aware discourse that was initially popularized by "The Message" was being asserted as a dominant element of the new Rap music. Through a more pronounced ideological bearing and explicitly cultural discourse, Rap artists began to establish strong and consistent links between issues of race, space, and youth identities, reproducing a facet of the genre that has had important consequences for blacks of all age groups.

Paul Gilroy addresses this phenomenon when he describes "a distinct, often priestly caste of organic intellectuals" (which he advances in a Gramscian sense of the term) who have actively maintained a sense of black cultural tradition while influencing cultural transformation and growth in and through their music:

They have often pursued roles that escape categorisation as the practice of either legislators or interpreters and have advanced instead as temporary custodians of a distinct and embattled cultural sensibility which has also operated as a political and philosophical resource. The irrepressible rhythms of the once forbidden drum are often still audible in their work. Its characteristic syncopations still animate the basic desires — to be free and to be oneself — that are revealed in this counterculture's unique conjunction of body and music. (1993: 76)

As this passage suggests, the capacity for music to communicate and disseminate more deeply felt elements of either subjective or collective identities that fall within what Gilroy terms a "cultural sensibility" is a central factor in the role of musical expression. Rap is but the latest and currently most influential form in a lengthy tradition of black musical expressiveness that transmits the psychical materials upon which people of a shared but dispersed culture can draw as a "resource." In this reading, then, the cultural functions of the music in relation to black cultural issues are at odds with the industry and market expediencies that sweep it up and into another realm, one that adheres to a quite separate (though not isolated) cultural sensibility, a capitalist and materialistic sensibility.

Yet as Gilroy and others have remarked, there is rarely a cohesive blackness that serves to unite and bond blacks across the broad diaspora, let alone within a nation demarcated by cultural unevenness and geo-cultural variation. Noting the struggles over authenticity and cultural identities that have produced numerous ruptures within the Hip Hop "nation" as well as within the more encompassing category of "black music," Gilroy states that "the fragmentation and subdivision of black music into an ever-increasing proliferation of styles and genres...has also contributed to a situation in which authenticity emerges among the music makers as a highly charged and bitterly contested issue" (ibid: 96). With the ongoing industrial appropriation of black music, Rap's status as the next and newest form of black musical invention made it an optimist's repository for the ideals and values of black cultural authenticity. The struggles which have ensued since and which have, by the mid-nineties, reached deadly proportions clearly involve issues related to the definition of a black identity within competing Hip Hop cultural sensibilities as well as debates over what image of black identity shall dominate.

More recently, Rickey Vincent has examined the mid-to-late eighties period and the industry push for artist crossover that began in the Disco era of the late 1970s. He describes the industry's actions as a frontal assault in a "war on the funk," writing that "major labels took control of every aspect of black music at the time, from management to

distribution, promotion and *actual musical production*, leaving a perceptible void in the heart and soul of a people's collective identity" (1996: 213). He suggests that it was at the urging of the major labels that many Funk acts first began to adapt their material toward Disco in the attempt to catch the wave that swept much of the industry in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Additional influences, such as the overuse of digital synthesizer technologies that de-emphasized the traditional Funk ingredients of the slapping bass guitar or syncopated horn sections contributed to the erosion of the genre as the industry began favoring radio-friendly, dance-oriented Pop. Of course, neither industry manipulations or technological invention automatically produce conditions of cultural devaluation. Vincent does not elaborate on other related factors such as a growing conservatism among black middle-class consumers and deeper generational taste cleavages (exemplified by black radio programming) that were undoubtedly implicated in the changes that he observes.

Vincent veers toward George's position when he asserts that "The Funk" is and remains the fundamental element in contemporary black music. Following this logic leads him to the claim that, by channelling black music toward what industry insiders considered to be a more widely palatable form for maximum crossover, they were actually undermining the deeper cultural roots of black musical expression. His argument holds to an inconsistently applied notion of black authenticity and cultural essentialism that, as he sees it, is forged in the music itself and is disseminated in rhythms and in lyrical discourses. He writes that "in the 1970s it was first soul and then The Funk that maintained many of the values that were integral to the black community's sense of identity -- but that all changed in the 1980s" (1996: 272). While this is largely true, he under-theorizes the relations between commercialism, community, identity, and "the Funk." Having demonized the majors, Vincent then points to the rise of black-owned independent labels as the saviour of black musical expression, positing Rap as the new musical and cultural force shaping black identities.

Market Fragmentation and the Return of the Catalogs

Following the breakthrough success of Profile and Def Jam in 1986 and 1987, Billboard again paid special attention to activities among the indie street labels, reporting on the means and apparatuses that sustained their sales and propelled Rap into the mainstream. With the major labels trying to cover all markets, trying to be all things to all people in terms of musical production and sales, one of their market strategies was displayed in the trade magazine's advertising at the time. As headlines proclaiming "Independents Enjoy a Major Turnaround" (May 2, 1987: 9); "Small Labels Maintain Street Sense" (May 9, 1987: 33); and "Rap Taps into Mainstream Market (June 6, 1987: 26) announced small label activity in the Rap genre, major labels such as Capitol and Columbia were purchasing double page spreads advertising the release of catalog material by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and Pink Floyd in the CD format.⁶³

The major labels were sitting on a gold mine of master tape recordings as well as being heavily invested in their established rosters. Corporate value was primarily rooted in what the companies already owned more than in their vision to capitalize on new musical forms or to develop new artists (despite stated intentions to reinforce black A&R units). Motown Records, once the most important purveyor of popular music by black artists, also exploited its extensive catalog as a Billboard special section on black music reported in September, 1986. Motown had by this time already abdicated its influential leadership role as a black-owned and operated label working almost exclusively with black acts and Def Jam was on the verge of becoming the second largest black-owned label operating in the U.S.⁶⁴ By 1986-87, Motown was largely out of touch with black "street music," and its

⁶³ Sales of CD players and disks were in a rapid upswing in this period as standards and quality were being established across the industry. Billboard reported that in 1982 when they first became available at retail, 25,000 CD players were sold. In 1986, 5.5 million units had been sold (Mar. 15, 1987: 88). Later that month the RIAA released figures that indicated the drop in sales for LPs between 1984-86 was 18% and that the rise in CD sales for the same period was 291%. Although prerecorded cassettes were the dominant configuration for 1985, it was reported that market saturation was resulting in declining sales of cassette components. (Mar. 29, 1986).

⁶⁴ By most accounts, Motown's golden period as "the voice of young America" ended in 1972 when the label's founder, Berry Gordy, moved the operation from Detroit to Los Angeles.

revenues were better guaranteed by CD reissues of established hit classics by proven stars, the sustained appeal of its main charting artist Lionel Richie as well as Stevie Wonder, and a struggling stable of moderately talented artists. It was not until the mid-1990s, with the appointment of Andre Harrel⁶⁵ to the position of President that Motown attempted to reconnect with the youth market.

At the same time there was also intense industry restructuring underway as transnational corporate mergers and buyouts extended patterns of industry concentration. CBS (and subsidiaries Columbia and Epic), WEA (Warner Brothers, Elektra, and Atlantic), PolyGram, RCA, MCA, and Capitol-EMI dominated the industry, controlling almost 90% of the popular market. In relation to their music divisions (as opposed to corporate involvement in other media and entertainment sectors), major label reputation, wealth, and value were considerably dependent on past Pop and Rock-oriented archival assets as well as the capacity to continue turning out mega-hits by mega-groups on an international scale. Indeed, the stage was set for major acts such as Aerosmith, Michael Jackson, Madonna, George Michael, Prince, and R.E.M. to sign massive multi-year contracts that effectively bound them to their corporate labels. The image of corporate behemoths staggering under their own weight with a roster of similarly "heavy" acts to manage while Rap's independent labels made fast contacts with new artists targeting regional and national domestic markets is not altogether inaccurate.

As the catalog CD advertisements reflect, the major labels were seeking to exploit their vaults of recorded material and to reap the financial rewards as consumers adjusted to the new CD technologies by repurchasing classics that they often already owned on vinyl.⁶⁶ Although adults were responding to the technological shift from vinyl to CDs, teen music consumers generally lacked the capital to make the transition immediately as the

⁶⁵ Known in the early 1980s as Dr. Jeckyll, Harrel formed half of the Rap duo Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde which had several charting releases. Later he was an executive with Def Jam before starting his own successful label, Uptown Records.

⁶⁶ As the industry was adjusting to the transition to CD configuration, Billboard reported that "1991 seems to be shaping up as the year the reissue will reach its crest" (March 23, 1991: 11).

new CD technologies became available. This was even more true among minority teen markets. As George Plasketes observes, mobility was another crucial element in the demise of the vinyl LP: "to a generation raised on 'boom boxes' and the Sony Walkman, music mobility is a necessity. And, vinyl does not travel. While the tendency is to attribute vinyl's decline almost exclusively to compact discs, cassettes have quietly been a contributing factor" (1992: 112). In Rap, cassettes as well as vinyl were the two major selling configurations, with CDs only becoming a regular feature after 1988. Indeed, the industry movement away from vinyl toward CDs caused considerable concern and debate among Hip Hop DJs who relied on vinyl releases for their livelihood.

Unfounded conspiracy theories occasionally circulated within the Hip Hop culture. Among them was the claim that since they weren't profiting from Rap anyways, the majors were entirely unconcerned that their actions might destroy Rap and the independent Rap labels by forcing a change to CD-based technologies. Still, the independent labels maintained a strong (if not necessarily controlling) presence in the Rap market to the end of the decade, and the genre benefited in market terms from new access to the national and international distribution systems that the major labels provided -- and profited from. Independents also maintained their connections with smaller, more localized sites of musical production and consumption by following the standard Dance music practices of circulating album tracks to club DJs for remixing and re-release in the 12-inch format. As well, they made positive efforts to improve the overall quality of LP releases (more coherence and, in Def Jam's case, more tracks on each album) which were perceived as being of better value for teen consumers with limited income.

*Concert Violence and the Constraining Force
of Rap's Negative Stigma*

Contrasting Rap's bright sales prospects, between 1985 and 1989 Hip Hop hit a wall of negativity that complicated its growth and expansion. Spontaneous Rap concert violence became a dominant issue within the music industry as muggings, stabbings, and

shootings were part of a recurring pattern in the large arena venues across the nation. Among these incidents were multiple stabbings at the 1985 Krush Groove concert at New York's Madison Square Garden; a wave of street muggings in the aftermath of the Madison Square Garden stop of the Run-D.M.C. "Raising Hell Tour" in July, 1986; and the infamous Long Beach Arena "riot" during the "Raising Hell" performance in August, 1986. As the severity of incidents and their frequency increased throughout the late 1980s, both civic and industry attentions were turned to the particular minority youth cultures that produced Rap and comprised its primary audience.

Of the incidents, Long Beach was the most striking because of its scale; 42 people were injured as marauding gang sets cruised the venue abusing other attendees and battling arena security, the police, and each other. Although Tricia Rose isolates the September, 1988 stabbing death of 19 year old Julio Fuentes at a show featuring headliners Eric B and Rakim at Naussau Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Uniondale, New York as being of particular significance⁶⁷, the earlier Long Beach riot can be more accurately identified as Rap music's "Altamont." The positive growth that the earlier Fresh Fest tours had engendered as the music expanded geographically was suddenly tainted by an image of ghetto ferocity that would continue to plague the Hip Hop culture (even though the violence in Long Beach was more accurately attributable to deep-seated animosities between warring gang sets than to Rap fans *per se*).

Mainstream media reports on the Long Beach Coliseum tour date failed to explicitly address the violence as being gang-related nor did they clarify that, rather than somehow being the responsibility of the artists involved, the violence was spatially motivated, owing to a context in which Rap fans of warring gangs converged within a compressed space. Mainstream media and critics also tended to focus on the stereotypical associations between

⁶⁷ The incident cited by Rose was in fact a catalyst within the Rap scene. Motivated Rap artists with, among others, Billboard columnist Nelson George, organized public demonstrations against concert and community violence under the name the Stop the Violence Movement. The group recorded the twelve-inch single "Self-Destruction" (1989, Jive Records) which entered the Hot Rap Singles chart at number one on Mar. 11, 1989, eventually selling gold and raising in excess of \$200,000 for the National Urban League.

Rap music, black youth, and masculine aggression. Countering these reductive representations, Run-D.M.C. announced in a press conference the following day that the group "refuses to play Los Angeles until police or other authorities take sterner measures to protect Run-D.M.C. fans against local gangs. The gangs stand for everything rap is against...Other cities don't have the problems that L.A. has. Run-D.M.C. isn't the problem, L.A. is the problem" (Billboard, Aug. 30, 1986: 77). The group appeared on a live telephone call-in program on Los Angeles Rap station KDAY to discuss the incident and its implications for fans, the group, and Rap music in general. This fact also reflects the centrality of KDAY in the L.A. Hip Hop scene, since it occupied a connective community role in which relevant issues were aired along with the broadcasting of new Rap releases. Ironically, the incident was a catalyst for a much-needed debate on South California's gang culture as well as on the ethical responsibilities of Rap artists who had emerged as influential public figures or, in a more problematic mode, as role models for teenagers.

The incident also announced to East coast rappers that, for all their similarities, black teenagers in Long Beach and the greater Los Angeles area functioned according to drastically different codes and operated within highly structured spatial parameters that were quite different than those in New York and other eastern seaboard cities. Within two years, with the emergence of the Gangsta Rap subgenre, the spatial dynamics and implications of place-based social identification that shape the L.A. youth environment would be publicized throughout the nation, producing even deeper cleavages between black teens and adults, white and black communities, and East and West Coast rappers.

Many of the resultant phenomena that Rose points to (including the negative impact on future Rap bookings, inflated venue insurance costs for Rap concert promoters, as well as the circulation of public perceptions of mayhem or danger associated with Rap) also actually began with the Long Beach Arena incident two years prior to the Nassau Coliseum killing. Commenting on the rapid rise of insurance costs for large-venue Rap concerts after

the Long Beach incident, the co-promoter of the 1986 Run-D.M.C. tour noted that the insurance cost per paid spectator for Rap shows had increased from 2.5 cents to 26 cents a head over a three year period, resulting in higher ticket prices and making tours more difficult to mount. Billboard featured the headline "Venue Reads the Riot Act Following Melee: Run-D.M.C. Gig Spurs Arena Policy Changes" (Aug. 30, 1986: 7), reporting that Long Beach Arena managers would more carefully scrutinize an act's performance record prior to booking but would not discriminate against any particular genre. This qualification was meant to encompass both Rap and Heavy Metal, the latter of which was also developing a negative reputation although this was more for venue property damage and self-induced injury than fan violence.

The trend did, however, continue and intensify after the Naussau Coliseum killing with Billboard reporting that the Trans-America insurance company "has cancelled coverage in mid-term for G-Street Express of Washington, D.C., the show's promoter and a major player in the black music scene" (Dec. 24, 1988: 6). Consequently, several other insurance underwriters closely examined the Rap tour industry, citing perceptions of a high risk insurance environment as being a major inhibitor in extending coverage to venues and promoters. A year later, under the headline "Many Doors Still Closed to Rap Tours," it was reported that "venue availability is down 33% because buildings are limiting rap shows" (Haring, Dec. 16, 1989: 1). Whereas prior to 1988 Rap headline tours had frequently been listed on the Billboard Boxscore chart for top concert revenues, after 1988 the occasional Rap act was listed on mixed-bill engagements with R&B headliners. In the attempt to circumvent the restrictive policies of insurance companies and venue managers, it soon became common practice for promoters to book Rap and non-Rap headliners together (something that had been common as Rap was breaking into the mainstream earlier in the decade) in mixed bills that generally drew from a broader audience demographic and included more female attendees. The strategy at times stretched credibility and common sense, as in one instance that saw KRS-1 and his hardcore Rap unit Boogie Down

Productions being promoted as a reggae act "because he has a lot of reggae in his music" (ibid).

Where the previous Fresh Fest and Def Jam tours had been a fundamental factor in opening up middle America to Rap and its constituent elements, the repeated violence at Rap shows began having a reverse effect as venue management, local police forces, and civic administrators all acted within their authority to restrict live Rap performances in larger public spaces. This often meant that the shows were undersold and frequently re-booked into smaller theaters or halls in predominantly black communities where fewer fans could afford ticket prices and young white Rap fans were less likely to venture at night. Even though subsequent tours such as the Def Jam 1987 tour were still touted as financial successes, there was a discriminatory antagonism between promoters and authorities that isolated Rap (as well as Heavy Metal) from the general Rock concert promotion business, containing and constraining Rap concerts.

With the trend of concert violence, various official spokespeople from cultural watchdog groups (including the police) began to speculate publicly that Rap presented more than a context for violence but that it was actually a causal factor behind these outbreaks. Rap was discursively portrayed in these circles as a vector of a violence-inducing pathogen. There were ample cases to which the authorities could point as apparent evidence or proof of Rap's capacity to incite violence, creating an oddly reminiscent link with dominant responses to Rock'n'Roll 30 years earlier.

The perception of civic threat, however, was more pronounced since Rap's relatively new crossover appeal meant that suddenly white suburban teens were also inclined to attend these concerts and were, consequently, at risk. Rap shows provided a common space where black and white teen music fans congregated, something that was generally less likely to occur with Rock or mainstream Pop shows. Other public spaces such as successfully desegregated high schools, movie theaters, and malls often offer a similar context for multiracial interaction. But concerts present a unique atmosphere for

teenagers to mix and mingle since they occur in the evening and are often held outside localized neighborhoods where audience members actually live. Furthermore, in concert settings, youth dominates and there is a particular sense of teen liberty that pervades the live *event*, contributing substantially to the "fun" factor involved. Contrasting the fun involved, considerable tension can result when teen audience members collide with the institutional regulatory systems of venue security and a predominantly white police contingent which in many instances misunderstands or has little demonstrated tolerance for the cultural expressions of "fun" and pleasure that ensue at a successful Hip Hop show.

Despite the legitimate complaints stating that public venues should be free of danger to audiences, the conjunction between Rap's crossover appeal to a growing white youth fan base and venue violence was an implicit factor underlying the intensification of calls for censure by civic authorities. By 1987, the emergence of new subcultural strands within Hip Hop, most notably pro-black Afrocentrism and the aforementioned "gangsta" mentalities that informed the narrative imagery of Gangsta Rap, only reinforced the perceived danger quotient among white parents as well as among middle-class black adults. Rap was itself undergoing drastic discursive shifts that added a potent blend of politics and aggression and with these changes came a more alert and sustained resistance to the musical form and its creators as conservative cultural groups such as the Parents Music Research Center (PMRC) mounted public campaigns against them.⁶⁸

The multiracial composition of Rap concert audiences was regularly cited by Nelson George in his *The Rhythm and the Blues* column as an achievement that surpassed the corporate engineering of crossover. Yet in much of the mainstream reporting, Rap shows constituted a new space of moral panic and were frequently the object of inflammatory attacks that stoked fear and concern among civic leaders and parents, effectively stalling

⁶⁸ For a detailed analysis of the issues and impact the PMRC and other conservative watchdog groups had on popular music and the industry, see Reebee Garofalo. 1997. Rockin' Out: Popular Music in the U.S.A.. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, pp. 423-439.

ticket sales and overall attendance figures. By the summer tour season in 1987,⁶⁹ Nelson George reported that the Beastie Boys/Run-D.M.C. "Together Forever Tour" was suffering from bad press and repeatedly encountered civic resistance despite few actual disruptions, resulting in lower-than-expected ticket sales and damaging the "interracial good-will potential of the tour."⁷⁰ Among civic officials, the rhetorical emphasis was on the reassertion of adult control and of maintaining a structured authority within the social contours of law and order. Rap's commercial and popular success among teens drew it to the attention of white authorities and it was subsequently subjected to closer surveillance and more stringent policing. In the discursive construction of social law and order, Rap was acquiring an outlaw reputation as these and other incidents cast the music, the artists, and its audiences as the product of a culture of violence.

Tricia Rose explains that, "the question is not 'is there really violence at rap concerts,' but how are these crimes contextualized, labeled?" (1994: 133). As she notes, there are stakes involved in the processes of labelling Rap concerts as danger zones and as sites of violence before the fact. It therefore remains crucial to interrogate the interests involved and the means through which normative social morals and structures of social dominance are policed and maintained. This is especially so when the weight of authority is brought to bear on minority constituencies and cultural leisure practices that are in an expansive mode such as Rap was in this period.

By 1991, Janine McAdams (who had had taken over The Rhythm and the Blues column from Nelson George) reported that the authorities and the media still blamed the music and the artists, writing that Rap was "still taking a beating for inciting violence,"

⁶⁹ In the summer of 1987, there were three major Rap tours crossing the country simultaneously: Together Forever, featuring Run-D.M.C. and the Beastie Boys; Def Jam '87 with LL Cool J, Whodini, Doug E. Fresh, Eric B and Rakim, Public Enemy, and Stetsasonic; and the Fresh Fest '87 Tour featuring the Fat Boys, Salt'n' Pepa, and Heavy D and the Boys. The tours all did well, with the Def Jam tour averaging 10,000-12,000 fans per show and grossing in excess of \$6.5 million (*Billboard*, Oct. 17, 1987: 34).

⁷⁰ For further commentary on the incidents of media misreporting and civic resistance to Rap tours at the time, see the editorial "Run-D.M.C., Beasties Together: On Tour: A Dispatch From the Front Lines," by Lyor Cohen, Chief Operating Manager of Rush Artist Management. (*Billboard*, Sept. 12, 1987: 9)

(Jan. 19, 1991: 31) after a shooting occurred at a concert in Anaheim, California with Ice Cube, Too Short and Yo Yo sharing the bill. Rap was perceived by fans and foes alike as a black-identified cultural form signifying a black youth sensibility -- its roots were undeniable. But over the years, concert violence has continually been reframed in official discourses as a seemingly obvious outcome for any event that is attended by a sizeable crowd of minority teenagers. Defined in these terms, the restrictive and ultimately racist apparatuses of authority that Rap encounters are more clearly justifiable in official public spaces of debate.

Temporal Distinctions Between Rap's Old and New Schools

Accompanying Rap's many changes between 1986 and 1990 were key aesthetic transitions that signaled a break from the popular Rock-influenced sounds that had propelled Run-D.M.C. and the Beastie Boys to the top of the Pop charts. Several influential albums -- now considered classics in the genre -- by new artists introduced a wider range of Rap styles and represented a correspondingly wide range of regional activity. Among these are Eric B and Rakim's 1987 album debut *Paid in Full* (4th & Broadway/Island Records); Boogie Down Productions' *Criminal Minded* (1987, B-Boy Records); DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince's *Rock the House* (Jive); LL Cool J's *Bigger and Deffer* (1987, Def Jam); Ice-T's *Rhyme Pays* (1987, Sire); Public Enemy's *Yo! Bumrush the Show* (1987, Def Jam); Salt'N'Pepa's *Hot, Cool and Vicious* (1986, Next Plateau); and 2 Live Crew's *2 Live Crew is What We Are* (1987, Luke Skyywalker). Commenting on Rock music's cyclical patterns of obsolescence and renewal, Theodore Gracyk describes the phenomenon of "aesthetic fatigue" that necessitates either adjustment or death in a style or genre. He writes, "there aren't always pressing social forces driving change, and the 'problem' of generating the creation of artifacts need not be replaced by a fresh problem. We simply tire of our minor variations of the same old thing" (1996: 206). The artists listed are exemplary of a response within Rap to aesthetic fatigue that had crept

into the genre in 1985-86. The style, sound, and general "feel" of the industry leaders Run-D.M.C. or the Beastie Boys was, by 1987, almost four years old and their multi-platinum sales figures suggested that critical mass had finally been reached. In fact, neither group ever matched the success of either *Raising Hell* or *Licensed to Ill* nor did they manage to maintain an innovative edge that could translate into sustained market dominance despite continued chart placement and concert drawing power. As David Toop notes, by 1987, Rap was adrift without focus, yet over the course of roughly eighteen months the impact of these emergent artists began to alter its trajectory. Rap was at risk of stagnation but the rise of a new wave of talent with distinct and distinctly fresh approaches to the genre revitalized it creatively as well as motivating its growth in the market, making this an important phase in the geo-cultural expansions of Hip Hop.

Importantly, because the major labels were not the driving force behind Rap's market appeal and popular growth with consumer audiences, there is a sense of organicism in the arrival of these new artists and the proliferation of subgeneric styles. The Rap scene was diversifying from within and the results of this aesthetic diversification were consequently made available to consumers as recorded product that was engineered and packaged primarily by independent labels, at least with their debut releases. In fact, even the genre distinctions (or what Frith refers to as "genre labels") that were implemented by the industry and Rap's various audience formations when describing these new styles were devised after the fact, based on what were generally agreed upon characteristics of the sound or, more frequently, the lyrical content. These genre labels (Knowledge Rap, Gangsta Rap, Reality Rap, etc.) were eventually standardized in industry discourses and the media as a form of marketing shorthand. They were deployed as an efficient means of description or as part of larger marketing strategies aimed at product positioning.

From a commodity perspective, the enhanced stylistic variety provided a much needed diversity for the genre even though Run-D.M.C., the Beastie Boys, Whodini and several other artists were leading the genre in terms of sales and exposure. Through its

distribution and sales apparatuses, the industry was better able to position different artists and their material for different listener groups, extending the range of options for Rap consumers. This suggests that industry appropriation and categorization also provided a service for the record buying public who could subsequently indulge in deeper levels of listener sophistication as they developed more refined tastes within the Rap meta-genre. Rap's expansion as a musical form and as a series of commodity products thus entered a new growth phase that more fully conformed to Rock which had, since the 1960s, developed a plethora of stylistic subgenres that accommodated different market groups and taste formations.

There is also an important temporal aspect to these developments as the general stylistic and cultural disparities between early Rap and that of the late 1980s led to the definitional distinctions between "Old School" and "New School" Rap. Not quite substantial enough to be defined as genre distinctions, the differences between "Old" and "New" school styles were still sufficiently pronounced to warrant descriptive categories that were meaningful in industry and audience circles. By 1988, Rap had been a fully realized facet of black youth expression for over ten years and many of the emergent artists had grown through their formative teen years with Hip Hop as a standard cultural influence. Rap's impact at various junctures has provided the funky backdrop to an entire generation (and is now also doing so for another generation), spawning another wave of styles and artists with a diverse range of talents.⁷¹

By the mid-1980s many teens held a dual attitude that, on the one hand, was respectful of the early Rap pioneers and their contributions to Hip Hop while, on the other hand, being somewhat disparaging of older artists who were no longer considered current, cutting edge or relevant to the scene. When artists' output fails to meet current standards in the eyes of other rappers or fans or when they are regarded as losing touch with the

⁷¹ For further illustration of the divergences between "Old" and "New" school Rap as well as for testimonial evidence of the "Old School" influence on subsequent generations of Rap artists, I recommend the 1996 Rap documentary film *The Show*.

evolving scene and the emergent styles, they are said to be "falling off." Shifts in sartorial codes, verbal forms or slang, rhythmic beats, vocal stylings, and thematic content were all factors that divided the Hip Hop generations, distinguishing Old School from New School.

Describing this phase in the scene as a low point, David Toop observes that "stream of consciousness self-praise/dissing lyrics...stretched ahead like a narrow dark tunnel, restricting any kind of creative verbal expansion, blocking a clear view of the wider issues in which rap was a player" (1991: 174). Mentioning some of the emergent names from 1987 (several of whom are listed above), Toop acknowledges that, despite what he regards as a tendency toward banality, "there were good releases." His criticism, however, lies mainly with the influential "response" records that swept the scene at the time as numerous acts addressed each other on vinyl, creating what amounted at times to little more than inside conversations or more aggressive infighting depending on the vitriol of the lyrics. What Toop seems to overlook in this particular analysis is the tradition of verbal jousting that is at the core of Rap's rhyming skills, owing much of its heritage to word games like "the dozens" or "snaps" (quick, cutting insults that are exchanged in informal competitive forums). His assessment of what he considers to have been a faltering scene fails to acknowledge that there was a power struggle underway with the weapons, appropriately, being words themselves. The apparent drift or loss of focus was due to a realignment of the scene and the changing of the guard as the older established artists were challenged from below by up-and-coming artists displaying different skills than their predecessors.

This was played out most prominently in the ongoing public battle between Old School artist Kool Moe Dee, who cofounded the pioneering Treacherous Three (and who appeared in a cameo role in the 1984 film *Beat Street*) and LL Cool J who personified the arrogant self-confidence of the mid-eighties New School. The issue sparking the combat was simple in principle: who is the baddest, freshest, deffest rapper in the business? LL Cool J set the tone by questioning the talents of Old School rappers, deconstructing their dominance and positing himself as the new Rap leader. The battle garnered considerable

attention among Hip Hop fans and critics, however, for in the Rap scene these were not trifling claims but the equivalent of throwing down the gauntlet. The tension and antagonism between the two rappers in fact became a selling point, and both exploited the conflict as a means of generating greater consumer interest in their recorded output. With each new release each artist boasted about his own prowess while "dissing" (dismissing, disparaging, and disrespecting) the other, continuing the cycle through calculated responses that were eagerly anticipated by audiences. The blows were delivered in songs such as Kool Moe Dee's "How Ya Like Me Now" (1987, Jive) and LL Cool J's "Jack the Ripper" (1988, Def Jam) and, with the release of the LP *How Ya Like Me Now*, a cover photo of Kool Moe Dee driving a Jeep over LL Cool J's trademark Kangol hat. Describing their mutual antagonism, the liner notes to *Def Jam's Ten Year Anniversary* CD compilation package (1995, Def Jam Records) draws a comparison between the young boxer Cassius Clay who dethroned the "old bear" Sonny Liston in the ring.

Nelson George focused on the battle between the two rappers in his Billboard column under the headline "Old School and New School Rappers Battle for Supremacy: Kool Moe Dee, LL Cool J Get Busy." While foregrounding the temporality of their conflict, he also suggests that there is a spatial aspect involved that is a result of Rap's gradual expansion out of the narrow locales where it was first founded. He writes, "the old-school rappers are those whose careers started in the New York boroughs of the Bronx and Manhattan during the early '70s. The term 'new school' is applied to anyone outside that elite group, though it is usually meant to refer to successful young rappers from Queens or Long Island, N.Y., and elsewhere" (George, Mar. 12, 1988: 25). Yet by October, 1988, George again raised the issue of temporality and artist longevity, noting that even such second generation or "new school" rappers as Run-D.M.C. were on the verge of being surpassed by the new influx of talent. As he writes:

The trio has had to battle the fact that its image, once the height of B-boy style, now looks a little old-fashioned in this period of high-low haircuts and Nike -- not Adidas -- sneaker dominance...Now Run, D.M.C., and Jam Master Jay are faced with the challenge of revitalizing their music and

themselves. Whether they can do it will say a lot about the longevity of rappers in the marketplace. (Oct. 1, 1988: 27)

George further observes that Old School artists such as the Fat Boys and Kurtis Blow were no longer connecting with young audience members, with Kool Moe Dee being an exception. Although George does not cite a reason for Kool Moe Dee's ability to maintain audience interest, it was partly due to his Old School reputation, his ample skills, and a willingness to battle that public exposure and sales were sustained.

In a special section on Rap published in the December 24, 1988 issue of Billboard, Monica Lynch, President of Tommy Boy Records, is quoted as saying that "the way the New School of rappers dress, the way they rhyme is different from what's been going on in New York for the past four years. It's not Run-D.M.C. or an LL Cool J style. The New School doesn't have anything to do with the macho posturing or busting a gold chain." In this case, Lynch is indicating the rise of yet another wave of talent including DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince, Eric B and Rakim, and Public Enemy who comprised the ascendent groups in the Rap industry. This observation describes transitions that were underway in multiple contexts and helps to isolate the point of the crucial shift between Rap generations as the next crop of artists and styles emerged, establishing the patterns that were to dominate for roughly the next five years.

While the context for Kool Moe Dee and LL Cool J's battle (waged on wax over the course of several releases and, on several occasions, in front of live audiences in concert settings) was ostensibly based on temporal disjunctions it also illustrated the influence of Rap's rise in the market. In an earlier period, prior to recording and industry interventions, the duelling MCs would have been almost exclusively contesting turf and local audience loyalties in the attempt to dominate each other. Through the display of rhyme skills and clever boasts their efforts would have been focused on establishing themselves as what Grandmaster Flash refers to as "the home champion." Turf was primarily associated with geographic space and the sense of place or sites of significance within which artists' identities were based.

By 1988 Rap's commercial growth had altered the stakes and changed the form and forum of the battles as artists engaged in struggles over *market* turf as well as physical spaces. Consuming fans were implicated at the point of purchase since it was record sales that constituted the final measurable gauge of Rap superiority. This can be discerned in LL Cool J's derisive attack on Kool Moe Dee on the single "Jack the Ripper" where he states "How ya like me now?/ I'm getting busier/ I'm double-platinum, I'm watchin' you get dizzier." While Kool Moe Dee was unquestionably a bankable talent and a bona fide Rap star, LL Cool J's sales far outdistanced him which was a reflection of his "victory" in the MC battle. By 1996, LL Cool J was still releasing new charting material while positioning himself for a film and television acting career.

None of these commercial developments managed to fully eradicate the sense of geographic identification and turf affiliation that had once been central to the scene. Numerous recordings were released that addressed space and place explicitly, boasting about the virtues of one's home environment while dismissing or negating the relevance of other spaces and places to which opposing rappers pledged allegiance. This was the key element in another celebrated Rap battle involving MC Shan and KRS-1. In 1987, Shan's single "The Bridge" (Cold Chillin'/WEA) attempted to elevate the profile of Queens and the Queensbridge Housing Projects in particular, challenging the Rap supremacy of the Bronx as the home and heart of Hip Hop. Shan was a member of the Juice Crew, a production posse (including Marley Marl, the Real Roxanne, Biz Markie, and Big Daddy Kane) that recorded on the independent Cold Chillin' label and represented some of the best Rap from the borough of Queens. KRS-1 and DJ Scott LaRock of Boogie Down Productions battled Shan on wax, releasing the devastating response records "South Bronx" and "The Bridge is Over" (1987, B-Boy Records). With the lyrics "Manhattan keeps on makin' it, Brooklyn' keeps on takin' it, Bronx keeps creatin' it, and Queens keeps on faking it," KRS-1 attacked MC Shan and the entire Juice Crew for "lying" about Rap's origins. Significantly, even the name Boogie Down Productions keeps the Bronx front and center

since the Hip Hop term for the borough is the Boogie Down Bronx. Shan's career as an MC took a major dive in the aftermath of his defeat by BDP although his moderately successful production career included the production credit for the huge Dancehall Reggae hit "Informer" by Canadian rapper MC Snow (1992, EastWest Records America). KRS-1 has continued to hone his reputation as one of the more skilled MCs in the business while also establishing himself as an important Rap producer and an unrelenting purveyor of "true" and "authentic" Hip Hop values.⁷²

The New Funk, the New Flow: Aesthetics, Style, and Content

In 1987 Rap underwent a process of aesthetic transformation as it fragmented into several prominent stylistic subgenres that presented a variety of listening experiences. Rap's cadences which had been so closely linked to the rhythmic and vocal qualities of a Rock aesthetic for the previous three years showed a gradual return to deep Funk influences (partially due to sampling technologies) that were also accompanied by a broader diversity of vocal styles and lyrical themes. Rap's aesthetic diversification and capacity for growth was noted within the industry, and in June, 1988, Mike Greene, President of the National Association of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS), officially announced a new Grammy Award category for Rap. The given rationale was that the genre had proven its market durability and demonstrated a commercial staying power while additionally displaying an appropriate flexibility in terms of the evolution of the form. In his press release, Greene stated "rap last year was an urban black music form, and over the last year it has evolved into something more than that. It has matured into several kinds of music, with several kinds of artists doing it. We felt there was enough product coming out to justify a rap category" (*Billboard*, June 4, 1988: 6). Clearly, Rap had always displayed a range of styles and aesthetic characteristics but Greene's comments indicate the point at

⁷² In 1996, MC Shan again made an appearance with KRS-1 when the two rappers were depicted in a soft drink advertisement under the headline "the beef has been settled once and for all," officially signalling the end of their prolonged rivalry. They also appeared together in a series of concerts.

which the industry fully acknowledged their existence and, more importantly, their value in terms of positioning and marketing Rap artists and their product.

