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Minzoku madness: hip hop and Japanese national subjectivity

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MINZOKU MADNESS: HIP HOP AND JAPANESE NATIONAL SUBJECTIVITY

by

David Z. Morris

An Abstract

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Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Timothy Havens

ABSTRACT

Japan is currently undergoing a subtle but pervasive social upheaval, a period of broad structural reform and soul-searching triggered by the rigors of the collapse of the hyperinflated "Bubble Economy" of the late 1980s. As the nation confronts the irretrievable loss of that economic mass delusion, it is turning instead to the reclamation of a quality of life sacrificed for much of the 20th century to national ambition for first military, and then economic pre-eminence. Historian Jeff Kingston has claimed that the ongoing changes, ranging from the reduction of working hours to the institution of freedom of information laws, have been equal in magnitude to those following the Meiji Restoration and Japan's defeat in World War II. Arguably, they represent the long-delayed fruition of postwar democratizing reforms.

This dissertation examines the use to which Japanese have put American forms of popular music, particularly hip hop, in grappling with these changes. The influence of African-American music in Japan has been strong since the 1920s and 1930s, and came to full flower during and after Japan's surrender and subsequent occupation. African-American music – not just jazz, but rock, funk, and soul – eventually became a 'music of resistance,' connected to events such as the student protests that marked Japan in the 1960's, indicating the symbolic power of what black America represented for Japanese youth, over and above the political or military might of America as a nation.

Hip hop, which reached Japan in the early 1980s and entered the mainstream by the mid-1990s, has shown the continued power of African-American sound and imagery in Japan. The uses and meanings of that power, though, are ambiguous. Hip hop in Japan today often means Japanese artists who imitate African-American styles and sounds. This imitation has been criticized by international commentators, condemned as contextless

cultural theft and a testament to Japanese insensitivity on matters of race. Key artists in this mode are overt nationalist authoritarians, their aesthetics reinforcing their support for revisionist histories and the revival of militarism. Other contemporary hip hop musicians, though, resist uncritical imitation, grappling with their relationship to hip hop's origins. This aesthetic self-reflection resonates with Japan's ongoing 'quiet revolution,' and many such artists share skepticism towards authority while embracing risk, difference, and social change. It is tempting to oppose their self-reflection as the positive corollary to nationalist authoritarianism, but both are driven by a similar relationship to abstract symbols, detached from their contexts by the forces of cultural globalization.

This dissertation follows the daily lives and viewpoints of hip hop artists in Tokyo and throughout Japan, from some of its most successful to those just starting their careers. It tracks their music-making processes and their practices of cultural adaptation, and places them within the larger context of Japanese society. It describes how an art form from far away has come to reflect the very unique contours of the new soil to which it has been transplanted.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

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To Aunt Debbie, Granny, Mom and Dad.

The relation between the gaze and what one wishes to see involves a lure. The subject is presented as other than he is, and what one shows him is not what he wants to see. It is in this way that the eye may function as objet a, that is to say, at the level of the lack.

Jacques Lacan
Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis

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CHAPTER 1

THE RABBIT IN THE MOON: GLOBALIZATION AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

I am in a tiny, smoke-filled box in Shibuya. It is at the bottom of a flight of curving stairs, and after passing a slight nook filled with coin-operated lockers, one can see it all comfortably in one glance. There is a bar to the left, relatively plain and small, where every drink is a reasonable five hundred yen. The back right hand corner houses a DJ booth, elevated just a foot or two above the dancefloor. The wall opposite the DJ, behind the audience, is completely covered in speakers, one five foot high pair augmented by a few others. The walls are painted black, and over this depthless surface bleed the red dots thrown by a disco ball hung high in a corner. At one A.M., there are roughly fifty people in attendance. By the surreal logic of a Tokyo Wednesday night, the show won't start for another hour.

A DJ, warming up the crowd for the live acts soon to come, spins sounds in hip hop's neighborhood, but of a different, spacier breed - varieties of dub and trancey techno whose sub-bass frequencies fill the small space, like wadded cotton or a down comforter. As I enter, the power of the sound pushes through my skin, shaking my teeth, my stomach, my guts. This is not just an invasion - as it crosses and eliminates my borders, I expand outward to meet it. It is what Freud called, in a much different context, a moment of the oceanic – but where Freud's consciousness expanded over the horizon, mine finds its limits at the black walls. Beyond them lies a city that is impossible to know, a concrete illustration of the asymptotic limit of universality. But this box, this room, this I can contain, and can contain

me. This is the Tokyo of my experience – tiny basements or second-floor rooms transformed by sound and light into resonating chambers for the self.

This particular room is called Family, the name of an intimacy that my sudden self-absorption threatens to betray. I recognize a passing acquaintance named Takara, but I wait to say hello, both enjoying the otherworldly moment and, it must be admitted, finding in it an easy security. I have at this point been absent from Tokyo for four months. My Japanese is rusty. My social connections feel so frayed as to unwind when I tug on them. But if I am only myself, and if myself is the experience of the moment, trying those connections seems suddenly superfluous. There are others who seem to feel the same. A young woman sways gently, her eyes closed, facing away from the DJ, absorbed by and absorbing the deep sound waves. Young men huddle against the DJ booth, scanning the records that rotate one after another, exchanging not a word. There is an autism here, a desire to be complete in the self, for the self to be identical with the world of that room.

But this autism does not ultimately prevail. All around me are small groups engaged in conversation, often lively. I finally hoist myself off the wall and catch the attention of Takara, a slouching introvert with whom I have a halting conversation about music, full of pauses. Then Kaori shows up. Kaori is Takara's polar opposite, so smiling and effusive that even in the cotton of the booming bass and the confusion of my scrambled Japanese he somehow convinces me that we're actually communicating. He's part of a production crew called Memory Storm, and we talk about his creative process, how he selects sounds, the samples that he assembles into songs. He tells me that he begins with an idea, an image, then carefully assembles sounds that match it. For a song called "Minzoku Madness," he tells me he first imagined people living in caves, ancient people. He wondered what it would have been like to stare into one of those caves, down into the darkness beyond the entrance,

where the comfort of home contained something deeper and mysterious. The song is a familiar, simple thing that transforms and builds, reveals the mystery within itself, expanding to the edges of the unknown. I ask him whether it was about Japanese people. "No," he replies. "Just people."

Tokyo's boxes, too, contain in their sense of safety the possibility of this unfolding strangeness. Kaori, who lives on the Western outskirts of Tokyo, points out that Family is just as close-knit as its name implies – a place so local that everyone knows each other. But just across the street is another club, another box, another home, this one called Game. It is also a place to listen to hip hop, but of a much different breed. Like the Kaori to Takara's Family, it is raucous, extroverted. Just like Family, it is a place where certain people feel at home, safe – but the two are mutually strange, even forbidding. A denizen of Game would not frequently venture to Family. He would stick out, his more colorful clothing, his exaggerated mannerisms marking him out from this subdued crowd. He might feel like that caveman looking a bit too deep; when we are within someone else's home, we experience the strangeness of its comfort.

A hip hop fan from Game would, almost certainly, find some of that strangeness in Family's music. At Game, for example at a showcase for the Da.Me records label I'd seen a few months earlier, the music was relentless, the beats loud, the MCs exhorting the crowd to ever greater celebration. But here, as Family's DJ gives way to the evening's lineup of rappers, there is no such velocity and no such explosion of enthusiasm. The first act attempts the odd combination of electric guitar and rap, with no beat pinning the two together. The lyrics that meander through this loose structure are introspective, comments on human nature and Tokyo mores. There is a sense of the tentative to the experiment, and a sense of evaluation among the audience, the hovering question – do they like it? The

verdict, portioned out in a smattering of applause and cheers, is uncertain. This is not the insult it might seem - the rapper and guitarist are trying new things, listening to the sound resonating back to them, off the walls, from the crowd. An audience concerned primarily with its own enjoyment – an audience like the raucous one across the street – would do them few favors.

The final act to perform that night – or, technically, at about 3am the next morning – Illustrates the potential of this ethos. Kaori moves up to the DJ booth. In front of him, standing on a wooden box the size of a footlocker that takes the place of a stage, is the rapper Nanoru Namonai, a name meaning "Without a Name." Kaori plays tracks, created by himself and others, and Nanoru Namonai raps over them – though some might question whether this can be called rap at all. His voice is breathy, drifting around or ignoring the already unpredictable beats, his lyrics so abstract that I have no prayer of really understanding them. As he sings, talks, and whispers, he only rarely addresses the audience, instead turning his face towards the sky, the floor, sometimes the back wall.

It is a performance that, like that of the rapper accompanied by electric guitar, takes many risks. But somehow this one, rather than seeming like a tentative experiment, pulls its various experiments into a gestalt that conveys the very sensation of profound questioning, uncertainty, and wonder. The music is beautiful, delicate, and complex, but also loose and improvisational. There is a challenge, but also a surprise, in its every moment and move. Midway through his set, Nanoru Namonai is joined by another rapper, tall and skinny, long-faced, dressed in black. At this point, one cannot know what to expect – but still, it is surprising when this tall man, closing his eyes, opens his mouth and begins reciting lyrics with the thin, high-pitched voice of a small girl. In almost any hip hop club, in Japan or around the world, this might have been met with laughter. But instead, it resonates, finding

in each of us the part that is still a child, uncertain, a part where we wonder not just what we are hearing, or who is speaking, but who exactly we, the listeners, are.

~~Japaneseness~~ and its Discontents

This is just one moment from the fragmented, multiple, often subterranean world of Japanese hip hop. It's a moment of aesthetic risk, in which an art form is pushed beyond its predicated limits in a new direction. My interest in this moment is not, in the end, primarily aesthetic, though standing there was revelatory for me as a music fan. The unpredictability of the music that is the primary focus of this work – what I will call Japan's hip hop avant-garde – articulate values deeper than art for art's sake. Both overtly, through lyrics, sounds, and speech, and less directly, through the structures of its production and consumption, this unpopular, unprofitable music is, in its own so far small way, advancing an ideological agenda.