After 1986 there emerged a new kind of "noise," a reorganization of sound and, using Tricia Rose's (1994: 39) term, an altered sense of "flow" that challenged the dominant Rock-oriented Rap that was then sweeping the charts. In a word, these aesthetic changes suddenly made Rap more *interesting*. Describing Rap in this moment as being somehow more interesting is not an offhanded claim. As I mention above, the rapid emergence of new artists and accompanying new styles motivated alterations to the musical form at just the point that it was at risk of stagnation. David Toop reads these developments quite differently, however, citing the proliferation of subgeneric styles in 1987 as a negative result of Rap's expansions. In his view, "the market had fractured and rap briefly lost a sense of direction, either looking for a marketing niche, looking for crossover sales in the opening created by Run-D.M.C. or temporarily withdrawing into the underground to compose rhymes loaded with serious purposes and music devoid of commercial sweetening" (1991: 175). His description frames the rise of new artists and influences primarily in market terms, defining their efforts as calculated gestures geared toward enhanced commercial success or as conscious strategies of a more culturo-political nature. He does not specifically address the aesthetic aspects of these transitions or the myriad elements that appeal to listeners and ultimately form the basis for their affective investments and subsequent audience formations. Whether calculated or not, what doesn't get said about the changes in the music in this period is that the array of emergent subgenres were intrinsically related to the remapping of the geographies of the Rap music scene and they had important implications for the evolution of the genre as it continued to grow outward and reach new audiences.

The establishment of a new musical and discursive framework was an achievement of major proportions as Rap's appeal and cultural influences continued to extend beyond the confines of the Northeast as well as the particular landscapes of black cultural

communities and other closely defined social settings. Increasing numbers of consumers and fans were attracted to the music as its stylistic range expanded and regionally dispersed "home champions" were gradually capable of establishing themselves in local and regional markets, producing local and regional audience bases. Although the centrality of New York was not immediately at risk of being usurped, regional talents such as the Fresh Prince and Steady B (from Philadelphia), The Geto Boys (from Houston), Ice-T and Eazy-E (from Los Angeles), Luther Campbell (from Miami), or Sir Mix-A-Lot (from Seattle) were asserting themselves and were gradually decentering New York rappers as the sole driving forces of the Rap aesthetic. Curiously, despite harboring their own active Rap scenes, prominent music cities such as Detroit, Chicago, and Washington D.C. did not initially produce any chart-topping talent and they remain lesser forces on the Hip Hop map. In considering how Rap became the major musical and cultural force that it has it is therefore necessary to acknowledge the transformative aesthetics involved for, as Toop suggests, the changes did have resonating implications for developments in other sectors including those aspects of the industry involving subgeneric categorization, product placement and marketing, as well as artist recruitment and development.

In his assessment, Toop identifies digital sound sampling as the central factor in the changing Rap aesthetic: "The reason why rap changed its sound so dramatically in the latter half of the '80s was due to the development of relatively low priced digital samplers with enough memory to hold and loop a few bars of music" (1991: 191). The enabling influence of digital samplers cannot be underestimated and with their ubiquitous use by Rap DJs the creative processes of song construction changed significantly, opening new vistas in terms of merging pre-recorded materials with digitally programmed or live drum beats. Yet while the technology did have substantial impact on the means of Rap production and on the resultant sound and style, it was not the single -- nor even necessarily the most important -- factor influencing change. Sampling did permit Rap producers and DJs to construct the underlying beats in new ways that, subsequently, resulted in new rhythmic

textures over which the MCs delivered their lyrics. The standard inclusion of familiar or recognizable snatches of pre-recorded materials that DJs had developed through earlier turntable techniques was continued through digital means. Sampling facilitated the digital co-mingling of television and movie themes as well as musical fragments from a virtually limitless array of sonic options with the slamming beats of the TR 808 drum machine or, in fewer cases, actual musicians. Thus, even as the "new" Rap had clearly audible similarities to a song such as Grandmaster Flash's classic lesson in turntable technique, "The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel" (1981, Sugarhill), its mode of construction and range of sources were radically altered.

Changes in Rap's vocal flow and texture must also be isolated as important non-technological facets of the genre's expansion in this period since both modes of rhythmic construction and lyrical delivery were subject to transformation. For instance, Rakim (of the duo Eric B and Rakim) introduced a unique vocal style to Rap with his slow, deep-toned delivery (that initially bore some resemblance to The Rake), communicating a restrained intensity that seemed devoid of unnecessary exertion or volume. Ice-T later displayed several stylistic similarities to Rakim, but his debut release *Rhyme Pays* (1987, Rhyme Syndicate/Sire) still maintained many audible traits that aesthetically linked his work to Run-D.M.C. or the Beastie Boys (especially the Rock-influenced title track). Rakim's vocalization on *Paid in Full*, however, established his characteristic style with its cool sense of detachment that is still held in high esteem by rappers and fans alike. The vocal flow on this first album remains an example of the best of the genre, providing a model that many upcoming MCs have emulated with varying degrees of success over the years. Rakim's entry onto the scene therefore remains a defining moment from an aesthetic perspective as his impact was immediately evident and his influence has endured. Augmented by a broad and impressive array of samples (including a section of Middle Eastern music on the re-mix of "Paid in Full" that boosted Israeli singer Ofrah Haza's international career) and the prominent display of Eric B's stiff but effective rhythmic turntable "scratching" techniques,

the duo presented a distinct alternative to the four-four Rock beats and shouted delivery that characterized the sound of Run-D.M.C.

The content shifted perspective as well as MCs including Ice-T, Just Ice, KRS-1, and Rakim frequently expressed their ghetto views and described various experiences (including criminal activities) in the first person subjective mode. They were not the first to do so, however, as this was also a characteristic of the influential but underskilled Philadelphia rapper Schooly D who emerged slightly earlier (and who some credit as being the first "Gangsta" rapper). In contrast to earlier forms of "Message" Rap or to the place-specific references of Run-D.M.C., the descriptive imagery in their lyrics rendered place in a much more proximate sense. Their common byways and perambulations were given a new depth and detail. The stronger tendency toward narrative self-awareness and a more clearly definable subjectivity closed the distance between the "story" and the "story teller." In this mode, the concept of "reality" became more of an issue in evaluating an artist's legitimacy within the Hip Hop scene (a factor which will be taken up in more detail in the following chapter). The capacity to convey an array of compelling images in the narrative description of space and place became a highly relevant component accentuating a rapper's point of view. Perspective on the spatial terrains of an artist's environment became a new focus of listener attentions and soon became a standard discursive element of the evolving "Gangsta" and "Reality" Rap subgenres.

Chuck D of Public Enemy also influenced changes at this time. He brought forth a vocal style that, while faster, louder, and more urgent than many emerging rappers, reflected the earlier influences of Melle Mel or Run-D.M.C. His powerful voice and authoritative presence was well-suited to the political didacticism that was Public Enemy's trademark. To offset his verbal barrage and to balance the tone, Flavor Flav occupied the role of a manic Rap jester, urging Chuck on with clever interventions while providing a certain comic relief in a higher atonal vocal register. The two offered a unique counterpoint in both vocal delivery and lyrical content that gave Public Enemy's sound a broader range

and showed a more sophisticated understanding of tone and tenor than many groups had demonstrated up to this point. The sonic assault that was the result of a combination of deep drum and bass beats, a high-pitched screech that punctuated the beats, and an almost exaggerated number of digital samples further reinforced the "power" of the group's overall sound. In this regard, there was an aesthetic convergence as the resistant, black militant ideologies that the group propounded were cast within a similarly radical soundscape that can be described as a sonic metaphor for the "chaos" of the contemporary social condition. Titles such as "Timebomb" and "Public Enemy No. 1" (1987, Def Jam) or "Countdown to Armageddon," "Mind Terrorist," and "Bring the Noise," (1988, Def Jam) left little room for ambiguity as the group announced its ideological program for social change through a complex arrangement of discourse, sound, and style.

Public Enemy's *Yo! Bumrush the Show* (the cover of which features the oddly ambiguous running footnote "the government's responsible") was one of the most galvanizing entries on the charts. Despite its modest entry on the Top Black Albums chart at number 60 on May 9, 1987, the release attracted considerable attention and received critical praise in the media. Inexplicably failing to mention Chuck D's political diatribe and the densely complex layering of beats and samples, Nelson George chose to make an aesthetic comparison in describing their sound upon the release of their debut LP, positioning them in relation to popular Rap predecessors. Commenting on their "fresh stance" and "rough sound," George notes that they were "not as smoothly r&b as Whodini or as rock'n'roll as Run-D.M.C." (Billboard, May 2, 1987: 26). In retrospect, George's choice of terms overlooks many of the group's most defining characteristics as they adopted an unparalleled approach to Rap as a vehicle for pro-black Afrocentric propaganda.

Public Enemy raised Message Rap to a new level, fashioning their songs as information packets, as elements of a radical political agenda. They further extended their connections between the political past and the cultural present by adapting numerous characteristics from the Black Panthers (i.e., the parading presence of the S1W -- Security

of the First World -- which was intended as a visual metaphor for organized militancy), often treading a fine line between politics and posing, balancing their potentially ephemeral style with a more edifying history of political music-making among black artists. There is a certain irony in the fact that Public Enemy was introduced to national audiences on their first major tour as the opening act for The Beastie Boys. The ideological distance between the two groups can be determined by differences between the Beastie Boys hit track "(You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (to Party)" (1986, Def Jam) and Public Enemy's "Party for Your Right to Fight" (1988, Def Jam) which appeared on their sophomore LP release *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*.

One of BDP's major aesthetic contributions over the years has been the manner in which KRS-1 adopted aspects of Dancehall Reggae music that reflected his affinity with Rap's Jamaican origins. This is especially evident in the Boogie Down Productions tracks "9 MM Goes Bang" and "The Bridge Is Over" on the 1987 release *Criminal Minded* that are structured around Reggae-influenced bass lines, sparse Hip Hop drum beats, and a sprinkling of Jamaican patois. By expressing the underlying connections between Hip Hop and Reggae, KRS-1 forges a cultural aesthetic link between the boroughs of New York and the island of Jamaica. In doing so he has both reproduced the aesthetic roots from which Rap originally grew while introducing a more contemporary New York Hip Hop sensibility to the popular Dancehall styles of Jamaica. He has since proven to be one of Rap's most consistent voices advocating the Reggae-Hip Hop hybrid as a black diasporic cultural expression that has evolved into an important subgenre in its own right. In 1989 KRS-1 produced the album *Silent Assassin* (Island) for the influential Reggae rhythm duo Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare featuring rappers Queen Latifah, Young MC, and the Shah of Brooklyn. More recently he has added his production skills to tracks by the Reggae-Hop artist Mad Lion who is a member of the Boogie Down posse.

Salt'n' Pepa emerged as the first of a number of prominent female Rap stars (including Queen Latifah, MC Lyte, and Yo Yo) who were able to maintain their footing

within the frequently sexist and male dominated industry while developing a distinctly identifiable sound and style that has remained popular and commercially successful. Salt'n'Pepa in particular successfully fused stylistic elements of R&B and Rap that has helped them to generate regular crossover appeal and their influence laid the base for subsequent female acts such as TLC in the industry. They articulated a female social perspective and advanced a thematic discourse of feminine (if not precisely feminist) desire in a manner that openly challenged the masculinist hegemony of the scene -- no small feat in a business that has a long tradition of male chauvinism and sexist exclusion. The themes of feminine libido, women's independence, and a female subjective autonomy have extended the range of images that are commonly associated with Rap, contributing to the more risqué and radically sexualized content and personae of contemporary artists such as L'il Kim and Foxy Brown. More importantly, Salt'N'Pepa and Queen Latifah have successfully established themselves as entrepreneurs in the music industry who are now bringing new talent to the Hip Hop ranks.⁷³

Finally, The 2 Live Crew introduced the Hip Hop nation to the regional styles of Southern Florida that were founded in a unique fascination with ultra-low bass frequencies embedded beneath fast tempo digital drum beats. It was the group's bawdy, risqué, sexist, misogynistic, and often out-right stupid lyrics, however, that garnered the most attention (reflecting how negative publicity and public controversy can translate into positive market response) despite their contribution to the overall diversity of rhythmic styles that were now part of the Rap scene. In two now-famous cases, the group was arrested in 1990 on public obscenity charges in Broward County, Florida, and Ft. Lauderdale record-store owner Charles Freeman was arrested for selling obscene material -- a 2 Live Crew album -- to a police officer. These incidents created substantial debate over Rap's content and

⁷³ For a more thorough exploration of issues pertaining to women in Rap, see Tricia Rose's Black Noise or my essay "Movin' Closer to an Independent Funk: Black Feminist Theory, Standpoint, and Women in Rap," in Women's Studies, vol. 23, Jan. 1994.

surrounding issues pertaining to the First Amendment and censorship.⁷⁴ Under the leadership of Luther "Luke" Campbell, the group then attempted to wrap itself in the American flag (literally) as staunch defenders of free speech and leaders in a growing anti-censorship movement that focused on recording artists and their work. In 1990, Luke with the 2 Live Crew released "Banned in the U.S.A" (on Campbell's independently owned label, Luke Records) which was based on a signature sample from Bruce Springsteen's 1984 hit "Born in the U.S.A." (Columbia) and was their highest charting release ever.

Further refuting Toop's singular emphasis on the force of technological change is the fact that the new wave of MCs also altered their fidelity to the rhythmic tempo. They demonstrated a more sophisticated sense of musical time, frequently working within the interstices between the beats, feinting and jabbing in a vocal counterpoint that "rode the rhythm" without locking onto the steady rock-oriented beats as many earlier rappers (including Run-D.M.C.) were prone to. Describing the song construction and recording of the first single "Public Enemy No. 1" from their debut LP *Yo! Bum Rush the Show*, Chuck D explains the creative process:

I made it off two cassette decks, splicing part of this record. A couple of the splices were off, but the rap over it was *on*. The loop wasn't perfect: you might hear the beat jump and shit like that. But when I did the rhyme over it, the rhyme was perfect, the rhyme being controlled by the rhymers, who can kind of ride the bumps. It gives it more of a natural feel, like an imperfect drummer was behind him. That's what made the soul and funk come out of it. (Dery, 1990: 86)

It is interesting to note that the production process does not, in fact, use digital sampling technologies, instead favoring more primitive cut-and-splice methods of sound editing. This approach is much more in keeping with the group's origins in amateur campus radio on WBAU at Long Island's Adelphi University. Public Enemy later went on to become one of the more adventurous and daring groups in terms of their use of sound samples, which makes this revelation all the more compelling.

⁷⁴ The obscenity ruling against 2 Live crew was overturned, but as Reebee Garofalo points out, "in their ecstasy over 2 Live Crew's acquittal, civil libertarians hardly notice that Charles Freeman, the record-store owner, was convicted and fined \$1,000 for selling the group's album two months earlier" (1997: 435).

As this explanation also suggests, young Rap artists began to show their renewed debt to Funk as well as the black Jazz idiom. Chuck D's description of his interplay with the rhythms seems to encompass the Jazz traditions of improvisation and complex syncopation as the Rap genre was gradually distanced from its prior Disco and Rock influences. Other acts at the time, including DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince (with "A Touch of Jazz," 1987, Jive/RCA) and Stetsasonic ("Talkin' All That Jazz," 1988, Tommy Boy Records) were branching out into other black musical idioms, extending the Rap form by merging it with a variety of musical styles and influences. Stetsasonic's "Talkin' All That Jazz" brings a jazz sensibility to Rap while criticizing its detractors who accuse artists of digital thievery or simple uninventive reproduction:

You see, you misunderstood, a sample's just a tactic
 It's a portion of my method, a tool in fact
 It's only of importance when I make it a priority
 And what we sample is loved by the majority
 But you're a minority in terms of thought
 Narrow-minded and poorly taught
 About hip hop fame or the silly game
 To erase my music, so no one can use it
 You step on us and we'll step on you too
 Can't have your cake and eat it too
 Talkin' all that jazz

The Jazz-Hip Hop-R&B blend was the cornerstone of Quincy Jones's 1989 LP release *Back on the Block* (Qwest/Warner Brothers) which saw Rap artists Big Daddy Kane, Ice-T, Kool Moe Dee, and Melle Mel performing on the same album as jazz artists including George Benson, Miles Davis, Ella Fitzgerald, Herbie Hancock, James Moody, and Joe Zawinul.⁷⁵

Just as traditional Jazz artists (Miles Davis being an obvious example) have absorbed and adapted emergent popular music styles throughout the years, numerous Rap artists (most notably Gang Starr's lead voice, Guru) have subsequently extended the connections between Jazz and Hip Hop. Between 1990-1995, several permutations evolved including the subgenre Acid Jazz that became a staple in urban nightclubs and

⁷⁵ The title track from *Back on the Block* went on to win the 1991 Grammy Award in the category of Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group.

lounges in the U.K. and North America. As the crest peaked, Billboard reported that several independent Rap labels were expanding into new niches, introducing a broader spectrum of musical genres to their catalogs in order to broaden their industry base. "Rock, jazz, and reggae are particularly attractive to these labels because of the growing popularity and acceptance of these musical styles in the world of hip-hop" (July 6, 1991: 1). The attempt to create new generic mixes and to capitalize on emergent trends by producing Hip Hop hybrids was also a necessary response to increased competition as the majors weighed into the Rap market.

Sampling technologies made these connections even easier to establish as older Jazz, Funk, or R&B tracks were mixed with booming drum beats and turntable scratching to create a much more diversified rhythmic bed over which vocalists flowed. Further commenting on Public Enemy's construction of beats and sounds, co-producer Hank Shocklee refers to the similarities between Rap and Jazz improvisation. Describing his perception of the free and unrestrained approach taken by the group's production team "The Bomb Squad" he states, "we believed that music is nothing but organized noise. You can take anything -- street sounds, us talking, whatever you want -- and make it music by organizing it. That's still our philosophy, to show people that this thing called music is a lot broader than you think it is" (Dery, 1990: 83). Although the Public Enemy sound rarely displayed any close affinity to what might be described as a Jazz aesthetic, the conceptual approach outlined by Shocklee bears resemblance to elements of the Be Bop and Modern Jazz movements from the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Having launched several lucrative careers within the evolving Rap star system, the proliferation of artists and new subgenres also reoriented Rap in the market, producing a new series of marketable commodities. Defined by Simon Frith as "genre rules," the formation of subgenre differences and distinctions is part of a structuring of values in the segmentation of markets that is relevant to fans and industry "taste-makers" alike:

It is genre rules which determine how musical forms are taken to convey meaning and value, which determine the aptness of different sorts of

judgement, which determine the competence of different people to make assessments. It is through genres that we experience music and musical relations, that we bring together the aesthetic and the ethical. (Frith, 1996: 95)

In the post-platinum period after 1986 Rap's fragmentation into a multitude of identifiably distinct and interrelated subgenres adhered to the general "rules" described by Frith. As I mentioned, temporal distinctions between "Old" and "New" school styles were insufficiently encompassing to function meaningfully as generic markers. But by instilling this aspect of temporality and an accompanying chronology of breaks and ruptures, critics, journalists and rappers in tandem were writing Rap's history and building a sense of the genre's tradition.

The eventual naming of detailed subgenre distinctions provided a more useful set of terms for understanding categorical differences or similarities as they evolved across the temporal spectrum, whether the analysis is focused on beats, vocal flow, style and personae, or ideological, discursive, and thematic characteristics. For instance, while the distinctions between "Gangsta" Rap, "Knowledge" Rap, or an Afrocentric/Islamic "Message" Rap are based primarily on discursive themes, the distinctions that define Reggae-Hip Hop more accurately reflect a response to the music's formal characteristics. The major subgeneric distinctions were not initially identified and defined by the industry. Rather, they emerged as meaningful comparative references from within the Hip Hop culture and Rap scene and were of primary significance in the organization of audience formations and discrete taste groups that formed more or less spontaneously. It was not until 1988 with the combined ascension of a New York-based Afrocentric black nationalist impulse (most clearly associated with Public Enemy and KRS-1) and the West coast Gangsta Rap styles (initially embodied by Ice-T and N.W.A.) that the industry began explicitly and fully exploiting these generic distinctions as part of their marketing strategies.

Chapter 7

"Boyz n the 'Hood": Rap, Region, and Place

*Say somethin' positive, well positive ain't where I live
I live around the corner from West Hell
Two blocks from South Shit and once in a jail cell
The sun never shined on my side of the street, see?*
(Naughty By Nature, "Ghetto Bastard (Everything's Gonna Be Alright)," 1991, Isba/Tommy Boy Records)

*If you're from Compton you know it's the 'hood where it's good
(Compton's Most Wanted, "Raised in Compton," 1991, Epic/Sony)*

The Regional Proliferation of Artist-Owned Record Labels

Reflecting on the intensification of regional Rap activity, Nelson George writes that 1987 was "a harbinger of the increasing quality of non-New York hip hop," citing as evidence the fact that three of the four finalists in the New Music Seminar's DJ Competition were from "outside the Apple -- Philadelphia's Cash Money, Los Angeles's Joe Cooley, and Mr. Mix of Miami's 2 Live Crew" (George, 1992: 30). In the pages of Billboard, he observed that despite New York's indisputable designation as the "home" of Rap, Philadelphia rappers in particular (most notably, DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince) were making inroads on the scene and on the charts, making it "rap's second city." This expansion was facilitated by the emergent trend in the development of artist-owned independent labels and management companies.

After years of bogus contracts, management conflicts, and poor representation, a growing number of artists began dividing their duties between recording or performing, locating and producing new talent, and managing their respective record companies. By forming self-owned labels and publishing companies and establishing themselves as autonomous corporate entities, forward-thinking Rap artists were also able to maintain creative control over their production while ensuring a greater percentage of returns on their sales. In a rather excessive discourse, artists spoke of throwing off the corporate shackles

of the recording industry as well as invoking the quite separate issues of building something of which one can be proud or being remunerated in a more lucrative manner.

Later, the added incentive of overcoming industry chill and major label censorship arose. This was largely due to the high-profile conflict in 1992 between Ice-T and the Time Warner corporation over the lyrics to the song "Cop Killer" (recorded with his Heavy Metal band Body Count). Although the recording is not in the Rap genre, Ice-T's reputation as a Rap artist was by then well-established and as a result much of the critical commentary in the controversy tended to focus on Rap in particular. In the aftermath of these events that attracted the vitriol of several regional U.S. police associations and no less a critic than President George Bush, several artists encountered timid major entertainment corporations which feared organized shareholder and consumer reprisals for their involvement in releasing and distributing "controversial" Rap recordings.

In 1992, Oakland rapper Paris severed relations with the Tommy Boy label, which was by this time a subsidiary of Warner Brothers Records, after it balked at distributing his sophomore LP *Sleeping With the Enemy*. The acrimonious dispute arose as a result of the track "Bush Killa," a lyrical assassination of President Bush. As Billboard reported, Tommy Boy passed on the album "after Warner Music Group chairman Robert Morgado announced last summer, in the wake of the "Cop Killer" controversy, that no Warner label would put out a record with a cover showing the President being stalked by a killer. Morgado also expressed displeasure with some of Paris' lyrics" (Nelson, Dec. 5, 1992: 12). The album was also rejected by Rick Rubins's Sex Records (another subsidiary of Warner Brothers) and the Island Records subsidiary, 4th and Broadway, after its parent company, PolyGram, expressed concerns about the album's lyrical content and the general cultural climate in the U.S. in the aftermath of the Ice-T controversy.

Paris was able to release the album through his own upstart label Scarface Records which, in an ironic twist, was funded by a considerable remunerative damage settlement from the Warner Music Group. Advertising for the release in Rap magazines such as Rap

Sheet appeared with the slogan "the record they tried to keep from coming out...is out." In a conscious display of do-it-yourself production, Paris acknowledges in the liner notes that "since this album was censored and rushed, I didn't have time to get my list of "thank yous" together, so I'll say "Peace," to all who've been supportive. All praise is due to Allah."

Once several key labels such as Luther Campbell's "Skyywalker Records"⁷⁶ and Eazy-E's "Ruthless Records" had been established and had proven the viability of the venture, their initiatives were rapidly reproduced as numerous artists followed suit. For many recording artists, getting "paid in full" suddenly meant learning the production and management side of the industry and exercising entrepreneurial skills as well. As the trend expanded, small artist-owned and operated labels burgeoned throughout the nation and another tier was added to the industry. With the rise of artist-owned labels there was also an increased emphasis on regional and local affiliations and an articulation of pride and loyalty in each label, its artist roster, and the central locale of operation.

As I have explained, Rap is characteristically produced within a system of extremely close-knit local affiliations, forged within particular cultural settings and urban minority youth practices. Yet the developments in the Rap industry, whereby production houses or record labels might be identified on the basis of their regional and local zones of operation, are not unique to this current period. For instance, independent "Race" record labels which targeted blacks in the South and in larger northern urban centers throughout the 1920s and 30s flourished in part due to the enhanced mobility of black populations which maintained their affinities for the various regional Blues styles. Nelson George's consistent attention to black musical tradition, the music industry's gradual permutations, and Rap's growing national influence led him to note in Billboard that "regional music used to be the backbone of black music and — maybe — it will be again" (May 31, 1986: 23).

⁷⁶ Luther Campbell's Skyywalker label caught the attention of Star Wars creator George Lucas who controlled proprietary rights over the name. A legal battle ensued and the court ruled in favor of Lucas, leading Campbell to change the name of his label to Luke Records in 1990.

He recalls black American musical production in the immediate post-WW II period when independent labels were dispersed across the nation, recording locally and regionally based artists while servicing the needs of black music consumers within these regional markets.

Examining the history of black popular music in the 1960s and 70s, the names Motown, Stax, or Philadelphia International Records (PIR) evoke images of composers, producers and musical talent working within very specific studio contexts in Detroit, Memphis, and Philadelphia. The dispersed independent labels and production sites that operated from the 1950s through the 1970s are therefore culturally meaningful and relevant to descriptions of black music of the period as they convey an idea of consistency and identifiable signature sounds or styles.⁷⁷ This trend has continued with Rap, yet there is a more pronounced and explicit connection to specific locales and the articulations of geography, place and identity that sets the genre apart from many of its musical predecessors.

Of the smaller labels that had thrived in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, most disappeared as musical tastes shifted, as economic transitions evolved, or as the industry majors swallowed them or bumped them out of the market by introducing their own specialty labels. Toward the end of the 1980s, the larger industry was no longer even primarily American, with the major parent companies being massive transnational entities with corporate offices based in several countries. Yet, in both Rock and Rap (following the demise of Sugarhill Records) there was a resurgence of regional production in the mid-to-late 1980s and, with it, the resurgence of regionally distinct styles. In the black music sector these were exemplified by the Minneapolis Funk that was a trademark of Prince, The Time, Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, or Jesse Johnson; the Washington, D.C. Go-Go sound of Chuck Brown, Redd and the Boys, and especially Trouble Funk; and from Chicago, House music exemplified by DJ Frankie Knuckles. Rap production in New

⁷⁷ See Reebee Garofalo. 1997. Rockin' Out: Popular Music in the U.S.A. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon. (pp. 257-264).

York, Los Angeles, and Miami also began to display regionally distinct "flavors" as individual producers emerged with their own trademark styles and influences. Individual studios such as Chung King in New York (where many of Def Jam's acts recorded) also became associated with specific production styles and sounds in Rap.

In December, 1989, Billboard featured advertisements in a special section on Rap for several new artist-owned labels that illustrated the regional expanse of the trend. Among these were ads for Eazy-E's Ruthless Records (Compton, Ca.), Luther Campbell's Skyywalker Records (Miami, Fl.), and Ice-T's Rhyme Syndicate (South Central, L.A.). Appearing alongside these were advertisements for the established independent Rap labels Def Jam, Tommy Boy, and Jive as well as ads for the newer "street" divisions of major labels including Atlantic ("The Strength of the Street"), MCA ("Wanna Rap? MCA Raps. Word!"), and Epic ("Epic in Total Control. No Loungin', Just Lampin'"). The phenomenon has since evolved to the extent that artist-owned operations have become relatively standard in the industry, existing as influential players alongside the major labels.

As a slightly later entrant, Death Row Records (initiated in 1992 by principal investors Suge Knight and former N.W.A. member Dr. Dre) flourished through a lucrative co-ownership and distribution alliance with upstart Interscope Records, which is itself half-owned by the huge conglomerate Universal Music Group. Although a series of misfortunes in 1996-97 (including the murder of its marquee star Tupac Shakur, Suge Knight's nine year sentence for probation violations, and an FBI investigation of possible gang-related enterprises including money laundering) have made the label's continuation unlikely, it rose to virtual dominance in the Rap field between 1992 and 1997 with top-charting releases by Dr. Dre, Snoop Doggy Dogg, and Tupac Shakur as well as the soundtrack albums *Deep Cover* (1992) and *Murder Was the Case* (1994). One of the factors that characterized Death Row Records from its inception and which is common to the dozens of artist-owned and operated Rap labels to emerge in the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, is an organized structure rooted in localized "posse" affiliations.

Homeboys and Production Posses

As Greg Tate explains, "every successful rap group is a black fraternal organization, a posse" (1992: 134). On the same theme, Tricia Rose writes that "rappers' emphasis on posses and neighborhoods has brought the ghetto back into the public consciousness" (1994: 11). For Public Enemy's Chuck D, posse formations are a necessary response to the fragmentive effects of capitalism; "the only way that you exist within that mold is that you have to put together a 'posse,' or a team to be able to penetrate that structure, that block, that strong as steel structure that no individual can break" (Eure & Spady, 1991: 330). Each isolates the posse as the fundamental social unit binding a Rap act and its production crew together, creating a relatively coherent or unified group identity that is rooted in place and within which the creative process is supported. It is not rare for an entire label to be defined along posse lines with the musical talent, the producers, and various peripheral associates bonding under the label's banner.

With collective identities being evident as a nascent reference throughout Rap's history in group names like The Sugarhill Gang, Doug E. Fresh and the Get Fresh Crew, X-Clan, or the 2 Live Crew, the term is today unambiguously adopted by Rap artists such as California's South Central Posse or Orlando's DJ Magic Mike whose crew records under the name "the Royal Posse." In some cases, several recording acts align themselves within a relatively coherent posse structure, sharing labels and producers, appearing on each other's recordings, and touring together. This aspect of the posse influence can be discerned in earlier amalgamations such as the Native Tongues crew, which at one point included A Tribe Called Quest, De La Soul, The Jungle Brothers, and Monie Love; the Blackwatch Movement, which was a Muslim-oriented Rap posse comprised of X-Clan, Isis, and Queen Mother Rage; or in the more recent grouping of the Brooklyn-based Boot Camp Click which consists of Buckshot, the Cocoa Brovaz, Heltah Skeltah, Originoo Gunn Clappaz, and the Representativz. As if to underscore just how pervasive the concept

has become, the mainstream press have also employed the term, with an article about Death Row Records and its C.E.O. Suge Knight being published in The New York Times Magazine (Jan. 14, 1996) under the headline "Does a Sugar Bear Bite? Suge Knight and His Posse."

The term posse is defined as a "strong force or company" (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1985) and for many North Americans it summons notions of lawlessness and frontier justice that were standard thematic elements of Hollywood westerns in the 1940s and 50s. This is, in fact, the basis of the term as it is applied within Rap circles although its current significance is related more precisely to the ways in which the Jamaican posse culture has over the years adapted the expressive terminology and gangster imagery of the cinema to its own cultural systems. In her illuminating research on the sinister complexities of the Jamaican posse underworld, Laurie Gunst (1995) relates how the posse system grew under the specific economic, political, and cultural conditions of mid-1970s Jamaica, evolving into a stratified and violent gang culture that gained strength through the ganja, cocaine and crack trade. As she explains in chilling detail, the Jamaican posse system has, since 1980, been transplanted to virtually every major North American city.

The time-line of the Jamaican posse expansion is important in this context as it coincides almost precisely with the emergence of Rap and Hip Hop in New York's devastated uptown ghetto environments. This connection is strengthened when the common lore of Rap's hybrid origins that were forged in the convergence of Jamaican sound systems and South Bronx Funk is considered. Among Reggae artists through the 1970s and 80s, names associated with real or cinematic criminals such as Dillinger or The Outlaw Josey Wales were common. The Jamaican "bad bwoy" character, which shares several common traits with black American symbolic icons such as Stagger Lee, constitutes the image-ideal of the outlaw posse member. It has, through various social mechanisms and discursive overlays, been traced upon many of Rap's themes, images, and postures

that take the forms of the pimp, hustla, gambler, and gangsta in the music's various sub-genres that evolved after 1987.

In certain instances, contemporary Rap artists have also tapped into the well of black cinematic figures, resuscitating the cool, hard, and dominating postures of "blaxploitation" figures John Shaft (from the 1971 Gordon Parks film *Shaft*) or Goldy (from the 1973 Michael Campus film *The Mack*). Since roughly 1987 the Hip Hop culture has also been influenced by alliances associated with West Coast gang systems that are primarily centered around the territorial boundaries and practices of the Crip and Blood sets. Media speculation on Death Row's connections with the Mob Piru Blood set in Los Angeles has never been denied by C.E.O. Suge Knight and numerous album covers and videos in the Rap genre feature artists and their posses "representing" their gang set and the 'hood by throwing gang sigs. The practice reached such an epidemic that BET's Rap City video program now forbids explicitly gang-related hand signs. Additionally, the New York Italian Mafia (i.e., the Gambino and Luciano families and the exploits of the "Teflon Don," John Gotti) has emerged as a recurrent thematic model that has been adopted within the New York Rap scene (i.e., the late Notorious B.I.G.'s proteges Junior Mafia) as have Asian Triad gangs (i.e., the Wu-Tang Clan), providing yet another series of image-ideals of "fraternal organizations" with a "gangsta lean."

Since its inception in the mid-to-late 1970s the Hip Hop culture has always maintained fiercely defended local ties and an inbuilt element of competition waged through Hip Hop's cultural forms of Rap, breakdancing, and graffiti. This competition has traditionally been staged within geographical boundaries that demarcate turf and territory among various crews, cliques, and posses, extending and altering the spatial alliances that had previously cohered under other organizational structures, including but not exclusive to gangs. With the discursive shift from "the ghetto" to the more localized and specific construct of "the 'hood" occurring in 1987-88 (roughly corresponding with the rise and impact of rappers on the West Coast), there has been an enhanced emphasis on the

powerful ties to place that both anchor Rap acts to their immediate environments and set them apart from other environments and other 'hoods as well as from other Rap posses which inhabit similarly demarcated spaces.

Commenting in 1988 on Rap's "nationwide" expansions, Nelson George writes, "Rap and its Hip Hop musical underpinning is now the national youth music of black America...Rap's gone national and is in the process of going regional." (George, 1992: 80). George was right then, as Rap was rising out of the regions and acts were "hitting" from the South (Miami-based 2 Live Crew or Houston's The Geto Boys), the Northeast (Seattle's Sir Mix-A-Lot and Kid Sensation), the San Francisco Bay area (Digital Underground, Tupac, Too Short), Los Angeles (Ice-T, N.W.A.) and elsewhere. Indeed, the significance of the east-west split cannot be overstated since it has led to several intense confrontations between artists representing each region and is arguably the single most divisive factor within the Hip Hop nation to date. Artists associated with cities in the Midwest or southern states often feel obligated to align themselves with one region or the other, or else they attempt to deftly sidestep the issue without "dissing" either coast.

Today, the emphasis is on place, and groups explicitly advertise their home environments with names such as Compton's Most Wanted, Detroit's Most Wanted, the Fifth Ward Boyz, and South Central Cartel, or else they structure their home territory into titles and lyrics⁷⁸, constructing a new internally meaningful Hip Hop cartography. The explosion of localized production centers and regionally influential producers and artists has drastically altered the Hip Hop map and production posses have sprung up throughout North America. Production posses have also demonstrated a growing tendency to incorporate themselves as localized businesses (often buying or starting companies unrelated to the music industry in their local neighborhoods) and to employ friends, family

⁷⁸ This is illustrated by the Flint, Michigan group The Dayton Family's release *What's On My Mind* (1995, Po' Broke Records/Relativity) which features the songs "Flint Niggaz Don't Play" and "Dope Dayton Ave." It is also common practice in recordings and live performances for acts to refer to their home region telephone area code or postal service zip code (i.e. Ed O.G. and da Bulldogs *Roxbury 02119*, 1993, Chemistry Records/PolyGram).

members and members of their wider neighborhoods. Extending Nelson George's observation, it now seems possible to say that Rap, having gone regional, is in the process of going local.

As a site of affiliation and circulation, the 'hood provides a setting for particular group interactions which are influential in Rap'music's evolution. In Rap, there is a widespread sense that an act can't "blow up" without first gaining approval and support from the crew and the 'hood. In "hardcore" Rap, successful acts are expected to maintain connections to the 'hood and to "keep it real" thematically, rapping about situations, scenes, and sites that comprise the lived experience of the 'hood. At issue is the complex question of authenticity as Rap posses continually strive to reaffirm their connections to the 'hood in the attempt to mitigate the negative accusations that they've sold out in the event of commercial or crossover success. Charisse Jones has noted a dilemma confronting successful Rap artists who suddenly have the economic means to "get over" and leave the 'hood. As she writes in the New York Times (Sept. 24, 1995: 43), contemporary artists such as Snoop Doggy Dogg or Ice-T are often criticized for rapping about ghetto poverty and gang aggression while living in posh suburban mansions.

Those who stay in the 'hood generally do so to be closer to friends and family, closer to the posse. While a common rationale for staying in the 'hood is familiarity and family bonds, in numerous cases artists also justify their decisions to stay on a creative basis, suggesting that the 'hood provides the social contexts and raw resources for their lyrics. Others leave with some regret, suggesting that the 'hood may be home but the tension and stress make it an entirely undesirable place to live (this is even more frequent among rappers with children to support and nurture); there is no romanticizing real poverty or real danger. The 'hood is, however, regularly constructed within the discursive frame of the "home" and the dual process of "turning the 'hood out" or "representing" (which involves creating a broader profile for the home territory and its inhabitants while showing respect for the nurture it provides) is now a required practice among hardcore Rap acts.

The posse is always explicitly acknowledged and individual members are greeted on disk and in live concerts with standard "shout outs" that frequently cite the streets and localities from which they hail. This continual reference to the important value of social relations based in the 'hood refutes the damning images of an oppressed and joyless underclass that are so prevalent in the media and contemporary social analyses. Rap may portray the nation's gritty urban underside, but its creators also communicate the importance of places and the people that build community within them.

As in all other popular music forms, "paying dues" is also part of the process of embarking on a Rap music career, and the local networks of support and encouragement, from in-group affiliations to local club and music scenes, are exceedingly important factors in an act's professional development. One way that this is facilitated is through the posse alliances and local connections that form around studios and producers. For example, in describing the production house once headed by DJ Mark The 45 King, Fab 5 Freddy recalls that "he had this posse called the Flavor Unit out there in New Jersey...He has like a Hip Hop training room out there, an incredible environment where even if you weren't good when you came in, you'd get good just being around there" (Nelson & Gonzales, 1991: XIII).⁷⁹ This pattern is replicated in numerous instances and is also exemplified by the production/posse structure of Rap-A-Lot Records in Houston (home to acts such as the Geto Boys, Scarface, and The Fifth Ward Boyz) where the company was forced to relocate its offices because "artists were always kicking it there with their posses like it was a club." (Rap Sheet, Oct. 1992: 18). By coming up through the crew, young promising artists learn the ropes, acquire lessons in craft and showmanship, attain stage or studio experience and exposure and, quite frequently, win major record deals based on their apprenticeships and posse connections.

⁷⁹ The Flavor Unit posse at the time included such Rap notables as Queen Latifah, Monie Love, Apache, Lakim Shabazz, and Naughty By Nature who, perhaps more than the rest, explicitly refer to their origins as New Jersey rappers hailing from 118th St., "Illtown," in East Orange. After internal restructuring, the posse's most bankable star Queen Latifah purchased Flavor Unit Management and has emerged as its executive head.

It is necessary to recognize that the home territory of a rapper or Rap group is a testing ground, a place to hone skills and to gain a local reputation. This is accurately portrayed in the 1992 Ernest Dickerson film *Juice* where the expression "local" is attributed to the young DJ, in one instance suggesting community ties and home alliances whereas, in another context, it is summoned as a pejorative term that reflects a lack of success and an inability to mobilize his career. In interviews and on recordings most rappers at some point refer to their early days, citing the time spent hanging out with their homies, writing raps or perfecting their turntables skills, and getting onto the stage at parties and local clubs or dances (Cross, 1993). Their perspective emerges from within the contexts they know and the places they inhabit. These experiences are also mediated by the powerful influences of professional artists whose forms and styles tend to establish dominant trends that, in turn, affect the practices of young artists.

Few Rap scholars (Tricia Rose and Brian Cross being notable exceptions) have paid attention to these formative stages and the slow processes of developing MC and DJ skills. There is, in fact, a trajectory to an artist's development that is seldom accounted for. In practice, artists' lyrics and rhythms must achieve success on the home front first, where the flow, subject matter, style, and image must resonate meaningfully among those who share common bonds to place, to the posse and the 'hood. In this sense, when rappers refer to the "local flavor," they are identifying the detailed inflections that respond to and reinforce the significance of the music's particular sites of origin and which might be recognized by others elsewhere as being unique, interesting and, thus, marketable.

The posse structures that privilege place and the 'hood can be seen, then, as influential elements in the evolution of new Rap artists as well as relevant forces in the emergence of new, regionally defineable sounds and discourses about space and place. For example, critics and rappers alike acknowledge the unique qualities of the West Coast G-Funk sound which defined a production style that emerged with Dr. Dre's work on the *Deep Cover* soundtrack and the release of his 1992 classic *The Chronic* (Death

Row/Interscope), and arguably reached its apex with the 1994 release of Warren G's *Regulate...G Funk Era* (Violator/Rush Associated Labels). Warren G is Dre's half-brother and their extended posse⁸⁰ had massive chart success between 1992 and 1995. Other local artists such as the Boo Yaa Tribe, Above the Law, Compton's Most Wanted, and DJ Quik also prominently feature variations on the G-Funk sound and reinforced its influence in the industry as a West coast subgenre. G-Funk makes ample use of standard Funk grooves by artists including George Clinton, Bootsy Collins, Gap Band, or Roger Troutman and is characterized as being "laid-back" and sparse, featuring slow beats and longer sample loops. While it was regarded as a regionally distinct style, it was also often related specifically to Dr. Dre's production style and was comparatively categorized by its difference from the more cacophonous East Coast jams (recognizable in the early work of Public Enemy's production crew the Bomb Squad). As Brian Cross (1993) notes, however, the impact of the G-Funk style among California Rap acts is also related to the extended influence of late 1970s Funk music in the Southwest that was a consequence of limited access to independently produced and distributed Rap product in the early 1980s, delaying Rap's geographic expansion from New York to the Los Angeles area.

Explaining the Bomb Squad's production processes following the release of Public Enemy's *Fear of a Black Planet* (1990, Def Jam), Chuck D describes his production posse's familiarity with various regional styles and tastes and their attempts to integrate the differences into the album's tracks. As he states:

Rap has different feels and different vibes in different parts of the country. For example, people in New York City don't drive very often, so New York used to be about walking around with your radio. But that doesn't really exist anymore. It became unfashionable because some people were losing their *lives* over them, and also people don't want to carry them, so now it's more like "Hey, I've got my Walkman." For that reason, there's a treble type of thing going on; they're not getting much of the bass. So rap music in New York City is a headphone type of thing, whereas in Long Island or Philadelphia...it's more of a bass type thing. (Dery, 1990: 90)

⁸⁰ Known as The Dogg Pound, the posse at the time included Snoop Doggy Dogg, Nate Dogg, Dat Nigga Daz and Kurupt, among others who represent the L.A., Compton, and Long Beach areas.

These regional distinctions between the "beats" are borne out in the example of the Miami production houses of Luther Campbell or Orlando's Magic Mike. In Florida (and to some extent, Georgia) the focus is on the bass -- Florida "booty bass" or "booty boom" as it has been termed -- which offers a deeper, "phatter," and almost subsonic vibration that stands out as a regionally distinct and authored style.⁸¹ Within the Rap culture artists and fans alike reflect an acute awareness that people in different parts of the country produce and enjoy regional variations on the genre; they experience Rap differently, structuring it into their social patterns according to the norms that prevail in a given urban environment. Thus, the regional taste patterns in South Florida are partially influenced by the central phenomenon of car mobility and the practice of stacking multiple 10 or 15-inch bass speakers and powerful sub-woofers into car trunks and truck beds.

Add to these stylistic distinctions the discursive differences from the various regions (i.e., the aforementioned Gangsta Rap from the West Coast crews, the chilling, cold-blooded imagery from Houston's "Bloody Nickle" crews on Rap-A-Lot Records, or the "pimp, playa and hustla" themes that are standard among Oakland and San Francisco cliques); the localized posse variations in vocal flow and slang; or the site-specific references to cities, 'hoods, and crews and a general catalogue of differences in form and content becomes evident. What these elements indicate is that, while the Rap posse provides a structured identity for its members, it can also provide a referential value to the production qualities and the sound of the musical product with which it is associated.

Spatial Discourse, the Nation, and the 'Hood

By 1990 Message Rap (or Knowledge Rap) and Gangsta Rap had emerged as important Rap subgenres that, more than other strands, adhered to relatively defined spatial discourses. In their different, contradictory, and even antagonistic approaches to the

⁸¹ For a detailed examination of the Florida "bass" phenomenon, see the special feature of The Source, March 1994.

concept of space and spatiality, they effectively reveal the extent to which issues of race, space, and place dominate the concerns of young Rap artists and the various audience formations that comprise the Hip Hop culture. Prominent Message Rap acts such as Boogie Down Productions, Paris, and Public Enemy maintained the centrality of traditional Rap skills by basing their presentation on the established performative interrelations between the DJ and the MC. Their unique contributions, however, were in the promulgation of distinctly Afrocentrist/pro-black political and cultural ideologies, lyrical pedagogy, and often insightful social analyses and critical commentary regarding contemporary cultural issues. The nationalist discourses in this Rap subgenre consequently appeal to the prevalent sense among minority youths that blacks must educate themselves in order to mobilize real change within their collective communities rather than relying on racist social systems to provide their cultural knowledge (and their spiritual "knowledge of self").

An important adjunct of this subgenre encompasses Islamic rappers of the Chicago-based Nation of Islam (or the smaller Five Percent Nation sect) of which Ice Cube, Paris, the Poor Righteous Teachers, Rakim (of Eric B and Rakim), Lakim Shabazz, and X-Clan claim membership. Here, the messages inscribed in the lyrics maintain a commitment to the basic tenets of the Islamic faith and remain sympathetic to the American Muslim heritage of Malcolm X as well as to the contemporary Muslim teachings of Minister Louis Farrakhan.⁸² Among these rappers, the black cultural diaspora is framed within the expansive reach of the faith and the religious discourses of Islam rather than being articulated in specifically spatial or racial terms.

As the heavy gold chains of one generation of rappers and B-boys gave way to the next generation's red, black, and green medallions featuring a silhouette of the African

⁸² For more detailed examinations of the political and religious foundations of Message Rap, see Joseph Eure and James Spady, (eds.). 1991. Nation Conscious Rap. New York: PC International Press; Rap Sheet, Oct., 1992.; and Ernest Allen, Jr. 1996. "Making the Strong Survive: The Contours and Contradictions of Message Rap," in Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap and Hip Hop Culture, William E. Perkins, (ed.), Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

continent -- a cartographic statement of cultural identity with extenuating nationalist implications -- the general idea of a unified black youth culture acquired clearer definition among Hip Hop practitioners. By founding identity and shared history in an essentialized blackness, the pro-black messages introduce a collectively realized image of racial and cultural heritage while attempting to address issues of contemporary common struggle. Blackness -- not urban environment or social space -- determines the nationalist character of this position, fixing identity along a linear continuum with the past. Message Rap in this period is part of a conscious effort to forge links across the diverse social settings and urban landscapes that divide and separate black youth throughout the country. This process includes the communication of a series of hybrid black nationalist discourses functioning within an inconsistently applied and at times contradictory political agenda. The hybridity of these discourses is due to the sweep of historical political moments that are embraced, with slavery, emancipation, the 1950s and 60s black power movement, and current crises involving social prejudice or police violence against young blacks all being merged in the lyrical texts.

The rhetoric of black solidarity linking artists and members of wider Hip Hop audience formations is invariably constructed in the form of an urgent appeal for greater political and cultural awareness. The aim is to resist and reorder the debilitating social conditions gripping black America. In attempting to communicate a sense of black youth solidarity, the spatial differences between 'hoods, cities, and regions are generally downplayed although they are not -- indeed, they cannot -- be ignored completely. In a manner reminiscent of the Black Panther Party's initiatives in the 1960s, the different cities and separate 'hoods are often conceived as self-contained cells that exist autonomously (working within the particular conditions of the local) but remain part of the larger Hip Hop movement. The depressed environment of the 'hood therefore emerges as a spatial symptom of a larger systemic decay that has inordinately impacted on blacks.

The most dynamic act to rise in this subgenre after 1987, Public Enemy outlines an agenda for radical social transformation in its recordings through explicit terminology. "Power to the People" (1990, Def Jam) invokes both the battle cry from the 1960s Black Power Movement and 1970s Funk (with references to several James Brown songs) while infusing 1990s Rap into the mix. As a result, their lyrics forge a sense of historical continuity within black cultural activism that, importantly, encompasses both men and women:

And you thought the beat slowed down
 Power to the people
 Get on up, get into it, get involved
 Feel the bass as the cut revolves
 To the brothers wit the 808
 Like I said before, P.E. got a brand new funk
 Turn it up, boom the trunk
 Internationally known on the microphone
 Makin' sure the brothers will never leave you alone
 To my sisters
 Sisters, yes we missed ya
 Let's get it together, make a nation
 You can bet on it, don't sleep on it
 'Cause the troops cold jeepin' it pumpin'
 (Power to the people)....

In a similar vein, on the group's most recognizable anthem "Fight the Power" (1990, Def Jam), which was recorded under the same title as the Isley Brothers 1975 hit song, Chuck D stresses the need for intellectual awareness and a learned attitude toward revolution and radical social transformation:

As the rhythm designed to bounce
 What counts is that the rhymes
 Designed to fill your mind
 Now that you realize the pride's arrived
 We got to pump the stuff to make us tough
 From the heart
 It's a start, a work of art
 To revolutionize make a change nothin's strange
 People, people we are the same
 No we're not the same
 'Cause we don't know the game
 What we need is awareness, we can't get careless
 You say what is this?
 My beloved let's get down to business
 Mental self-defensive fitness
 (Yo) bum rush the show

You gotta go for what you know
 Make everybody see, in order to fight the powers that be....

The rhetorical appeal to unity and revolutionary action is shaped through the recurrent manifestation of a collective social amalgamation that implies an expansive body of conscious youth.

Paris is even more explicit about his "plea for unity" on the track "Break the Grip of Shame" (1990, Scarface/Tommy Boy) which makes references to black pride, revolutionary movement, and the Islamic faith, all presented within what he describes as "pro-black radical raps upliftin'." Paris and Public Enemy each identify a knowledge gap within the black nation that must be spanned in order to unite the black constituency as a coherent whole. Like KRS-1 (especially on the track "You Must Learn" from the album *Ghetto Music: The Blueprint of Hip Hop*, 1989, Zomba/BMG), these artists articulate the need for black youths to come together and inform themselves for the "revolution" that is already underway in the cultural war zones and in the depressed urban terrains of the 'hood.

In his enquiry into the cultural resonance and meanings of the term "the 'hood," Paul Gilroy challenges prevalent reductionist impulses as well as the nationalistic tendencies in 1990s Rap. He poses the underlying question "how is black life in one 'hood connected to life in others? Can there be a blackness that connects, articulates, synchronizes experiences and histories across the diaspora space?" (1992: 308). He criticizes the idea of "nation" that has emerged as an important structuring concept in American Hip Hop culture (mainly after 1987) and remains sceptical of the value invested in the discourses of "family" unity (communicated in the rhetoric of black brotherhood and sisterhood) when there is so much territorial antagonism evident in the strands of Rap that privilege the spatialities of gang culture and turf affiliation. Gilroy is perplexed by the closed contours that the 'hood represents, suggesting that its inward-turning spatial perspectives inhibit dialogue across divided social territories and cultural zones. He further argues that redemptive attempts to appeal to either the black "nation" or to the "family" of

internationally dispersed blacks in Message Rap are ill-conceived and based in a particularly Americanist viewpoint that harbors its own exclusive and hierarchically stratified biases.

Perhaps more in line with Gilroy's expansive, trans-Atlantic visions of Rap's diasporic potential is the track "Ludi" (1991, Island Records) by the Canadian act the Dream Warriors. Based in Toronto, the group is part of one of the world's largest expatriate Caribbean communities. Like Gilroy's London, Toronto is an "important junction point or crossroads on the webbed pathways of black Atlantic political culture. It is revealed to be a place where, by virtue of factors like the informality of racial segregation, the configuration of class relations, the contingency of linguistic convergences, global phenomena such as anti-colonial and emancipationist political formations are still being sustained, reproduced, and amplified" (1993: 95). In mapping a cultural "crossroads," the song utilizes an early reggae rhythm and a lightly swinging melody (based on a sample of the Jamaican classic "My Conversation," released in 1968 by The Uniques) that taps into a particularly rich moment in the evolution of the reggae style and revives a well-known Jamaican track while resituating it within the performative contexts of Hip Hop.

"Ludi" (which refers to a board game) begins with rapper King Lou stating that the song is for his mother -- who wants something to dance to -- and his extended family to whom he offers the musical sounds of their original home environment. The family to which he refers is not, in the immediate sense, the family of black-identified brothers and sisters that cohere within nationalistic and essentialist discourse but literally his siblings. He then expands his dedication to the wider "family" of blacks with a comprehensive roll-call of the english and spanish-speaking Caribbean islands and Africa which inform but by no means determine his cultural identity. There is no attempt to privilege an originary African heritage nor is there a nostalgic appeal to the Caribbean heritage. This extensive list recognizes Toronto's hybrid Afro-Caribbean community and refers directly to a locally manifested culture of international black traditions (rather than a single tradition of

essentialist blackness) within which the Dream Warriors developed as young artists. The song's bridge also reinforces the Caribbean connection, explaining what it means for the DJ selector to shout out "rewind" or "come again," making several references to the turntable practices of Jamaican sound systems that are mainstays throughout internationally dispersed Caribbean communities.

Later in the track, King Lou's cohort Capital Q reminds him that "there are other places than the islands that play Ludi. Why don't you run it down for the people?" Here, employing a distinctly Jamaican DJ "toaster" dialect, King Lou provides a wider expression of black diasporic identification as he expands his list to include Canada, the U.K., and the United States, countries where the Afro-Caribbean presence is the largest and most influential. He concludes by mentioning his international record labels 4th and Broadway and Island Records and, finally, names the influential Toronto-based independent production house, Beat Factory, that first recorded the group. In this last shout out to Beat Factory he effectively returns the scale to the local, closing the circle that positions the Dream Warriors within a global/local system of circulation.

There is no simple means of assessing the impact of this expansive global/local perspective but, within Gilroy's innovative theoretical *oeuvre*, the song can be celebrated for the ways in which its musical and lyrical forms reinforce the dispersed geographies of contemporary black cultures without falling victim to the conservative reductions of black essentialism. Without cleaving toward either the rhetorical rigidity of black nationalist Rap or the nihilistic vitriol of "niggaz with (bad) attitude," the Dream Warriors present an alternative path. As "Ludi" illustrates, the group unself-consciously articulates an evolving hybrid identity informed by transnational migrations that are actively manifested on local grounds.

On the other end of the Rap spectrum is the example of artists who mainly operate within a discursive field featuring spatialized themes of intense locality. Whereas the proponents of Message Rap evoke an expanded vision of black America, it is in contrast to

the ghettocentric visions of urban black experience that also emerge in the genre, mainly within the lyrics of Gangsta Rap. Despite many shared perspectives on black oppression and systemic injustices there exists a tension in the interstices between the expansive nationalisms of Message Rap and the more narrowly defined localisms of Gangsta Rap with its core emphases on "the 'hood." This distance is widened in view of the latter's unapologetic claim that "life ain't nothin' but bitches and money." The two subgenres are addressing generally common phenomena in their focus on black struggles for empowerment yet they are deploying spatial discourses and programs of action that do not fit easily together.

The emergence of an intensified spatial terminology was not a sudden occurrence, but by 1987 when Boogie Down Productions (featuring KRS-1), Eazy-E, and Ice-T broke onto the scene, the privileging of localized experience rapidly acquired an audible resonance. From New York, BDP released "South Bronx" (1987, B-Boy), a track that aggressively disputes the allegations of various rappers from Queens who, in the aftermath of Run-D.M.C.'s commercial successes, claimed that they were Rap's true innovators. KRS-1's lyrics reaffirm the South Bronx borough as the birthplace of Hip Hop, reinforcing the message in the now-classic chorus with its chant "South Bronx, the South, South Bronx."

Giving name to locations and to the artists who inhabited them anchors his testimony although memory and place are both central to KRS-1's claims on behalf of his home territory. He attempts to prove its dominance by recounting the genre's formative stages with close attention to localized, highly particular details:

Remember Bronx River, rolling thick
 With Cool DJ Red Alert and Chuck Chillout on the mix
 While Afrika Islam was rocking the jams
 And on the other side of town was a kid named Flash
 Patterson and Millbrook projects
 Casanova all over, ya couldn't stop it
 The Nine Lives crew, the Cypress Boys
 The Real Rock steady taking out these toys
 As hard as it looked, as wild as it seemed

I didn't hear a peep from Queen's...
South Bronx, the South South Bronx....

The references to people and places provide a specificity that is comparatively absent in Eazy-E's important (but often overlooked) single release "Boyz-n-The Hood" (1988, Ruthless/Priority) from the same period. With its plodding beats and Eazy-E's undeveloped Rap skills, the track (penned by Ice Cube, who later helped form the nucleus of the group N.W.A.) did little to advance the genre aesthetically. Yet, in its uncompromising linguistic turns and startling descriptions of homeboy leisure (involving beer, "bitches" and violence), it was rivetting and offered a new hardcore funky model for masculine identification in Hip Hop:

'Cause the boyz in the hood are always hard
Come talkin' that trash and we'll pull your card
Knowin' nothin' in life but to be legit
Don't quote me boy, 'cause I ain't sayin' shit

Describing the LP *Eazy-Duz-It* on which the single first appeared, Havelock Nelson and Michael Gonzales explain that it "overflows with debris from homophobia to misogyny to excessive violence. And yet, anyone who grew up in the project or any Black ghetto knows these extreme attitudes are right on target" (1991: 81).

The "reality" factor surfaces as a complex and troublesome aspect in Rap generally and with greater frequency in Gangsta Rap especially as it rose to prominence in the music industry, displacing other more progressive and inclusive discursive forms. De Certeau describes the intense emphases on the real as a relatively recent phenomenon, as the product of a contemporary media culture:

The media transform the great silence of things into its opposite. Formerly constituting a secret, the real now talks constantly...From morning to night, narrations constantly haunt streets and buildings. They articulate our existences by teaching us what they must be. They "cover the event," that is to say, they *make* our legends out of it. (de Certeau, 1984: 185-186)

The appeal to the real is founded on the claim that hardcore Rap is a legitimate vehicle for the expression of actual cultural experiences. The streets and the 'hood are generally conceived as the primary sites where the real coheres and it is the street-oriented themes of

Gangsta Rap that most often refer to "keeping it real," "representing the real," or other similar terms.⁸³ MC Eiht of Compton's Most Wanted explains that "it's just like reliving the past, and I do it on paper. Things that I seen in my younger years that I know about. It's not just talking, it's realism...Whether people think its fake or whether people think I'm trying to be studio or whatever, muthaphukkas know the real" (Rap Pages, June, 1994: 41). Elsewhere, Oakland rapper Spice-1 offers another, more complicated explanation when he states that "to white kids it's just music. To the black kids it's real" (The Source, June, 1994: 68).

This latter proposition is perhaps a more accurate assessment of the term as it is "really" intended. Whereas the term "reality" in Rap tends to be linked exclusively to the lyrical content and street based narratives, Rap taken as a whole is deeply connected to an ongoing and ever-changing black cultural tradition that remains a central force in the daily reality of urban black teens. Within an essentialist cultural logic, the real is always located within the core culture. Afrocentrist proclamations, bolstered by emerging anthropological evidence attesting to the African continent as the originary source for all humanity, fulfills a similar function by other means. In this regard, reality within a Hip Hop paradigm is more than "just music" and it is certainly more than the lyrics. It is both of these as they are situated within the lived contexts of black expressivity and black identity formations.

Clearly, the multiple realities that comprise life in the 'hood, like the multiple identity formations that accompany them, are not granted equal attention by either rappers or social critics. Much is absent due to the selective privileging of a limited facet of 'hood experience that has become associated with the real as an image construct. The focus is on a particular image of reality that, while existent in the streets and neighborhoods of numerous black urban sections, has been harnessed in a calculated strategy to create a compelling and graphic product that appeals to a sizeable audience (much like slasher films or contemporary gangster movies). Eazy-E and his group N.W.A. provoked these debates

⁸³ In the mid-1990s, there has been a gradual shift away from the potentially pejorative term "Gangsta Rap" as an increasing number of artists implement the term "Reality Rap" in defining the subgenre.

and quickly established the terrain for the representations of an ostensible urban reality in Gangsta Rap, leaving cynical critics like Mike Davis to question their legitimacy and ethics from the cultural sidelines.

Eazy-E's "Boyz-n-The Hood" reflects many of Rap's earlier modes of spatial representation that conceive of the ghetto landscape as a generalized abstract construct, as space. The terminology of the 'hood, however, also adds a localized nuance to the notion of space that conveys a certain proximity, effectively capturing a narrowed sense of place through which young thugs and their potential victims move. Claims to the representation of authentic street life or 'hood reality emerged with sudden frequency following the rise of Eazy-E and N.W.A. who were among the first to communicate detailed images of closely demarcated space in this manner. This suggests that "reality" and a reduced spatial scale are somehow linked conceptually among those who developed the particular spatial discourse of the 'hood within Gangsta Rap. The contribution of "Boyz-n-The Hood" is ultimately its influence in the popularization of a new spatial vocabulary that spread throughout Hip Hop from all regions as artists from the West Coast gained prominence in the field.

By most accounts, the spatial discourse that congeals around the concept of the 'hood emerges in Rap by California-based artists with the greatest frequency and force. But in the popular media as well as in academic treatises, the focus tends to be on the expressions of "gangsta" violence and masculine aggression to the exclusion or minimization of equally prevalent spatial elements. As David Toop writes, "the first release on Ruthless Records, launched by rapper Eazy-E and producer Dr. Dre in 1986, was like a tabloid report from the crime beat fed through a paper shredder" (1991: 180). The very term "Gangsta Rap" is more concretely concerned with the articulation of criminality than any other attributes that may emerge from its lyrical and visual texts. Having become sedimented in the popular lexicon as the key or trademark term for the subgenre, it is difficult to critically challenge the primacy of criminality and to replace it with a spatiality

that, to my mind, preceeds the "gangsta-ism" that saturates the lyrical texts. The criminal activities that are described in Gangsta Rap's intense lyrical forms are always subordinate to the definitions of space and place within which they are set. It is, therefore, the spatialities of the 'hood that constitute the ascendant concept and are ultimately deserving of discursive pre-eminence.

Since Rap's invention, it has become somewhat of a convention for the MC or rapper to place him or herself at the center of the world, as the subject around which events unfold and who translates topophilia (love of place) or topophobia (fear of place) into lyrics for wider dissemination. This is illustrated in Ice-T's "Intro" on his debut album *Rhyme Pays* (1987, Rhyme Syndicate/Sire). Adapting a sampled version of Mike Oldfield's 1974 hit "Tubular Bells" (Virgin), the track displays none of the rhythmic norms of the period and is devoid of bass and drum beats. Similarly ignoring standard Rap flow, Ice-T's vocals are less influenced by the dominant East Coast form than the spoken-word delivery of adult-oriented humorist Rudy Ray Moore (whose "Dolemite" character exists alongside the traditional Stagger Lee tales and was also translated into several "blaxploitation" films). The pimp and hustler thematics expounded throughout the album are also more reminiscent of the novelists Donald Goines or Iceberg Slim (whose name Ice-T adopted) than anything existing in Rap up to that point, with the possible exception of Philadelphia MC Schooly D.

As an introduction, the track allows Ice-T to present his Hip Hop curriculum vitae which is explicitly defined in spatial terms:

A child was born in the East one day
 Moved to the West Coast after his parents passed away
 Never understood his fascination with rhymes or beats
 In poetry he was considered elite
 Became a young gangster in the streets of L.A.
 Lost connections with his true roots far away....

The description of a personal exodus embarked upon by the young rapper under conditions of extreme adversity is crucial to the construction of mystique and legend. Describing his entry into L.A. gang culture and the Rap scene in the magazine Rap Pages, Ice-T identifies

cities, neighborhoods, high schools and housing projects that have meaning to him and to those familiar with these areas:

I went to a white school in Culver City, and that was chill, but I was livin' in Windsor Hills near Monterey Triangle Park...When I got to high school all the kids from my area were gettin' bussed to white schools and I didn't want to go to them schools. So me and a few kids from the hills went to Crenshaw. That's where the gangs were. (Rappages, Oct. 1991: 55)

Here, place is a lens of sorts that mediates one's perspective on social relations. It offers familiarity and it provides the perspectival point from which one gazes upon and evaluates other places, places that are "other" or foreign to one's own distinctly personal sites of security and stability (no matter how limited these may be). Ice-T may be from New York, but he is of Los Angeles and it is the spaces and places of L.A. that provide the coordinates for his movement and activities.

Ice-T goes on to make the distinction between East Coast Rap and the emerging L.A. "gangsta" style, noting that the latter developed out of a desire to relate incidents and experiences with a more specific sense of place and, subsequently, greater significance to local youths who could recognize the sites and activities described in the lyrics. In this regard, Rap offers a means of describing the view from a preferred "here," of explaining how things appear in the immediate foreground (the 'hood) and how things seem on the receding horizon (other places).

The braggadocio also locates his origins in New York, essentially fixing his own "roots" in Hip Hop's cultural motherland. Ice-T is clearly centering himself, building his own profile. In the process, he relates a history that invests supreme value in New York as the first home of Hip Hop, naturalizing his connections to the artform and validating his identity as a tough, adaptive, and street-smart L.A. hustler, the self-proclaimed "West Coast M.C. king." Ice-T's references to New York illuminate the spatial hierarchy that existed at the time since the Northeast was unquestioned as the dominant zone of Hip Hop cultural activity. Battles among Rap innovators were still being waged on the local, interborough scale in New York City although, gradually, New York's monopoly on the

form was lost as various other sites of innovation emerged. The rise of the L.A. sound and the massive impact of the gangster themes after 1987 resulted in the first real challenge to New York's dominance in Hip Hop. This development had the additional effect of polarizing the two regions as the aesthetic distinctions based on lyrical content and rhythmic styles became more defined and audiences began spending their consumer dollars on Rap from the nation's "West side."

"The West side is the best side": Representing Compton

The West's arrival was heralded by a deluge of song's that celebrated and glorified the street warrior scenarios of the California cities of South Central Los Angeles (with help from the 1998 Dennis Hopper film *Colors* and Ice-T's galvanizing title song on the soundtrack), Oakland and, especially, Compton. Starting with N.W.A.'s "Straight Outta Compton" (1988, Ruthless/Priority), numerous recordings circulated conveying the narrative imagery of viscious gang-oriented activities in Compton, including "Raised in Compton" (1991, Epic) and "Compton 4 Life" (1992, Epic) by the group Compton's Most Wanted, and DJ Quik's "Born and Raised in Compton" (1991, Profile) or "Jus Lyke Compton" (1992, Profile). Appearing on the cover of his album *Way 2 Fonky* (1992, Profile), DJ Quik stands posed alongside a chain-link fence topped with razor wire, sporting a jacket emblazoned with the Compton logo, proudly advertising his home territory. Through these multiple means of signification the city of Compton rapidly gained a notoriety framed by the image of tough and well-armed homeboys and the ongoing deadly conflict between rival gangs (the Bloods, Crips, and the LAPD) operating with a near-total lack of ethics or moral conscience. This last point can be most clearly discerned in the ubiquitous refrain in Gangsta Rap that "Compton niggaz just don't give a fuck."

Tricia Rose and Brian Cross situate the rise of Compton-based Rap in two quite different frames of understanding. Rose writes that "during the late 1980s Los Angeles rappers from Compton and Watts, two areas severely paralyzed by the postindustrial

economic redistribution developed a West coast style of rap that narrates experiences and fantasies specific to life as a poor young, black, male subject in Los Angeles" (1994: 59). Her assessment situates the phenomenon of West Coast styles and lyrical forms in an internally based set of socio-economic conditions. Brian Cross locates the rise of Compton's Rap scene within a wider and more appropriate cartographic relation to New York and other California locales:

Hiphop Compton, according to Eazy, was created as a reply to the construction of the South Bronx/Queensbridge nexus in New York. If locally it served notice in the community in which Eazy and Dre sold their Macola-pressed records (not to mention the potential play action on KDAY), nationally, or at least on the East Coast, it was an attempt to figure Los Angeles on the map of hiphop. After the album had gone double platinum Compton would be as well known a city in hiphop as either Queens or the Bronx. (Cross, 1993: 37)

In its initial phase, Compton Rap is more likely the product of phenomena described by Cross. The general narrative content of "Straight Outta Compton" sheds little light on the city or its social byways and does not demonstrate any particular concern with the locality's economics. Its basic function as a geographical backdrop to the dangers that N.W.A. as a group represents actually follows the same standard constructions of abstract space heard in Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "New York, New York" five years earlier or in Eazy-E's "Boyz-n-the-Hood."

Stating at the outset that "when something happens in South Central Los Angeles, nothing happens. Just another nigger dead," Ice Cube establishes the track's general theme of spatially organized violence:

Here's the murder rap to keep you dancin'
 With a crime record like Charles Manson
 AK-47 is the tool
 Don't make me act the motherfuckin' fool
 Me and you could go toe-to-toe, no maybe
 I'm knockin' niggers out the box daily
 Yo, weekly, monthly, and yearly
 Until then, dumb motherfuckers see clearly
 That I'm down with the capital C.P.T.
 Boy you can't fuck with me
 So when I'm in your neighborhood ya better duck
 'Cause Ice Cube is crazy as fuck
 As I leave, believe I'm stompin'

But when I come back, boy
I'm comin' straight outta Compton....

Without detailed spatial descriptions of landmarks and environment, Compton does not emerge as a clearly realized urban space in the N.W.A. track even though it is the group's home town. The California city is instead interpolated as a bounded civic space that provides both specificity and scale for the communication of a West Coast Rap presence. The group is "representing" their home territory and the song's release was their bold announcement that the "boyz" from the 'hoods of Compton were "stompin'" onto the scene and could not be avoided by anyone who paid attention to developments in the business. The Compton and South Central L.A. crews were not only serving notice to their neighboring communities that they were in charge, they were serving notice to New York and the entire Hip Hop nation that the new sound had arrived and the balance of power (based on innovation and inventiveness) had tipped toward the West. This was the beginning of a decade-long antagonism between the East and West coasts that has too frequently proven that the gangster themes comprising the lyrical content are based in more than mere lip service or masculine posturing.