This agenda is part of a larger discourse in Japan. Often equally subtle and indirect, this can be described for an international audience as a debate over Japanese identity, though it would only occasionally be recognized as such domestically. It is often centered on controversial issues of Japanese history and politics. In particular, the legacy of World War II remains both central and troubling in the experience of Japaneseness, and its lingering questions have become acute once again thanks to structural pressures transforming Japan at its deepest level. These include an aging populace and stagnant economy that are increasing immigration and reducing job prospects, and have contributed to mounting political tensions over labor issues and the status of minorities. More fundamentally, the proper mode of political engagement remains an intense object of contention in discussions of Japanese

culture, fought over between a modern civil society, including democratic and radical elements, and a strain of overt authoritarianism eager to position itself as fundamental to the Japanese character. Historian Jeff Kingston has described the current period of transformation as at least as profound as those following the Meiji Restoration and World War II (2004). In the West, the most alluring symbols of the conservative elements in the upheaval are Japan's right-wing nationalists, whose projects include controlling history and maintainig a racialized and limited Japanese identity. It is thanks to these figures, as well as their allies in government and organized crime, that international onlookers have come to see Japan as possessed of almost mythic national schizophrenia, dysfunction, and self-deception. On the other hand, concrete political change seems to promise a quite different future, most obviously the recent rise to power of the Democratic Party of Japan, in an election partly premised on dismantling the crony politics of the nationalist Liberal Democrats who have ruled for a half-century.

Much of the conflict is articulated through different views of Japanese geopolitical power and the personal identity that so often depends on it. While never a colony proper, Japan was occupied by the U.S. following World War II, and many Japanese, including many rappers, continue to use this as a basis for drawing parallels between the Japanese and oppressed peoples worldwide. Meanwhile, though, others present the starkly different view that Japan, a political unit supported by an ethnic ideology, is itself an oppressor, a colonialist force within Asia and an abuser of supposed undesirables within its borders. This division of a national identity into two almost diametrically opposed halves offers valuable, perhaps even unique, insights into the role of national power on the world stage in constructing individual citiizens' identity. As we will see, it goads us to ask an uncomfortable

question – what are the costs of acknowledging one's own privilege, and what are the benefits of clinging to victimhood?

Though I don't maintain the conceit throughout this dissertation, I think of this as the struggle for ~~Japaneseness~~. This struck-through construction, what Jacques Derrida coined the erasure, attempts to capture a consciousness of the problems of national identity as such – its essentialism and ultimate unreality – while retaining the ability to talk about the power such terms retain in the lives of individuals. For Derrida, the erasure was a tentative hold on a language that would match reality's constant shifts: "By means of this double, and precisely stratified, dislodged and dislodging writing, we must also mark the interval between inversion, which brings low what was high, and the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept, a concept that can no longer be and never could be, included in the previous regime." (Derrida, 1981) Japan is in acute need of this ability to write the future – that is, to simultaneously admit the contingent and constructed nature of national identity, and to nonetheless consciously craft one that will move the nation forward. The uncertainty of identity underlies current controversies over work, language, and immigration whose resolution remains uncertain. Though its historical situation makes the stakes particularly clear, Japan is not fundamentally unique in this, both because similar issues confront many nations in this 'globalizing' world, and because they represent a tension between singularity and cosmopolitanism to which no time or place in human history can lay particular claim.

Japan's youth, who will ultimately have a large say in resolving the interval in ~~Japaneseness,~~ are forming their worldviews and identities in part through hip hop. For over a decade, the top tier of Japan's music industry has featured a healthy number of rappers and R&B singers, as well as pop groups who show substantial hip hop influences. Meanwhile, at the bottom of the music industry's pyramid-like hierarchy – the stratum that forms this

work's main subject – a multitude of hip hop styles, factions, and subgenres has developed, along with an increasingly strong infrastructure for the independent production, distribution, and sale of lesser-known music. Rather than the bearer of any singular message, this is one field of contention over the questions of identity, with links to larger discourses. Some hip hop artists subscribe to fundamental ideas of selfhood resonant with those of the most conservative nationalists, who advocate a return to Japan's past status as a closed country, seeking to throw out all 'foreigners' and create a nation safe for a 'pure' Japanese identity. Others, though, view identity as flexible, contingent, and amorphous. Both of these worldviews, and the varieties between, emerge through hip hop in various ways. These include public statements, song lyrics, and also, most subtly but perhaps most profoundly, the ways artists situate themselves musically relative to the tradition in which they work.

The artists that I find in these positions do not always see themselves as engaged in a political debate, much less in a philosophical struggle over first principles. Even when directly political statements are articulated, either in or around music, these are weighted with inflections that make them constantly more or less than the advocacy of particular ideas. Ian Condry, through the trope of "battling hip-hop samurai," depicts Japanese hip hop in terms of a jockeying for internal position on the basis of artistic skill (2006). But to take hip hop – or any cultural form – as a straightforward forum for debate runs roughshod over the model of subjectivity that is now broadly accepted in the human sciences, one that views personhood itself as deeply suspect. The idea of a 'battle', no less than nonacademic hip hop tropes such as the need to 'represent' or 'express yourself,' privileges a fixed and pre-existing identity. It downplays the degree to which what is being 'expressed' is not the self but a series of discourses and structures that predate it – in this case, discourses of hip hop and ~~Japaneseness~~, as well as economic structures both within and outside the realm of music.

Rather than "battling samurai" (and since we are apparently compelled to describe Japanese culture with Japanese metaphors), I find it more accurate to think of Japanese hip hop as the field of the *kagemusha* – the shadow warrior. In Akira Kurosawa's film of the same name, a peasant thief – in essence, a non-person – is trained to impersonate a powerful shogun who is mortally wounded (Kurosawa, 2005). The clan's enemies, suspecting the truth, maneuver to expose the impersonator, who finds his previous cynicism turning to a true loyalty as he, bit by bit, becomes the shogun he once merely impersonated. The essential battle is not one of skill, but of appearance – revealing the death of the shogun would destroy his forces more effectively than any military rout. Similarly, the most fundamental battle of Japanese hip hop is not one waged only through skill for position, but, at the same time, through position for the right to set the framework and standards of skill. This is most straightforwardly encapsulated in debates over the relationship between Japanese hip hop and its American sources, struggles over who is the most 'real' – and whether this can be defined as loyalty to a form, or some less absolute set of practices. I have found that, like the shadow warrior, Japanese hip hoppers pass with surprising ease through the crisis of their 'borrowed' identity. But that passing through takes many forms, some premised on a logic of fixed identity that makes them, again like the shadow warrior, particularly vulnerable to 'exposure' as in some way false. Those who seek the confidence and power of kingship must always perform the role impeccably. But there are others less committed to such claims of supremacy, and less vulnerable to unmasking, because they embrace the contingency of identity itself.

Global Identity and Desire

Though there are other very important aspects of globalization, I am focused here on questions of identity. How does interaction within a global context affect the way people see themselves? Can a direct line still be drawn – if it ever could – between national citizenship or ethnic grouping and a certain culturally-identified set of behaviors and values? For the most part, those thinking about globalization have accepted from the outset that whatever stability identity might have once had, it is now lost, as signs, practices, and bodies cross borders with ever more freedom. But there has been a major split in how that loss is conceived. On the one hand are thinkers for whom the new global subject is simply more open than ever to the influence of power in determining identity. On the other are those who see globalization as an expansion of the field of identity choice for relatively empowered subjects.

Daniel Lerner was one early thinker about cultural borrowing and influence, and largely held to a quite simple model by which culture was power's loyal handmaiden. Lerner was a quintessential modernist, who implicitly believed that the model of society loosely encompassed by "The West" was a superior one, and explicitly argued for the inevitability of its international adoption. In *The Passing of Traditional Society* (Lerner, 1958), Lerner describes the ongoing transformation caused by a palpable force moving into nonwestern societies. "Where Europeanization once penetrated only the upper level of Middle East society . . . modernization today diffuses among a wider population and touches public institutions as well as private aspirations . . . for spreading among a large public vivid images of its own New Ways is what modernization distinctly does." This spread is seen to take place through media outlets including "tabloids, radio and movies." Lerner explicitly speaks of what

modernization has "done *to* some people" (my emphasis), reinforcing the image of a willful entity moving and transforming with disquieting power, operating on figures relatively powerless to resist it.

The study of cultural change on a global scale continued for some time to depend on similar metaphors, according to which influence projects outward from some center of power. Scholars of culture and communication have focused on mediated channels of influence producing the vivid images that change cultural values. Such logics were expressed through terms like Americanization, Westernization, modernization, or cultural imperialism, all holding that powerful nations or societies are able to impose their worldviews through the aggressive export of cultural products that share their values. Such a model doesn't imply any particular politics: Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart's *How to Read Donald Duck* (Dorfman & Mattelart, 1975) proceeds from a version of Lerner's thesis that media, facilitated by hard power, prepare the ideological ground for the social transformation of weak cultures by strong ones. But rather than Lerner's celebratory picture of a new day dawning, *Donald Duck* is a scathing indictment of Walt Disney as a proxy for a U.S. capitalist invasion of South America.

In whatever valence, this model has come to seem quite outdated. The dramatic (though by no means full or universal) global leveling of economic and social power over the last half-century has not been accompanied by a halt in transcultural influence, highlighting the importance of factors besides top-down power in cultural globalization. This complexity was foreshadowed even by Lerner and Mattelart, whose models were unable to fully contain the situation they sought to describe. Lerner could not help but acknowledge the importance of the individual in embracing any exported identity, pointing out "the rapid

spread of these new [modernist] desires," and claiming that "What the West is . . . the Middle East seeks to become."