On "Raised in Compton" (1991, Epic/Sony), MC Eiht of Compton's Most Wanted explicitly racializes the urban spaces of the city, more fully addressing the specificities of its cultural character and providing a further sense of the place that he recognizes as his formative home. He reproduces several of the general elements that N.W.A. had already imposed on Compton's representational repertoire but for him, the city also has a personally meaningful history that is manifested in his identity as a gangster turned rapper:

Compton is the place that I touched down
I opened my eyes to realize that I was dark brown
And right there in the ghetto that color costs
Brothers smothered by the streets meaning we're lost
I grew up in a place where it was go for your own
Don't get caught after dark roaming the danger zone
But it was hell at the age of twelve
As my Compton black brothers were in and out of jail

The attempt to historicize his relations to the city and the 'hood makes this cut slightly more complex than "Straight Outta Compton" as MC Eiht's bonds to the localized Compton environment are presented as the outcome of an evolving growth process as a child becomes a man. Subjective history, conveyed here in an almost testimonial form, and the experience's of space together offer relevant insights onto the social construction of a gangster attitude or a gang member's rationale.

George Lipsitz isolates something similar with his focus on the socio-political importance of merging musical and non-musical sources of inspiration and experience among California Chicano Rock musicians since the 1960s:

As organic intellectuals chronicling the cultural life of their community, they draw upon street slang, car customizing, clothing styles, and wall murals for inspiration and ideas...Their work is intertextual, constantly in dialogue with other forms of cultural expression, and most fully appreciated when located in context. (Lipsitz, 1990: 153)

Like the California Chicano music Lipsitz describes, "Raised in Compton" highlights a customized car culture, urban mobility, and the sartorial codes of the Compton streets ("T-shirt and khakis") all described within highly particular vernaculars. In its inclusiveness of the minor details that are, in practice, part of the daily norm for many urban black youth in the rim cities surrounding Los Angeles, the song accesses the spatial and racial characteristics of the city of Compton that have influenced and shaped the man that MC Eiht has become. The articulation of spatial specifics (places, place names, specific site references, etc.) is still lacking but there is also a rich description of some of the social formations that are spatially distributed and which reproduce the forces underlying the black teen gangster ethos with which MC Eiht, and many others, so clearly identify.

Maintaining the gang member's pledge to defend the set and the 'hood forever, the track "Compton 4 Life" (1992, Epic/Sony) also features MC Eiht providing a personal profile that sutures him into the neighborhood environment and inextricably conjoins him with the deeper gang structures that prevail. Again, the prior history of place is invoked as a determining factor and, in a tragic example of fatalism, MC Eiht accepts the idea that the

authority of the past is supreme and is, therefore, implicated in the reduced range of options available to many young black urban dwellers. From his perspective his destiny, while not foreclosed in absolute terms, is highly influenced by the pressures of the past that have produced the social conditions in which he now finds himself.

Mid-point in the track he challenges outsiders to "throw up your 'hood'cause it's Compton we're yellin'." This is a "turf" statement and it is entirely consistent with the understanding of spatial otherness that is fundamental to L.A. gang culture. Whereas Eiht and other Gangsta rappers enter into the discourses of alienation and social disenfranchisement as a negative factor compelling them toward a criminal lifestyle, they also easily expound their own versions of alienating power. Framed in terms of gun violence and human decimation, these expressions are intended to diminish the presence of others who represent other cities and other 'hoods. This is the articulation of control through domination, ghetto style.

What first appears as an incongruity in the expressed logic of the relations between space and power may be an example of insightful reversal that is common to black expressions of cultural resistance. Spatial domination and geo-social containment in the threatening form of "one time" or "five-o" (the police) and other gang members are conceived as unavoidable negatives of life in the 'hood. Defeating the enemy forces is the ultimate goal. But in establishing this dynamic, MC Eiht cleverly acknowledges that, even in victory, the streets represent their own kind of incarcerating authority:

Compton 4 Life
Compton 4 Life

It's the city where everybody's in prison
Niggers keep taking shit 'cause ain't nobody givin'
So another punk fool I must be
Learn the tricks of the trade from the street
Exist to put the jack down, ready and willin'
One more Compton driveby killin'

There is a brief pause in the rhythm that hangs like doom, stilling the song's pace and flow and creating a discomforting gap in the track. When the chorus "Compton 4 Life"

suddenly breaks in with the final syllable echoing ominously, it becomes clear that the title is formed around a double entendre. On the one hand, this is an expression of spatial solidarity and loyalty to the 'hood while, on the other, it refers to the pronouncement of a life sentence to eternal imprisonment in the city's streets and alleys.

As "Straight Outta Compton," "Raised in Compton," and "Compton 4 Life" suggest, "our sensibilities are spatialized" (Keith and Pile, 1993: 26). In these examples, Compton's central significance is maintained through the lyrical representation of activities that are space-bound and which are then discursively traced onto the identities of the rappers who "claim" Compton as their own. The issue of whether or not the songs refer back to a consistently verifiable reality is rendered moot by the possibilities they present as textual spaces of representation. Artists discursively locate themselves in an array of images and practices within the texts, constructing a relatively coherent identity out of the urban detritus that is evidently a crucial aspect of the Compton they experience.

Despite claims by critics of Gangsta Rap, such as David Samuels (New Republic, Nov. 11, 1991) or Folk musician Michelle Shocked who (with Bart Bull) suggests that "Los Angeles as a whole and South Central specifically bear little resemblance to the cartoon landscape -- the Zip Coon Toon Town -- of gangsta rap" (Billboard, June 20, 1992: 6), the subgenre's narrative depictions of spaces and places are absolutely essential to an understanding of the ways that literally millions of urban black youths imagine their environments and the ways that they relate those images to their own individual sense of self. The spaces of Compton and other similar black communities that emerge through their work are simultaneously real, imaginary, symbolic, and mythical. With this in mind, the question that should be asked is not "is this real and true," but "why do so many young black men choose these dystopic images of spatial representation to orient their own places in the world?" By framing the question thusly, the undeniable fascination with the grisly mayhem of the lyrical narratives is displaced and one can then embark on a more illuminating interrogation of the socio-spatial sensibilities at work.

*Mobile Perceptions of Compton:
The View From Here (and There)*

According to Doreen Massey, the identity of place is "constructed out of movement, communication, social relations which always stretch beyond it" (1992:14). This indicates that place acquires its significance in and through human interaction. Despite the various songs that may suggest otherwise, the cities or sites of significance that are encompassed by the term "the 'hood" never exist in isolation. Their unique significance for rappers and other members of the Hip Hop culture is based on a structured relationship to "other" places, whether on the scale of a city or 'hood. Indeed, the nation-wide mobility of Rap artists such as Ice-T and his DJ, Afrika Islam (who moved from New York to L.A.), Ice Cube (who briefly moved from L.A. to work with various New York producers), or Too Short and his entire production posse (who have moved their base of operations from Oakland to Atlanta) introduces a range of contact and overlapping influences that are noteworthy within Hip Hop. Hip Hop has never been a static form; it has always been prone to change and hybridity due to ongoing influences that are generated through multiple connections and contacts. Its practitioners continue to demonstrate a high rate of mobility that extends the range of the culture and contributes to enhanced dialogue across the map.

In 1992, two recordings about Compton were released that reach beyond the prevailing representations of a city framed within localized boundaries and attempt to situate the phenomenon of Compton-based Rap in a wider and more elaborative perspective. The first of these is DJ Quik's "Jus Lyke Compton," from the 1992 LP *Way 2 Fonky*. The track adopts a unique perspective on space, place, and subjective identity that, in its emphasis on mobility throughout the American heartland, is relatively rare. Quik's capacity to navigate the spatial cartographies of Hip Hop and to communicate the cultural importance invested in spatial difference sets "Jus Lyke Compton" apart from most recordings that maintain place-based perceptions of the 'hood. DJ Quik bears witness to various permutations of the gangster lifestyle that is enacted "in the field" and in so doing he motivates a process of self-reflection and reflection on the impact of his cultural labor.

The geographical or conceptual boundaries of any closely delineated zone are not impermeable, as DJ Quik observes on the track. He first locates himself as "local," a Compton native whose modest enterprise and 'hood-oriented entrepreneurial success on the home stage have enabled him to tour and travel throughout the nation:

Finally out the motherfuckin' C.P.T
 Off to other cities and shit
 No longer just an underground hit
 Movin' thangs, a local nigga made good
 And made a name off of making tapes for niggaz in the 'hood
 And now let me tell a little story
 About the places I been to and the shit that I been through
 Like fightin' and shootouts and bangin' and shit
 All because a nigga made a hit, check it

1991, it was double or nothin' that a nigga would hit
 Then we broke out with the funky shit
 About bitches and niggaz and gettin' drunk off that bud
 I was doing the shit they hadn't heard of
 But foolish was I to think that it wasn't no other cities like this
 And that they didn't like this
 That Compton was the home of a foot in yo ass
 Where you got blast

This opening segment is part of a strategy to position himself at the threshold between local and national scales of success. While the boastful introduction is standard to the Rap form, Quik's equation of success with enhanced mobility illustrates a system of values that are organized around a celebrity's spatially expansive evolution from a local phenomenon to a more widely recognized artist. Identities forged in the 'hood are a product of spatial compression and are deeply influenced by locally sustaining bonds that cohere within the more narrowly defined social parameters of place. Since the song is a paean to his Compton roots, the strategy through which he links himself with the city is important and is also ultimately intended as a means to elevate both his status and that of the hometown. By employing spatial terms to describe his success and outward growth as he gets over through the Rap game, Quik implicates experiences at the local scale as being essential to his enhanced national profile as an emerging Rap "star."

The "story" that Quik recounts is structured along an expansive trajectory. Moving from his Los Angeles center to the urban enclaves of Oakland, St. Louis, San Antonio, and Denver, the song is a virtual reproduction of the concert tour itinerary, mapping performances in cartographic succession. The spatial descriptions also shift as he moves through the story, with the more proximate city of Oakland being framed within terms of recognition as well as a certain historical sense or familiarity. The other cities he cites seem much further away, and consequently, much less familiar:

Now that's just a thing of the past
 Let me tell ya why firsthand, we did a show up in Oakland
 And niggaz was kickin' up sand
 To them bangin' ain't nothin' new and slangin' ain't nothin' new
 And for every nigga we done shot they done shot two
 Straight through and on through the sixties before I was born
 Families of young niggaz mourn
 So I'm just lettin' you know
 That if you take a trip to the Bay
 Keep your hand on the clip

Because Oakland is jus lyke Compton
 Yeah, I'm tellin' y'all Oakland is jus lyke Compton

The track is infused with a touristic awe of middle America, revealing the provincial mindset of an untravelled individual with limited exposure to other distant spaces and places.

As his travelogue unfolds there is a sense that DJ Quik's worldview is also undergoing adjustment through new contacts with dispersed members of the Hip Hop nation. This is most clearly expressed in the descriptions of his tour stop in Missouri where he registers the most intimate interactions with the city's local constituency:

Moving on to St. Louis, where the country is fucked
 With gold teeth in the mouth, but they still know what's up
 Where it's hot as a motherfucka, hot enough to make ya cuss
 That's why I kept my ass on the bus
 But later on when it cooled off we came down and met a couple of friends
 Who put us up on the St. Louis cap
 The Smith Center, with Big Bob, Little Steve Tojo, Biss and Rich
 And a couple of bitches
 Then they took us to a man named Gus in a store
 He put me down with a herringbone and shoes galore
 That's when I started thinking that this wasn't like home
 But then they had to prove me wrong

'Cause later on that night after we did the show
 We went back to the afterset and wouldn't ya know
 Yeah, Bloods and Crips start scrappin' and shootin'...in Missouri?
 Damn, how could this happen?

Now St. Louis, is jus lyke Compton
 Yeah, y'all, St. Louis is jus lyke Compton, nigga

DJ Quik attempts to account for the far-reaching impact of Compton-based Rap, reflecting on his own incapacity to foresee that the violence and nihilism commonly associated with his home turf could be so easily transported elsewhere. The passage conveys Quik's fascination with what he and his Compton cohorts have begotten and, more importantly, it grapples with some of the potential meanings of the broader circulation of key elements of the scene which he had evidently assumed were specific to Compton. Of central interest is the description of the multiple ways in which the California gang culture has been adapted and integrated into the daily practices or locally meaningful experiences of audiences residing throughout the American heartland. Citing the flash of gang signs and the ubiquity of red and blue colors designating Blood and Crip gang members at his various concerts, Quik reveals mixed emotions of pride and horror.

Without implicating West Coast Gangsta Rap or his own musical output, he criticizes audience members across the nation for re-enacting cinematic gang scenarios without comprehending the spatial contexts and their relevance to Southern California urban youth:

I don't think they know, they too crazy for their own good
 They need to stop watchin' that "Colors" and "Boyz n the Hood"
 To busy claimin' Sixties, tryin' to be raw
 And never even seen the Shaw

But now, back to the story that I'm tellin'
 We packed up the tour and started bellin'
 When we arrived I saw red and blue sweatsuits
 When I'm thinkin' about horse dookey and cowboy boots
 I guess Texas ain't no different from the rest
 And San Antonio was just waitin' to put us to the test
 and before it was over the shit got deep
 A nigga got shot in the face and was dead in the street
 Then they came in the club thinkin' of scrappin'
 Yeah, we was puttin' 'em down and squaring the rest, shit,
 I even had to wear the bulletproof vest

Now San Antonio, is jus lyke Compton
Yeah, San Antonio, is jus lyke Compton, bitch

With a reference to "home" functioning as an explicit context for the track's revelations, Quik balances the "here" of Compton with a recurring "there" of the tour stops and social encounters along the way. De Certeau refers to a travelling "enunciation" as a factor in the production of relational points "near" and "far." He writes:

To the fact that the adverbs *here* and *there* are the indicators of the locutionary seat in verbal communication -- a coincidence that reinforces the parallelism between linguistic and pedestrian enunciation -- we must add that this location (*here* -- *there*) (necessarily implied by walking and indicative of a present appropriation of space by an "I") also has the function of introducing an other in relation to this "I" and of thus establishing a conjunctive and disjunctive articulation of places. (de Certeau, 1984: 99)

Isolating a series of similarities and differences, the spatial logic and investment in place lead him to measure all other places against the neighborhoods and community spaces from which he emerges:

After a month on the road
We came home and I can safely say
That L.A. is a much better place to stay
How could a bunch of niggaz in a town like this
Have such a big influence on niggaz so far away?...

Now Denver, is jus lyke Compton
Yeah, y'all, Denver, they wanna be lyke Compton
And ya know that Oakland, is jus lyke Compton, bitch
Yeah, y'all St. Louis, we made it jus lyke Compton, fools
Uh-huh San Antonio, is jus lyke Compton
Yeah, and Denver, the wanna be lyke Compton, punk ass niggaz
I thought ya knew....

Quik's territorial identification with the home-place of Compton is the track's narrative constant although its value is realized only through Quik's new perspective as a touring musician. The bridge hinges on the realization that, while the C.P.T and the 'hood comprise refuge to which he can comfortably return, it is not nearly as insular or contained as he had originally believed. Home acquires new meaning for the rapper once he has attained the profile and means to extend his territory and range of mobility beyond the homefront, beyond the 'hood. Compton and South Central Los Angeles may well be "a

much better place to stay" but in order to make this statement, the prior imperative of departure is required. This allows Quik to gaze back at the locale from which he came and to re-evaluate it in terms of his own subjective criteria based upon the linguistic and rational concept of "here" and "there."

It is the very fact of travel and mobility out and away from his home territory that permits him to reflect on the localized practices and values he has taken for granted. Neal Smith and Cindi Katz's perspective on travel and identity helps to illuminate DJ Quik's perspectives:

The notions of travel, travelling identities, and displacement represent another response to the undue fixity of social identity. "Travelling" provides a means for conceptualizing the interplay among people that are no longer so separate or inaccessible one to the other...The flow of travel not the putative fixity of space donates identity. (Smith and Katz, 1993: 78)

Quik's movement is between stable points on the map -- he is the mobile force linking these various spaces and places. With each arrival and departure, however, there is a realization of something bigger than himself and the Compton world that he knows so well. The song's lyrics convey an evolving process of identity transformation, the remaking of the locally defined self into a national figure as Quik constructs a more expansive subjective identity that exceeds his previous self-image as "just an underground hit...a local nigga made good." In achieving this, however, he lyrically constructs a spatial hierarchy that privileges Compton above the other city spaces described. This spatial authority is then folded back upon Quik himself as he affirms his identity as a legitimate representative of the West Coast gangster practices that he sees being re-enacted across the states. In this manner, then, Compton and DJ Quik become inseparable symbols of authority and authenticity, the travelling embodiment of the "real" and the original product of the funky West Coast sound as well as the compelling gang lifestyles that have been copied in other locales.

In another example interrogating Compton's distant impact, Bronx rapper Tim Dog's "Fuck Compton" from the 1991 release *Penicillin on Wax* (Ruffhouse/Columbia)

stands as a prime example of spatially segregated bi-coastal antagonism in Hip Hop. As a response to the meteoric rise of Compton acts and recorded homages to Compton gangsters, Tim Dog's release attempts to do two things: undermine the status of Compton-identified acts and their West Coast Gangsta Rap style (specifically its most acclaimed propagators, N.W.A.) and elevate the status of his home territory, the South Bronx. At the time of the single's release, the impact of West Coast Gangsta Rap had substantially altered the Hip Hop scene and Tim Dog was reacting to the shifting patterns as the prior authority and innovative leadership of East Coast artists came under review.

On the surface, the track adheres to the basic mode of the recorded "boast" and "dis," presenting a challenge framed in aggressively confrontational language. Yet the terms of engagement emphasize location and position on the Hip Hop map (including both geo-spatial locations as well as market positions in the music industry), entering into the overlapping discourses of turf, territory, and spatial identities. In this sense, the track is a culturally meaningful articulation of Hip Hop's cartographies of difference conveying what was at the time a growing sentiment of disdain between artists and posses from the two coastal regions.

Tim Dog's verbal attack suggests that he is responding to the dominant set of spatial and place-based images emanating from Compton. He is lashing out at a representation of Compton that is portrayed by the hardcore Gangsta Rap acts who established the city's infamy. The members of N.W.A. and their extended posse are the explicit target, metonymically isolated as representatives of the larger West Coast Gangsta Rap phenomenon. Over a drum and piano sample from N.W.A.'s "Kommershul" (1991, Ruthless/Priority) the "Intro" on *Penicillan on Wax* opens with the "a message to N.W.A.":

No matter how hard you think you are
 This is what the whole world thinks about you
 Yeah, straight outta the motherfuckin' Bronx
 Lettin' everybody know that Tim Dog ain't takin' no motherfuckin' shorts
 And I stole your motherfuckin' beat and made it better

To show the whole world that y'all ain't nothin'
But a bunch of pussys

N.W.A. responded to this with a legal suit claiming copyright infringement that was eventually settled out of court. In the video for "Fuck Compton," Tim Dog and his crew enact the mugging and immolation of N.W.A. in the streets and alleys of the Bronx with lookalike actors standing in for Eazy-E and Dr. Dre. The message involves an indiscrete statement of utter disrespect and dismissiveness of the Compton Rap scene and the symbolic annihilation of West Coast rappers by those from the East, in this case led by Tim Dog. Indeed, a factor elevating the track as a benchmark in Rap is its importance as an early indicator of an expanding trend of transregional invective.

Tim Dog's overall contribution to the genre has been minimal yet "Fuck Compton" marks a turning point in what has frequently been referred to as a "civil war" threatening the Hip Hop nation.

Oh shit, motherfuckers, step to the rear and cheer
'Cause Tim Dog is here
Let's get down to the nitty-gritty
And talk about a bullshit city
Talkin' about niggaz from Compton
They're no comp and they truly ain't stompin'
Tim Dog, a black man's task
I'm so bad I'll whip Superman's ass
All you suckers that riff on the West Coast
I'll dis and spray your ass like a roach
Ya think you're cool with your curls and your shades
I'll roll thick and you'll be yellin' out "Raid"
One hard brother that lives in New York
Where brothers are hard and we don't have to talk
Shut your mouths before we come out stompin'
Hey, yo Eazy
Fuck Compton! Fuck Compton! Fuck Compton! Fuck 'Em!

As a reply to the popularity and commercial clout of Gangsta Rap, "Fuck Compton" exemplifies the dialogical elements within Hip Hop. It is constructed in the form of a national conversation with representatives from one regional front addressing those from another. Tricia Rose explains that "hip hop produced internal and external dialogues that affirmed the experiences and identities of the participants...hip hop developed as part of a cross-cultural communication network" (1994: 60). While this is true, her explanation also

implies a more cooperative interaction than is always the case. Rather than a series of positive engagements (which are relatively common), many recordings including "Fuck Compton" deploy deeply negative discourses, the equivalent of "lyrical gang-banging" and verbal warfare. These dialogic articulations of animosity within Hip Hop display a pronounced spatial character and reproduce the tensions of spatially nuanced difference that continually thwart the formation of a sustainable politics of unification or solidarity within the loosely defined Hip Hop nation.

In his assessment of the track, Paul Gilroy suggests that Tim Dog's diatribe is actually one of "profound bewilderment" with the portrayals of gang violence and black-on-black crime that are the hallmark of West Coast Gangsta Rap. He reads the text as a disillusioned statement registering "disappointment that the idea of homogeneous national community has become impossible and unthinkable" (1992: 308).

Havin' that gang war?
 We wanna know what you're fightin' for
 Fighting over colors?
 All that gang shit's for dumb motherfuckers
 But you go on thinking you're hard
 Come to New York and we'll see who gets robbed
 Take your jheri curls, take your black hats
 Take your wack lyrics and your bullshit tracks
 Now you're mad and you're thinking about stompin'
 Well I'm from the South Bronx
 Fuck Compton! Fuck Compton! Fuck Compton! Fuck 'Em!
 Tim Dog and I'm the best from the East
 And all this Compton shit must cease
 So keep your eyes on the prize
 Don't jeopardize my arrive 'cause that's not wise
 Well come and get some of this loaded tech-nine
 Bo bo bo shots are cold gunnin'
 And you'll really be a hundred miles and runnin'...
 Fuck Compton! Fuck Compton! Fuck Compton! Fuck 'Em!

According to Gilroy, Tim Dog's cross-regional expression of incomprehension and nonrecognition is evidence that the discourses of black sibling unity and linked diasporic or nationalistic identities are untenable in practice, based more in wishful thinking than material or historical fact. He writes, "if Tim Dog is to be believed, Compton is as foreign

to some blacks in New York as Kingston, London, Havana, Lagos, Aswan, or Capetown — possibly even more so" (ibid.).

Writing from the U.K., Gilroy acknowledges his own geographic displacement from the city spaces being addressed in the track. He notes that the potential meanings underlying the lyrical discourses are invariably open to diverse translations once they are encountered in other cultural contexts (across the Atlantic or among dispersed audience formations within the black diaspora). His assessment on this point is entirely accurate; in fact, it can be said that there is also a strong foreign element alienating blacks from separate 'hoods within shared metropolitan areas in the U.S. More than merely revealing the limits to these connective discourses, however, "Fuck Compton" also reminds us that otherness can form the grounds for hate, even within the rather narrow cultural formation of Hip Hop. It is easy to hate or mistrust that which is foreign, strange, and unrecognizable (shared racial attributes notwithstanding) and this is clearly evident in Tim Dog's vitriolic and contradictory attack against the West side.

"Represent": Proximate Renderings and the Extreme Local

Rob Shields writes that "representations of cities are like still-life portraits...representations make the city available for analysis and replay" (1996: 228). Although he is referring to planning documents, maps, and other materials, he follows de Certeau (1984) by including stories and urban myths as part of the repertoire of urban representation. He explains that the various forms of urban representation introduce a range of signs and metaphors that "are linked to normative notions of what are appropriate social reactions to each of the myriad of possible events and encounters" (ibid: 229). From this vantage-point, it might be added that new sites and scales of spatial representation (communicated through specific signs and metaphors) introduce an altered sense of what may be considered "appropriate" in different contexts.

By the end of the 1980s, Rap artists had provided an assortment of spatial representations of New York and Los Angeles that were both consistent with and divergent from prevailing dominant image-ideas of those urban centers. Rappers worked within the dominant representational discourses of "the city" while agitating against a history of urban representations as they attempted to extend the expressive repertoire and to reconstruct the image-idea of the city as they understand it. This proved to be a formidable challenge since New York and L.A. exist as urban icons, resonant signs of the modern (New York) and postmodern (L.A.) city. They are simultaneously the products of a deluge of representational images and narrative constructions and of material existence and social interaction.

Rap's emergence from city spaces unencumbered by a deep history of representational images, with less representational "baggage," presents a unique opportunity for its lyrical innovators to imagine and represent their cities. As a traditional frontier city and a prominent contemporary regional center, Seattle might be considered as an *underrepresented* city that lacks the wealth of representational constructions common to the larger centers to the South and the East. In the mid-1980s Seattle was a veritable hinterland known best as the home of Boeing's corporate and manufacturing headquarters. In the music industry, Jimi Hendrix was perhaps Seattle's best known native son, but the city was otherwise not regarded as an important or influential center for musical production or innovation. The city's status changed with the rise of Bill Gates's Microsoft corporation and by 1990 it was garnering considerable attention as the source of the massively influential (and commercially successful) "Grunge/Alternative" music scene. Music has subsequently been an important element in the construction of Seattle's contemporary image although the industry's Rock predilections have not been as favorable to the city's Rap and R&B artists.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Addressing the relatively minor industry consideration for Seattle's black artists, Sir Mix-A-Lot's Rhyme Cartel Records released the conspicuously titled *Seattle...The Dark Side* in 1993. The cover prominently proclaims that the release "flips the script. No Grunge...just Rap and R&B...SeaTown style."

In the spring of 1986, Seattle rapper Sir Mix-A-Lot's "Square Dance Rap" (NastyMix Records) made an obscure entry onto the Billboard Hot Black Singles chart. The release did not advance any radical aesthetic statement nor did it make a lasting contribution to the Rap form. Its relevance is in its capacity to reflect the diverse regional activity in Rap production at the time as artists and labels attempted to establish themselves within the rapidly changing conditions fostering regional and local expansion. Mix-A-Lot's emergence illustrates the fact that Rap was being produced in relatively isolated regions and, as the track's chart status suggests, that it was selling in significant volume within regional "home" markets. Despite this, an advertisement for Profile Records appearing six years later in Billboard's "Rap '92 Spotlight on Rap" (November 28, 1992), portrays the proliferation of industry activity with a cartographic cartoon entitled "Rap All Over the Map: The Profile States of America." New York, Chicago, Dallas, St. Louis, Vallejo and Los Angeles are all represented with the names of acts and their respective regions and cities. The Pacific Northwest is conspicuously labelled "uncharted territory" which refers to Profile's inactivity there, but which also reproduces the dominant image of the region as a distant and unknown frontier in the view of those from the nation's larger or more centralized Rap production sites.

Regardless of the ad's insinuation, the fact that Seattle was at this stage "in the house" indicates that the genre's breakout with the 1986-87 commercial assault by the Beastie Boys, DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince, Kool Moe Dee, LL Cool J, or Run-D.M.C. had implications far beyond the normalization of Rap's crossover capacity. Rap's consumer base was not just extended throughout the nation but new and unforeseen sites of production were also being established. In an interesting spatial inversion that regards marginality as a positive factor, Bruce Pavitt, cofounder of the Alternative-oriented Sub Pop label, states that "one advantage Seattle has is our geographical isolation. It gave a group of artists a chance to create their own sound, instead of feeling pressured to copy others" (Billboard, August 18, 1990: 30). Sir Mix-A-Lot slowly solidified his Northwest

regional base, posting reputable figures on two albums recorded on the NastyMix label which his sales helped build. He later sealed a distribution deal merging his self-owned Rhyme Cartel label with Rick Rubin's Def American label (a subsidiary of the Warner Music Group) and went on to release the widely acclaimed album *Mack Daddy* (1992, Rhyme Cartel/Def American). The single "Baby Got Back," a ribald ode to women's posteriors, reached the number one position on the Billboard Pop charts, eventually selling double platinum.

Displaying pride in his Northwestern roots, Sir-Mix-A-Lot provides an excellent example of the organization of spatial images and the deployment of a spatial discourse. In general terms, details that might be overlooked speak volumes about space and place, presenting additional information about the ways that individuals' daily lives are influenced by their environments and conditions of existence. For instance, the standard group photo in the inner sleeve of *Mack Daddy* depicts several members of the Rhyme Cartel posse wearing wet-weather gear consisting of name-brand Gore Tex hats and jackets. This is a totally pragmatic sartorial statement from the moist climate of the Pacific Northwest that remains true to Hip Hop's style-conscious trends. It displays a geographically particular system of codes, conveying regionally significant information that once again demonstrates Hip Hop's capacity to appropriate raw materials or images and to invest them with new values and meanings.

The track "Seattle Ain't Bullshittin'" is exceptional for the manner in which it communicates a sense of space and place with clarity, sophistication, and cartographic detail. Establishing himself on the track as a genuine Seattle "player," as the original Northwestern "Mack Daddy" (a term for pimp), Mix-A-Lot makes a claim to local prestige as a former Seattle hustler who shifted to legitimate enterprise as a successful musician and businessman. His braggadocio adopts a purely capitalist discourse of monetary and material accumulation, reproducing the terms of success and prosperity that conform both to dominant social values and to the value system inherent within the Rap industry.

Masculine power and domination are represented in the banal identification with expensive luxury cars, but the image of cars also "drives" the cartographic portrayal of the greater Seattle and Tacoma region and the exploits of a highly mobile Rhyme Cartel posse.

As the title suggests, Seattle is the centerpiece to the track. This is clear from the beginning as Mix-A-Lot and posse member the Attitude Adjuster ad lib over a sparse guitar riff:

...Boy, this is S.E.A.T.O.W.N., clown (forever)
 Sea Town, Yeah, and that's from the motherfuckin' heart
 So if you ain't down with your hometown
 Step off, punk
 Mix, tell these fakes what the deal is...

As the bass and drums are dropped into the track, Mix-A-Lot lyrically locates himself as a product of Seattle's inner-city core known as the CD (or Central District):

I was raised in the S.E.A. double T. L.E.
 Seattle, home of the CD, nigga
 19th and, yes, Laborda,
 pimpin' was hard...
 It wasn't easy trying to compete with my homies in the CD

Seattle's Central District is home to a sizeable concentration of black constituents who comprise roughly 10% of Seattle's total population. Mix-A-Lot's portrayal of the CD neighborhood is not explicitly racialized yet the references to pimping and competition among "homies in the CD" easily fall into a common, even stereotypical definition of "the 'hood" that is pervasive throughout Rap of the period.

The Attitude Adjuster states at one point that "it ain't nothing but the real up here in the Northwest," attesting to the hardcore practices and Hip Hop cultural identities that are evident in Seattle as well as the rest of the nation. Unlike most major American cities, Seattle's black presence does not have a huge defining power on its urban character; black youths are a socially marginalized amalgamation within a geographically marginal city. The Attitude Adjuster's pronouncement may suggest a hint of defensiveness but it also gives voice to the black presence that is, as the subtext implies, just as hardcore as those from other urban centers.

Having established his ghetto credentials, Mix-A-Lot expounds on several spacially oriented scenarios, shifting scale and perspective throughout the track, veering "all over the map" with his descriptions of local, regional, and national phenomena:

So even though a lot of niggas talk shit
I'm still down for the Northwest when I hit the stage
Anywhere U.S.A.
I give Seattle and Tacoma much play
So here's to the Criminal Nation
And the young brother Kid Sensation
I can't forget Maharaji and the Attitude Adjuster
And the hardcore brothers to the west of Seattle
Yeah, West Side, High Point dippin' four door rides...

Mix-A-Lot adopts the role as Seattle's Hip Hop ambassador, acknowledging his own national celebrity profile while accepting the responsibilities of representing the Northwest, his record label and posse, and fellow Rap artists from Sea Town. Exploiting his access to the wider stage, he elevates the local scene, bringing it into focus and broadcasting the fact that Hip Hop is an important element of the Seattle lifestyle for young blacks living there as well. This is the reverse of the example of Compton which was familiarized through a relentless process of cultural reiteration by numerous artists. "Seattle Ain't Bullshittin'" performs a similar function as the plethora of recordings about Compton, but in contrast it stands alone as a unique expression of Northwest identity. There is no similar track on the Seattle-based Criminal Nation's *Trouble in the Hood* (1992, NastyMix/Ichiban), for example, although references to the region are sprinkled throughout several tracks and on the liner sleeve one group member sports a Tacoma t-shirt identifying his hometown.

The perspective shifts again as Mix-A-Lot adopts an intensely localized mode of description, recalling the days when he "used to cruise around Seward Park," moving out of the bounded territory of the city's Central District that is the posse's home base. Seattle is cartographically delineated here through the explicit naming of streets and civic landmarks that effectively identify the patterned mobility of the crew:

Let's take a trip to the South End,
We go west, hit Rainier Ave. and bust left,
...S.E.A. T.O.W.N., yo nigger is back again

...Gettin' back to the hood,
 Me and my boys is up to no good,
 A big line of cars rollin' deep through the South End,
 Made a left on Henderson,
 Clowns talkin' shit in the Southshore parking lot
 Critical Mass is begging to box
 But we keep on going because down the street
 A bunch of freaks in front of Rainier Beach
 Was lookin' at us, they missed that bus
 And they figure they could trust us...


In 1992, the trend toward such closely demarcated spatial parameters was not yet a common characteristic in Rap, although it was increasingly becoming a factor in both lyrical and visual representations. Rather than an expression of a narrow social perspective celebrating the local to the exclusion of other wider scales, "Seattle Ain't Bullshittin'" demonstrates a rather successful method of representing the hometown local "flavor" on an internationally distributed recording. With its references to the city's crosstown byways and meeting places, the track successfully communicates an idea of the general leisure practices of the Rhyme Cartel posse while also retaining a privileged perspective on place that resonates with greater meaning for Seattle or Tacoma audiences. These audience formations will undoubtedly recognize their own environment and the track will consequently have a different and arguably more intensely felt affective impact on them. The requirement to maintain a certain allegiance to "the local" is a standard practice in Hip Hop that continues to mystify many critics of the Rap genre. It is imperative for negative critics to recognize and understand the dual processes that are at work here and to acknowledge that there are different messages being communicated to listeners who occupy different spaces and places and identify with space or place according to different values of scale.

It is precisely through these excessively detailed image constructions that the abstract spaces of the ghetto are transformed into the more proximate sites of significance or places of the 'hood. Looking beyond the obvious, the spatial discourse provides a language through which numerous social systems are framed for consideration. The track is not solely about space and place on the local scale in Seattle but it is also about the ways

in which these spaces and places are inhabited and made meaningful. Struggles and conflicts as well as the joy and love of place are all represented here as are the simpler facets of daily life such as missing the bus. This is not a display of parochial narrowness but a much more complex and interesting exploration of local practices and their discursive construction in the popular media.

As I've explained, spatial language is flexible and it can quickly encompass vast or minimal terrains, as Sir Mix-A-Lot and others demonstrate. The eponymously titled debut EP by the Lifers Group (1991, Hollywood Basic) offers an example of an even further spatial reduction that moves into entirely different social boundaries and reproduces a significantly different aspect of social experience. The Lifers Group consists of a collective of rappers who are incarcerated at New Jersey's infamous Rahway Prison which is "home" to a segment of the northeast region's convicted criminal element. Identified both by their names and prison numbers, the group members represent a prison posse which is active in the Scared Straight program targeting young repeat offenders of minor crimes or youths convicted of more serious first offences. Including tracks such as "The Real Deal" and "Belly of the Beast," the EP provides an insider's perspective on prison life, lyrically constructing an image of space and place that is constrained by concrete walls and cell bars.

Their message challenges the bravado and street hustler images that pervade the Rap genre as they stress the point that while the streets may be tough, prison is also a dangerous and frightening place to live. The Lifers Group represents the antithesis of "living large" and being mobile in the city; they introduce the sobering reality and negative consequences that are generally absent in Gangsta Rap's arrogant self-promotion. There is no celebrating their primary site of significance here, no glamorizing the world in which they dwell for the repeated theme is framed along spatial lines that continually reduce and compress the subjective self. For these men, the streets are part of a past life and "walls, steel bars and mental scars" now constitute the defining boundaries of their spatial reality. For these men,



more than ever place is a defining element in their sense of self and identity. They can do little else but manipulate a spatial language.

Chapter 8

The 'Hood, the Nation, the World: Rap Into the 1990s

"Pop" is minimally about how music sounds and massively about how it sells
Jane Dark

*Authenticity has always been a marketing ploy -- either for boutique merchandisers or
demagogic politicians -- and a naive yearning for consumers.*
Adolph Reed, Jr.

The Mainstreaming of Hip Hop

With the 1980s drawing to a close, Rap was circulated even more widely as another major media wave that popularized the style, language, music, and attitude of Hip Hop further disseminated many of the culture's defining elements throughout North America and the world. In Billboard's 1990 year-end wrap-up, columnist Janine McAdams wrote that "1990 may well be remembered as the year when the biggest-selling albums were by rap artists," (Dec. 22, 1990: 33) as Rap posted top sales in the Pop category (MC Hammer's *Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em* and Vanilla Ice's *To the Extreme*), matched by several defunct Rock acts (primarily Creedence Clearwater Revival and Led Zeppelin whose CD catalog sales and box-set compilations were also huge sellers). Building on an inertia that had initially been generated via dispersed regional and local activity and then carried over through major international mass media conduits, Hip Hop's cultural profile grew to an extent that exceeded the outbreak of low-budget Hip Hop-oriented films in 1984 or the 1986-87 multi-platinum sales posted by the Beastie Boys, LL Cool J, or Run-D.M.C. As Rap's popular appeal expanded there was a noticeable thematic convergence of issues involving space and place as well as an accompanying emphasis on the articulation of spatially oriented notions of authenticity and reality in Hip Hop. The subcultural roots of Hip Hop rose as a topic of intense debate within the extended Hip Hop nation as the internalized sense of cultural ownership among Rap practitioners collided with externally sourced corporate apparatuses. In observing the developments of the genre as a facet of

popular culture and the music industry at the end of the 1980s, it is necessary to acknowledge that the process of Rap's growth also produced conditions engendering a series of new spatial discourses and attitudes toward place.

Hip Hop was saturating the media spaces of the mainstream press and, of greater consequence, television. Despite several constraining factors such as the continued crisis in Rap tour and concert promotions (which contributed to a noticeable decrease in all-Rap headline shows at large urban venues) and the ongoing pressures on the genre and its practitioners from the PMRC, Focus on the Family, and several other conservative action groups, Rap was entering a phase of heightened activity. This "activity" can be considered from two competing perspectives: one which conceives of it as a result of Hip Hop's dynamic and vibrant subcultural expressiveness or, in less optimistic terms, one that regards it as a product of the machinations of an opportunistic corporate culture. Each, in fact, has an element of validity, for even as talented artists motivated growth in the rapidly expanding scene, in its ubiquity it was also harnessed to commodity advertising campaigns.

Rap became a staple facet of advertising jingles and Hip Hop offered a stock set of images that were incorporated in the marketing of soft drinks and snack foods, clothing and footwear, and such name-brand products as Campbell's soup, McDonald's "Chicken McNuggets," and Pillsbury baking products (with the doughboy being recast as a rapping homeboy). Whereas earlier stages of Rap's popularization established it as a mainstay among certain teenage audience formations and a culturally active and aware adult demographic (i.e., artists and club-goers in New York's downtown scene), the genre's penetration did not necessarily reach the larger social body. This changed at the turn of the decade when corporate America's cooptive maneuvers became more aggressively pronounced. Their activities were influential in the mainstreaming of Rap music and the

Hip Hop lifestyle, effectively circulating the more easily accessible symbols of Hip Hop and more deeply instilling many of its base elements into the popular consciousness.⁸⁵

Still, negative perceptions of Rap's black cultural roots and its danger quotient remained as factors inhibiting its mainstream appropriation. The 2 Live Crew explicitly acknowledged this when they adopted and revised a black nationalist slogan, producing their version, "2 Black, 2 Strong, 2 Live." The brutal rape and beating in April, 1989 of a New York investment banker by a group of black teenagers also, again, grafted Rap to social threat when it was reported that the accused exchanged rhymes "in a cypher" among themselves in their jail cell and had referred to their violent spree as "wilding," a term ostensibly derived from the song title "Wild Thing" by West coast rapper Tone Loc (which charted just prior to the crime in February and March of that year).⁸⁶ The proliferation of a variety of subgenres including Pop Rap, however, offered a marketable alternative to the non-mainstream and more politicized styles that attracted so much negative attention.

Having been carefully packaged and positioned for crossover, top Pop Rap stars such as MC Hammer, the Fresh Prince, Young MC, or Kid and Play eventually helped to improve the genre's commercial profile. For example, Young MC's biography emphasized his college degree and clean-cut lifestyle which, combined with a Grammy Award for his debut double-platinum LP *Stone Cold Rhyming* (1989, Delicious Vinyl), made him a suitable spokesman for companies and commercial products including Taco Bell and Sprite. Will Smith, a.k.a. the Fresh Prince was awarded his own television situation comedy (the Fresh Prince of Bel Air) in 1990 after gaining industry attention and commercial success with "Parents Just Don't Understand" and "A Nightmare on My Street" (1988, Jive). The point that I want to make, however, establishes these phenomena

⁸⁵ For more about Rap and its commercial appropriations, see M. Elizabeth Blair's "Commercialization of the Rap Music Subculture," in Journal of Popular Culture, 27:3, Winter 1993.

⁸⁶ See Houston Baker, Jr., "The Black Urban Beat: Rap and the Law," in Black Studies, Rap, and the Academy. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1993.

as Rap's cultural victory, not corporate America's, especially since the fears that Rap's commercial appropriation would lead to its eventual demise have proven to be unfounded.

Summoning terms used in the previous chapters, these divergent positions also further heightened the perception within the Rap scene that there existed a "real" or "authentic" Hip Hop culture which was vulnerable to erosion by the "inauthentic" influences of exploitive capitalism. Numerous cultural formations working within specific musical genres have experienced this issue as a dilemma in the past yet in the case of Rap the issue has remained central to the creative culture that produces it. Janine McAdams articulated several of the more resonant factors underlying the issue of Rap realness and the genre's Pop derivatives in Billboard by framing it as either a contrast in content or in geo-social origins. It is worth quoting her at length in order to analyse her comments:

The more rap may make it onto pop or urban radio and will continue to sell in record numbers in the years to come, "real rap" probably won't. What is "real rap"? Just think of where rap comes from, of the experiences and lifestyle and hardships that first fueled and informed rap music. The strong Afro-centric, street-level, urban political socio commentary call to action, call to party, tale of the 'hood rap lyrics and music are not likely to be recognized, heralded, or celebrated by the machine that is pop music. Because pop seems to accept only rap that cleans itself up, makes itself presentable, modifies its language and its intensity, and is devoted in part to pop video imagery...Rap is the musical expression of revolution, of the anti-establishment. Real rap does not seek government approval; it is not meant to be mass-appeal. (McAdams, Oct. 12, 1991: 24)

Despite a genuine concern regarding the topic, McAdams commits several errors in her accumulative critique that are representative of more widespread and prevailing assumptions about the music's past and its origins. For instance, she misrepresents Rap's history by conflating distinct temporal movements, folding them upon each other in a manner that incorrectly posits a relatively coherent teleological Rap tradition. Rap's nonlinear trajectory has been among its preservational characteristics since it has made the genre's developments impossible to predict and difficult to forecast with any accuracy. Adhering to a common misperception (but one that is not rare among rappers themselves) her argument suggests that a dominant defining characteristic of "real" Rap is a modicum of socio-political content and, moreover, that political Rap should not be considered in the

same vein as Pop Rap, even if it sells platinum (as Public Enemy did at the time). She creates the impression that, on the one hand, Rap had been fiercely political and strongly inclined toward Afro-centric cultural conscientization from its inception (having only been intermittently so prior to 1987) and, on the other, that the various subgenres are not differentiated by distinctly unique elements with their own informing histories.

While she may be correct in stating that the "pop machine" will not embrace the "real" rap, her terms remain vague. Absent from her assessment is any clear acknowledgement of the industry's role as an organizational and directive influence that, among other things, is responsible for genre definitions and accompanying market demarcations that she herself relies upon. Evidence suggests that, in fact, the "pop machine" did warm to the "real" Rap in numerous instances, among them being the emergence of a distinct genre of Gangsta or 'Hood films directed and often produced by black men, which in turn, provided the music industry with soundtrack albums that often outdistanced the films in the commercial market. Rather than examining the complexity of the music industry's involvement in market labelling she offers several examples of artists who conform to her loose definitions of "the real Rap." None of this accounts for the popular success of the ideological rants of Public Enemy or the fact that the hardcore "gangsta" act N.W.A. had topped the Billboard Top Pop Albums chart in the week following the release of *Efil4zaggin* (1991, Ruthless/Priority), joining the Beastie Boys, Tone Loc, MC Hammer, and Vanilla Ice as the only Rap acts to ever reach the number one Pop Album position up to that time.⁸⁷

Coming from a different "hardcore" sensibility than N.W.A., Public Enemy combined elements of what McAdams would define as Rap "realness" with staged show business flourishes, achieving crossover hit success and widespread mainstream attention.

⁸⁷ While alterations to Billboard's sales research methods and chart evaluation system were partially responsible for the meteoric chart ascent of *Efil4zaggin*, the album also reached the public without major advance media hype. Released on Eazy-E's Ruthless Records label and distributed by the independent Priority Records, it soared to number one in advance of a single release and without the benefit of an accompanying video; these were sales based on N.W.A.'s established reputation for solid production, compelling street-tough lyrics, and a "buzz" within the Hip Hop scene itself.

Their most recognizable hit, "Fight the Power" (1990, Def Jam) was a crucial addition to the soundtrack of Spike Lee's incendiary 1989 film *Do the Right Thing*, forming a linkage from which both benefited. Despite their unrelenting "attitude" and a language and discourse that was patently intended to grate against dominant social norms, Public Enemy and N.W.A. (among many others) each occupied a position that implied a keen awareness of the broad range of popular culture options. They manufactured contemporary radical postures that ultimately drew them closer to a teen Rock tradition, turning rebel images to their commercial advantage. The groups were most interesting (shocking, entertaining, etc.) from a cultural perspective precisely because they so evidently understood their relationship to Pop music traditions and to the accepted norms from which they deviated. In retrospect, Rap's maturity at this juncture was predicated on the basis of the shrewd manipulation of media images and popular celebrity that the media can engender. It is clear that massive consumer response and headline popularity situates groups such as Public Enemy or N.W.A. within a popular phenomenon that escapes McAdams's limited definitions of "real" Rap and Pop.

Perhaps unknowingly, many Hip Hop advocates were in fact reflecting traditional "mass culture" critiques (i.e., the Frankfurt School) of patterns of commercial manipulation and appropriation, denying the legitimacy of mainstream representations that divorced the image from the "reality" of their subculture. Founded in either a nostalgic attitude that maintains an ideal image of an ostensibly more unified, purer, or more authentic set of cultural practices that have been lost (or stolen), or a critical attitude that regards major corporate incursions as inevitably leading toward the commodification of lived cultural practices, the appeal to "the real" gained considerable support within Hip Hop circles. This debate had been smouldering for years but as external high-stakes players continued to bring their commercial influences to the scene at the end of the decade the issue of authenticity and appropriation was reignited.

It was in this phase of Hip Hop's evolution that the identification of a "hardcore" attitude forged within the discursive articulation of "the real" was finally cemented in Rap music. Ironically, however, the term emerged as a powerfully influential and enduring facet of the culture in part due to the music industry's appropriation, consolidation and reinforcement of its relational significance. The "hardcore" aesthetic was adopted as another indicator informing independent and major label promotional campaigns and their strategies for positioning acts and recorded product in the market. In the Hip Hop culture "staying hardcore" and "keeping it real" are part of the discursive reproduction of affirmative values that, in the wake of renewed commercial interest, are perceived as being constantly at risk of cooptation or sanitization by forces displaying no commitment or stake in the culture's tradition and continuance. Tony van der Meer explains the scope of the problem concisely in his introduction to Toop's Rap Attack:

There is nothing wrong with one community learning from the cultural forms produced by another, if it respects their specific shapes and meanings. There is something horribly wrong with a dominant community repeatedly co-opting the cultural forms of oppressed communities, stripping them of vitality and form -- the heritage of their creators -- and then popularizing them. The result is a 'bleached pepsi culture' masquerading as the real thing. This is what threatens to dilute the real feeling and attitude of hip hop, preventing its genuine forms the freedom to fully develop. The expression of Black people is transformed when it is re-packaged without any evidence remaining of the black historical experience. (Toop, 1984: 5)

Once again, the issue of legitimate ownership emerged with rappers claiming authority over the genre and the Hip Hop scene while denigrating the shameless corporate attempts to profit from its social resonance without proper accountability. While the question of maintaining cultural tradition and artistic integrity in the face of commercial cooptation remains relevant, debates on the topic tend to omit some of the wider implications of the issue.

From a historical perspective, the incidents of institutional appropriation provide a useful indicator in a sequential chronology of Rap's expansion into the American heartland. For instance, if Rap was still perceived as being a strictly marginal music or an alternative to the general Rock and Pop fare, its various commercial adaptations would not have made

sense from a purely business perspective. Despite a prevalent reluctance among commercial entities to embrace the full range of Hip Hop practices, Rap could no longer be ignored as a cultural presence. Companies representing a range of commodities subsequently attempted to absorb some of the attention that Rap had won, grafting Rap's popularity onto familiar consumer products in a desperate attempt to appear up-to-date or "cool" since, as a Campbell's public relations spokesman put it, "children love Rap...it's very, very hip." Rap was "fresh," it was "youth," and in marketing terms, it had an appeal that was current. Yet, in most cases it was not Rap or Hip Hop culture *per se* that presented the desired object for appropriation but, rather, the aura and the image appeal that they generated.

There seemed to be an abstract value system at work that delineated acceptable and unacceptable incursions into the Hip Hop scene. Major labels swamping the market with mediocre product was clearly regarded in the negative, but a surge in independent label activity was deemed more acceptable within Hip Hop circles due to their connections to local scenes. By 1989, the growth pattern of the Rap industry had reached its apex, shifting first from a localized music with minor regional impact to a more widely recognizable regional and national form. Rap's spatial expansion finally encompassed the entire North American market and was now beginning to extend to other continents in a global market situation. This resulted in the vast growth in recompense and overall economic stakes.

From a business vantage, it was difficult to criticize the financial benefits that accrued from increased public awareness and new global access, even if that meant that youths in their early teens were learning about Rap from a McDonald's television commercial -- which was, in any case, unlikely. Rap's longevity encouraged both independent and major labels to identify consumer demographics and patterns and then to expand regional and national markets through extensive advertising campaigns that reached the new global consumer base. As reports in Billboard between 1989 and 1992 reveal, independent Rap labels (with major label distribution arrangements) and majors were

attempting to simultaneously break acts locally and regionally (i.e., through exposure on campus or community radio stations and college concert dates) while initiating international promotional campaigns to introduce the genre to countries around the world. Having guided Rap outwardly from its underground status and ghetto locales to the top of the charts, label executives (at both independent and major scales) sought to open new markets where Rap was still considered either a novelty or a minor alternative genre.

Billboard reported that, on the inertia of American responses to MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice's recordings and the crucial entry of MTV Europe, Rap was finally breaking into the European market with significant sales. But the article also suggests that "while MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice have a pop appeal, pure rap may prove too hardcore for Southern European tastes" (Mar. 30, 1991: 9). Language remained one obvious barrier since the rapidly evolving slang and localized references could often be impenetrable to even english speaking fans in America. But the distinction between "pop" and "pure" Rap in the pages of the leading industry organ also illustrates the extent to which their identifying characteristics were ingrained in the minds of those operating at the industry level. In separating the two the article illustrates disparities in sales and financial returns, with "pure" Rap being closer to the initial intentions of Hip Hop's pioneers but ultimately less remunerative in the market. Consequently, the allure of Pop success and accompanying wealth was a motivational factor for many young rappers to enter the business. Tony Van der Meer refers to the eventual emergence of "a lottery mentality among Black and Hispanic youth" (Toop, 1984:6) as many in their ranks were tempted to forsake their local roots in community, rechannelling their hopes and dreams with new vigor toward getting over through the Rap music business.

Alan Light suggests another possibility, noting that "a dichotomy was firmly in place -- rappers knew that they could cross over to the pop charts with minimal effort, which made many feel an obligation to be more graphic, attempt to prove their commitment to rap's street heritage" (1992: 229). Pop Rap, which had always been a segment of the

larger Rap genre, had ascended as the dominant subgenre and its most successful purveyors, MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice, consequently became pariahs within Hip Hop circles. They undeniably reached the pinnacle of Rap in sheerly commercial terms between 1989 and 1991 and their dual impact on Rap record sales is indisputable with Hammer's *Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em* being the best selling Rap LP of all time and Vanilla Ice's *To the Extreme* being one of the fastest-selling LPs in the history of the music industry. Neither showed an exceptional talent on the microphone, but their production qualities were unassailable and they excelled in live performances with elaborate dance routines and a full band. Hammer was as frequently associated with his trademark harem pants and energetic dancing as his rapping, and despite the platinum sales of "Ice, Ice Baby" (1990, SBK) and gold sales of "Play That Funky Music" (1990, SBK), Vanilla Ice was never considered by Hip Hop traditionalists as much more than a melanin-challenged novelty .

Their questionable status within the Hip Hop culture was even more pronounced as their images virtually flooded teen magazines and, in Hammer's case, took the form of an "action" figure and a Saturday morning cartoon (a dubious achievement that was shared by Pop rappers Kid 'n' Play in the wake of their success in the 1990 hit movie *House Party*, Reginald Hudlin, dir.). Respected rapper Sir Mix-A-Lot offered "shout outs" of Hip Hop solidarity to Vanilla Ice ("ain't no beef") and Hammer ("keep gettin' paid") in the liner notes to *Mack Daddy* (1992, Rhyme Cartel/Def American) but his gesture was anomalous among Rap's hardcore contingent. Hammer and Vanilla Ice were more frequently cast as the scapegoats for Rap's slide into a commercial morass. In the worst imaginable term in Hip Hop, both were regularly accused of "selling out" the culture and the artform and even today, Vanilla Ice is described in terms very similar to those used by defenders of "real" Rock'n'Roll in reference to Pat Boone's -- *not* Elvis Presley's -- presence on the scene between 1955 and 1962.

Today, a "hardcore" Rap aesthetic based on funky beats and solid microphone skills that are perceived as being "rough, rugged, and raw" (to quote EPMD's

"Crossover," 1992, Def Jam) and a corresponding "hardcore" discourse suggest a certain defensiveness against the taint of Pop ephemera. If Hip Hop is a way of life, as many rappers suggest it is, then the discourse of a "hardcore" commitment to the scene and its cultural underpinnings arises as a crucial attitude that can then be woven into Rap practices. In view of this, there seems to be little question that Hammer and Vanilla Ice were not judged on the basis of their Rap talents but were, in essence, victims of a backlash against a perceived Rap inauthenticity. As van der Meer accurately notes, the integration of images, stylistic nuances, and traces of a Hip Hop sensibility were, in fact, most often guided by the hands of others operating exclusively in the corporate/commercial realm. Despite insider criticism, many black entrepreneurs and artists managed to maintain close and, more importantly, respectful ties to Hip Hop's cultural communities, since claims of a "sell out" could lead to a career obituary. They, too, were forced to negotiate the terrains of a competitive industry which sought to maximize the commercial uses of Hip Hop.

Rap, Media, and the Global/Local Nexus

Returning to McAdams's definitions, spatial existence within America's black urban geographies is a primary factor informing the "real" Rap. Her invocation of "where rap comes from" is specific; she is describing the ghetto and explicitly refers to "the 'hood" as the zone where "real" Rap is shaped and developed (although she forges a linear connection that simplifies the ways in which Rap has reimagined and repackaged spatial images for mass consumption). While the thematic content of much Rap often describes actual social milieux and cultural practices, the representational distance transforms the idea of what is real and where reality coheres. For white teen record buyers who make up a sizeable, if not a majority segment of Rap consumers, it is the *impression* of an existent reality that is being responded to rather than any actual essence of the ghetto or 'hood, following a similar path of access as that taken by major mainstream advertisers. The

ghetto spaces and 'hood places are not incorporated wholecloth into the fabric of the text although the text is undoubtedly imbued with traces of originary spatial contexts.

As I have suggested, in these instances the 'hood is a spatial construct within the lyrical narratives and Rap discourses. Yet in McAdams's argument, spatial identification with the ghetto or politicized commentary on the character of black existence in these social zones are necessary prerequisites of Rap authenticity. It would seem from her position that it is because Pop Rap does not attempt to maintain explicit spatial connections with black culture that it is regarded as a subordinate subgenre that is less deserving of attention or success. The tenability of this reasoning is limited, yet the discourse of "Rap realness" upon which it is based has continued to expand within the Hip Hop culture throughout the 1990s.

I would also argue that this line of reasoning shares several aspects with media theories of placelessness that surfaced in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. Joshua Meyrowitz has suggested that the impact of global mass media has had a certain levelling effect on minority and impoverished social sectors, noting that the "unified backdrop of common information" and "the homogenization of information networks" (1985: 134) subtracts from the significance of place and undermines place-based identities. He writes:

Physical location now creates only one type of information-system, only one type of shared but special group experience. Electronic media begin to override group identities based on "co-presence," and they create many new forms of access and "association" that have little to do with physical location...The homogenization of regional spheres is, of course, only a matter of difference. Different places are still different, but they are not as different as they once were. (Meyrowitz, 1985: 143-145)

Edward Relph describes something similar when he writes that "an inauthentic attitude towards places is transmitted through a number of processes, or perhaps more accurately 'media,' which directly or indirectly encourage 'placelessness'...they have reduced the need for face-to-face contact, freed communities from their geographical constraints, and hence reduced the significance of place-based communities" (1976: 90-92). Meyrowitz and Relph each confer responsibility for the deterioration of spatial integrity and place-based

identification on integrated mass media systems which encompasses the institutional apparatuses of the music and entertainment industries. Their isolation of a widespread social condition provides an interesting perspective on contemporary, postmodern phenomena and social trends that deprivilege the local as a site of significance.

With access to wider distribution and media dissemination Rap could be uncategorically defined as an internationally popular artform. Subsequently, the Hip Hop culture has been greatly affected by global/local dynamics in the aftermath of its expansive growth. Rather than Rap being placed at risk of sanitization or deterioration, however, it was confronted with the problem of losing fundamental connections to localities that have traditionally provided the proximate contexts for the genre's impressive capacity for innovation and creative reinvention.

Pop Rap *is*, in many ways, a placeless product that, despite its transnational commercial character, still has formal ties to Hip Hop traditions and locally nurtured music scenes. With its spread to international markets and growth on a global scale the connections to these local or regional sites becomes more tenuous, less easily maintained. As industry executives suggested in 1990, "the rap market is venturing into brave, new territory, and the majors are going along for the ride. The rap market, some industry insiders say, is limitless" (Billboard, Nov. 24, 1990: R-18). This statement actually carries two distressing messages: first, it is clear that the "industry" was willing to free-ride on the labor of black artists and entrepreneurs who had toiled in the business for years trying to build something that straddled the difficult line between being commercially viable and culturally redemptive. With long-term major label ambivalence toward Rap suddenly shifting by 1988 there was considerable resentment among those artists and entrepreneurs whose locally and regionally applied efforts had established Rap as a stable facet of the national and international music industry. Describing what he considers to be a deplorable situation at the time, Russell Simmons noted that the majors involved themselves with Rap "solely for the market share and not for the music. Majors hurt us developmentally...In six

months every major has put out more rap than I have in six years. That tells you something" (ibid: R-14).

Furthermore, the rhetoric of limitless boundaries and unconstrained potential is actually quite closely related to colonial discourses that regard marginal or "lesser" cultures as easily accessible sites for capitalist intervention and commercial exploitation. There is no sense of history in this pronouncement, no acknowledgement that Rap is connected to the spaces and places from which it emanates through longstanding social patterns of production and consumption. These patterns encompass the practices of musical creation and performance as well as audience leisure activities which, in Hip Hop, are often less a matter of outright consumption at concerts or clubs than of active co-creation of the event. Perceived among an industry elite as a series of unbounded spaces of cultural innovation, the suggestion is that Rap's primary zones of creative productivity as well as yet-unrealized Rap markets (understood in spatial terms) are susceptible to the incursions of major industry forces which are, in effect, placeless and stateless. In a transnational/global economy, major labels are virtually without a "home" anchor and this emerges as a central factor distinguishing them from their independent counterparts in the industry.

The intensification of debates and conflicts around the issue of Rap's mainstreaming created a serious rift within the Hip Hop culture. Hip Hop essentialists responded to Pop Rap's ascendancy in three major ways: they consciously attempted to maintain the foundational pillars of Hip Hop that included break dancing and graffiti spray art and, in Rap, freestyle microphone skills and DJ scratch and mix techniques (i.e., KRS-1 and BDP); they initiated an urgent pro-black nationalist discourse that deployed Rap as a communicative medium to reach and educate a youth constituency (Public Enemy or X-Clan); and they mobilized a spatial discourse emphasizing locality in order to reinforce their connective links with neighborhoods and place-based communities that were often in sharp contrast with the barrens of corporate industrial culture (Ice T, N.W.A., or Compton's Most Wanted).

The Emergence of the Rap Press

In Billboard's Dec. 24, 1988 special section on Rap there appeared a small advertisement for the Rap-oriented magazines Word Up! and Rap Masters. Ad copy claimed that the magazines, published by the New Jersey-based Word Up! Publications Inc., together reached over 500,000 teenagers each month. As the advertisement suggests, apart from the dissemination of Hip Hop sensibilities through live and recorded music or through the broadcast media, an ancillary press dedicated exclusively to Rap was also emerging. Joined by similar teen-oriented Rap magazines (including Rappin', Spice, and 2 Hype, as well as more journalistically inclined publications including The Source, Rap Sheet, and The Rap Pages), the Rap press created new sites for the expression of Rap fandom while capitalizing on the sensational commercial and cultural growth of Hip Hop. These magazines extended Rap's range of circulation and enabled many of Hip Hop's internal codes to reach a youthful and ever more style-conscious Rap audience. Over time, the high-gloss Rap magazines have also been supplemented by a massive array of lesser-known and less professional efforts that include home-spun fanzines, video magazines, and electronic "e-zines" or Rap web sites on the internet.

Conforming to a basic fan magazine format that follows traditions first established by Hollywood movie magazines in the 1930s and 40s, the teen-oriented Rap and black music magazines Word Up!, Rap Masters, Rappin', Spice, 2 Hype, Right On, Black Beat, and Black Sounds that dominated the market between 1989-1992 focus on "an image of the way stars live" (Dyer, 1979: 39). These particular monthly Rap magazines are most directly influenced by such teen-oriented publications as Tiger Beat or 16 Magazine which dominated in the 1960s. Like earlier Pop music publications, Rap magazines continue to mediate fan desires as they relate to popular musical celebrity. This is especially true for audience members who may be too young to attend concerts, to regularly afford recorded materials, or to otherwise participate as active consumers.

Teen magazines are generally characterized by short, anecdotal and uncritical articles about individual artists and groups which relay background information on the stars' likes and dislikes (favorite foods, clothing styles, activities, what they look for in the opposite sex, etc.). They usually employ casual interviews in an informal tone with a secondary interest in upcoming recording projects, tours, and the artistic or cultural aspects that inform the music. By extending the spectrum of coverage to encompass music, TV, and film stars, the magazines provide an overview of the entertainment industry, allowing magazine readers to boost their own sense of knowledge about celebrity lives and to increase their overall cultural capital (since the "better" or more serious fan is usually the one who knows the most -- and the most current -- information about an artist or group).

To the youthful fan, this trivia helps to establish a more proximate relationship with the stars, facilitating a stronger sense of fan identification with a given celebrity by portraying the star's "human" side and providing the material basis for the intensification of what Lawrence Grossberg has termed the "affective" relations of individuals and aggregate audience formations to a given musical scene. Grossberg's explanation situates this as a form of subjective cartography that adheres to the ever-changing and often subtle "mattering maps" upon which fan allegiances are inscribed:

The notion of *affect* points to the fact that there is more to the organization of our everyday lives than just a distribution or structure of meaning, money, and power; Some things *feel* different from others, some matter more, or in different way, than others. (1987: 186)

At the level of affect, fans make the appropriate personal "investments" in the set of images, statements, or styles which "feel" the best, which seem to be the best suited to the full range of an individual's interests or desires and the conditions within which they are experienced. They circulate within a self-defined terrain of popular relevance, overlapping most frequently with others who navigate similar cultural terrains and share common maps of meaning. Consequently, conventional teen magazines function as additional indicators of important detail, conveying the minutiae upon which fans might also base their subjective

connections or structure their affective relationships to the music and the artists who make it.

The basic layout and format of teen-oriented fan magazines is an important element of their appeal and the promise of numerous full-page color photographs and pull-outs is common to most publications. As brief interviews and quotes construct an image of the star's underlying character, photographs provide a visual representation of who the star "is", often on his or her own turf. The spatial dynamic involves two distinct loci, that of celebrity and of fan, that are separate but mutually dependent for their socio-cultural definition. The organization of photos and interviews are part of a calculated attempt to breach the gap between celebrities and their young fans, providing what appears on the surface to be access to the inner sanctums of the celebrity milieu or the perception of access to inside information about the men and women who comprise the Rap scene's upper echelons. As the celebrity's private domain is turned inside out and made public through photographic and interrogative probes (as in a Rap Masters photo feature on Biz Markie's newly renovated condominium which features a photo of the star "posed" on the toilet) the perception of distance is reduced and readers acquire the sense of a more intimate relationship to the stars they admire and desire.

With the emergence of bobbysoxers in the mid- to late-50s and teenyboppers in the 1960s, teen fan magazines established themselves as being geared primarily toward young female readers. As Chambers (1985) points out, romance is the operative element of most Pop music and images generated in its musical performance as well as in teen magazines actively construct a preferred female audience. In their formal construction, earlier conventional teen magazines promised their female readers a package of celebrity images and profiles, providing a cultural space within their pages where young girls could engage in the fantasy of romance within the safety and enclosure of their own bedrooms. This symbolically completed the cycle in which an artist's private life might be transformed into

a public quantity and then, upon audience consumption, returned in a new commodified state to the private domestic realm of the individual fan.

The ratio of photographs to written text suggests that these magazines are to be looked at rather than read *per se* as the articles rarely concentrate on issues or problems which may be pertinent to a young girl's daily experience. For example, an article in Spice dedicated to the topic of date rape is an anomaly that stands out precisely because of its relevance and importance to teenaged girls. Simon Frith's suggestion that "...the starting point for an analysis of the sexual differentiation of leisure must be that girls spend far more time at home than boys do...The women's world is the home..." (1983: 225) provides a context for the ways that Rap teen magazine pin-ups might be used. Pin-ups are primarily intended for young teenagers' bedroom walls (or possibly school lockers), closed off from the outside world, contained in the private domain of pleasure and fantasy. As Frith observes:

...the relationship between music and the bedroom continues. Their public use of music might be much the same as boys (for background and dancing), but girls' home use remains different, with continued emphasis on personalities. (1983: 227)

Rap fan magazines for a young teen market can be situated in a common group with other teen music and entertainment magazines which are primarily (though not entirely) oriented toward a female audience. The format of the magazines and the composition of the photographs (characterized by head-on shots and close-ups of celebrities in carefully posed stances) adhere to the conventional teen magazine mode of presentation. But it is the additional advertisements for jewellery or contests offering celebrity dates or phone calls, etc., as prizes that most clearly contribute to the gender specific structuring of these publications. In the case of Rap Masters and 2 Hype, the female editors function as interlocutors mediating the dialogue between the artists and the fan readership. Poised/posed among various male Rap artists (including Ice Cube, who wears a jacket emblazoned with the slogan "bitch killa") in friendly embrace, these women occupy the

position most desired by the female readers, conveying the fun and excitement of participating in the parties and gatherings of the apparently bustling Rap scene.

Ultimately, however, the capacity for these teen-oriented fan magazines to portray or represent the full spectrum of Rap practices is limited by the magazine format. The more aggressive lyrical strains or the hardcore political ideologies that frequently comprise Rap's discourses do not conform to the generally mild and apolitical content of publications geared toward a young teen readership. In several issues of popular Rap teen magazines published between 1989 and 1992, feature articles explore the politics of black nationalism, the social conditions underlying Gangsta Rap themes, obscenity in Rap lyrics, and issues pertaining to female rappers (single motherhood, family commitments, the negotiation of a male-dominated industry, etc.). The constraining influences of the teen magazine format and the minimal inclusion of hardcore Rap sensibilities produces a tension between the magazine covers. Teen-oriented Rap magazines must negotiate complicated and contradictory cultural terrains and the dynamics of pleasure and politics and of frivolity and substantiality in a way that more traditional Pop-oriented music and entertainment fan magazines tend not to.

By adopting this particular format, Rap fan magazines targeting young readers have created a difficult project for themselves as they struggle against not only the way that youths think about race and gender issues but also the ways that they might understand and use the medium of the conventional teen magazine. By employing a standard generic format and implementing its common discursive patterns these publications put at risk the ostensibly progressive political projects advocated by some hardcore rappers while failing to adequately analyse and critique conservative, racist, or sexist tendencies of others. While Rap teen magazines introduce a more radically inclined set of discourses than do most mainstream teen entertainment magazines, printing diluted political arguments which must vie for space with quite unrelated articles on style and fashion weakens their overall impact within the textual spaces of the publication and trivializes their importance as

potentially transformative discourses. While it is also true that, in some cases, the various artist stances and culturo-political positions could be addressed as stylistic facets in the construction of their public images, the critical mechanisms for assessing this possibility are not easily accommodated within the teen magazine format itself. The structure and content of the conventional teen magazine is ever-present and influential in Rap teen magazines, resulting in a tendency toward the banal which is subsequently imposed on the social and political critiques posited by Rap artists in songs and in interviews. Rap's politics and its political rappers are subsumed by the teen magazine format and are frequently overpowered by the emphasis on superficiality.

Following the rise in popularity of teen-oriented fan magazines, a more engaged Rap music press was born that sought to convey the complexities of Rap and Hip Hop's internal elements. In this genre, The Source, Rap Sheet, and The Rap Pages are the most influential, with The Source (which defines itself as "the magazine of hip hop music, culture, and politics" on its masthead) emerging as a market leader and the most important of the three. Based on a press format established by Rock magazines such as Rolling Stone and Spin, these Rap magazines feature lengthy artist interviews, record reviews and general insider information that, in tandem, provide a relatively concise update on industry activity as well as the more subtle makings of the Rap scene at the local, regional, and national scales. There is a greater emphasis on the political and social structures of the Hip Hop scene as it provides a foundation for Rap music's production. This can be discerned in the indepth articles tackling complex social issues (such as government legislation on violent youth crime or welfare policy, organized conservative campaigns against Rap, overviews of political initiatives and key government players, etc.) that specifically impact on Hip Hop's primary innovators within black and Latino communities. The content and issues featured in these magazines hail a slightly older or more mature readership than the teen entertainment press: for example, The Source's primary audience demographic is comprised of "mostly young men, 16-24, half of them white, the other half mostly black"

(Sengupta, New York Times Apr. 26, 1996). This is manifested not only in the range and scope of subject material but also through such factors as the common use of profanity in direct quotes or the accurate reproduction of song lyrics that portray an image of ghetto life in forthright vernacular.