The importance of the individual, of desire and creativity and initiative even among those with little economic or social capital, was brought further to the fore beginning in the 1990s. One of the most sophisticated thinkers in this trend has been Arjun Appadurai, who uses language cribbed from psychoanalysis to explain the circulation of identity in globalization, frequently insisting on the importance of fantasy, the imagination, and dreaming. "In dreams, finally, individuals even in the most simple societies have found the space to refigure their social lives, live out proscribed emotional states and sensations, and see things that have then spilled over into their sense of ordinary life." (Appadurai, 1996) He specifically relates this to media, such as the spectacle of cricket, which (in the form reported on the news) serves as a "textual suture for a much more diverse collage of materials having to do with modern lifestyles and fantasies." (Iwabuchi, 2002) Koichi Iwabuchi, similarly, repeatedly references a "yearning" for particular visions of distant places and cultures. In the global economy, he claims that products are sold on the basis of such visions, when, based on the product's country of origin, the "image of the contemporary lifestyle is called to mind as the very appeal of the product." (27)

In such models, rather than the 'push' of identities onto subjects by top-down power, there is a 'pull' as individual agents choose their own identification with products and the fantasies they condense. This emphasis on the subject's desire depicts a far more empowered global populace, a viewpoint with the political effect of encouraging people to make the best possible use of the ideas and images available to them. But at the same time, it risks obscuring the reality of imbalances of power and money that ensure certain fantasies are given priority over others. In addition to de-emphasizing the political-economic

structures underlying the distribution of cultural signs, these subject-centred viewpoints have deeper theoretical problems. While purely structural explanations of identity must assume a subject who is always ready to accept the position waiting for them, those focused on the subject's power to choose and reconfingure markers of identity de-emphasize anything pre-existing such choices. They risk assuming a subject both created in the moment of choosing its identity, and able to make such a choice before it is created.

To find a solution to the inadequacy of both the cultural imperialist model and the empowered subject model, we must look beyond discussions of globalization and towards more general trends of thought about identity. I have yet to find a more clear, concise, and compelling delineation of that theoretical landscape than is offered by Stuart Hall in the essay "Who Needs Identity?" (P. S. Hall & Gay, 1996), in which he identifies two general ways of thinking about the issue. First, he finds in Foucault, Althusser, and ultimately in Marx, a fundamental structuralism, an emphasis on the place prepared for the subject by the systems of culture, economy, and discourse surrounding them. We can fit hierarchical thinkers of globalization – whether modernizers like Lerner or resisters like Dorfman and Mattelart – within this structural frame of thinking about identity and subjectivity. But Hall explicates the fundamental inadequacy of these theories, in which "Discursive subject positions become *a priori* categories which individuals seem to occupy in an unproblematic fashion." (10) He cites Foucault's career-long trajectory away from structure and toward the subject as a metaphorical acknowledgement that "the theoretical work cannot be fully accomplished without complementing the account of discursive and disciplinary regulation with an account of the practices of subjective self-constitution. It has never been enough – in Marx, in Althusser, in Foucault – to elaborate a theory of how individuals are summoned

into place in the discursive structures. It has always, also, required an account of how subjects are constituted." (13)

For a theory of the subject that can accomplish what he refers to as the 'articulation' between individual and subject position, Hall turns to psychoanalysis, specifically to Jacques Lacan's model of the subject. First Hall must dispense with what he feels is the simplistic version of Lacan that entered intellectual discourse through Althusser's 'interpellation.' In this, the single moment of the 'hail,' equated to the Lacanian mirror stage, founds the social subject. This version of Lacan left Althusser open to Paul Hirst's claim that the process of interpellation required that "This something which is not a subject . . . already have the faculties necessary to support the recognition that will constitute it as a subject." (Hirst, 1979)

Hall's crucial response is to point out that such criticisms assume a caricature of the Lacanian subject (albeit one sometimes promoted by Lacan) according to which the specular misrecognition of the self described as the mirror stage occurs at a single moment. According to this version of Lacan, one moment encompasses "the resolution of the Oedipal crisis . . . the submission to the Law of the Father, the consolidation of sexual difference, the entry into language, the formation of the unconscious as well – after Althusser – as the recruitment into the patriarchal ideologies of late capitalist western societies!" (P. S. Hall & Gay, 1996). It was no great feat for Hirst to trouble this Lacan, in part by the suggestion that children might not be easily trained in the full range of capitalist convention in a single stroke.

The Psychoanalysis of Cultural Globalization

Hall is brief in outlining a more subtle Lacanian subject, one that is more evolutionary, in which the dislocating gaze of the other constantly renews and shifts the self-image. This process, for Hall, can only be understood with Foucault and Althusser to provide an understanding of the structured discourse that pre-exists the subject. I am less convinced of this last part – though metaphorical, the Lacanian Law of the Father, Language of the Other, and similar concepts provide a more than adequate starting point for thinking about discourses that precede individuals. Nonetheless, it is essentially Hall's Lacanian model of subjectivation, in which an individual is driven by animating desire into the subjective place prepared for it, that underpins the current case study.

The same model of subjectivation has more or less explicitly structured a small set of works in the study of global identity that have attempted, like Hall, to push past the division between structure and agency. These begin as early as the 1960s with the work of Frantz Fanon, who was more successful in bridging the gap than anything Hall finds in Marxist thought of the same period (Fanon, 1994). Fanon, a black Algerian and a subject of French cultural power who vociferously opposed the colonial system, nonetheless refused to depict himself or his fellows either as victims of a top-down power that dictated their cultural being, or as possessed of some unique cultural or ethnic essence that kept them free from real domination. Whether despite or because of his position, Fanon was able to see that, instead, the colonial system is substantially based on the evocation in the colonial subject of complicit desires. These included the subject's desire to own what his master possesses, and ultimately to be what his master is. It is through these desires that colonialism aims to yoke

the person to the subject position prepared for them. In attempting to understand this process, Fanon constructs the first sustained study of cultural globalization that explicitly embraces psychoanalysis as its methodology.

Since Fanon, the understanding of the complex and internally contradictory role of desire in global culture has advanced only in fits and starts. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Said, 1979) is the Ur-text of postcolonial studies, but Andrew Young (Young, 1990) asserts that it shares, sub rosa, Lerner's tendency to posit a monopolar process of pure power, exercised upon both the physical and economic corpus of the Middle East and on its imagined, constructed image. For Said, Orientalism is a process by which the West constructs an "eternal unchanging platonic vision of the orient," (127) a discourse faulted for obscuring beneath its veil a real people in all its rich fullness. Thus Said posits a self-identical Oriental essence that the West must straightforwardly seek to understand more accurately. In his wake have followed many who took up the call to better represent the objects of presumably inaccurate Western representations – but such an impulse represses the inaccuracy of representation as such, finally only replacing one "unchanging platonic vision" with another.

It is Homi Bhabha who has most comprehensively confronted the implications of a psychoanalysis of cultural globalization. Though a 'postcolonialist' in focus, Bhabha's relationship to Said seems to parallel Lacan's relationship to Freud: Bhabha loudly hails Said as his mentor and inspiration, while taking radical turns away and even against the supposed mentor's work. In direct opposition to Said's search for humanist truth, for Bhabha, translation "acknowledges the historical connectedness of subject and object of critique such that there can be no simplistic, essentialist position between ideological misrecognition and revolutionary truth. The progressive reading is crucially determined by the adversarial or agonistic situation itself." (Bhabha, 2004) This point is crucial for any nonreductive reading

of movements that, like Japanese hip hop at various moments, paint themselves as progressive or resistance efforts. More broadly, Bhabha seeks to avoid the dichotomy between structuralist and romantic models of global subjectivity, looking towards "neither the glassy essence of Nature . . . nor the leaden voice of 'ideological interpellation.'" (46)

According to Young, Said remains fascinated by the image reflected in Nature's glassy essence. In order to claim that Western Orientalism is false, a misrepresentation, Said must assume that there is a 'real' Orient that is more 'true' than that described by the West (Young 130). In order to gain access to this real Orient, Said must in turn claim for the intellectual an ability to operate outside of ideology, and a responsibility to remain true to this 'outsideness' through a fidelity to "experience" and "skeptical critical conscious" (Said 327). Psychoanalytic thinkers like Fanon and Bhabha intervene to refuse the dichotomy of the inside and outside, or even the idea of finally separate discourses of identity. When Fanon states that "The Negro is not – Any more than the white man," (Fanon, 1994) he dispenses in a few words with the kind of enlightenment humanism Said was still engaged in a decade later. Likewise, Bhabha states that the mimetic character of colonization "conceals no presence or identity behind its mask." (Bhabha, 2004) What he posits is a truly vertiginous contingency at the heart of identity. "Access to the image of identity is only ever possible in the negation of any sense of originality or plenitude; the process of displacement and differentiation (absence/presence, representation/repetition) renders it a liminal reality. The image is at once a metaphoric substitution, an illusion of presence, and by that same token a metonym, a sign of its absence and loss." (51)

It is important to point out that for Bhabha, what is evanescent is the image, not the subject itself. The subject remains very much a presence in Lacanian models of identity, but as a process or function rather than an image, a consciousness, or any other monism. Lacan,

in his elaborative 'return to Freud,' formalized a range of moments, forces, and categories that make up this subject, and crucially, all of them are intersubjective – the psychoanalytic subject is no such thing unless it is interacting with other subjects. These functions include the gaze, which for Lacan is not simply observation but has the power to construct the viewer's own identity; the letter, which is not a tool used by individuals for expression, but a creator of subjects; and *meconnaissance*, which regards the act of understanding as inseperable from mis-understanding.

These more specific functions, which are particularly useful in considering issues of identity under conditions of cultural globalization, are the acts of a subject formed in two stages, which Bruce Fink summarizes as alienation and separation. Alienation is also known as the entry into language, or, in an example of how Lacan productively transubstantiates Freud's mythic language into linguistic functions, castration. Alienation occurs as a subject-in-process learns to describe his experiences, needs, and self in symbolic terms. But insofar as these symbolic terms predate the subject using them, they cannot provide a true channel for communicating – they always carry the meanings of the others who have shaped and spoken the language before. In Lacan, these others of history become the Other that exists, at the moment of speaking, in all language. "The signifier requires another locus – the locus of the Other, the Other as witness, the witness who is other than any of the partners – for the Speech borne by the signifier to be able to lie, that is, to posit itself as Truth." (Lacan, 2004)

Despite Lacan's general linguistic bias, the letter and word are not the only forms of sign to be assumed by the subject as part of the process of alienation. Also crucial are images, including the child's recognition of the image of his own body, a moment that "symbolizes th I's mental permanence, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating

destination." (Lacan, 2004) This "Mirror Stage" alienates the subject in the sense that it removes the child's pure experience of a fragmented, chaotic infant body and imposes on it a sense of control and completeness. But this sense, the image of the body, is only ever a fantasy, an "imago," which smoothes over the complexity of experience and installs a false wholeness in the same sense that the letter does. This smoothing entails a loss of *jouissance*, of enjoyment of the pure experience of the world, which is the necessary tradeoff for the ability to speak with others as a part of society. The idea that communication entails a certain loss that allows membership in a system can be extended to music, no less conventional and syntactical than speech.