In feature interviews, artists frequently address their backgrounds prior to entering the music business and recount their patterns of daily interaction within highly localized zones of activity. It is in this mode that the 'hood and the spatial coordinates of lived experience are most clearly defined in the press. Place is an unambiguous factor in the themes and discourses of the music and the Rap press provides a textual space for the explanation and elaboration of artists' relationship with their neighborhoods and local posses or crews. In The Source and The Rap Pages, monthly photo-features of graffiti spray art from across America and around the world are intended to display the ongoing practices of one of the cornerstones of the Hip Hop culture. The specificity in naming the aerosol artists and their zones of operation simultaneously acknowledges the global and the local scale of Hip Hop's influence.

The Rap Sheet goes the furthest in emphasizing geographic activities in "the Hip Hop nation" with its regular feature sections entitled "Regional Rags," which reports on small and mid-sized Hip Hop publications from across the U.S.; "Local Streets," featuring reports by locally identified artists on different aspects of their hometown scenes; and "A Day in the Hood," in which a Rap Sheet reporter meets the artists on their home terrain, visiting their familiar haunts and being introduced to the accompanying crews or posses. The latter section is structured on the premise that there is an informing relation between a group or artist's 'hood and his or her music. In this regard, coverage is intended to provide context and insight on the artist's daily circulation and experiences while reinforcing the general and related themes of "reality" and "authenticity" through first-hand observation.

For example, in the September 1992 issue of Rap Sheet, guest reporter J.T. Money of the Miami-based act Poison Clan reflects on the unique quality of the South Florida "bass sound" in the "Local Streets" column. Briefly mentioning several of the key labels, producers, and acts which comprise the local scene, he describes the region's unique emphasis on bass-oriented mixes, comparing it to other regional styles in the U.S. Tracing out the cultural particularities of Miami and South Florida, Money explains how the multi-ethnic and multi-racial social context in the entire South Florida region (especially Miami) is a product of the confluence of Caribbean cultures (Cuban, Dominican, Haitian, and Jamaican) which, with American R&B and Rock, provide the greatest musical influences on the regional sound. For him, Miami's cultural hybridity is its strength and underlies the Hip Hop lifestyle existing there.

In December, 1992, Seattle's Kid Sensation profiled his local scene in a similar manner but in his article the city's cartography is defined in considerably closer detail. While mentioning locally active artists, clubs, important local Hip Hop radio programs, and record stores that stock Rap and Hip Hop, Sensation also provides a description of the proximate geographic relations between the adjacent cities of Seattle and Tacoma, the city's Central District (the CD, "home for most of the hardcore rappers in South Seattle...the rougher ghetto area"), and the Seward Park area ("the spot where people like to gather and pump their stereos...it's almost like a social club"). For him, the locality is a lived space and he isolates several important sites of significance that not only shape his own sense of space, place, and belonging but which are also significant in a broader social sense, as zones of social interaction and congregation among the local Hip Hop contingent. In this mode, particular places are deemed to be crucial factors in the the circulation of black youth and the organization of the Hip Hop scene in Seattle. These places are also rendered as site markers that arise in the music itself, for example providing the backdrop and the setting for Sir Mix-A-Lot's "Seattle Ain't Bullshittin" (1992, Def American) with its particularized

spatial references to the Seattle CD and Seward Park neighborhoods and the explicit mention of streets linking the two.

The Rap Sheet's "A Day in the Hood" section also adopts a geographic/spatial theme in its profile of local urban neighborhoods. There is a tacit acknowledgement that the 'hood is a generic term which describes minority ghetto spaces in contemporary American cities -- every Rap posse comes from a 'hood that they "claim" and "represent." But in featuring profiles of nationally dispersed 'hoods and nominating the 'hood as a definable territory that is demarcated through a subjectively experienced sense of place (evoked by the host Rap artists) there is an attempt to see each 'hood as a unique spatial construct and to discern what the host artists conceive as locally meaningful phenomena. Differences in mobility or stasis between various urban sites and local neighborhoods are often the most pronounced characteristics to emerge from the 'hood profiles each month, with some localities fostering a constrained and limited sense of place-based identity (evident in the profile on the Cypress Hill section of South Gate, California, hosted by Cypress Hill) and others being more expansively conceived by their inhabitants (as in the profile on the Bloody Nickle area of Houston, hosted by the Rap-A-Lot Records label).

In the premiere issue of The Rap Sheet (July 1992), the "A Day in the Hood" section foregrounds the Cypress Hill posse's neighborhood from which the group's name is derived. In this article, the compression of locality is a pronounced and influential factor in the sense of place that the artists have of their home turf. The intersection of Firestone Boulevard and Cypress Avenue is roughly at the center of the posse's 'hood with the crew's family homes being spread throughout the immediate vicinity. They have lived in this neighborhood throughout their formative teen years, before they were Rap artists, and the interview reveals a sense of personal history that connects the members of Cypress Hill to their 'hood as they recount stories and relate anecdotes about the area while moving easily through it.

Their comments communicate the importance of local tradition and the remembrance of past events, but in isolating them there is an explicit connection between a temporal past and place that allows the crew to point to a house or a street corner as they recount a story. Michel de Certeau writes that "there is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can 'invoke' or not" (1984: 108). Events may be long since past, but the places where they transpired remain and, in an almost mystical way, continue to harbor a shimmering residue of the given event that can only be seen in memory by those who live there and experienced it firsthand. The members of Cypress Hill reflect this as they point out sites and places to the accompanying journalist, completing the stories "invoking" the "spirits" that make these very places significant to them.

In general, the Cypress Hill posse seems sedentary, rooted in place (in contrast to their roles as nationally acclaimed Rap "stars" with a demanding national and world-wide tour schedule). They live close to one another and walk rather than drive between each other's homes and the various sites where they gather together. A photograph portrays band members Sen Dog and B Real settled on "the wall," which consists of a low brick abutment on a neighbor's front porch, conveying a standard image of "hang time" in the 'hood and the productive leisure practices that reinforce posse bonds (which, as the article suggests, usually involves smoking marijuana or drinking beer together). An additional emphasis on spatial compression described by the visiting Rap Sheet reporter conveys the concept of the 'hood as a bounded territory: "I roll with the Cypress crew up the street towards the railroad tracks -- "the border"...We get to the tracks that divide Cypress Ave., signifying the end of their hood. They don't like to go past the tracks" (July 1992: 20). Without further elaboration, the implication is that the 'hood is a relatively secure bounded home environment beyond which the combined variables of risk, threat, and danger increase.

Quite another sense of the 'hood emerges in the October, 1992 issue on Houston's "Bloody Nickle" (or Fifth Ward) in which landscape and terrain are meticulously

described. The reporter establishes an image of the zone that downplays the widely reported dangers of the neighborhood: "the landscape -- green grass and thick groves of trees everywhere, wide two-lane streets and an occasional creek -- made it hard to imagine massive drug trafficking and crime. It's there, but it's happening on quiet street corners under overgrown willow and oaks as much as in alleys or burnt-out buildings" (October, 1992 : 19). This pastoral description is intentional since it dilutes the potency of lyrical descriptions of the ward in songs by The Geto Boys, Scarface, or The Fifth Ward Boyz, providing an alternative set of images for readers who are familiar with the discursive constructions of space and place in their music. The article later reiterates a common image of the 'hood as a depressed and potentially dangerous social environment with the reference to a "descent" into the Bloody Nickle area.

The Fifth Ward is compared along racial lines to other Houston wards at one point (the black wards, the Hispanic ward, etc.) although Willie D of The Geto Boys is quoted as stating that "we're not really into that neighborhood stuff, we're all from Houston. We have it bad enough. We take pride in our individual neighborhoods, but we all run together" (ibid: 20). His optimistic sentiments reflect the fact that while Houston consists of an arrangement of interlocking sectors, "the 'hood" as a social construct is only ever identified as a minority zone where race and class are the levelling factors that provide a tentative communal coherence in the midst of well-documented minority youth violence and other gang-related activities.

Willie D's comments also reflect elements in common with the attitudes of the Cyress Hill crew when he suggests that while each individual claims home territory in his or her 'hood, the allegiances are relational, based on personal background and history as much as on urban structure and spatial cartography. It is not just that the 'hood exists as a named or definable section on city maps or in urban designs, but that it is a known and lived place with affective values which its inhabitants invest in it. In the example of Houston and the Bloody Nickle, central markers on the landscape such as recording

studios, nightclubs, restaurants, or public parks (such as Tuffly Park, "where Rap-A-Lot sometimes holds its artist meetings out on the grass") resemble community commons in which members of the local Hip Hop scene congregate. These are the sites of central significance that individuals collectively settle on as being important to their daily reality as they actively make anonymous spaces into particular places in an ongoing process of cultural production and transformation.

Finally, in a manner unlike Cypress Hill's use of 'hood space, transportation and mobility among the Houston rappers also function in the production of a sense of place and identification with local landscapes, again reinforcing the relationality of the dispersed neighborhood zones and territories. This might be a result of the Rap-A-Lot crew's nonhomogeneous roots in place. Whereas the Cypress Hill posse are all from the immediate neighborhood where they have grown up together and now own homes, the Rap-A-Lot crew represents several different city wards and sections and, thus, "claim" several different 'hoods among them. The wider city's highways and streets are passages that cross through more abstract (i.e., foreign or unfamiliar) transitional spaces that surround the various sites of significance comprising their various 'hoods. Consequently the Rap-A-Lot crew seems always to be on the move, getting in and out of vehicles, arriving and leaving various sites, moving in unison as a posse. Their sense of the city and of the 'hood is intensely informed by a motion that resists narrow spatial constraints without ignoring points of territorial transgression and boundary crossings.

Despite these regular portrayals of socio-spatial sensibilities and localized patterns of habitation and habituation, "A Day in the Hood" displays several revealing assumptions about the composition of the 'hood as a socially constructed place in Hip Hop culture. One assumption is founded in the notion that there is a "truth" about subjective identities that can be revealed through witnessing the featured artists in their home environments, which also harbor an essential "truth" quotient. Artists are elevated in the magazine's pages as Rap celebrities but, upon their return to the 'hood, they are resituated in order to better connect

with their foundational roots in a perceived process of revitalization. This is, in an imprecise way, part of how the artists claim to "keep it real," maintaining their legitimacy by not growing too distanced from the 'hood that elevated them in the first instance and which in many cases continues to provide the thematic backdrop for the lyrical narratives they record. The 'hood may be either a zone of threat or nurture as the artists grow, acquire skills, and rise through the music industry, but once they have finally established themselves as prominent acts the 'hood is almost invariably described by most hardcore artists as a well for spiritual, social, and artistic replenishment.⁸⁸ Understanding the 'hood in such terms is crucial to the understanding of its spatial resonance in Rap lyrics and Hip Hop discourses.

The Rap Pages section is also implicitly structured upon the belief that the broad popular profile of music celebrity produces a spatial displacement (whereby artists become touring and performing nomads whose images and recordings are available to consumers "everywhere") that has the capacity to impact on and erode their locally constituted identities. This is to say that by revisiting the 'hood, the false skin of Pop celebrity is shed and the given artist recaptures the sense of self upon which his or her "true" identity is founded. The prevailing logic would have it that when artists achieve national or global star status they lose the sustaining bonds with place, essentially making them placeless subjects, but more importantly, its reductive tendencies disempower subjects which are more likely to feel empowered in the familiarity of the home environment. In a basic configuration, this posits the local as a position of positive virtue whereas the vast and frequently anonymous spaces of the global communications complex are contrastingly soulless and undifferentiating in their potential for the decimation of the subjective identity. The further operative assumption here is that the apparatuses of the mass culture industry transform individuals in negative ways but that the authenticity of the home place, defined

⁸⁸ For a more detailed examination of why artists do or don't maintain relations with the 'hood, see Charisse Jones, "Still Hanging in the 'Hood: Rappers who stay say their strength is from the streets," in The New York Times, Sept. 24, 1995, pp43-46.

in Hip Hop as the 'hood, functions as a mitigating force against the displaced identity of mass media celebrity. Therefore, the interviews appearing under the headline "A Day in the Hood" are also concerned with a certain image of power that isolates artists in places where their strengths are most recognizable and most easily affirmed within the close encounters of neighborhood and, at slightly more remove, community.

All of these assumptions are conjoined by the overarching notion that the 'hood is a relatively self-evident, exposed, or transparent social space. A *day* in the 'hood is presented as being an adequate allotment of time to see the local landscapes, the ways in which the featured artists use their space, and to glean a basic understanding of the places being displayed. Clearly, however, one day is of insufficient duration to adequately assess much of anything substantial about the cultural norms and social patterns that may make a space into a place for rappers and their collective posses. Does this render the column irrelevant? No, or at least not entirely, for its main value is in the ways that it provides additional context for Hip Hop's ongoing internal processes of defining and refining the many discursive patterns that involve articulations of space and place.

Mass Media Dissemination: Music Video and Television

Whereas Rap's steady growth over the decade was achieved without substantial programming at either black or Pop radio, its massive sales thrust in 1989-90 can be directly attributed to a new access to television, primarily through cable music video programs. Beginning in late 1988 television embraced Rap to an extent that was finally commensurate with its sales and commercial impact and its reception among teen consumers. It was during this period that top-selling Pop artists MC Hammer, Tone Loc, Vanilla Ice, and Young MC swept the Pop music industry as cable music video programming boosted the genre's exposure.

MTV's introduction of *Yo! MTV Raps* had the greatest single influence on Rap's enhanced exposure despite the fact that the station had consciously resisted Rap's regular

inclusion in its video rotation since it began broadcasting. As with Funk and Soul music before it, MTV executives based their exclusion of Rap on the dubious claim that it did not conform to the station's Rock format, with occasional video clips by Rap's leading acts such as Run-D.M.C., LL Cool J, Kool Moe Dee, or DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince being the infrequent exceptions. Following its premiere in late 1988, the ratings for *Yo! MTV Raps* soared, making it the highest-rated program in MTV history up to that point. Initially hosted by Hip Hop pioneer Fab Five Freddy and later by Dr. Dre (of the group Original Concept) and Ed Lover, the program gained serious street credibility due to the hosts' well-established profiles within Hip Hop circles. Their respected status among Rap artists (and MTV's considerable clout) also gave them relatively unimpeded access to the scene and its top talent which was crucial to the program's immediate success. When it premiered, *Yo! MTV Raps* exclusively featured Rap videos in a half hour daily block. Favorable viewer response among teen and pre-teen viewers soon led to a one hour block of daily Rap programming in the coveted midday after-school slot and additional airtime at 10:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. on Saturdays. Once Rap had gained a foothold on the station, crossover programming increased and Rap videos were more frequently added to general rotation, reaching a wider segment of the viewing audience.

Television's role in hyping audience interest and motivating consumption of popular music is not at all a recent phenomenon: the Beatles' 1964 appearance on the Ed Sullivan show helped to establish the group in the U.S. market and opened the door for the "British Invasion" that followed. MTV had itself proven incredibly effective as a catalyst in introducing new acts and increasing their commercial prospects as what some critics dubbed "the Second British Invasion" swept the nation in the early 1980s with Culture Club, Duran Duran and other so-called "video bands" emerging as top Pop stars in America in advance of major tour exposure. MTV had also proven incredibly effective in raising the commercial profile of American "alternative" acts with distinct local/regional followings such as R.E.M. (Athens, GA) in the early 1980s or Nirvana, Soundgarden, and Pearl Jam

(Seattle, WA) in the early 1990s. Sales of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* were also unquestionably aided by the sheer dynamism of his performance in the "Billy Jean" video, the artfully cinematic style of the "Thriller" video, or the Broadway-inspired production of "Beat It." Even after a quarter century of Dick Clark's American Bandstand or Soul Train with Don Cornelius, it is unlikely that television has ever played such a crucial role in crossing black American artists and recordings over to white teen audiences as it did in the late 1980s and early 1990s with Rap.

Noting MTV's questionable record in handling black acts since its inception, Nelson George reported in Billboard that, after its introduction, *Yo! MTV Raps* quickly became an essential medium in breaking new acts and introducing the huge and crucial MTV teen audience to Hip Hop. George writes:

Where R&B failed, rap has made major inroads on MTV...The long-term impact of this on the marketing of rap (and all black music) is yet to be determined. It is clear, such as in the case of Tone Loc and Living Colour, that MTV has been crucial to their success. Its recent involvement with nontraditional R&B, particularly rap, puts MTV ahead of most black radio and the black press, which, considering MTV's beginnings, is quite ironic.
(Apr. 8, 1989)

The benefits of Tone Loc's video exposure is a case in point since the release of his hit debut singles "Wild Thing" and "Funky Cold Medina" (1988, Delicious Vinyl) coincided with the premiere of *Yo! MTV Raps*, accelerating up the charts after substantial MTV play. By April 15, 1989 his album *Loc-Ed After Dark* reached the number one position on the Top Pop Albums chart, unheard of for a first album by a Rap artist (although Vanilla Ice was soon to repeat this feat). Retrospectively, the unforeseen response to *Loc-Ed After Dark* was a harbinger of things to come and in this regard it stands as a benchmark in Rap that constitutes the first real example of music video's impact on Rap sales. Other cable networks also introduced regular Rap programming in this period: Black Entertainment Television (BET) introduced its popular "Rap City" program (that also currently airs in syndication on Canada's Much Music station); the FOX Network introduced "Pump It Up"; The Video Music Box, a pay-per-view music network that initially reached 27 major

urban markets, also featured Rap prominently. Together, these programs entered into the everyday media diets of millions of teenagers, many of whom were unfamiliar with the details of Hip Hop or were underexposed to it in its live form.

Fans of the genre and the mildly curious (as well as undiscerning or "grazing" viewers) were introduced to the music's visual accompaniment in video form, artist interviews, and concert clips. Rap was now available on a widespread and daily basis *in the homes* of urban, suburban, and non-urban teenagers across America and the vast majority of viewers were white youths. Tricia Rose observes that "Rap music videos have animated hip hop cultural style and aesthetics and have facilitated a cross-neighborhood, cross-country (transnational?) dialogue in a social environment that is highly segregated by class and race" (1994: 9). Although it is difficult to determine the extent of actual cultural dialogue that video engenders, there is no doubt that the visual imagery communicated within a range of diverse youth formations has been influential.

The impact of *Yo! MTV Raps* and other Rap video programs on youth and teen culture was almost immediately visible as general youth styles began reflecting Hip Hop's sartorial patterns. Teenagers from coast to coast increasingly adopted the loose and oversized sportswear that was popularized in the videos resulting in record sales of name brand sportswear and team logo attire as well as the emergence of an entire industry of Hip Hop-influenced clothing by black-owned companies including Cross Colors, Karl Kani, rapper Play's "IV Play" design label, and more recently, Naughty By Nature's clothing line, Chuck D's "Rapp Wear," and The Wu-Tang Clan's "Wu-Wear" line. In the process, Hip Hop style, vernacular, and attitude became part of a nationally dispersed subcultural phenomenon.

Prior to 1988, there is little mention of video production in relation to artist promotion or image construction; at the time it was perceived as a useful but marginal promotional tool. Rap had no substantial television presence and as a result labels were often hard-pressed to develop the public images of their artists in a manner that was

consistent with established procedures for handling Rock and Pop talent. In the aftermath of MTV's foray into Rap (and similar initiatives by other cable networks as well), independent label executives regularly voiced their desire to develop their artists visually by exploiting Rap's sudden television access. The reason was obvious: a popular, well-received video could translate into nation-wide sales of an additional 200,000-250,000 units for a single whereas, prior to video, independent label sales of only twice that number might be regarded as a considerable commercial success. Still, with their larger coffers and a more elaborate and established system for artist development, the major labels had a distinct advantage over independent labels. They were better able to budget for video production for their Rap acts, often leveraging them onto video rotation and the charts simultaneously.

Working in the favor of independents is Rap's comparatively low production costs that are substantially less than those of mid-range Rock acts and, thus, free up a larger percentage of the overall budget for video production and other promotional endeavors. Tommy Boy records Chairman Tom Silverman stressed that video was "200% more important to us than radio" (Nathan, Dec. 16, 1989: R-13) as he reinforced the importance of the visual medium in positioning artists in the market. Seeing the massive impact of home cable music video programs Tommy Boy, Def Jam, Warner Brothers, and Atlantic also attempted to capitalize on the interest in videos by introducing home video cassette packages to the commercial Rap market. Heavy Metal home video packages had proven successful and it was assumed that Rap would also fare well. Public Enemy's debut video package sold in excess of 25,000 units (which is certified gold for video) for Def Jam but in comparison to record and CD sales this was considered insufficient to justify the production expenses incurred. Tepid consumer interest in the video package configuration (due to regular viewer access to new videos on daily music television programs) basically halted the industry's attempts to develop it as a major commodity although video compilation packages are still produced.

In 1989, MTV decreased its daily time commitment to Rap by half which, as Billboard reported, was "in response to complaints from record companies that rap had become too dominant a force on the station" (Nathan, Dec. 16, 1989: R-13). Ironically, the Video Music Box (later known simply as "The Box") that played requests based on viewer call-ins to a 1-900 number was also criticized for reportedly programming Rap as almost 75% of its total output. These criticisms of The Box's playlist were often based on unvalidated rumors within the industry that unscrupulous promotions managers frequently hired teenagers to dial in requests for specific tracks by artists they represented in order to generate a "buzz" in the market. Due to the inordinate demand for Rap videos the alleged practice was perceived by some in the industry as being a motivated strategy rather than a legitimate expression of viewers' musical taste preferences and eventually became known in Hip Hop parlance as "jackin' The Box."

Rap's market expansion and increased appeal among traditional teenage Rock consumers, combined with a sense of encroachment among the older 25-34 Rock audience was received with considerable hostility. Even though slogans such as "no Rap, no crap" and "no Funk, no junk" (which raise the spectre of the "Disco sucks" backlash against Disco and dance music in the late 1970s) had emerged as "positioning statements" on Adult Top 40 and Rock radio as early as 1988, MTV's actions confirmed that there was a surging backlash against Rap within the industry itself. An aggressive Rock contingent once again voiced its insecurities with the claim that a predominantly black-oriented music was displacing Rock on music video networks and radio.⁸⁹

The implicitly racist rationale submerged in these promotional slogans mirrored the anti-disco crusades in another way as well. As Garofalo (1997) has recounted, in 1979-80, the primary target of white Rockist vitriol was Disco, but residual resentments eventually spread to other forms of black music as well, leading to the exclusion of a

⁸⁹ Claims that Rock was in decline and losing chart share to Pop, R&B, Dance music, and Rap through the 1980s were, in fact, true. This was attributed to Rock's emphasis on album releases and long-term career development as opposed to one-off successes in other genres ("Rock Losing Grip as Other Genres Gain," Billboard, Nov. 10, 1990: 1).

sizeable portion of black artists and recordings from radio playlists. A decade later, some radio PDs revealed that many Rock audience members could not make a fundamental distinction between Rap and R&B, stating that "anything that's close to rap or even has three or four bars of rap is considered rap to a lot of people...People are going to hear a Bobby Brown record on our station and think that's rap. They think Madonna and the New Kids on the Block are rap" (Ross, Oct. 13, 1990: 15). Thus, unfamiliarity with the genre combined with Rap's sudden pervasiveness and market domination at the time obviously created a chill within some sectors of the music industry. Audiences, media programmers, and industry executives all displayed what Public Enemy described on their 1990 Def Jam LP release as a latent "Fear of a Black Planet."

Aside from the resistance to Rap from Rock programmers and audiences, the impact and lucrative potentials of unprecedented Rap video exposure were evident to industry insiders within a year. Rap's expansion through cable broadcasting on MTV, BET and other cable networks was actually hindered by the fact that home cable access had not reached total nation-wide saturation. Cable hookups were often beyond the financial means of many urban poor who comprised a sizeable section of the Rap audience and as a result the cable medium expanded more slowly in zones characterized by high density impoverishment. Non-cable networks had much better market penetration and as Rap gradually became more common (if not exactly a staple) on the major broadcast networks, it reached an even larger audience base. In navigating the different television options, Rap label strategies involved placing videos on MTV or other cable Rap programs since they had a higher rotation rate (albeit among a smaller and generally younger audience base) while attempting to book artists onto the major network talk shows.

Premiering in early 1989, *The Arsenio Hall Show* (which was produced for syndication by Paramount Television) was the most consistent vehicle through which Rap acts gained access to mainstream network television. As the only black late-night talk show host (competing with *The Tonight Show*, hosted by Johnny Carson and, later, Jay Leno,

and *Late Night With David Letterman* in the same general time slot) Hall's program claimed to be the link between viewers' home and the 'hood, which was a coy racial code hinting at the virtual "who's who" of prominent black actors and Hip Hop artists on the nightly guest list and the largely white viewership. In its first year on the air the program featured many top Rap and R&B musicians, helping to break new acts and new releases while attracting viewers of the desirable and profitable 18-25 demographic which also comprised Rap's most active consumer group. Hall's style, which was initially both ingratiating and hip, offered a successful blend of mainstream talk television and B-boy cool. This was best exemplified, for instance, in appearances by MC Hammer, who was asked about the central role of the church in contemporary black music, or Will Smith (*The Fresh Prince*), who exchanged "snaps" and played the dozens with Hall in a display of black verbal intercourse and male interaction that was virtually unknown on television at the time. Capitalizing on his sudden popularity, Arsenio also recorded the novelty Rap track "Owww!" (1989, MCA) under the alias Chunky A, which reached the Hot Black Singles and Hot Rap Singles charts in December, 1989.

Of greater importance, Hall was in tune with developments in the Rap scene and the wider black community, making him an important arbiter of many cultural issues. When a coalition of West coast rappers (including Digital Underground, Ice T, MC Hammer, N.W.A., Tone Loc, and Young MC) replicated the East coast initiative of the Stop the Violence Movement with the release of the album *We're All in the Same Gang* (1990, Grand Jury/Warner), Hall hosted the record launch on air and provided a forum for discussions about youth gang-related violence and the June 15, 1990 "Peace Weekend." In the winter of 1991, Hall also hosted artists from the Black Women in Rap tour (which included Queen Latifah, MC Trouble, MC Lyte, and Harmony), providing advance promotion for the tour and exposure to underrepresented female Rap artists. Scoring a major coup, Hall also featured then-Presidential hopeful Bill Clinton as guest saxophonist with the program's house band, elevating the status of both men among the young viewing

audience.⁹⁰ Finally, as sections of Los Angeles burned in the aftermath of the Rodney King verdict in April, 1992, Hall brought civic leaders, community activists, and concerned actors and musicians together (L.A. Mayor Tom Bradley and actor Edward James Olmos among them) onto his program to address the issues and to engage in dialogue toward comprehension and a resolution. It was in no uncertain terms riveting television and the compelling social debate confirmed Hall's unique role as late-night television personality and a black celebrity.

In August, 1989, Billboard reported that *The Arsenio Hall Show* was having a noticeable impact on commercial sales and consumer recognition of black musical talent. While researchers acknowledged that it was difficult to determine what the cumulative effects of cable video programming and Hall's show were, the direct clout was evident by examining urban radio in the same midnight time slot. Urban radio stations had noticed that their late-night numbers dipped when Hall's show aired, leading PDs to either work around the program, forge tie-ins, or slot artists appearing on the show into regular playlist rotation (Billboard, Aug. 19, 1989: 1). In this regard, Hall was a boon to Rap and contemporary R&B music while he was on the air. Notwithstanding his successes, Hall fell victim to transitions in the late night talk show landscape and *The Arsenio Hall Show* went off the air in 1994, leaving a gaping hole in the active representation of contemporary black musical cultures in the mainstream media.

In the midst of Arsenio Hall's late-night television tenure and in the wake of enhanced television exposure, Rap radio suffered a major loss when the all-Rap format station KDAY in Los Angeles went off the air on March 28, 1991. Citing insufficient advertiser revenue the station owners vacated Rap entirely, ironically shifting to an all-business news format and leaving several L.A. urban-oriented stations to cover Rap as a part of their overall programming mission. As Billboard reported (Rosen and McAdams,

⁹⁰ Bill Clinton's appearance on MTV had a similar effect among young voters as he manipulated the generational differences between himself and President George Bush to his advantage, altering the way contemporary campaigns are approached in the process.

April 13, 1991: 1), the KDAY decision was consistent with a general trend away from all-Rap or high Rap rotation formats across the country. The article does not, however, explore the possibility that Rap's increased exposure through television and video may actually have impacted on the previous centrality of these important Rap stations that committed to the genre when few others would. The visual component of television added much to the image and sensationalism of the genre and it is entirely likely (though difficult to prove with any certainty) that one of the unacknowledged outcomes of its rise, in tandem with other economic factors, was the demise of stations like KDAY.

Rap's visual exposure on television in this period more firmly aligned the genre with the mainstream music industry since television was the last media bastion inhibiting its expansion. Once Rap viability was proven among television programmers and viewing audiences, the basis was established for the genre's top-selling artists to accelerate in the mainstream. Yet Rap's access to television and its full-fledged entry into the transnational media matrix produced a curious byproduct as street-level "Reality Rap" gained prominence. There was a new urgency to the expression of spatial particularities that emerged as Rap was drawn more deeply into the mainstream and the corresponding rise of localized imagery and discourses of place-based identities led some artists to adopt what Eazy-E, Ice T, Ice Cube and others describe as the role of "underground street reporters."

Underlying this assertion is the basic premise of journalistic objectivity which, in Ice Cube's view, is based in personal observation: "we just tell it how we see it, nothing more and nothing less" (Mills, The Source, Dec. 1990: 39). Rappers develop their ideological and theoretical perspectives of race and class in America "on the ground," drawing from earlier analytical modes (i.e., the black Panther Party or Malcolm X) and applying their lessons to contemporary conditions in a manner that resonates with rapper Rakim's important reminder that "it ain't where you're from, it's where you're at" ("I Know You Got Soul," 1987, 4th & Broadway/Island). Rap "reporters" reflect the widespread sentiment among minority youths that their stories are deemed irrelevant by

society unless there is a body count involved. In response to this, hardcore rappers conceive of themselves as legitimate street reporters for disenfranchised blacks and Hispanics who actively sustain the community infrastructures through which they circulate but whose access to the public means of communication are denied. Frequently positioned within a conservative media frame as untrustworthy and violent ruffians or social welfare cases, youths struggle to redefine themselves through language and visual portrayals.

Asserting control over the means of representation (if not the conduits of dissemination), Rap artists tend to construct powerful images of the scenarios that they know best and which are most familiar to them on a daily basis. They are careful not to divulge where the line between fiction and reality is drawn, however, often refusing to state where their experience ends and imagery of hypothetical ghetto conditions are inserted. Rapidly shifting visual and lyrical metaphors are implemented as a method of illumination or critique, the understanding being that Hip Hop audiences are already operating within the same general discursive frame and are, thus, privvy to the multiple and complex meanings at work in the texts. The ambiguity remains a central factor and, in a curious manner, makes many Rap videos more compelling since the extreme situations portrayed exist in the realm of possibility which is equally chilling.

Rap artists and young video directors alike have proven to be extremely adept at communicating their sense of locale, visually representing the places of significance which they inhabit and delineating different social settings and different regions through Rap videos. The set of images that are presented portray the scene and setting in which the Rap narratives unfold, graphically conveying information about an artist or group's home front. Rose succinctly encompasses the breadth of the phenomenon when she writes:

Over most of its brief history...rap video themes have repeatedly converged around the depiction of the local neighborhood and the local posse, crew, or support system. Nothing is more central to rap's music video narratives than situating the rapper in his or her milieu and among one's crew or posse...this usually involves shots of favorite street corners, intersections, playgrounds, parking lots, school yards, roofs, and childhood friends."

(1994: 10)

Local sites are not ambiguously referenced in either videos or Rap lyrics; the whole purpose of representing the local is to be explicit. The emphasis on detail and geo-social sites of significance is particularly pronounced among West coast rappers whose daily lives are more strictly organized around turf and territory than are their East coast counterparts.

The notion of "street reporting" and a national black news voice consequently relies on a conceptual construct linking local experience to a form of more widely networked media representation. Chuck D employs a similar, but more expansive analogy with his widely adopted (but under-analysed) statement that Rap is "the black CNN that we never had" (Eure & Spady, 1991: 336). On the track "She Watch Channel Zero ?!" (1988, Def Jam), Public Enemy criticize TV viewing habits that privilege idealistic fantasy scenarios and what is perceived as a damaging unreality that supplants the potential for radical use of the medium:

Trouble vision for a sister
 Because I know she don't know, I quote
 Her brain's retrained
 By a 24 inch remote
 Revolution a solution
 For all our children
 But all her children
 Don't mean as much as the show, I mean
 Watch her worship the screen and fiend
 For a TV ad
 And it just makes me mad
 I don't think I can handle
 She goes channel to channel
 Cold lookin' for that hero
 She watch channel zero

Despite its regressively stereotypical representation of female viewing habits, the song reflects Chuck D's attitude toward mainstream television content. In fact, references to the media and their systematic opposition to representations of black culture and Hip Hop (including black radio) are rife throughout *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (1988, Def Jam) as Public Enemy attempted to challenge dominant media practices and to infuse radical black nationalist ideologies into their recordings and videos.

After 1989 when Rap video was becoming established fare on television and Rap's strength was evident on the Pop charts, the Rap-CNN analogy seemed reasonable if imprecise. Rap is not "like" CNN in any direct way; it is not really the same in its structures, purpose, or global reach and influence. Still, the analogy offers an interesting perspective on Rap's social relevance in relation to issues of locality since CNN is a medium that reconstructs the local in a global context, raising the particularity of events and occurrences to national and international scales. The basis of the analogy lies within the dynamic conjunction of local and global sensibilities and practices. Rap, however, is a medium that is widely attended by urban minority youth and, as such, it provides a connective tissue spanning a broad cross-section of the African-American socio-cultural body.

Public Enemy's political and cultural agenda, for example, requires a major media base to distribute the images of black resistance to U.S. racism and messages of expansive ideals of cultural nationalism. In other examples of hardcore Rap, most notably the Gangsta Rap subgenre, access to the mass-media provides a means of "representing" the local posse or crew and their home environment, depicting their methods of survival "in the 'hood." Rap's descriptions of social spaces and the articulation of cultural identities forged within lived environments across the nation do, in effect, function as a series of local reports providing regular updates on the struggles and victories of black America that are rarely featured in unexpurgated form in the mainstream media. Viewed in this light, the Rap-CNN analogy holds up under scrutiny.

Chapter 9

"The Hood Took Me Under": Urban Geographies of Danger in New Black Cinema

*Now I'm of age and living in the projects
getting paid off the clucks and the county cheques
I'm telling ya, fresh out of high school, never did I wonder
that the motherfucking 'hood would take me under
(MC Eiht, "Streiht Up Menace" 1993, Sony Music)*

Teen Violence: Wild in the Streets. Murder and mayhem, guns and gangs: a teenage generation grows up dangerous -- and scared. Newsweek, August 2, 1993

Relatively early in Hip Hop's development, its strong visual appeal made it a suitable subject for cinematic representations. Although novelty films such as *Breakin'*, *Rappin'*, *Break Dance*, and *Beat Street* fared relatively well with teen audiences, they did not capture the full experience of Hip Hop. These were minor films and, after a quick flurry of formulaic releases, the early eighties style of Hip Hop films faded away. The 1988 release of the neo-blaxploitation film *Tougher Than Leather* (Rick Rubin, dir.), produced by Def Jam's CEO Russell Simmons and starring Run-D.M.C. as young urban avengers, was not aesthetically or thematically consistent with the earlier Hip Hop films, shifting toward an emergent, harder-edged image. When it was released, the film was regarded by many (including Nelson George and Spike Lee, who both publicly dismissed it) as final proof that Run-D.M.C. were no longer part of Rap's avant garde and it was a critical and commercial failure (as was the group's concurrently released LP of the same name). The major site of innovation in Hip Hop's visual representation was proving to be the Rap video sector as budding young directors, among them Spike Lee, Albert and Allen Hughes, and F. Gary Gray, honed their skills on small budget projects of three or four minutes duration.

Also released in 1988, the Dennis Hopper film *Colors* proved to be a much more influential vehicle for the Hip Hop culture in commercial terms, exposing young audiences

across the nation to a selective and sensational cinematic representation of L.A.'s gang culture. Whereas *Tougher than Leather* looked like a B-movie update of the black gangster film genre of the early 1970s, *Colors* was touted as an ostensibly realistic portrayal of the deadly conditions that pitted black and Latino youth gangs against police and against each other in South Central L.A. The implicitly racist and paternalistic assumptions that informed the script were not easy to ignore yet, for all of its shortcomings, the film seemed to offer insights on the Southern California gang problem and the deadly consequences of turf warfare. The images amazingly managed to both revile and glorify California teen gang life, leading rapper DJ Quik to later criticize the film's role in popularizing and facilitating the spread of Crip and Blood organizations throughout the midwestern U.S. on the track "Jus Lyke Compton." Outbreaks of violence -- not all of it gang-related -- seemed to validate the film's message that the police were fighting a losing battle against young black and Latino outlaws who outnumber and out gun them.

Ultimately, it was the *Colors* soundtrack on the Warner Brothers label that brought the film its most pronounced connection to Hip Hop. Featuring tracks by Eric B and Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, Salt'n'Pepa, MC Shan, and especially Ice T, the soundtrack album became an instant classic in the genre. Ice T's title track was the vehicle that catapulted him into Rap's front lines and helped to forge his identity as the consummate L.A. Rapper whose street credentials included stints as a hustler, thief and pimp and, later, as an accomplished actor.⁹¹ *Colors* was perhaps most important for its dual role in exposing a Gangsta Rap aesthetic within an accompanying representational array of West Coast gangsta images, even though Ice T's contribution to the album was the only track that conformed to the emergent Gangsta Rap style. *Colors* emerged just as Rap was itself undergoing substantial thematic and aesthetic transitions and it can be argued that the film was a catalytic force in the film industry, paving the way for a deluge of gangsta-oriented films that were set in the 'hood and which were characterized by their Rap and Hip Hop

⁹¹ Although Ice T's first major cinematic role was in the 1991 Mario van Peebles film *New Jack City*, he had made a cameo appearance -- as a rapper -- in the 1984 film *Breakin'*.

soundtracks. *New Jack City* (1991, Mario van Peebles, dir.) capitalized on the success of *Colors* by casting Ice-T in a major role (as a street-smart cop with revenge on his mind), consequently reinforcing the strong links between Hip Hop and new black cinema. It is appropriate that the son of Melvin van Peebles, whose *Sweet Sweetback's Badasssss Song* instigated the initial blaxploitation trend of the early 1970s, should be an influential catalyst for the ensuing 'Hood film genre that the industry touted in the early 1990s.

Interviewed in the mid-nineties, Richard Price, author of the novel "Clockers" and, with Spike Lee, co-writer of the screenplay for its cinematic adaptation, addresses the social basis upon which black youths are represented in the film:

The reality is that these kids don't give a fuck about stuff like preying on your own people. They don't think of themselves as political or sociological...They are thinking about how to get visible. Plus they are teenagers, and teenagers think of nothing but themselves, not whether they are black or white or rich or poor. (Quart & Auster, 1996: 16)

Despite his observation, there remains substantial evidence to contradict his notion of black youth, identity, and collective cultural awareness. In practice, prevailing institutional forces make it difficult for many black and Latino teenagers to ignore either their racial or their class-based status. This is made clear in Mike Davis's detailed description of the racist practices of the Los Angeles Police Department's enforcement of curfew laws and the spatial policing of "sumptuous playgrounds, beaches and entertainment centers" which have as a result "become virtual no-go areas for young Blacks or Chicanos" (1992: 284). In contrast to Price's thinking, these teen groups are continually isolated as visible minorities and are subsequently demonized as a mobile threat, leading Henry Giroux to note that "the racial code of violence is especially powerful and pervasive in its association of crime with black youth" (1996: 67).

In the 1990s economy of danger black teens are inordinately wealthy and they have a deathly concise comprehension of how they are perceived by the parent culture in their daily circulation through the urban landscape. Take, for example, a conversation I overheard while leaving a suburban cineplex after a screening of the film *Friday* (1995, F.

Gary Gray, dir.), starring the popular Rap star Ice Cube. The film was not a blockbuster advertised with the accompanying slogan "on screens everywhere." Its appeal lies with the young Hip Hop crowd and it was marketed accordingly, shown in select locations in and around the city but mainly in neighborhoods with high density working-class minority populations. As the crowd of mostly black and Latino teenagers shuffled out of the cineplex one young brother mentioned that "the 'hood films" are always screened in the same theater, closest to the entrance/exit. His understanding of this was based on the belief that the management was uncomfortable with the idea of a crowd of minority youth traversing the full length of the lobby and potentially intimidating other paying customers.

On several subsequent occasions this was corroborated as the films which tended to draw a predominantly black teen audience from the surrounding neighborhoods were, in fact, consistently situated close to the doors. The additional presence of a rent-a-cop in the cineplex lobby when such films such as *New Jersey Drive* (1995, Nick Gomez, dir.) were shown further confirmed his observation. Giroux (1996) points to the existence of a generational divide that is especially evident where black youths and white adults are involved, suggesting that the perception of teenagers as being "indeterminant, alien, and sometimes hazardous" leads to practices of social regulation that are often exercised in precisely the ways that the young theater-goers had experienced them. The practice of selective exhibition and segregation in theater spaces is nothing particularly new, having a tradition that includes either the exclusion of blacks or their banishment to the "nigger heaven" of the upper balconies in the 1920s and 30s or the booking and screening of "blaxploitation" films at inner-city theaters that by the early 1970s had been all but abandoned by white patrons who had fled to the suburbs. Today it is common practice to single out and isolate those films (and their audiences) that are thematically focused on the lives and experiences of contemporary black youth from the 'hood.

And what, or more precisely, where is the 'hood in cinema? Differentiated from the displaced construct of the ghetto which formed the dominant spatial configuration of such

early 1970s blaxploitation films as *Shaft* (1971, Gordon Parks, dir.), *Superfly* (1972, Gordon Parks, Jr., dir.), *Cleopatra Jones* (1973, Jack Starrett, dir.) or *The Mack* (1973, Michael Campus, dir.), the 'hood offers a generational variant on inner-city regions and the prevailing landscapes of urban oppression. In the blaxploitation film, ghetto space is often rendered as a vast, abstract expanse of urban dilapidation. Its topography functions mainly -- though not entirely -- as background, providing a setting of urban decay in which action unfolds. Reporting in a Newsweek cover story on black movies which was published as they approached the height of their popularity in 1972, Charles Michner suggests that the depiction of ghetto spaces did communicate a spatial specificity in certain contexts that helped to extend their recognition factor among localized audiences:

Unlike most white escapist fare with its never-never landscapes of purple sage and alpine luxury, the strongest of the new black films are firmly rooted in the audience's own backyards -- "Super Fly," "Charleston Blue" and "Shaft" in the squalid, decayed slums of Harlem, "Melinda" in barren, bleached-out Watts. The spectacular Eldorado Cadillac driven by Priest in "Super Fly" gets quick recognition from some of the audience because it actually belongs to "K.C.", a well-known Harlem pimp who plays himself in the film. (Michner, 1972: 78).

In comparison to the dominant images of black cultural experience and everyday life portrayed prior to the 1970s, blaxploitation films presented images that resonated with a recognizable or familiar sense of ghetto authenticity among its black audience members. Despite divergent opinions on the social value of the blaxploitation action films within black communities (*ibid.*), many black urban audiences responded favorably to the enhanced profile of black writers, directors and actors who were deemed to be more adept at cinematically representing the ghetto than were their white counterparts. The sense of space in blaxploitation cinema, however, is based on the portrayal of a broad expanse of the ghetto constituted as an urban region rather than as a narrow locality. The ghetto is visually and narratively constructed as a swath of human and architectural devastation; it is a rusty container to be filled by the cinematic exploits of John Shaft, Priest, Goldy, Foxy Brown or Cleopatra Jones.

Furthermore, in the 1970s blaxploitation films, there is a prevalent tension between ghetto-dwelling blacks and urban whites (who are also frequently Italian and invariably associated with organized crime syndicates of one form or another). Whites are cast as the inferior Other in the majority of black action films of the period and are frequently represented as sexual fodder for the hyper-sexualized appetites of the black male "Superspades," inept buffoons or icons of evil, each of which makes them suitable targets for the justifiable violence and brutality of the black protagonists.

Despite their popularity and profitable returns, blaxploitation films and the proliferation of black filmmaking were relatively short-lived. As Ed Guerrero (1993) has indicated, the blaxploitation era was in decline by 1974 and Hollywood studios, realizing that black audiences constituted a sizeable market, attempted to reach white and black audiences together through films with greater crossover appeal. Guerrero explains that the strategy was largely successful due to the emphasis in the mid-1970s on white/black buddy films and on "one black comic 'superstar,' Richard Pryor, as even the featured black actors of the boom years found themselves in bit parts and increasingly shuttled into oblivion by the film industry" (1993: 110). Pryor's rise was also crucial in establishing a Hollywood precedence that allowed his successor, Eddie Murphy, as well as female comedian Whoopi Goldberg to rise through the ranks in the 1980s as the next generation's black film superstars.

As I have explained, with the rise of Hip Hop culture the discursive dominance of "the ghetto" has been challenged from below. The range of spatial images and terms through which it has traditionally been defined has been superseded by the alternate youth discourse of the 'hood. Similar to the spatial shifts that were discursively organized around the ghetto and the 'hood in Rap, the spatial locus of action shifted in cinematic representations as well. In black cinema, as in Rap, the visual construct of the 'hood emerges in the late 1980s as a spatial effect of the increasingly common social patterns of localization and particularity which are in contrast with concurrent trends toward

globalization and transnationalism (Robins, 1991; Gupta and Ferguson, 1992). From this perspective, the visual constructions of the 'hood can be seen as an expression of social scale that is situated along a spectrum of relations spanning the local, regional, and global. Scale is thus a representational determinant in the visual and narrative portrayal of the 'hood in film (although it is important to stress that it is a scale which is inscribed by the interrelations of internal and external social dynamics, the dynamics of "here" and "there," that can lead to hierarchies of difference through representational practices of spatial othering).

As a discursive construct, the 'hood is everywhere, taking shape in and through the artistic work of the young members of the Hip Hop culture who "express themselves" (as N.W.A. suggest in one song) through the popular recording, film, and video media. Referring to the confluence of representational images that cohere in "black male ghetto films" and Rap videos, Tricia Rose (1994) points to the pronounced presence of the contemporary urban terrain. She explains that in Rap and much of the Hip Hop culture, place-based identity and location comprise important core themes. Crucially, the 'hood is visually coded and communicated in Rap and contemporary black cinema as a zone of chronic danger and risk which delineates the practices that occur within its representational landscapes. It is the primacy of this spatial logic locating black urban youth experience within an environment of continual proximate danger that largely defines "the 'hood film."

While not ostensibly a 'hood film (that is, a film that is primarily structured upon a visual and narrative spatial discourse of "the 'hood"), Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) establishes a number of standards that contribute to its status as a precursor to the 'hood genre that was to follow its release. Lee has emerged as a skilled cinematic *auteur* who, as a central figure in the recent resurgence of black filmmaking, has led the way for numerous black directors such as Julie Dash, Reginald Hudlin, Matty Rich, and John Singleton. Although he had moderate success with his earlier films *She's Gotta Have It* (1986) and *School Daze* (1988) and had directed music videos for artists including

Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, Miles Davis, Anita Baker, and Branford Marsalis, it was *Do The Right Thing* that confirmed his reputation among critics and audiences. Lee's age and his thematic concerns also situate him in an important position as a link between young members of the Hip Hop culture and an elder generation of cultural workers and artists which preceded him, each of which inflect and influence his work in noticeable ways. The repetition of Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" (1989 Def Jam) throughout *Do The Right Thing*, for example, was an important directorial decision that acknowledged and appealed to the young Hip Hop crowd and the song ultimately went on to have considerable success and influence as a benchmark in Rap music as well being the most widely recognized release by Public Enemy.

Set in one city block of New York's Bedford-Stuyvesant district, *Do The Right Thing* (DTRT) portrays the interactions of the local community on the hottest day of the year. The heat is clearly a factor in terms of the violence that ensues in the script, yet the site of a community locked in place also suggests a cauldron that continually threatens to boil over in the midst of heated social conflicts. As such, the space of the neighborhood becomes much more prominent in terms of the storyline itself. Underlining this, Lee's production journal (which was published following the film's release) opens with an architect's rendition of the neighborhood's street plan encompassing the block of Stuyvesant Avenue between Lexington and Quincy avenues. According to Line Producer John Kilik, the financing studio Universal Pictures had suggested that the film be shot in California at its studio facility, an idea that Lee adamantly rejected. Lee notes that as he prepared the script and considered the location he simply rode his bicycle throughout Brooklyn and Bed-Stuy scouting possible shooting sites. This informal approach adds a sense of familiarity and personal investment in Brooklyn on Lee's part while remaining consistent with his well-documented commitment to the city borough he calls home.

As the production journal reveals, Lee's emphasis on location also takes into account interborough differences that basically segregate various ethnic and racial groups

into separate regions of the city. The neighborhood portrayed in *DTRT* is not one of easy harmony; rather, it is a community in tension, informed not by a gentle tolerance but by a simmering racism that produces dislike and mistrust among its various inhabitants. His production notes convey the complexities of representing racial identification with localized places (such as Bed-Stuy or Bensonhurst) as he develops the central theme of displacement and conjunction among numerous groups within one block.

Lee's Bed-Stuy is in many ways representative of most major American cities populated by a diversity of cultures and he remakes this block into a community through the spatial organization of individuals within the geography of the neighborhood. On one corner is the Italian-owned pizzeria and facing it is the Korean-owned market. Roughly next to the pizzeria is the local low-watt community radio station WE LOVE and the block is anchored at the far end by the central character, Mookie's (Spike Lee) apartment. In between these poles are the homes and front stoops where the other characters, young and old, live and congregate. In his role as a pizza delivery man, Mookie comprises the meandering thread connecting the characters and their domiciles, meeting the neighbors on the block as he makes his rounds.

The element of community is also constructed from within a real, existing community that lives on this block of Stuyvesant Avenue and which gives a sense of vitality to the space that precedes the film's production. Referring to the intrusive presence of the film production crew and actors, Location Manager Brent Owens describes the preproduction meetings with the local homeowners, noting that the closing of a neighborhood crack house was a galvanizing moment for the crew and the community:

One crack house, which was on Lexington Street, was notorious. The place was foul: crack vials, dead animals, used condoms, and feces everywhere. The straw that broke the camel's back was seeing a woman with two children no older than three, and an infant in a carriage, go into the crack house and stay for twenty minutes or so. We sealed the place up the next day. (Lee and Jones, 1989)

Despite this particular episode, however, drugs and issues of ghetto poverty on a major scale are absent from the script of *DTRT*, falling outside the terrain of racial tension and

violence that Lee is more narrowly focused on. Although the block is not what might be described as "deep ghetto," where the damage of economic decay is often visible in the building structures themselves, neither is it a neighborhood of evident prosperity. It is a depressed neighborhood where the community members strive to maintain their dwellings which, in the process, illustrates a sense of humble dignity. The real danger of the neighborhood -- economic oppression and resentments of entrepreneurial intruders of other ethnicities -- is complex and difficult to convey cinematically. Yet Lee's script and Ernest Dickerson's careful cinematography construct the film's tensions that are narratively informed by spatial relations. Danger is introduced as a manifest element in the images of plain, unadorned brownstone row houses and through the portrayal of listless and mainly idle youths; tension and the potential for danger might consequently be inferred by audiences without being explicitly defined.

Remarking on another aspect of the crew's involvement with the existing community, Giancarlo Esposito (who plays the role of Buggin' Out) states:

Most Hollywood films, even in independent films, don't give a goddamn about the neighborhoods they film in...I know for sure that the crew and cast of *Do The Right Thing*, from the craft service people on up, cared about the people on Stuyvesant street. We organized a clothing drive, we gave away food, we hired people from the neighborhood. In a very concrete way, we did what we could. (ibid.)

In Esposito and Owens's remarks, the combined and overlapping realities of need, want, and danger are articulated in a manner suggesting a community in distress. According to John Adams, "a setting becomes a symbol of its function -- an index of the kinds of narrative event which habitually (and literally) 'take place' there" (1994: 183). Adams goes on to describe the ways that "territorial oppositions are established through the mise en scene, where the deployment of actors within the space create specific spatial metaphors for attitudes and relationships" (ibid.). Lee's direction carefully nurtures the portrayal of a placed or sited community, establishing characters such as Da Mayor (Ossie Davis) and Sister Mother (Ruby Dee) who portray the patriarchal and matriarchal cornerstones of the neighborhood and who, with other common "types," perform the daily task of place-

making within the community. By slowly constructing the image of community as a situated social achievement with an evolved local history, Lee illustrates the problematic issues that can ensue when individuals with neither awareness, interest or concern for those histories buy their way into them.

Sal's pizzeria is portrayed as an anomalous fortress in the middle of hostile territory and this juxtaposition which locates Italian entrepreneurs in a predominantly black neighborhood also places the characters Sal (Danny Aiello) and his sons Vito (Richard Edson) and Pino (John Turturro) in the path of a quickly swelling danger. They are not just outsiders or aliens in the strictly spatial sense but they are also outside of the established rhythms and flows of the community itself, unfamiliar with the codes and rankings of status and identity that are so important to the locals with whom they interact through their business. The inner/outer spatial dynamic of threat and danger is extended by the roaming presence of the white police officers who throughout the film are shown with uncontained grimaces of dislike for the black youths who live on the block. When tensions break the surface and Sal erupts by smashing Radio Raheem's (Bill Nunn) powerful portable stereo (aptly playing "Fight the Power"), the police arrive like a latter-day cavalry troop. As they attempt to neutralize the situation, they inadvertently kill Radio Raheem, setting off much greater violence in the form of a riot that destroys the pizzeria and shatters the community relations among the different ethnic groups.

Lee's script notes stress his desire to capture this fluctuating element of risk, threat, and danger and his attempt to cinematically render an image of the blurred boundaries between victim and aggressor or subordinate and dominating social forces. Describing these relations in terms of hegemonic authority, Stephen Haymes writes:

The social geography of urban space is characterized by public spaces in the city that are positioned unequally in relation to one another with respect to power. The concept of power is key to interpreting this positionality, to understanding how public spaces relate to one another in the context of the urban. (Haymes, 1995:113).

Resentments among the black characters of the film are directed toward the apparent prosperity of racial Others who also, centrally, come from other places whether they be boroughs or neighborhoods in the city or other cultural locales: the Italian pizzeria owners, the Korean market owners, and a Waspish yuppie homeowner whose cultural allegiances are signified by a Boston Celtics basketball jersey prominently bearing white basketball star Larry Bird's number. Yet the very prosperity and success of these Other/outside places places them in the path of potential danger as neighborhood resentments rise, especially among the disenfranchised black youth whose own social prosperity is restricted, anchoring them on the block with few options for advancement or mobility.

When the prevailing community agreement collapses and the tenuous balance among the diverse groups is transgressed, the police respond. The danger threatening Sal and his sons is suddenly reversed, turned toward the neighborhood's black youths who are muscled to the ground by the burly officers as they reassert authority and effectively return the power to the hands of outsiders. This set of images that includes the arrival of a small army of riot police corresponds with Michael Keith and Steve Piles's comment that "for those who have no place that can be safely called home, there must be a struggle for a place to be (1994: 5). *Do The Right Thing* reinforces the notion that, community histories notwithstanding, many urban blacks live in bounded neighborhoods that are spatially maintained through policing and the frequently coercive expression of law and order. Place is consequently a primary site of struggle.

The 'Hood as a Cinematic Space

Paula Massood asserts that it was director John Singleton who, with *Boyz N the Hood* in 1991, "first mapped the 'hood onto the terrain and into the vocabulary of the popular imagination" (1996: 90). In fact, it was the release of the song "Boyz N the Hood" in 1986 (Ruthless/Macola Records) by Eazy E and the core members of what eventually became the Rap group N.W.A. which established "the 'hood" as an emergent term in the

spatial discourse of young urban blacks and Latinos (and eventually other youths as well) across North America. The song vividly portrays the 'hood as a space of violence and confrontation, as a zone of indiscriminate aggression where threat and danger are commonplace, even banal. With the subsequent release of the album *Straight Outta Compton* (1988, Ruthless/Priority), N.W.A. consolidated the stereotypical association of black male youth, the drug trade, gang-banging, gun violence, and routine police harassment with the place names Compton and South Central L.A. Their pioneering album, as well as early recordings by Ice-T, introduced a situated "place-image" (Shields, 1991) of danger that characterizes the subgenre of west coast Gangsta Rap and which is a literal presence in *Menace II Society* (1993, Allen and Albert Hughes, dir.) and *Boyz N the Hood*.

With the co-emergence of Gangsta Rap and 'hood films, previously marginal urban geographies were repositioned at the center of civic attention and public debate. N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton* and the scenarios describing ostensibly natural and everyday occurrences of violence and mayhem were, for many listeners across the country, the first real exposure to the city of Compton. In Singleton's *Boyz N the Hood*, the dangerous reputation of Compton is extended when Furious Styles (Lawrence Fishburne) takes his teenage son Tre (Cuba Gooding, Jr.) and his friend Ricky (Morris Chestnut) into the depths of the 'hood in Compton. The boys' discomfiture is evident as they look over their shoulders at the intimidating teens standing on the corner drinking beer from 40 ounce bottles. Their nervousness reflects the notion that they are in foreign territory, out of their element and off their own turf: they are in Compton. Later, when Tre and Ricky encounter Ricky's brother Doughboy (Ice Cube), he says to them "Y'all come from Compton? I thought you was scared of Compton" to which Ricky responds in the affirmative. As a process of "spatial labelling" whereby "sites and zones associated with particular activities become characterized as being appropriate for exactly those kinds of activities" (Shields, 1991: 60), Gangsta Rap's narrative diffusion of highly particular, spatially determined

styles, argot, and practices elevated the national profile of these urban regions and introduced many of the initial concepts of space, place, and danger that have emerged in 'hood films.

The general conjunction between Rap and new black cinema can be seen in *Menace II Society* in which Rap artist MC Eiht is cast as A-Wax, a street hustler and O.G. (original gangsta) in his early twenties who is described as being slightly older and more battle-worn than the teenaged members of his crew. The character is "down for the 'hood," a tested street soldier who scrapes by with his wits and a gun, selling crack to hapless "cluckheads" and doling out retribution to adversaries who cross him and his posse -- a role not at all unlike that adopted by MC Eiht himself since the age of thirteen (*The Source*, June, 1994: 67). Adding his rapping skills to the soundtrack with the song "Streiht Up Menace," Eiht recounts and elaborates on scenes from the film, emphasizing the progression of threat, violence, and danger that forms the basis of what many rappers refer to unproblematically as the "reality" of "Growing Up in the 'Hood" -- which is also the title of the contribution to the *Boyz N the Hood* soundtrack by Compton's Most Wanted, featuring MC Eiht (1991, Sony Music). It is pertinent to maintain a sense of this crossover influence between Rap and the 'hood film as the two media maintain a relationship of cross-pollination and mutual invigoration that extends beyond the range of narrative and visual imagery to include the enhanced public exposure of Rap artists on the movie screen (most notably Ice T, Ice Cube, and Tupac Shakur) and the importance of commercially successful soundtrack recordings as a factor in the careers of Rap artists as well as in the overall earning power of these films.⁹²

⁹² As an example of the interrelations between Gangsta Rap and 'hood films, DJ Quik's "Jus Lyke Compton" (1992, Profile Records) refers to the nation-wide proliferation of Southern California gang structures and the enmity between Crips and Bloods as being partially influenced by the films *Colors* (1988, Dennis Hopper, dir.) and *Boyz N the Hood*. Furthermore, regular cameo appearances by Rap artists such as EPMD (who appear briefly in Ernest Dickerson's *Juice*), Too Short (*Menace II Society*), Onyx's Neva and Sticky Fingaz (*Clockers*), and Yo Yo (*Boyz N the Hood* and *Menace II Society*) strengthen the bonds between Hip Hop music and film.

Gangsta Rap's graphic description of space, place, and danger has its correlative in contemporary 'hood films as is evident in *Menace II Society's* opening narration by the central protagonist, Caine (Tyrin Turner):

Went into the store just to get a beer. Came out an accessory to murder and armed robbery. It was funny like that in the 'hood sometimes. You never knew what was gonna happen or when. After that, I knew it was gonna be a long summer.

The 'hood is the informing space in which the narrative action is framed; the film's timeline follows the evolution of that "long summer," beginning with Caine's high school graduation and ending with his violent death in a driveby shooting as he, his girlfriend and her young son prepare their departure from South Central L.A.'s mean streets. His trajectory throughout the film is not linear, however, as he swerves between the roles of victim and victimizer, in one instance getting car-jacked and shot in the shoulder, in another pointing a gun at the head of an unfortunate teenager whose gold wheel rims he covets. In the end, his summer sun is blotted out in a final act of payback and one-upmanship when he is shot dead in response to his vicious beating of a teen from another 'hood who has encroached on his home environment. The element of risk and surprise are fused in his statement "you never knew what was gonna happen or when" and the narrative reinforces a sense of the 'hood's capacity for imminent danger through a gradual escalation of random incidents of violence that also emphasize the centrality of turf and bordered enclaves within the social systems of the 'hood in urban Southern California.

As a core element of both Rap lyrics and contemporary black cinematic narratives, youth and danger are conflated with life in the 'hood. Manthia Diawara explains that this often follows a geo-socially specific coming-of-age theme:

Just as in real life the youth are pulled between hip hop life style, gang life, and education, we see in the films neighborhoods that are pulled between gang members, rappers, and education-prone kids. For the black youth, the passage into manhood is also a dangerous enterprise which leads to death both in reality and in film. (1993: 25)

Youth is represented as a heterogeneous formation and its highly stratified composition is emphasized with the distinctions between juvenile and twenty-something status playing a

decisive role in character construction and plot. More recent films such as *Menace II Society*, *Boyz N the Hood*, and, more recently, *Fresh* (1995, Boaz Yakin, dir.) and *Clockers* (1995, Spike Lee, dir.) successfully portray the often subtle differences that separate and complicate the lives of youths in the 13-24 year old demographic at the same time as they portray a range of reactions and responses to the dangers that young black men (and to a lesser degree, women) routinely confront. This contrasts sharply with the age coordinates of the male and female heroes of the earlier ghetto-centric blaxploitation films who were generally much older and were accordingly more empowered in their roles as urban action figures.

In *Boyz N the Hood*, when the pre-adolescent Tre, Doughboy, and Ricky wander the periphery of their 'hood and encounter a gang of older teenage thugs, they cross the railroad tracks into a literal danger zone. There, they dispassionately stare at a decomposing human corpse; then moments later when the teenagers steal their football, Doughboy is beaten for trying to retrieve it. The spatial construction of danger in the scene is consequently organized within accompanying boundaries of age that indicate a pattern of interlocking constraints which define the 'hood for children. Taking Diawara's observations regarding the spatial dimensions of the 'hood a step further, it is consequently the processes through which localized neighborhood space and its associated dangers are negotiated by youth at different stages of their development and growth that inform the narrative core of the 'hood film.

The spatial logic informing representations of the 'hood also intervenes as a factor in the process of identity formation that is inherent in the complex nexus of youth and race and which is present as an underlying current in *Clockers*. Within a system of place-based values, the 'hood is fetishized as the unqualified site of "nigga authenticity" which, as R.A.T. Judy (1994) explains, is an existential and ontological conundrum confronting black youth today. The "real nigga" of the 1990s is, in the perception of many black teens as well as mainstream Americans (i.e., older, middle and upper class), young and "deadly

dangerous."⁹³ This can be seen, for example, in the opening sequence where Strike and his drug-slinging cohorts debate the relative danger quotient of various Rap artists, discussing their "hardness" in terms of whether or not they have ever killed anyone. But the rise of a discourse locating the danger-ridden 'hood as a realm of authentic black identity and experience remains a factor in the mitigation of black culture and black experience that exists in other locales and cultural milieux, including rural and suburban environments. Suburban and middle-class black constituencies are frequently reviled or dismissed within a discourse of the 'hood on the basis of their fundamental disconnectedness from the 'hood itself which has been remade into the privileged space of authentic blackness. Remaining mindful of John Jeffries's (1992: 159) assertions pertaining to black popular culture and images of urban "cool," it is more precisely the extreme inner-city, or the 'hood, that is the primary locale of cool for contemporary teenagers.

This can also be seen in the television program *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, starring rapper turned actor Will Smith (aka The Fresh Prince) and produced under the corporate sign of Quincy Jones. The sitcom's Rap theme song establishes the scenario: As a basketball playing teen in a West Philadelphia 'hood, Smith's homeboy character "Will" is bullied by a gang of local thugs. His mother, sensing the danger to her son, sends him to live with wealthy relatives in the posh town of Bel Air, California. Danger is thus the underlying motivation upon which the program's entire context is predicated, a factor that is rarely raised once the final strains of the theme song have ended but which cannot be ignored. Uprooted from his place of origin, Will remains an icon (albeit somewhat spongy) of authentic ghetto cool, a fly brother for whom the 'hood will always be "home."

⁹³ As an example of the conflation of youth, race, and danger, see the cover of the Canadian news magazine *Maclean's* (May 18, 1992) which, in the aftermath of urban riots relating to the acquittal of California police officers in the beating of Rodney King, pictured a black male teenager wearing a hooded sweater under the headline "Young, Black and Angry."

The program's humor lies largely in the conflict of youth, race, and class portrayed as a series of disjunctures, with Carlton (Alfonso Ribeiro), Will's ultra-preppy cousin, constituting the ironic foil to Smith's character. Carlton is the image in negative relief of what black youth is supposed to be: He has no street smarts, no sense of street style, and importantly, despite being articulate he demonstrates no verbal dexterity: Carlton is the stereotypical "oreo" -- black on the outside but white at the center. The scenario corresponds with Gilroy's earlier noted observation that "today we are told that the boys, and the girls, are from the 'hood -- not from the race, and certainly not from the nation" (1992: 308), for if the 'hood with its accompanying dangers inscribes the contemporary black male as "real" then Carlton has no hope of ever being real, let alone black. Carlton's evolving "buppie" character, like Will's homeboy, is a relatively unambiguous identity statement rooted in social space and place-based logics. Where Will's character speaks the inner-city and ostensibly the 'hood, Carlton speaks some problematic nether-land that is spatially set between cultures and poles of identification, producing a character that is hybrid in its construction and reflects a complex identity composite that is forged in what Homi Bhabha (1990) calls "the third space."

In *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, the 'hood exists as a structured absence, its effect and influence exerting themselves from the edges of the scripted narratives as an implicit danger lying in some distant beyond, outside the security that wealth can buy. In the rare instances where the 'hood explicitly resurfaces, it tends to be coded as rupture or as points within the script where danger from the outside breaks through the veneer of gentility that pervades the Bel Air mansion where most of the action is set. In ways that reproduce social stereotypes and sustain the alienating images of black youth, danger is carried on the backs of teenagers portraying the uncouth and undisciplined mannerisms of the 'hood which, in the context of the sitcom, is intended to heighten the socio-spatial distinctions between Carlton, Will, and the 'hood.

Just as the demographic subset "youth" and the cultural designation "black" should not be conceived in singular terms, neither should the 'hood be approached as a homogeneous space or unified geo-cultural terrain. Paul Gilroy's critical interrogation suggests that, while the discourse of the 'hood has emerged as the socio-spatial dominant for black teens, in its implied localism it problematizes the potential for expansive diasporic identification and collective political movement among black youth. I return here to his leading query cited earlier:

It's important that the 'hood stands in opposition to foreign things...if the 'hood is the essence of where blackness can now be found, which 'hood are we talking about? How do we weigh the achievements of one 'hood against the achievements of another? How is black life in one 'hood connected to life in others? (Gilroy, 1992: 308)

The distinctions between this 'hood and that 'hood have crucial, often life-threatening implications for those who inhabit them and live in and by their territorial codes. By extension, however, the cinematic representation of different 'hoods and of different modes of habitation also allows for an elaborated understanding of what the 'hood is in American society and how its social dimensions are constructed. According to Milbrey McLaughlin;

The experiences of youth growing up in one urban area can and do differ in many important ways from those youngsters growing up in another urban environment that may be only two blocks away. Most important in these differences are not the status and character of individual institutions but the collective determination of the environment in which local youth develop and mold a sense of identity. (1993: 37)

The diversity of localized cultures, neighborhood patterns, and modes of existence does not necessarily negate the capacity for teenagers living within these distinct zones to communicate in meaningful and connective ways across their various differences. There exists a strong tendency toward cultural dialogicism that, despite local or regional differences, maintains a sense of cultural commonality as well that is formed within the nexus of race, class, and urbanicity.

In Paula Massood's compelling essay, she examines the means through which contemporary black filmmakers "map the 'hood" as a previously concealed space on the American cityscape. Her focus on films set in South Central Los Angeles, however, does

little to illuminate the ways that the 'hood is represented in films set elsewhere. As a reminder of the implications involved in such cinematic myopia, John Jeffries has noted:

In thinking about what the urban is, we have some preconceptions...For those of us living on the East Coast, especially considering the way L.A., with its urban conflict and gangs, has been described to us in the newspapers, some of the images that were most shocking in *Boyz N the Hood* were the shots of low-density housing. Many of us in East Coast audiences either subconsciously or unconsciously asked, "Where's the city?" (1992: 213)

Set in New York's high-rise housing projects and their adjoining neighborhoods,⁹⁴ Matty Rich's *Straight Out of Brooklyn* (1991), with its title harking back to N.W.A.'s "Straight Outta Compton," Ernest Dickerson's *Juice* (1992), and Spike Lee's *Clockers* portray a different kind of 'hood that is constructed much more vertically than California's horizontal 'hood with its wide boulevards, neat single-family homes, and low-rise public housing units. In these films, the sense of danger is intensified by a pervasive spatial compression that fuels the stress and tension of the various characters. The twin elements of constraint and restricted mobility (to name two points that Massood foregrounds) are signified through a visual tightness that is only rarely alleviated, as in the scenes where geographic distance and cultural difference are communicated in *Straight Out of Brooklyn* through Dennis's (Lawrence Gilliard, Jr.) wistful gaze across the river toward the towers of lower Manhattan.

In *Juice*, the four protagonists led by the late Tupac Shakur as the rapidly unravelling Bishop (whose name suggests a nod towards Ron O'Neal's character Youngblood Priest in *Superfly*) and Omar Epps as the optimistic Hip Hop DJ Quincy (or "Q") are continually framed against buildings and brick exteriors. Theirs is a world of architectural height and institutional might that contrastingly diminishes their own stature as black teenagers in the city. Throughout the film they are defensively positioned against the multifaceted dangers of the city; a rival gang, the school truancy cop, the police, and in the

⁹⁴ In the case of *Straight Out of Brooklyn*, this is the specific locale of the Red Hook housing projects, home to director Matty Rich. The projects depicted in *Juice* remain anonymous although the city is clearly New York and the locale is representative of Harlem or the Bronx.

end, one another as Bishop's fear and paranoia turn to desperation and he hunts his friends down. Both before and after committing their murderous crime in what is supposed to be a straightforward robbery of the local Asian-owned corner store, they are shown scurrying through derelict buildings, alleys and back-streets. Here, the closely demarcated architectural contours of the city evoke a danger that lurks around the corners as *Juice* confronts the navigational dilemmas of avoiding danger, violence and death in the 'hood. Unlike the 'hood films set in South Central L.A., there are no broad spatial expanses depicted here but, rather, a maze of connective pathways through the 'hood. In the film's portrayal of urban density, knowledge and cartographic familiarity of the 'hood are conveyed as being informing facets of urban youth survival strategies.