The second force that shapes the subject is separation. As with the mirror stage, Lacan conveys this concept through a story of what happens to a child at a particular moment of development. In this case, that is the moment when a child realizes that its mother is a separate being, with separate needs and desires. The child hopes to once again become the object of its mother's full attention, and works towards this by attempting to determine what it is the mother desires. Like the Freudian Oedipal drama of which it is a version, this story is best understood not as a description of a real event or time, but as a structural metaphor for a motivation that becomes a theme of human life – the desire for a return to some satisfying wholeness, and the attempt to guess the desires of another who would provide it. But this is a doomed pursuit, in at least two ways: first, of course, because it is impossible to know the mind of another, but more profoundly, because it is only in our fantasy that the other knows its own desire. We presume a connection with the other to be the secret to a full, happy, satisfied life – but ultimately, even our own mothers do not know themselves well enough to accurately name their desire, or to satisfy it. In the Lacanian

scheme the source of the subject's own desire – the mainspring of all human motivation and action – is this fantasy of the so-called 'small other,' the other's desire, or *objet petit a*.

This desire is loosely invoked by Appadurai and Iwabuchi. But what exactly is being suggested when Appadurai cites the dream of modernity? What are the contours of Iwabuchi's "yearning"? Understood in a Lacanian mode, global culture and communication are signs and fragments onto which we focus a fundamental human desire to 'join,' or in slightly different terms, to understand ourselves and one another. This is sought in fantasies of a self that corresponds to its signification (the mirror), and which can satisfy the desire of the other (the mother). But these desired signs, whether crossing ten feet or a thousand miles, are chronically incomplete – they can never capture the Other in their fullness, nor even capture our complete, full Selves. Even to say 'incomplete' implies some possible future correspondence between self and text, when in fact, for Lacan, the subject is founded on the failure of the sign, and desire is a function of the chronic incompletion of signification. The sign that exactly corresponds to its referent – a symbol identical to the object it is 'about' – is the coldest kind of death, not only useless for practical communication, but lacking in the ambiguity, multiplicity, and slippage that make language work.

One of Lacan's terms for the slippage between the sign and its referent, for the failure that keeps culture alive, is *meconnaissance*. This means roughly mis-knowing, but the term is appropriately enriched by a mis-translation. In military and other contexts, reconnaissance is a quest to know, a mission driven by need. But it is the very force of this need that turns cultural reconnaissance into mis-connaissance, not just a mistake or mis-knowing, but an impassioned, conquest-minded expedition for knowledge that necessarily goes off track. Rather than receiving any message, those who consume these messages,

driven by their own hopes and fears, find what they seek in them – the reflected glory of other cultures where people have things the viewer badly desires, things that would fulfill and complete the viewer's fragmentary life. This imagined fullness prompts mimicry of the signs onto which it has been projected, with the hope that the mimic can introject a portion of its promise back into their own experience. But as Bhabha states, such a mimic at their best is almost the same, but not quite, the attempt at mirroring always finding the wrong angle and the wrong light. A torturer of the other's image, the reader will always extract the answer he wants.

That such efforts fail as mimicry does not mean they fail as culture – culture is nothing but a series of copyings, in which progress and change are synonymous with failure. These mimicries in turn create new conjunctions of signs, to be consumed by others, themselves driven to find in these fragmentary mirages some knowledge of faraway people. However infinitely deferred its goal, the journey towards identity is a constant of the global subject – just as a human must either submit to the limits of society or sacrifice subjectivity itself, there is no way to be exposed to the circulating signs of identity and refuse a position relative to them. As Bhabha captures it – citing, significantly, Toni Morrison's tale of slavery's violence to the subject – this majicking of wholeness out of fragments is driven by "a profound desire for social solidarity," and takes the form of an incantation: "I am looking for the join . . . I want to join, I want to join." (18) "The join" is a split, a gap – the "bar" between sign and signifier whose slippage is the life of communication. But it is through that gap that we nonetheless seek "to join," to conquer the gap and seize identity.

Coming Attractions

This dissertation moves through five moments at which the join of identity is leapt and bound. Chapter 2 focuses on the particular position, viewpoints, and art of the group Origami. The group produce remarkable work, adventurous sounds through which I trace part of the relationship between aesthetics and politics. Over the course of my research I spent a great deal of time with Shibito, one of the group's two members, who is at once a highly educated and worldly cosmopolitan, and deeply proud and invested in his Japanese cultural heritage. The observations and reflections that arise from this complex interweaving of national pride and global consciousness made Shibito the most compelling participant in my study, and throughout Chapter 2 his observations help me address a variety of core issues in nonreductive ways.

Chapter 3 surveys a broader set of artists on a much narrower subject. The transformations of language form a central metaphor for the larger conception of cultural translation that I am advancing in this dissertation, but they also form a major component of that process. English surfaces again and again in Japanese hip hop, mostly in the form of individual, decontextualized phrases that, thanks to the limits of comprehension and the concomitant ease of repurposing, take on new meanings. These new meanings are both specific to individual terms, and more categorical, as they accrue to "English" as such. As part of understanding this latter, broader power of English to signify broad values, this chapter also examines the reception of American hip hop in Japan, particularly the issue of comprehensibility. The linguistic mis-knowing that is the generative heart of Japanese hip hop is shown to be exemplary of meconnaissance as a general principle in the transformations of language and culture.

The fourth chapter again refocuses on a relatively small number of artists, and particularly on the group King Giddra. Giddra are part of the growth of right-wing sentiment among some hip hop groups, interesting because hip hop is so often thought of as synonymous with a multiethnic, antimilitarist, antinationalist worldview. This chapter traces the counterintuitive but fascinating logic by which such groups connect their xenophobic beliefs to the ethos of hip hop, in particular by drawing on the 'nationalism' of some African-American political movements. This chapter also traces the deeper connections of African-American and Japanese politics, in particular the degree to which Japan was once viewed as an inspiration for nonwhite people around the world.

Chapter 5 moves from the large scale of nationalism as a source of identity and commitment, to the more personalized realm of labor, examining both the representation of the working world in hip hop, and the economic context in which music is produced. Many of the participants in this work are so-called Freeter, or part-time workers. In this respect, they reflect the shifting reality of labor in contemporary Japan, as a realm of stability and lifetime employment comes ever more to resemble the 'risky' post-Fordist economies of the rest of the world, in which flexibility has increased as security has declined. These musicians' attitudes reflect certain shifts of ideology that have followed, with significant lag, the structural transformation of Japan's economy. As security becomes a dated standard of achievement, more and more Japanese are embracing the flexibility that accompanies risk, valorizing the conjunction of uncertainty and possibility that defines their experience.

The sixth and final chapter turns to focus on the object at the center of all these sociological and political vectors. Without assuming that there is anything like 'pure' music untouched by cultural mediation, I here attempt to get as close as possible to the sound of hip hop – specifically, to the rhythm that drives it. That rhythm has specific sonic

properties, including the repetitive opening and closing of possibility, that mirror the more fundamental structure of human subjectivity as it oscillates between purely 'being' in any given moment, and 'knowing' in the timeless flow of discourse. This motion between radical individuality and total social imbrication – the motion of which rhythm is one concrete instance – is the site at which the acting subject emerges, and this work's closing effort is to examine how the details of such a moment of emergence dictate the nature of the subject that comes into being. This is an engagement with the deepest question demanded by Japanese hip hop – what is the impact on social actors of the culture they perform?

Psychoanalysis and the Ethics of Globalization

Bhabha's claim that there is no identity behind the mask of mimesis can seem bleak. More importantly, it could be critiqued, as Hall does Foucault, for discarding identity only because it is false. But Bhabha and other Lacanian thinkers of identity are at least as programmatic as they are epistemological, calling not for a deconstructivist dismissal of identity – for psychoanalysis, this is the embrace of psychosis – but for a more conscious relationship to the identity function. The parameters and stakes of this shift have been outlined by Claudia Leeb in the context of feminism, in the essay "Toward a Theoretical Outline of the Subject: The Centrality of Adorno and Lacan for Feminist Political Theorizing."(Leeb, 2008)

Through Adorno's remarkably similar thinking of the 'non-identical,' Leeb finds in the Lacanian imaginary – the realm of the *objet petit a* – a description specific to the modern capitalist condition of the subject. The subject is under threat from what Adorno calls 'identity thinking,' the habit of classification and containment under the delusion of some

ultimate similarity. Leeb offers the example of certain feminist discourses of 'woman.' (Adorno, 1983) The subject who seeks to premise its own identity on such signs – among which we could also include the signs of nation and race – is, for Lacan, fundamentally alienated in itself, dominated by objective structures, including the signifying chain with which it seeks a total identification, motivated by the fantasy of the *objet petit a* (Lacan, 2004, 6; Leeb, 2008, 362). Leeb finds Adorno laying heavy accusations at the feet of 'identity thinking,' particularly what she terms its inherent injustice to the other – that is, its ban on difference under the sign. Whether through an open hostility or, equally, through the "attempt to capture the other in oneself" (Lacan, 1991) that is called love, the subject operating in the logic of identity reduces the other to nothing more than a mirror for the self. This "cold love" is a semiotic violence that leads often enough to the real-world kind: Leeb, following Drucilla Cornell, cites the recent willingness of Western feminists to endorse the bombing of Afghanistan in the guise of liberating Afghan women (Leeb, 2008)(Cornell, 2005). We can find a similar cold love in Japan's past efforts to establish "Asia for Asians" through a sustained campaign of atrocities against the region.

But such identification with the symbolic is not the condition of the subject as such – it is itself, to veer into a related lexicon, a form of ideology. What Leeb finds most promising in a Lacanian political subjectivity is the instability of the Real that inherently inhabits the symbolic, a framework that "allow[s] us to acknowledge difference(s) . . . without fixing them as an absolute." (365) This provides an important contrast not only with the monistic self-identical subject of modernity, but also the decentered subject of the postmodern, which, in reifying the total determination of the subject by the symbolic, is just as potentially complicit in identity thinking. Instead, it is in the failure of the symbolic to

fully correspond even with itself that the Lacanian subject may find the opportunity to challenge particular symbolizations (366).

Lacan gives the signifying chain a position, for each subject, equivalent to the Freudian unconscious, and just as the unanalyzed Freudian patient can remain paralyzed by hysteria and neurosis, the Lacanian subject can easily remain in a relationship of fantastic desire for the certainty of the signifying chain. It is in the face of this certainty's constant incompleteness that "violence and injustice towards the other" (Leeb, 2008) become society's hysterical symptom. A common response to this process has been to call for a greater understanding of ourselves through an understanding of the signifying chain that inhabits us. One such call can be found in the Freudian injunction to self-knowledge: "Wo est war, sol ich warden." Where It is, there I will be – 'it' here being, in part, the discourse we did not choose to be born into. This injunction suggests a process of mastery over the previously unexamined forces – the unconscious or, alternately, the symbolic order – that have, until the intervention of analysis, been directing the subject's actions from behind the screen of the ego's false wholeness. This understanding will often take the form of a challenge, since engagement with the substance of a sign will reveals its contingency and incompleteness. There is a close connection between such a challenge at the sociocultural level and that contained in the individualized attention of psychotherapy, as the goal of the therapist is to catch the elisions and repressions that found the individual's identity, while a politicized intervention into the false wholeness of a sign can effect the disturbance of many subjectivities founded on identity with it. Leeb initially cites the work of queer, nonwhite, and working-class women in challenging the totalizing thought of certain feminisms on the basis of their clear, historical incompleteness.

It is important not to misconstrue this as an impulse to describe any category – the feminine, the Oriental, the Japanese – 'more accurately.' Such an injunction to search for historical truth drove countless movements of liberation and independence in the 20th century, and formed the foundation of 'new' nations carved out of old colonies and kingdoms. We now bear witness as these movements proliferate with fractal intensity, "identity" as such taking the role of the Sorcerer's Apprentice, the shards of nations growing legs to wade into a hundred small chores hardly less bloody than the earlier, larger struggles – struggles which then, too, felt for those nations like the act of becoming themselves. Like those wild brooms, there is something fundamentally unreal about the 'nations' and 'peoples' rising up to seek their recognition or independence, their origins only ever the rehearsal in the present of a symbolic chain riven with error by the passage of time. "Identities are about . . . the invention of tradition as much as . . . tradition itself" (P. S. Hall & Gay, 1996), the invention of history as much as history itself, its cleansing of inconsistencies and difference in favor of identity.

What is to be sought from the challenge to identities, then, is not their subdivision, but a dialectical engagement with their contingent nature that complicates, or maybe even undermines, the drive for identity itself. For Lacan, Adorno, and Leeb, the "Ich" of Freud's formulation must, if it is to be ethical and empathetic, be maintained in its absence. The ethical impetus of a politicized psychoanalysis is not simply the illumination of the subterranean action of the signifying chain, but the defanging of the fantastic desire of the other that animates that action. This is achieved by a recognition of the incompleteness and ignorance of the *objet petit a,* the imagined other whose desire we so frantically seek to grasp. For Lacan, recognition that there is not some other who knows and understands more than us is a profound moment of moving away from full determination by the signifying chain, of

replacing "est" with "ich." This moment, known as the traversal of fantasy, is when the subject as such can overcome the ego's attachment to the imaginary – the realm of the image of the other, and the other's desire.

Leeb thus advocates a political embrace of incompleteness, a strategy of "encircling the Real." Rather than attempting to capture identity or resolve away the contradictions of subjectivity, such an encircling would provide an outline of the subject that maintains dissonance and even antagonism – and in so doing, reduce the fantasmatic desire for some whole other that always devolves into aggression. Freud quipped that the purpose of psychoanalysis is to "substitute for hysterical misery ordinary human unhappiness,"(Freud, Breuer, & Luckhurst, 2004) a claim sometimes understood as advocating a forced therapeutic re-integration into the 'normal' order, whether the patient likes it or not. But in the context of politics the statement can be understood in quite the opposite manner - as a call to move from the search for fixed and 'safe' identity, which despite lofty goals certainly has hysterical misery as its main dividend, to an embrace of the state of subjective incompleteness, which despite a perhaps inevitable individual melancholia promises a far better social outcome.

Ethnography as Analysis

This dissertation is an attempt to apply a Lacanian understanding of global culture and identity to the very specific realm of Japanese hip hop. The method for undertaking this research has been ethnographic, aspiring to (though ultimately failing to reach) the standard of simultaneous creative and interpersonal immersion that drives ethnomusicology. Over the course of four years, I spent about nine months in Japan, mostly in Tokyo, meeting and

talking to musicians. My earliest access to my subjects was through work on a non-academic journalistic piece for a music magazine (Morris, 2008), and over the years I further expanded my network through similar writing for a website, both projects providing platforms for preliminary, formal interviews. In certain cases, I was able to expand those encounters into more substantive relationships, often through encountering people again and again at some of the various hip hop concerts and events I attended. This led to many moments like the one outlined above, in which the experience of music was mixed with discussion about it. The highest standard of ethnomusicological immersion – in fact, an aspect required to even properly call research ethnomusicology – is to make music with one's informants. Though I am a musician, and my experiences in that realm were invaluable in easing my understanding of the technical and procedural aspects of music-making in Japan, I never came to be a participant in the music-making processes and logics I describe here.

This shortcoming may ultimately have been productive in reconciling some of the tensions inherent in the combination of ethnographic method and psychoanalytic theory. Before attempting to describe the uneven seam along which my practice joined the two, I should emphasize that I am not a clinical psychoanalyst, and any extent to which I may inadvertently suggest that I am 'reading' the individuals who participated in my study, I have overstepped my bounds. I instead come to psychoanalysis from the tradition that attempts to derive from texts broader judgments about systems of social meaning. Lacanian psychoanalysis bridges the gap between the individual and the social much more effectively than its Freudian predecessor, which tended to produce "Freudian Readings" primarily focused on reading art as a symptom of an artist's supposed neurosis, premised on the strict categories of the Oedipal family drama or other Freudian myth-archetypes (Bonaparte, 1988) (Felman, 1988). In place of this, Lacan enables us to interpret the act of signification, not as

the extension of personal neurosis, but as part of a much more universal and, indubitably, more significant process that constructs the values and meaning of society as such. In Zizek's work, for example, the films of Hitchcock do not give us any insight into the man who created them, but rather serve as windows into the society of which he was a part (Žižek, 1992). Here artists are no longer seen as subjects of analysis, but as analysts themselves, engaged with the signification that activates all subjects, and for whom the psychoanalytic reader can best serve as a translator.

But the ambiguous movement from text back to individual as a site, not of neurosis, but of social construction, demands yet another reconception of the analytic object – or maybe just a more precise walking of the always precarious tightrope between the subject and the sign. One possible route to squaring this circle is a detailed comparison of the ideal methods of the analyst and the ethnographer[1]. To begin, both analysis and ethnography are methods based on interaction. The relationship of the analyst to a subject is arguably more fundamental to psychoanalysis than theories of psychic structure such as that I have already scanned, the latter having grown out of the experience of practicing analysts including Freud and Lacan. In fact, psychoanalysis as such, in contrast to ego psychology, "presupposes a subject who manifests himself verbally in addressing another subject," (Lacan, 2004) assuming all subjectivity to be intersubjectivity. Likewise, ethnography has moved away from modeling the ethnographer as an observer existing in some permanently separate "outside," and toward an interactionist mode that, particularly under the rubric of the so-

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[1] I say ideal because both, in practice, fail to correspond with their conceptions. But I hope that as the instance of my own encounter plays out through this work, it, no less than the art it intends to grasp, will demonstrate the productivity of failure.

called participant observation on which ethnomusicology is premised, acknowledges the inevitable shaping of the ethnographic situation by the presence of the ethnographer.

This means that the analyst and the ethnographer must each make decisions about what might be termed their way of being with those they are studying – like quantum physicists, they must acknowledge and account for the impact of the act of observation on their objects of study. A sustained analysis of Freud's work finds him to be a highly interventionist analyst, constantly cajoling, suggesting, even subtly coercing his subjects to agree with his assessments of their psychic lives. Freud eventually became conscious of the consequences of displaying such overt interest in his subjects, whose integration of the analyst into the very psychic landscape that was the object of treatment became known as transference. His followers, in reading his accounts of therapy, saw something disturbing: not only female patients regarding Freud as a romantic object, but Freud's own drives apparent on the page for those who would look. Lacan, in response to this, advocated a cultivated neutrality in which analysts would "efface ourselves" and represent "an ideal of impassability." The point of this neutrality is to minimize the force of the analyst, and consequences such as the resistance to therapy that Freud often found triggered by his own prophetic and authoritative moments, a hostility to being, in Lacan's words, "freed by anyone but [the patient's own] self." (Lacan, 2004)

By this standard, the ethnographer, whose interest is almost inescapably foregrounded in the ethnographic encounter, can hardly help but be a terrible psychoanalyst. To pick just one extreme contrast, the psychoanalyst depersonalizes their relationship to the patient through charging for services, while the ethnographer is often visibly spending money just to be close to their subject. The ethnographer inescapably wears their interest on their sleeve, in the mere act of showing up and talking to people, and subjects are likely to

understand this interest as profoundly personal, driven by a curiosity that is the opposite of "impassability." Moreover, it is almost inherent to the ethnographic activity that the ethnographer is to one degree or another an outsider to the culture they are studying, and are thus more likely to display just the sort of broken surface that, for Lacan, will "allow the patient's aggressive intention to find support." (*ibid*, 16) Over the course of my research, I was asked countless times – "Why are you interested in Japanese hip hop?" This question was never only directed at me, but by my participants back to themselves – "Why is this foreigner, this white American, interested in me?"