Despite Spike Lee's denial that *Clockers* is a 'hood film, it fails to fully escape its allegiances to the genre, maintaining a tightly bounded spatial perimeter within which the central protagonist Strike (Mekhi Phifer) operates as a street-level drug dealer in the projects. According to Lee:

Hood films are kind of over. This was one of the reasons I was hesitant about doing it. Audiences, black and white, are getting pretty fatigued of that genre. Rightly so, they want to see some different stories coming out of black culture besides a shoot-em-up hip-hop film...I thought we could transcend the hood genre and make something greater. (Wallace, 1996: 12)

In *Clockers*, the 'hood is portrayed as a space of extreme limitations, constructed as a profile of density which is nonetheless replete with human intercourse that thrives and falters in an intense proximity. Lee's construction of the 'hood fully acknowledges the magnification of danger under such tight conditions and the inherent threat engendered in the stratified arrangement of power, authority, and territorial contestation. Unlike most films in the 'hood genre, however, he leavens his assessment of the 'hood by encompassing positive, even liberating images of hope that also inflect the experience of urban existence.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ For example, Strike is not portrayed as a menacing gangster figure but as a teenager who, by virtue of his social positioning, is subjected to the magnetic pull of "the street." His hustler image is diluted by a closeted fascination with trains which, as Richard Price observes, is "a symbol of mobility and the desire to break out" (Quart & Auster, 1996: 17).

Lee's New York setting constructs Strike's zone of operation meiotically: his landscape is cramped and circumscribed in ways that correspondingly amplify the dangers that inform his actions and options. Strike is constantly under surveillance, watched by competing forces (the police and his criminal mentor), effectively frozen in place on the bench at the center of the low-rent housing complex where he lives with his mother. Yet spatial compression increases the intensity of relations among the primary characters, particularly Strike and the various males (a local drug entrepreneur, a police detective, a beat cop, and an elder brother) who mold his sense of self and identity; whose push and pull combine to produce a hybrid composite replacing an absent father figure. The transcendent element Lee refers to may cohere in the unique means through which danger is narratively structured, for it is not solely the danger of inner-city violence that Strike must negotiate but also the danger of failure in the eyes of those whose respect he most desires. In this context, danger is related to the complexities of identity and respect that function as crucial codes of the street and which, in their continually contingent nature, must be renegotiated through ceaseless attention to profile, status and reputation.

With *Dead Presidents* (1995), Albert and Allen Hughes more successfully circumvent many of the common traits (and clichés) of 'hood cinema alluded to by Lee while maintaining a fundamental spatial sensibility that is characteristic of the genre. Set in the late 1960s and early 1970s, *Dead Presidents* returns to the Vietnam era and the general period from which blaxploitation films emerged. Its themes are suggestive of a retro-war film crossed with a conventional heist film yet its narrative and visual construction resonate with contemporary 'hood films in a manner that indicates an attempt to reach across the intervening years and to establish a dialogue with earlier black cultural cinematic forms.

The locality within which the central figure Anthony (Larenz Tate) and his two homeboys, Skippy (Chris Tucker) and Jose (Freddy Rodriguez), circulate is established with subtitles identifying the area as the "North East Bronx," an urban locale consisting of tightly packed single-family domiciles that challenges the dominant contemporary place-

images of the South Bronx with its high-rise city housing. The trio is introduced working as milk delivery boys who, on the cusp of their high school graduation, envision their options as being twofold: stay in the neighborhood and hustle for a living (Skippy is adamant in his desire to fill the role of neighborhood pimp) or go to Vietnam. Upon graduation, Anthony shows his ghetto survival skills as a low-stakes pool shark and numbers runner in a small-scale racket operated out of the back of the neighborhood pool hall. The sense of the 'hood is conveyed most forcefully in this segment as Anthony scrapes a living out of the local area, greeting men and women casually as he strolls through his home environment. He is initially portrayed as being marginally connected to criminal activity and the dangers he confronts are correspondingly minimal. The escalation of his criminal involvement is depicted in his ascension to the rank of getaway driver for his loan shark boss, reflecting the 'hood's negative authority over many young black men. Skippy and Jose are drafted into the military soon after their graduation, an indication of the relative powerlessness of many young black and Latino men to chart their own destinies or to map their own geographies. Anthony is contrastingly portrayed as being more focused and self-guided; he enlists in the military as a means of escaping the 'hood, of expanding his range and perspectives by following in his father's footsteps and capitalizing on the enhanced opportunities that military training and experience might offer.

In a clever and visually exciting segue, the Hughes brothers invoke the jungle analogy by conjoining the tough Bronx landscape and the Vietnam battle field with Anthony as the running continuity. He is depicted leaping fences and sprinting through alleys as he escapes the wrath of his girlfriend's mother, shouting neighbors, and vicious attack dogs; then, through a seamless edit, he is running for cover in the middle of a tense, fast-paced fire-fight in Vietnam. While Anthony is the connective figure forging the links between the spatial locations of his 'hood and the southeast Asian war zone, the narrative element of danger is simultaneously extended. He is positioned between two landscapes and two corresponding images of danger that demand similar survival strategies. Escaping

these twinned threats, Anthony has little choice but to keep running for both symbolically and physically, his stasis will have grave and possibly deadly consequences

As Anthony and Skippy relax in the American military compound in the aftermath of one battle sequence, Skippy says "this ain't our war, man. Shit, our black asses should be back in the Bronx where we belong." The statement reveals the limits of his geo-cultural cartography as he maps himself permanently into the neighborhood he knows best, that being a neighborhood of predominantly black urban infrastructures. McLaughlin writes that "the city sets the broad context for youth. But within urban communities, neighborhoods are 'home' and are the most immediate and salient environments for young people" (1993: 44). From Vietnam, Skippy and Anthony refer to their corner of America as being "back in the world" which is intended as a comparative distinction between home and the hellish war zone but the expression also attributes an enlarged or glorified sense of spatial importance to the constricted urban terrains of their neighborhood in the North East Bronx.

Skippy's statement also reveals limitations in his capacity to process the complexities of an emergent black nationalism that is hinted at in his reference to racial difference and the war effort. He has little experience of "the world" beyond the boundaries of his home environment and so his sense of black culture and a black cultural politics is framed exclusively within the images of home that he is most familiar with, affirming McLaughlin's observation that "for inner-city youth, their neighborhood and the context it provides are all they know" (1993: 54). In fact, the black power movement of the period was in some ways mobilized through the meeting and interaction of young black soldiers who represented diverse regions and urban locales from across America but who, like Skippy, had only ever had limited exposure to other "worlds" of black (or white) experience. There is no narrative attempt to harness the political activism that defined a crucial facet of black life in the era; the directors do not expand on this aspect of the black G.I. experience except in an oblique reference to Viet Cong propaganda campaigns that

attempted to appeal to black soldiers' own sense of cultural and political struggle with America and to cleave a division between white and black troops.

Nor do the Hughes brothers capitalize on the narrative potentials of the black power movement as it constituted a connective force on the homefront. Although historically the expansion of the Black Panther Party across the U.S. as well as that of other black social and political groups provided a national network that linked communities and urban settings from coast to coast, in *Dead Presidents* this factor is neutralized, reduced to little more than a slim facet of the plot. Delilah (N'Bushe Wright) is the revolutionary soul sister who articulates the movement's political discourse but who, in the end, is represented alternately as a sexy radical or as a female avenger stoked in black rage. She is ultimately killed in the midst of the poorly executed heist and the notion of expansive American black power politics or the national uprising of ghetto blacks in the narrative dies with her. This is not suggest a severe shortcoming of the film. Rather, the directors' avoidance of these issues serves to deepen the localism and constraining limitations of a neighborhood perspective that in the context of the narrative blinds inhabitants of the 'hood to other, wider potentials that might align distinct urban geographies in a collective sense.

Compression and constraint finally undo the hopes and dreams of Anthony, Skippy, and Jose who, upon returning to "the world" from Vietnam find that little has changed for them. Anthony is the figure of the emasculated male, unable to adequately support his girlfriend and their small child. They end up living in a small apartment in a rundown housing tenement as he works at a menial job as a butcher. When he eventually loses this meagre source of income, he is driven to design a plan for an armed truck robbery with his friends from the neighborhood. Danger and desperation are mingled here as it becomes clear that escape from the constraints and dangers of the neighborhood require aggressive measures. Despite meticulous planning, however, the heist goes awry and the deaths of several armed guards and a police officer lead to an intense search for Anthony and his crew throughout the neighborhood.

In the end, Jose, Skippy, and Anthony each fall victim to the effects of spatial compression. Jose's grisly demise is a clear metaphor for a loser's dead-end when he is pulverized against a brick wall by a speeding police car in a chase down a closed alley. Skippy is discovered by police alone in his tiny, disheveled apartment, his dead eyes glazed into the cataracts of a heroin overdose, the needle still protruding from his arm. The profoundly melancholic moment is accentuated by his earlier optimistic references to home as "the world;" the police find him positioned in front of a flickering television screen that features the bitter-sweet strains of soul man Al Green performing "I'm So Tired of Being Alone" on the *Soul Train* program. Anthony's capture is filmed with a crane shot that foregrounds the sense of containment and enclosure; his arrest takes place in the narrow hallway of the pool room where he is literally squeezed between two police phalanxes. The film ends with Anthony's courtroom appearance before a judge who sentences him to life in prison, finalizing the constriction and the danger that has framed Anthony's life throughout the film.

In *Dead Presidents* the geographic and architectural constraints are ultimately confirmed by the inability of the characters to think expansively and to project self-images that transcend the boundaries of their immediate social contexts within their 'hood. Their restricted imagination (that, for all of its limitations, still displays a thin sheen of hope and optimism that something better exists just beyond their reach) further reduces the capacity to "get over" by lifting themselves up and out of the localized geographies of danger that inscribe their daily existence.

Friday offers a tribute to the hood genre by presenting an example of how the dangers of the 'hood are portrayed in a humorous vein. Co-written by Ice Cube and DJ Pooh, *Friday* affirms the bonds between 'hood and home environment in a display of exaggeration and camp excess. The spatial construct of the 'hood constitutes the film's core but the screenplay simultaneously sustains conventions of the 'hood film while exposing them to irreverent critique. Ice Cube plays Craig, a teenager facing a personal

employment deficit, who with his blunted neighbor Smokey (Chris Tucker), spends the day sitting on the front porch of his family home. The compression and constraint that is common to the 'hood film is reduced to an absurd scale of minimal mobility with Craig and Smokey never wandering more than one or two houses away from their roost. Yet, their stasis resonates with elements of non-comedy films such as *Do The Right Thing* (1989, Spike Lee, dir.), *Menace II Society*, and especially *Boyz N the Hood* with its porch posse scenes (also co-starring Ice Cube), all of which feature images of men of various ages sitting idly and bantering as they survey the 'hood around them.

The unmoving, localized site of action provides an amusing motivation for the film's narrative flow as various characters circulate through the 'hood, coming and going from the front porch where the boys sit. Their vantage offers them a window on their small world, yet for all its limitations, it is a rich and full world of drama and suspense. Danger is encountered in the menacing character of Deebo (Tiny "Zeus" Lister, Jr.), a slightly cross-eyed and slow-witted bully. Deebo's approach is announced in an intertextual reference to *Jaws* (1975, Steven Spielberg, dir.) by music similar to that which heralded the shark attacks. Undercutting this, however, is the accompanying sound of his squeaking bicycle which neutralizes the threat he presents by infantilizing him. Where other 'hood films portray vicious car-jackings, *Friday* portrays the neighborhood thug stealing a bike. In another scene depicting a drive-by shooting, the bravado and machismo that imbues the male characters in most 'hood films is parodied as Smokey quivers and cries in total fear. *Friday* consequently remains true to the conventions of the 'hood film by foregrounding the ever-present risk and dangers that arise for young blacks, but by inverting and exposing them to exaggeration and humorous critique it is uniquely situated in relation to other 'hood films.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ The conventions of the 'hood film have also been scathingly parodied in *Don't Be a Menace to South Central While Drinking Your Juice in the Hood* (1996, Shawn and Marlon Wayans, dir.) which failed to fully capitalize on the 'hood film market but still managed to post an impressive earnings-to-budget ratio, making it one of the top ten most profitable films of 1996.

This chapter began with a description of spatial segregation and the exhibition of 'hood films that discriminates against young minority audiences. The incidents of real violence that have, in the past, erupted at movie theaters screening black films including *New Jack City* (1991, Mario van Peebles, dir.) or *Boyz N the Hood*, however, make it difficult to ignore or dismiss the concerns of theater managers or the police. As a series of precedent-setting occurrences, this violence seems to validate the association of danger with 'hood films. In its multivariiegated character as a discursive construct, a representational/cinematic space, and as an array of actually existing places, the 'hood is *constitutive* of a powerful image-idea of young urban black experience. At the same time, it is *constituted* by the multiple ways that these images and experiences are merged and rearticulated daily within North America's urban geographies. Understood from this perspective, the portrayal of ubiquitous danger in the 'hood film also forces society to reconsider the means through which representation and reality often bleed together.

Epilogue

Throughout this study, issues of race, space, and place have been examined within the historically specific contexts of Hip Hop's cultural evolution. Within Hip Hop, Rap has emerged as one of the primary vehicles for the expression of spatial sensibilities from a youth perspective and it has, in its many subgeneric forms, become one of the more distinct sites for social debate on the contemporary convergences of youth, race, space, and place. While writing the dissertation, I returned to many earlier recorded examples while maintaining my status as an active consumer of new material. It quickly became obvious that these tendencies have always been generally prevalent in Rap and Hip Hop practices.

Guided by the theoretical inquiries of Paul Gilroy and the historical research of David Toop and Tricia Rose in particular, my interests were in the ways in which spatial issues have been framed and articulated since Rap began and the ways in which they have changed at various temporal junctures. As the preliminary research unfolded I realized that the focus should encompass the myriad forces (cultural, political, economic, corporate) affecting these spatial sensibilities. I should state that at no point have I attempted to be comprehensive or definitive in my findings. There are so many examples in Rap and Hip Hop reinforcing the general arguments of the project that any attempt to include them all would be impossible. Paul Gilroy accurately assesses the research dilemma:

One of the things I find troubling in debates about rap is that I don't think anyone knows what the totality of its hypercreativity looks like...I can't keep up with the volume of hip-hop product anymore. I don't know if anyone can. There is simply too much of it to be assimilated, and the kinds of judgements we make have to take that volume into account. It's a flood -- it's not a flow, it's a flood actually -- and bobbing up and down in the water is not enough. (1992: 309)

I believe this dissertation demonstrates the means through which young artists have employed Rap in the re-mapping of the urban terrain. The term "mapping," for all of its academic currency, is appropriate here since it captures the sense of active process involved. Hip Hop's processes of cultural mapping have produced a valuable body of

work that defines the spatial relations between the 'hood, the region, the nation, and more broadly, describes minority teen existence within the "global/local nexus." This is cartography on the move and over the past 20 years rappers have, like "super rapper" Muhammad Ali, fainted, jabbed, and rapped against the system, challenging and opposing the dominant socio-spatial configurations. In so doing, they have introduced a series of alternatives that express the needs, concerns, and desires of urban minority youth at the end of the twentieth century.

As I have argued, the material conditions and social dynamics connecting these variables have not remained constant since Rap first emerged as a facet of the Hip Hop culture. Rather, they have been in continual flux, undergoing transformations that have a profound influence on the lives of young black and Latino teens for whom Rap is a central cultural practice and commodity. As we near the end of the century, the color-line that Du Bois long ago identified as America's primary constraint continues to divide the races in America. Small children and teenagers are growing up in a society where *de facto* segregation of neighborhoods and schools is common. At the dawn of Rap's third decade, minority teens and a sizeable segment of white teens as well have given voice to a range of socio-spatial concerns that are asserted with increasing intensity.

Like most subcultural groups, those who ascribe to the Hip Hop lifestyle and live within its range of attitudes and practices have developed their own internally coherent styles, codes, and elaborate systems of meaning. Over the years teenagers have implemented these codes and signs to communicate the importance of spatiality and, in the past ten years, there has been a strong turn toward place-based value statements that inform individual and collective identity affiliations. Rap has become an essential element in the formation of spatial politics and the politics of place upon which different "players" and posses base their identities in an arena that is characteristically obsessed with identity and public profile. To express the emergent spatial practices upon which these identity affiliations are founded, youths have devised an entirely new lexicon and medium through

which to describe the spaces and places of the contemporary urban landscape. This is one of Rap's most important social functions and it is absolutely essential that this be acknowledged if there is to be an understanding of the music's role in the lives of its young fans and consumers.

One needn't look far to see that "stakes is high" for many minority youths in America; black and Latino teenagers are at risk as never before, confronting the fears of neighborhood violence and the desperation of economic pressure and limited employment options that often fuel it. Despite occasional exceptions, relations between the sexes are also generally conflicted and the unequal distribution of spatial power between young men and women remains a serious problem within Hip Hop circles. Still, there is much optimism as well and Rap provides a communicative medium through which the joys and fears of youth are expressed and the contexts of existence, both positive and negative, are defined. It provides the cultural means through which identities, often forged under duress, are written onto the social map. The diverse range of narratives and discourses, along with a variety of regionally dispersed rhythms and flows, actually produces the territories and loosely circumscribed boundaries of the Hip Hop nation.

In this dissertation I have also attempted, with my analyses of Billboard's Rap coverage and the rise of ancillary Hip Hop media, to fill an absence by exploring what I regard as an insufficiently accessed area of Hip Hop scholarship. Each of these has provided inertia to Rap's structured expansions in a cultural commodity system while also communicating many spatial issues that arise within Rap texts and discourses. Despite maintaining an evolving historical approach, however, the phenomena isolated here are not solely of the past. Rap's impact and influence have endured far beyond the tentative hopes of its early pioneers and supporters and outlasted the negative criticism of its detractors.

As I write this, Wu-Tang Clan's double CD *Wu-Tang Forever* (1997, Loud/RCA) occupies the number one spot on the Billboard 200 album chart and the Notorious B.I.G.'s double CD *Life After Death* (1997, Bad Boy) has slipped from the top position but remains

on the chart at number seven. Each of these albums is laced with references to the East Coast region, with Wu-Tang describing their allegiance to "Shaolin Island" (Staten Island) and metropolitan New York while Biggie Smalls "represents" Brooklyn to the fullest. Rap also tops the Hot 100 Singles and Hot R&B Singles charts with "I'll Be Missin' You" (1997, Bad Boy/Arista), a tribute to the late Notorious B.I.G. by Bad Boy posse members Puff Daddy, Faith Evans, and 112. At this writing, one fifth of the tracks on the Hot 100 singles chart are in the Rap genre with the figure increasing when R&B songs featuring Rap-oriented breaks or Hip Hop beats are considered (Billboard, June 21, 1997).

Hip Hop's ubiquity and commercial success have resulted in subtle indicators of its wider social impact. For example, as the term "the 'hood" has seeped up from the "underground," having been popularized through Rap and the Hip Hop media, it has entered into a standard vocabulary within the social mainstream. Today it is not uncommon to hear individuals who are quite distanced from Hip Hop as either fans or consuming audience members erroneously referring to their upscale or gentrified enclaves as "the 'hood." As this project has illustrated, the 'hood is not just *anyplace*; the term cannot simply be used to define *any* neighborhood. As I have endeavored to explain, the 'hood is the product of a unique spatial sensibility that permeates the Hip Hop culture. It is a spatial construct which can be traced through a series of transformative moments, having usurped other earlier spatial constructs that have been historically defined within black cultural practices including music, literature, and cinema.

As it is constructed through Hip Hop's cultural discourses and within the narrative spaces of Rap, the 'hood is portrayed as a proximate space that is subject to particular influences, practices, and social tensions predominantly emphasizing the presence and experiences of black and Latino teenagers. In its usage it generally foregrounds contextually located cultural dynamics of place, encompassing race, class, and age. Its primacy is also generally measured in relation to other, larger spatial scales, leading Naughty By Nature to claim that "The 'Hood Comes First" (1993, Isba/Tommy Boy)

which as a relational value statement subsumes and reduces the value of other spaces and places.

While the 'hood and the corporate boardroom represent two distinct and distanced arenas that are informed by vastly differing spatial practices and spatial discourses, historical research reveals that the two have consistently been articulated toward each other. That is to say, Rap's spatial expansions and its thematic, narrative, and discursive content are inextricably bound to the corporate exigency of global commerce. Tremors in one realm can have massive repercussions in the other.

As this project unfolded, two incidents occurred that tragically reflect this last point while resonating with the spatial foci of the preceeding pages. On September 13, 1996, Oakland rapper Tupac Shakur (2Pac) died in Las Vegas from gunshot wounds sustained in an unsolved driveby shooting. For several years prior to his murder Shakur had been a lightning rod of celebrity controversy living the "thug life" and adopting the postures of a self-professed "outlaw immortal."⁹⁷ Becoming the newest and most vocal "soldier" in the Death Row Records posse in 1996, he maintained an ongoing bi-coastal "beef" with New York-based Bad Boy Records, its C.E.O. Sean "Puffy" Combs, and the label's most bankable Rap artist, the Notorious B.I.G. (Biggie Smalls). His hit single "California Love" (1996, Death Row), recorded with Dr. Dre, clearly stated his regional allegiances but with the release of "Hit 'Em Up" (1996, Death Row), Shakur abandoned the concept of love, explicitly citing East Coast artists Mobb Deep, Biggie Smalls, and Bad Boy Records as the targets of his wrath.

At the time of his death, rumors of a festering antagonism between the Bad Boy and Death Row posses circulated widely, eventually extending to a wider expression of conflict between acts representing both coasts (even though ongoing police investigations in Las

⁹⁷ Among Tupac's transgressions were the shooting of two off duty police officers in Atlanta in 1993, a sexual assault in 1993 that led to his conviction and imprisonment the following year, and an assault on film director Allen Hughes in 1994. While on trial for sexual assault, Shakur was also robbed at gunpoint and shot five times in New York, setting in motion a series of accusations implicating Puffy Combs and the Notorious B.I.G. of Bad Boy Records in the ambush.

Vegas and Los Angeles indicated that the shooting was almost certainly related to a settling of accounts among L.A. Crip and Blood gang sets). In the aftermath of his death, the sales of *All Eyez On Me* (replete with a cover image of 2Pac flashing the West Coast "W" hand sign) accelerated, as did the catalog sales of his earlier releases. Death Row further capitalized on 2Pac's passing with the rushed distribution of the video single "Life Goes On" (1996, Death Row). Completed before his death, the video continued the artist's introspective fascination with his own demise, portraying an angelic 2Pac surrounded by deceased musical luminaries such as Marvin Gaye and Miles Davis in heaven.

The full scope of the spatial and territorial conflict was defined explicitly on recordings by acts including Mobb Deep, The Notorious B.I.G., Dr. Dre, 2Pac, Westside Connection and many others. The Hip Hop press also helped to frame the rising tensions in spatial and territorial terms, fuelling the conflict with speculations about a brewing "civil war." For instance, the May 1996 issue of The Source features L.A. artist Ice Cube on its cover flashing the West Coast hand sign and sporting a diamond studded pendant in the shape of the same sign. The accompanying headline reads "East vs. West: Inside Hip Hop's Civil War." Ice Cube is an appropriate spokesman since his group Westside Connection (consisting of Ice Cube, Mack-10, and W.C.) had recorded the hit single "Bow Down" (1996, Priority), an aggressive declaration of West Coast supremacy. The following September, Suge Knight was featured on the cover of the magazine with the headline "It Ain't No East Coast/West Coast Thang." The September, 1996 issue of Vibe pictured Biggie Smalls and Puffy Combs on its cover with the headline "East vs. West: Biggie and Puffy Break Their Silence." It seemed that the gangster ethic and street posturing that had permeated the Rap genre for the past ten years had blown up and out of the narrow enclaves where it began, first capturing the attention of the Hip Hop media and, gradually, encroaching on the corporate and institutional fibre of the Rap scene in ways that seemed much more attuned to the "street" than to "the executive suite" (to borrow Negus's dichotomous distinction).

Six months after 2Pac's death, the Notorious B.I.G. was killed in a similar fashion, gunned down in a "surgical" driveby shooting in Los Angeles. Once again speculations of East/West "beef" circulated within the mainstream and alternative media (and among fans on the internet) and, once again, the incident was blamed on gang related conflict. The media lamented the loss of another Rap artist who was in his prime and made the obvious ties between this incident and the 2Pac shooting. Two weeks after Biggie Smalls died, his sophomore album was released, immediately charting at the number one top-selling album position. The first single, "Hypnotize" (1997, Bad Boy), dominated the singles charts, becoming an instant favorite with nightclub DJs while the accompanying video went into heavy rotation on U.S. and Canadian music video stations. Controversy and death, it seems, are good for business.

The album track "Going Back to Cali" (1997, Bad Boy) stands out for the manner in which it operates within the tensions of the East/West conflict, adapting and appropriating several basic sonic characteristics associated with the West Coast sound (most clearly reminiscent of 2Pac and Dre's "California Love"). It is doubtful that this is an homage to the production styles from L.A. but, rather, it suggests a clever provocation of West Coast artists, especially those on the Death Row label. Yet even as Biggie Smalls "represents" the East Coast and asserts his status as the New York Rap "don," he still "gives props" to L.A. and the whole West side:

If I've got to choose a coast, I've got to choose the East
 I live out there so don't go there
 But that don't mean that a nigga can't rest in the West
 See some nice breast in the West
 Smoke some nice ses in the West
 Y'all niggaz is the mess
 Pickin' up on stock
 Givin' L.A. props
 All I got is beef with those that violate me
 I shall annihilate thee, case closed....
 Cali, great place to visit...

The roots of this regional battle for national supremacy are rooted in the history of Rap itself. The contestatory traditions that once characterized the local MC and DJ battles in the

boroughs of New York have, like Rap, grown and expanded. That it has taken such a vicious and violent turn is less easily accounted for, yet this also unfortunately remains consistent with patterns of youth crime and "black-on-black" gun violence that daily affect the lives of urban teens.

In reporting the deaths of 25 year old 2Pac and 24 year old Notorious B.I.G., the Hip Hop media reminded readers that while the incidents produce an immeasurable loss to the Rap world, the crisis of gun violence is an American problem that is inordinately impacting on young black men. By contrast, the mainstream media often seemed unable to focus beyond the celebrity angle, framing the incidents in common sense terms as a logical outcome of the gangsta-ism that is thematically endemic to Rap. Slowly, artists from the two coasts are attempting to settle differences through carefully scripted public statements, high-profile joint public appearances, and guest spots on each other's recordings. The spatial dimensions of authority, power, and pride may not fully disappear, but, for the time being, players in the Rap game seem willing to accept that regional and local differences aren't enough to go to war over. Already, as young Rap artists mature and have children of their own there is evidence of a new conciliatory attitude that may, in fact, be a healthy result of Rap's longevity.

The emphases and investments in space and place within Rap music and Hip Hop will undoubtedly continue. They will also continue to undergo transformations that address simultaneously shifting phenomena in the wider cultural milieux. It is my hope that the theoretical approaches and research documentation in these pages may provide a basic record of some of the evolutionary factors involved and that others may find the results of my efforts useful in charting future transitional phenomena in Rap and Hip Hop.

Appendix

The Message (1982, Sugarhill Records)
Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five

It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder
How I keep from going under
It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder
How I keep from going under

Broken glass everywhere
People pissing on the stairs, you know they just don't care
I can't take the smell, can't take the noise
Got no money to move out, guess I got no choice
Rats in the frontroom, roaches in the back
Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat
I tried to get away but I couldn't get far
'Cause the man with the tow truck repossessed my car

(chorus) Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge
I'm trying not to lose my head
It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder
How I keep from going under

Standing on the front stoop, hanging out the window
Watching all the cars go by, roaring as the breezes blow
Crazy lady, living in a bag
Eating outta garbage pails, used to be a fag hag
Says she danced the tango, skip the light fandango
Was zircon princess seemed to lost her senses
Down at the peep show, watching all the creeps so
She could tell the story to the girls back home
She went to the city and got social security
She had to get a pension, she couldn't make it on her own

(chorus)

My brother's doing bad, stole my mother's TV
Says she watches too much, its just not healthy
"All My Children" in the daytime, "Dallas" at night
Can't even see the game or the Sugar Ray fight
The bill collectors, they ring my phone
And scare my wife when I'm not at home
Got a bum education, double-digit inflation
Can't train to the job, there's a strike at the station
Neon King Kong, standing on my back
Can't stop to turn around, broke my sacroiliac
A mid-range migraine, cancered membrane
Sometimes I think I'm going insane
I swear, I might hijack a plane

(chorus)

My son said, "Daddy, I don't want to go to school
 'Cause the teacher's a jerk, he must think I'm a fool
 And all the kids smoke reefer, I think it'd be cheaper
 If I just got a job, learned to be a street sweeper
 Dance to the beat, shuffle my feet
 Wear a shirt and tie and run with the creeps
 'Cause it's all about money, ain't a damn thing funny
 You got to have a con in the land of milk and honey

(chorus)

They pushed that girl in front of the train
 Took her to the doctor, sewed her arm on again
 Stabbed the man right in the heart
 Gave him a transplant for a brand new start
 I can't walk through the park 'cause it's crazy after dark
 Keep my hand on my gun 'cause they got me on the run
 I feel like an outlaw, broke my last glass jaw
 Hear them say, "you want some more?"
 Livin' on a seesaw

(chorus)

A child is born with no state of mind
 Blind to the ways of mankind
 God is smiling on you but he's frowning too
 Because only God knows what you go through
 You grow in the ghetto, living second rate
 And your eyes will sing a song of deep hate
 The place that you play and where you stay
 Looks like one great big alleyway
 You'll admire all the number book-takers
 Thugs, pimps, and pushers and the big money makers
 Driving big cars, spending twenties and tens
 And you wanna grow up to be just like them
 Smugglers, scramblers, burglars, gamblers
 Pickpockets, peddlers, even panhandlers
 You say "I'm cool, huh, I'm no fool"
 But then you wind up dropping out of high school
 Now you're unemployed, all nonvoid
 Walking around like Pretty Boy Floyd
 Turned stick-up kid but look what you done did
 Got sent up for a eight-year bid
 Now your manhood is took and you're a Maytag
 Spend the next two years as a undercover fag
 Being used and abused to serve like hell
 Til one day you was found hung dead in the cell
 It was plain to see that your life was lost
 You was cold and your body swung back and forth
 But now your eyes sing the sad sad song
 Of how ya lived so fast and died so young

"Street Justice" (1983, Profile)
The Rake

You can see it any night on the nightly news
 Some punks think they're big bad dudes
 Commit some crimes and power dues
 Those punks that think they're big bad dudes
 Don't serve a day, don't do no time
 They get away and that's a crime
 You call that justice, you call that fair?
 Now dig me brother, listen here
 The only way the workingman will ever get his justice
 Is on the street

(Chorus) Gotta meet the punk on the battlefield
 Gotta beat the punk
 Street justice
 Gotta meet the punk on the battlefield
 Gotta beat the punk
 Street justice

When I left for work I thought things were cool
 With the wife at home and the kids at school
 I walked down the street, got on the bus
 Put the coin in the box, in God we trust
 I'm a working man and I do my job
 I pull my weight and I work real hard
 For the things I have I have paid the price
 In sweat, in blood, in sacrifice
 I call that justice, I call that fair
 Now dig me brother, listen here

I got to work about ten to eight
 Worked 'til twelve then I took a break
 Worked straight through 'til the boss came by
 Put his hand on my shoulder and he looked me in the eye
 Said, "Listen man, you got a call, take it in my office just down the hall"
 I looked at the clock, it was ten past four
 And that was all he said he didn't say any more

It was my brother in law on the line
 He said "hey man you better make some time
 Come on home as fast as you can" and I dropped the phone and I ran
 I ran as fast as my legs could carry me
 I ran through the streets of no man's land
 Burned out places where tenements stand

(chorus)

I was not prepared for the things I saw
 When I opened up the apartment door
 The TV was in pieces, the furniture was scattered
 Mirrors were all busted up and window panes were shattered
 My kids were in the bedroom, they were beat up bad

With tears in his eyes my little boy said
 "We did all we could, we put up a fight"
 And I took him in my arms and I told him he did right
 Then I picked up my daughter and she started to cry
 She said "Daddy, oh Daddy, oh Daddy, why?"

But the worst that day was about to come
 When I saw my wife there and what they had done
 She was bruised all over, cuts on her hand
 I gotta tell you brother, it was more than I could stand
 She was taken by the medics out of the kitchen
 Taken by a stretcher in terrible condition
 She looked like the books as they moved down the the hall
 And when I saw her face I saw the writing on the wall
 I saw it on her lips, I read it in her eyes
 Said "Oh my God, I've been compromised"
 A cut will heal, a graze will heal,
 A bruise will heal, and a scrape will heal
 But a woman's virtue is her pride
 Oh my God, she's been compromised

(chorus)

Well the next thing that happened was the cops arrived
 This brother cop comes and pulls me aside
 And says "brother, I'm sorry" and he looked real sincere
 "Now dig what I'm saying, make sure you read me clear
 For you this here is something that is terrible and cruel
 But it ain't no exception, it's more like the rule
 Go to the precinct and you know what they'll say
 This happens here twenty-four hours a day
 No one was killed, ain't no big deal
 Some lady was raped but her scars will heal
 Let's say, brother, that we catch the punk
 And you take him to court and all that junk
 Think about it brother, and think about it good
 This here ain't like Hollywood
 We're living in the U.S. of hypocrisy
 where the innocent pay and the criminals go free"

(chorus)

Well I heard his words and I thought it out
 Believe me when I tell you that I had my doubts
 But in the end I did what I was brought up to do
 I took it through the system of the red, white and blue
 They caught the punks, put 'em up on trial
 And the lawyers talked in their double-talk style
 They called them misdirected youth
 And made all kinds of lies from truths
 It was a great big game that was going on
 And truth and justice were the pawns
 Lost in the shuffle, left behind
 And man what really blew my mind

Was the final day of the courtroom show
The final play was the final blow
When the judge came in and did his talk
And them three punks were free to walk

(chorus)

Justice hadn't served me (oh no)
Justice let me down (yeah)
Was just a three ring circus that had played me for a clown

Had my back to the courtroom ready to leave
When those three punks came up to me
"Hey man, we got your wife
But next time, sucker, we're coming for your life"
And I took a vow and I took it then
That the next time that we met again
I would give them punks what they deserve
And finally justice would be served

(chorus)

I sent my family to my mother in LA
And I got ready for the dudes to come my way
The night was cold but I felt the warm
It was like a calm before the storm
And when those three punks came
A bomb went off inside my brain
It was like a man who had gone insane
I felt no hurt, I felt no pain
I felt some things that I can't explain
I came down so heavy, I came down so hard
I felt like a one-man demolition squad
I took all the knives, I took all the guns
And then when I had them punks on the run
I turned them over one by one
And finally I saw justice done

(chorus)

There down on the corner the sirens sound
There are police all around
Running up the fire escapes, flashing their lights
Calling out my name trying to see if I'm alright
But that's o.k., ain't no need for alarm
Ain't nobody here to do them any harm
For tonight I've had my victory
And I wait for them peacefully

(chorus)

So now brothers, as I wait to leave
And give this weary soul some rest
Go my brothers, go in peace
And to your loved ones all the best

(chorus)

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