The vernacular phrase for this is self-consciousness, and these questions both highlight the relation of this common term to the function of the *objet petit a,* and the risk the ethnographer always runs of distorting whatever they observe. The ethnographer's object of study should be, understood in these terms, the desiring orientation of their study participants to the others of their lives. Psychoanalysis and ethnography both recognize interaction between subjects as fundamental to constituting both the individual and the context, and both confront the danger of the observer being drawn into these interactions, becoming the target of the performance of the self until what is being observed is no longer the standard course of things. Just as the analyst must both work to minimize the transference and to make productive headway through its inevitable appearance, the ethnographer must strive to be something other than the mirror that draws participants' self-image, and must be ready to act productively when this does inevitably occur.

The elimination of these risks is the goal of the immersive method called participant observation. Through extended integration of the researcher into the lives of study participants, the "broken surface" of the bad analyst is supposed once again to become the impassive, neutral gaze of the effaced viewer. This cannot be, obviously, the simple

neutrality of observation at a distance or from behind a blind. The good participant observer is not the one sitting in a corner, unseen and unheard, but one who is enmeshed in participants' lives. The crucial difference is that this enmeshment is as a person among people, rather than as a single researcher who stands out from other people in the situation as odd or remarkable. A sterling example of the technique is Aaron Fox's *Real Country* (A.Fox, 2004), which tells the story of Fox's multi-year entry into the culture of Texas honky-tonks. Fox is a musician, and over the course of his participation in the scene he eventually gains as much notoriety in that capacity as he does for the fact that he is writing a book about his experiences (58). His claim that his status as a researcher slowly fades into the background is backed up by the texture and substance of his account, full of the kind of intimate interactions that would have evaded a researcher who merely conducted interviews. The ideal participant observer becomes, both from within and without, indistinguishable from the individuals being studied, a part of their community.

But this ideal is only ever partially achieved, and in some cases it may appear straightforwardly impossible – but even such an imperfect situation holds the potential for either effacement of the researcher's desire from the scene, or productive negotiation with it. Sudhir Venkatesh immersed himself in the inner circle of a criminal organization in a Chicago housing project (Venkatesh, 2008), and though clearly marked as different from his informants by race, background, and motivation, managed in at least some sense to blend into his setting. He does this not by getting people to forget that he is a researcher – he never becomes an active part of the gang's operations – but by so straightforwardly claiming a place in their lives that he becomes a member of the community exactly in his capacity as a researcher. A major part of this is, obviously, simply the accrued indifference that is the fruit of long-term presence; like Fox, Venkatesh spends years in his subject's lives. Such

immersion in part allows study participants to complicate their picture of the researcher in ways that increasingly frustrate the transference of desire. For instance, Venkatesh relates an episode in which one of his most important informants observes that Venkatesh, like many of the figures he is studying, is 'hustling' – that is, trying to make a living. The only difference is that while others in the projects hustle by selling drugs, fixing cars, or giving haircuts, Venkatesh is "hustling for information." This recognition of professional, even financial motivation is the exact parallel of the psychoanalyst's insistence on payment – consciousness that the ethnographer is 'just doing his job,' is not there 'for' the study participants. This recognition does some of the work of installing the impassiveness Lacan deems so crucial to the analytic relationship, reducing the drive to perform for the ethnographer's benefit.

Venkatesh's account, though, also points towards alternatives to impassiveness as an ethnographic ideal. He describes in detail his repeated miscalculations, misadventures, and misunderstandings of a setting he approaches with almost no practical knowledge. The emblematic moment is his initial meeting with the men who will become his core subjects, when he arrives at a building occupied by gangsters holding a survey whose first question is "How does it feel to be black and poor?" The gangsters, completely unsure what to make of him, hold him captive for most of a day, time which itself turns into the opportunity for thick ethnographic description. Again and again, Venkatesh turns his own strangeness to his advantage, inadvertently instigating situations, his subjects' responses to which offer him insights into their lives, or displaying ignorance in a way that elicits valuable corrections[2].

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[2] He also, through a methodological slip that he reflects upon productively, cultivates one central informants' impression that he is writing the man's biography. In a replay of Freud's discovery of the

This is completely out of synch with the ideal of participant observation, or of the impassive analyst, instead representing a return to the Freudian figure of the cajoling provocateur, an analyst who encourages the transference and makes use of it.

Perhaps a realistic aim for ethnography is somewhere between these two extremes. My own experience, in a society of which I had only slightly more knowledge (and significantly less linguistic mastery) than Venkatesh did of his arena of study, certainly involved a quotient of bumbling that I can only hope was turned to productive use. Some of this was the questioning way of the ignoramus, the ability, in such a foreign setting, to ask questions that no insider could without losing legitimacy. But at other moments, the ethnographic method brought me into contact with my participants as the ideal, immersed, impassive analyst, my status as researcher forgotten in favor of my personhood. I would compare this oscillation with the 'pulse of the subject' – the cyclical manner in which the individual moves from self-consciousness to unconsciousness, from observation to action. In part, my setting was one in which I was fully comfortable, in which I could simply be myself – the culture of music. But at the same time, I was operating in a profoundly alien environment, whose mores and practices I learned, quite literally like the child learning to speak, through a process of trial and error of which acute self-consciousness (in both the literal and emotional senses) was not just an effect but a component. It was when discussing or enjoying music with participants that I was least likely to display the broken surface of the analyst, when my role as an analyst felt least apparent.

But in my capacity as an American in Japan, discussing matters of Japanese identity, I had no such hope. I could not help but display my own desire, even if I attempted to give it

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transference, he finds that this misunderstanding threatens to corrupt their interaction as the man begins to play to Venkatesh in more and more apparent ways, filtering and distorting information with abandon.

that most neutral mask of intellectual curiosity, and my participants could not help but respond to this desire directly, inescapably distorting their actions in catering to me. And even given the hope offered by Venkatesh's ethnography of strategic difference, there was an additional wrinkle in my case. Crucial to Venkatesh's success in exploring black poverty is his separateness from the black-white binary that structures the American racial system, and which is profoundly implicated in all questions of black social position. In describing the analytic encounter, Lacan points out that "the most incidental pretext is enough to arouse an aggressive intention [in the patient] that reactualizes the imago" (*Ecrits* 16) – the imago being, in part, the array of predetermined relationships that we might call the weight of history. As an Indian-American, Venkatesh did not trigger the powerful racial imagos that would have inevitably been the baggage of a white researcher in the same situation, or the even more complicated issues of racial community and class that would have been faced by a black researcher. His relatively greater outside-ness freed him, to at least some degree, from the discourse that precedes him.

In contrast, I can claim no such independence from the discourse into which I entered. As a white American man in Japan, I inescapably trail a ghostly procession - Admiral Perry, President Truman, General Macarthur – that makes me very much an implicated element of any discussion of Japanese identity. One of the main arguments of this dissertation is that Japanese discourse of identity gains a major orientation from its relationship to America, leaving me in a complicated trap – for if I am right in this assertion, is the conclusion itself not then based partly on ethnographic evidence inevitably distorted by my identity? Far from being able to call on the ability of an ignorant, detached researcher to elicit information, I am a walking provocation that demands a rebuttal from my subjects. I inevitably capture them at 'dishonest' moments when they are not being, but thinking

about being, and performing their thoughts about being for my benefit. Perhaps the most fundamental aspect of this, as I'll explore in more depth, is simply the degree to which my subjects, who often had little commercial interest in America as a market for their music, nonetheless cared intensely about their representation in American minds.

How does one deal with such a conundrum? The impulse sometimes cultivated in academia is to not deal with it – to take such difficulties of perspective as insurmountable, to research only that which we can safely claim to fully grasp, to speak only as and for 'what we are.' This is yet another form of identity thinking, the more pernicious for its warrant as a form of intellectual discourse, an impulse whose twin we will encounter soon in the "theories of Japaneseness" that provide an orienting pole for some of the most disturbing trends of Japanese self-image. But how might we work, after refusing a reification of the very difference we seek to disturb, to maintain a productive research agenda in the face of the very real distortions of misunderstanding? Not, it is clear, by overcoming them in any final way. In my difference, I will always and inevitably be more Freudian than Lacanian, a provocateur, my own desire structuring the interaction. I will never absorb the full quotient of cultural knowledge that determines who a Japanese person is, not even enough to render my own surface impassive and non-desiring. In fact, my own quite literal surface will always pose a demand to Japaneseness, and vice-versa. I will, to put it simply, never be Japanese.

Perhaps the key insight offered by a psychoanalytic ethnography is that, equally, Japanese people will never be simply Japanese. Ethnography is an encounter with the non-identity of the subject, a constant rocky crossing of the "broken surface" of identity, with all its desiring protuberances. I have already made clear that I have no intention of analyzing individuals, but those individuals, occupying so many positions on the sprawling map of discourse, do provide the best testament to the folly of any totalization. Their responses to

me were indicators of their variations not only between, but within themselves. Some of my participants were apparently indifferent to my difference, comfortably and forthrightly addressing my both grossest misunderstandings and my most tendentious questions. In other cases, the very anxiety that I provoked became a productive line of inquiry, silences and discomfort speaking their own language. This is a language that can only be read through the close observation that ethnography makes possible.

Clifford Geertz, a founding figure of contemporary anthropology, saw his field as a kind of signmaking about signs, with the goal not of arriving at a final and complete picture of a whole culture, but of re-presenting the ways that culture thought about itself through its signs. Geertz was of the fairly Lacanian view that "cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete," (Geertz, 1977) insisting that anthropology, no less than the underlying sign systems it describes, is "essentially contestable," its advance dependent on a growth not in accuracy per se, but in the precision of the contestation surrounding it. This position is in line with the ethical stance already found in Leeb that all cultural representation should be considered part of a developing dialectic rather than as absolute. It is, moreover, particularly significant in light of anthropology's consistent targeting for critique as a corollary and tool of imperialism – conceiving of its findings as contestable and dialectic is one way to work through the power imbalances that can seem inherent to the practice.

In that black box called Family, I found it difficult to remove myself from a moment of pure identity with music that enfolded me like a mother. I did eventually start talking, though, driven perhaps as much as anything by my sense of 'duty' as a researcher – talking to the people around me, asking questions, joking, comparing impressions in a way that complicated my unity with the music. But it was loud, and my Japanese was not perfect. Who's to say that in Kaori's comments about creativity, I didn't hear some of what he said,

and some of what I wanted to hear? Perhaps when he talked about the local character of the place, he was not celebrating it as familiar and tight-knit, but deriding it as provincial and small. And as for Kaori, might not what he said have in some way been for my benefit? Perhaps he had a sense that it would be useful to me, or gratifying (as indeed it was), to hear him deny that the 'folk' he imagined were in any way Japanese. Perhaps he got that sense from something I'd said to him, or just a squint when a related subject came up, some cock of my head. It's impossible to know.

Whatever the inescapable regularity with which I, as a researcher, became a desiring subject and distorted the responses and actions of my participants – either as I heard that which I desired to, or as they played to my imagined need – I can at least take the variety of those distortions as a counter to any temptation to reach yet another identitarian conclusion about 'what it means' to be Japanese, or American. To take individuals – even artists or other self-declared oracles – as representatives readable for the social processes in which they are embedded, is no less a reduction than that which sees literary production as a symptom of individual neurosis. Many American writers have already sought after the inevitably illusory wholeness provided by writing their own discourses of Japanese identity, or even critiques of Japanese discourses of identity. I am, instead, aiming primarily to articulate and elaborate discourses within Japan that are deconstructing such fantasies, while finding even in their logic contradictions, incompletions, meconnaissance. I aim in what follows for an awareness of the subject's distance from itself, the desire that distorts all perception, and, most of all, of the series of failures that is the only content of my own attempt to read.

CHAPTER 2

AMATERASU'S MIRROR: REFLECTIONS OF MODERN JAPANESENESS

At 2pm on September 3rd, 2008, I was standing outside a Chinese restaurant near Nakano-Sakaue station in western Tokyo, anxiously examining passing cars. The traffic was heavy, the sun beat down, and the street was a mess of orange construction cones and warning signs. The gargantuan pillars of a new highway overpass stretched like fingers above the six-lane road, which was called Yamanote - Hand of the Mountain. Nakano-Sakaue was all concrete and glass, paved over and treeless, and I occasionally ducked back into a shaded alley to escape the pounding sun – only to dash back out, afraid of missing my connection.

I was waiting for Yoshimoto. I had first met him just over a year previously, via email, then phone, as a representative of the Temple-ATS (Pronounced "tenpuru ay tee ess") record label. He had come across as formal but enthusiastic as we arranged for an interview with Origami, the small label's most important group. In my early discussions with Yoshimoto, I often expressed my admiration for their strange, spiritual brand of hip hop, and he had implied he would pass the message on to the group. On the day of the interview, when I finally met Yoshimoto, he introduced himself as "also" Shibito, the emotive younger half of Origami. He laughed at my surprise and confusion as two men became one.

I would find that Shibito took this separation of his roles as entrepreneur and artist very seriously – one suggestion of his interest in identity and its difficulties. Together with fellow rapper/poet/producer Nanorunamonai, who we met performing solo in Chapter 1,

Shibito creates adventurous hip hop that, though international in significance, is infused with Japanese culture. When I first interviewed the two of them, they appeared in traditional summer *yukata*, a gesture that comes to bear more and more significance in retrospect. Their lyrics, though universal in outline, frequently draw on local themes from Buddhism to the multigenerational family. Their music is largely restrained and frequently eerie or dissonant, a minimalism that can be paralleled to Japanese court music of the koto and shakahuchi. Most of all, the Japanese language itself fascinates them. Shibito frequently references the novelists Natsume Soseki and Akutagawa Ryunosuke, and the duo's lyrics are full of wordplay – starting with the name Origami, which both Americans and Japanese are most likely to hear as "paper folding," but which is spelled with the Chinese characters meaning "Descending Gods."

For all their interest in Japanese culture, Origami do not have a simple relationship to their national identity. They produce Japanese music in a genre that comes from somewhere else, speaking at once from the ground they stand on and from some other place across the horizon. This is less surprising than it seems, given Japan's lengthy engagement with America. But more deeply, it reflects an ambivalent stance towards identity as such. Though they are fascinated with Japanese culture – in its concrete forms of literature, aesthetic theory, and language – Origami resist transubstantiating this into any abstract sense of 'Japaneseness.' During that same first interview, their yukata still firmly in place, they told me that "We don't want to represent Japan."

Shibito cultivates an incompletion and fragmentation in his artistic as well as personal identity. "My rapping is very much a case of multiple personalities," he told me. "Imagine you have a huge number of selves, stretching out in the past, present, and future. And let's say you go above, and you pick out points along this line. Shibito is the one up

there picking – maybe somewhat more objectively, from outside." As a creator of art that hopes to survey human nature, he is both a subject and an object – both a commentator and a phenomenon. As I got to know them and their work better, I came to see that Origami were engaged in a struggle with the difficulties of capturing the truth of living people in unliving symbols, of speaking with authority while unable to escape human frailty, struggling to construct some semblance of identity while acknowledging the inevitable imperfection of the process. Shibito called on Japanese mythology for an ideal model of detached observation: "There's a rabbit in the moon, and it's always watching the earth."

All of the artists in Japan's hugely diverse hip hop universe deal with divided selves, divided situations, divided practices. They are both elevated artists and lowly workers; they are experimenters who strive for broad acceptance; iconoclasts who draw heavily on outside influence. For those looking from America, what is most arresting is that they are Japanese, yet in their embrace of such a seemingly distant thing as hip hop, seem 'Americanized'. They look from where they stand to an elsewhere that they cannot wholly see, but which nonetheless draws their gaze. This is not a uniquely Japanese split – any attempt to communicate involves using symbols whose meaning is determined elsewhere, by another – but the landscape over which we travel to meet our signs always has its own unique contour.

In the case of Japan, the signs of identity are shaped by international relationships with America, China, and Korea, as well as by internal differences between the Japanese majority and the poor, immigrants, and minorities at the margins. Throughout Japanese politics and culture there is a persistent tension between those who would explore these differences and allow "Japaneseness" to become a more diffuse idea, and those who hope to maintain Japanese identity in at least the appearance of fixity. This is true even within Japanese hip hop, whose overseas origins might seem to demand a detached view of

nationality. While Origami balance their national cultural roots with a marked indeterminacy, other artists attempt mightily to heal these splits, to create something unified and firm.

In my time with Japan's hip hop musicians, I was first and foremost attracted to those artists producing innovative and experimental sounds, artists who I felt were making music notably different from American hip hop. Over time I came to understand that the sounds did not simply matter for their own sake, but actually gave form – sometimes abstract, sometimes overt – to a way of being, an openness to change and challenge that resonated with listeners. Sometimes this resonance was reflected in seemingly mundane lifestyle choices about work, location, and relationships. At other points, it manifested in more spectacular forms, radical breaks that aimed for broad reform, in the hope of making Japan a better place.

War Against Babylon

I finally spotted Shibito through the windshield of his shiny new Toyota, wearing his omnipresent fishing cap and slight mustache. There was always something reserved about his face, his smile enigmatic, but also wry, perhaps the traces of an adolescent social awkwardness assuaged by a deeper self-confidence. He waved at me in a small, controlled way and I hustled quickly to jump in the passenger (left hand) door before the light changed.

Shibito had called me that morning and ended up – perhaps, thanks to my still-imperfect Japanese, somewhat accidentally – inviting me out to his farm. I wasn't sure quite what he meant: like a great deal of Japanese vocabulary, "faamu" is a straightforward Japanization of an English word, but many such words have slightly different meanings than

the sources they are drawn from. I certainly knew better than to expect a broad expanse of wheat worked by giant combines and tractors.

We chatted idly as we moved slowly through Tokyo traffic. "There's a lot of *babiron* here," Shibito observed.

Babiron? This was vocabulary that had somehow passed me by. Yoshimoto spoke a bit of English – he had spent time during high school as an exchange student in Canada. He was used to me, occasionally, throwing difficult words back at him for a little help.

"Babiron?"

"Un, babiron," he explained. "Keisatsu."

Ah, police.

It was one of those moments, not uncommon for English speakers of Japanese, when an affinity of meaning suddenly clicks into place, where the strange becomes the familiar.

Babiron. *Babylon*.

"Babylon means police? Really, is that common?"

"Well . . . maybe all people who know hip hop or reggae will know it. Babylon means police."

As we drove on, I saw that he was right – it seemed that at every intersection, directing traffic or just observing it coolly, were men in strangely anachronistic uniforms, hexagonal caps, white gloves, and epaulets complete with braided gold ropes. This sort of kitsch homage to the West was a fashion theme in Japanese public life. The uniformily female airline attendants of JAL and ANA look like Benny Hill's harried Swinging London stewardesses, high school uniforms are inspired by Western military dress, and based on midcentury photos showing him in high starched collars and long tails, one might think

Emperor Hirohito had ruled over 19th-century Britain. One remarkable symbol of the end of the Sinocentric tributary system in East Asia was the moment when, at late 19th century negotiations following the defeat of Russia, the Japanese representatives arrived in Western dress – ready to negotiate a Western-style treaty.

Shibito's name for the police was a similar act of imitation and appropriation, though of quite different political significance. The story of how Babylon came to Tokyo is long and winding, and a testament to the profound transformations available in the interpretation of history and language. Babylon was once a city-state in the floodlands between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, but it is now little more than a tumble of ruins. Its degradation has been worsened by the presence of U.S. military forces, who have crushed brick paths and destroyed a reconstruction of the ancient Ishtar Gate (Leeman, 2005). For Jamaican Rastafarians starting in the mid-20th century, as ancient Biblical scriptures became a kind of code for the understanding of the African diaspora, the biblical Promised Land of Zion – beautiful, peaceful, and prosperous – was taken to indicate Ethiopia or Africa more generally. Rastas, by contrast, were in Babylon.

Less and more than a real place, Babylon came to stand for a condition of the soul – the white man's land and Pharoah's land, the land of colonialism, consumerism, greed, corruption, and 'downpression.' For the original Rastas, Babylon was the West Indies, far away from Zion/Africa. Inspired partially by the back-to-Africa movement of Marcus Garvey, the good Rastaman aimed to withstand, and sometimes fight against, Babylon and its forces, and to promote freedom and peace (Owens, 1982). One way the fight against Babylon was undertaken was through music, particularly what became reggae. Bob Marley described this as the effort to "Chant Down Babylon" – to, like Joshua before the walls of Jericho, lay low enemies and oppressors with sound.

The struggle of black Jamaicans echoed that of black Americans, and when the music and ideas of reggae traveled to New York City, they influenced American hip hop (having themselves been influenced by American soul and funk), helping forge connections between different moments of the African Diaspora (J. Chang, 2005) Both Jamaican reggae and American hip hop came to Japan soon after their birth, bringing the language and attitude of resistance to Babylon with them. Its pronunciation and usage had transformed, as it had even in the U.S., where the term is less often used as a specific referent to police. But its implications of a broader, deeper struggle of the weak against the strong, of the enlightened against the closed-minded, and ultimately, of the pure and weak against the corrupt and strong, were intact. The Japanese reggae singer Chiyori would later tell me of her admiration for artists engaged in "War Against Babylon" – the entire phrase lifted from English.

Those outside looking in might see something confusing in the adoption of this stance by Shibito and other Tokyo hip hoppers – perhaps even something false or hypocritical. Reggae and Rastafarianism were the expressions of hopeful but struggling people, victims of racially-rationalized exploitation on an international scale. Similarly, hip hop was birthed from New York's South Bronx, where in the 1970s and 1980s a dangerous mix of the extreme poverty of deindustrialization and the extreme wealth of the drug trade inspired artists to produce both social critiques and escape routes for the soul (J. Chang, 2005). Japan, on the other hand, is a wealthy and successful nation, its postwar recovery deemed a "miracle," its technological savvy the envy of the globe. How could its youth, with access to a panoply of cultural indulgences, their material needs more than met, find any true resonance with the situation of the impoverished citizens of bombed-out Kingston or the Bronx?

Western critics have pursued this line of thinking in various forms. Scholarly treatments have frequently argued to confirm Japanese hip hop's superficiality and disconnection from real hip hop culture (Bynoe, 2004; Cornyetz, 1994). Popular articles have asked whether the adaption of hip hop in Japan can be compared to "the Elvis effect" – the profit-driven appropriation of black music by white Americans (Dreisinger, 2002). Depictions of Japanese hip hop in American popular culture have furthered the theme, showing Japanese fans to be particularly superficial in their relationship to hip hop, totally insensitive to its political significance. These texts proceed from several underlying assumptions, the most basic of which is that genres or styles transplanted from one place or population to another can be used 'incorrectly,' that such uses can be antithetical to a certain original spirit of the form.

As we will see in the next chapter's discussion of right-wing nationalism in Japanese hip hop, there are instances when it is sorely tempting to talk in terms of corruption and misuse. At the same time, though, such judgments are circular: as Simon Frith succinctly states it, the connection between a cultural form, a population, and a political orientation always "derives in the first place from an account (usually mythical) of its own past . . . the history of the genre is rewritten in terms of a new purism" (P. S. Hall & Gay, 1996). The linkage of a music like hip hop to any particular population, location, or lifestyle must be constantly reproduced, in part by defining the unreal, the Other, instances or uses of a culture that don't 'belong.' Nina Cornyetz' article is particularly indicative here in the way it argues to define the Japanese relationship to blackness in hip hop as "fetishistic." The implied obverse of such a classification, of course, is that other groups have a firm, real, non-fetishistic relationship to the blackness depicted in hip hop.

In such small but consistent ways, Japan has been used to buttress the "new purism" pursued by American hip hop, standing for a whole series of cultural tropes of what hip hop isn't. It has been useful in this project because of broader perceptions of Japan in the late 20th century, themselves with roots in World War II propaganda. The most striking illustration of this is the American-made comedic short film "Tokyo Breakfast," which depicts a Japanese family, speaking in accented English and using the term "nigger" frequently and enthusiastically (Kuntz & Maguire, 2000). The thrust of the film is that the family members are pure consumers of popular culture, so distanced from history and politics that they fail to understand the offensiveness of their own language and behavior. These ideas tie into images of Japanese people as herd-like followers, as good imitators, and as financially privileged thanks to the postwar economic 'miracle.' Judging from much more laudatory treatments of other international hip hop cultures, a real, legitimate relationship to hip hop is one rooted in acute political consciousness, victimization, and innovation derived from individuality – all things that Japanese are implicitly unable to claim. Even other studies finding 'misuse' of African-American culture in international contexts have been less polemical, more willing to chalk up shifts in meaning to the inherent instabilities of shifting context and translation issues, rather than attributing them to an inherent and vaguely malicious insensitivity (see Havens, 2001).

Yoshimoto, from a comfortable upper-middle class background and a graduate of prestigious Waseda University – the "Harvard of Japan[3]" – might seem an easy target for just such a characterization. But it is only thanks to deeply ingrained Western ideas of

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[3] Though accurate in some ways, this comparison hardly captures Waseda's position near the top of an educational system that has far greater deterministic effect on students' lives than America's. Waseda has produced many of the top bureaucrats and politicians of Japan's current era – it could easily be considered one of the foremost institutions of Babylon (Wolferen, 1990).

Japaneseness that Hirohito's top hat and Yoshimoto's hip hop can be conflated as instances of conformist-minded imitation. An attention to Japan's domestic political and cultural landscape shows them to be, in fact, directly opposed. There are major forces in contemporary Japan that embrace with varying degrees of subtlety the idea of a hierarchical, conformist, ethnically and politically unified nation – a "Japan" whose goal is to be identical with its own platonic ideal form. By contrast, Yoshimoto and others like him strive, in their lives and art, to open up gaps in the supposedly smooth façade of Japanese identity, their drive and strategy derived partly from the global "War against Babylon." It is ironic that as American commentators question Japanese hip hop's connection to its 'real' American source, artists like Shibito are engaged in a struggle to dispute and displace exactly such discourses of the 'real' at home, where they serve fundamentally authoritarian aims. Origami's indirect, questioning stance towards authority can be found in tracks like *Sanzu* (named for the Buddhist equivalent of the River Styx). The unevenness of the written lines reflects how the rappers transform Japanese into a dense wall, shifting from almost impossibly fast to languorously slow from one line to the next.

For part of our trip to Chiba, Shibito and I listened to the radio, flipping from pop to NHK's educational channel, which was playing Russian lessons. Then came an oddly cheery voice on a scratchy, fuzzy recording, chanting exercise moves in a sing-song rhythm – "Lift your arms! Next, legs!" Shibito laughed, surprised. This was the *taisou* - group exercises. Workers at Japanese companies had once participated every morning, gathering on huge exercise fields to move in complete unison, not just with one another, but, theoretically, with the rest of the nation – building strength through uniform motion. Shibito remembered doing them during his own childhood, but when I asked him if they were still done in schools, he said no, not at all. Even Japan's giant corporations, staffed by

legions of officebound salarymen, were moving away from the practice. "Some companies that are very traditional will still do them. But not many." I asked him why they were being broadcast.

"Just for old people," he replied.

The *taisou* remain a persistent part of America's Orientalist discourse of Japan. As recently as 2008, a Saturday Night Live sketch imagined a Japanese version of the workplace sitcom "The Office," premised on stereotypes of obedient, robotic workers, with the *taisou* as one of its central gags. Within Japan, the *taisou* are, simultaneously, the expression of an ideal of group harmony subtly tied to national development and even militarist expansionism. For Shibito, they were symbolic not just of a troubled history, but of an entire attitude toward nation and identity that he found so sadly wrongheaded he could only laugh.

Tokyo Underground

Because Origami were my first and strongest point of contact, it is inevitable that they sit at the center of my mental map of hip hop in Japan. This is, inevitably, a distorted image – Origami and their friends are, by some standards, relatively insignificant. But neither is there a better place to start, as hip hop in Japan is produced by a vast and intricate network of friends and allies, not to mention rivals and even, strong as the word may seem, enemies. It has multiple centers, both geographic locations and strong personalities that define an array of intersecting or competing musical styles, political attitudes, business alliances, fashion trends, and audiences. It is even inaccurate to characterize it as a singular community – the mistake made by critics who assume that "Japanese hip hop" consists of one thing, whether to be praised or buried.

Though Shibito and Nanorunamonai are respected in select circles and seem financially comfortable, they have never appeared on the Oricon chart of top sellers. They work to cultivate a fanbase, not through the massive advertising campaigns, TV appearances, and commercial tie-ups that characterize Japan's pop stars (Stevens), but by playing frequent live shows across the country. This building from the bottom up is one possible definition of a musical 'underground,' and it is a process characterized by often unglamorous persistence and struggle. Many of the artists on the Temple ATS label, like the majority of the artists I came to know during my time in Japan, could not yet support themselves through music. Tokyo's musicians work as teachers, florists, software designers, drug dealers, customer service representatives, and record store clerks while trying to make a name for themselves in another, much different sphere.

The other way in which I use the term 'underground' is related to this dogged persistence. Many of the artists outside of the Oricon spotlight champion novel sounds, working against the expectations of the average music consumer, who may be more interested in the easy and predictable. Musicians at the economic margins of the music industry are sometimes there because they are willing to sacrifice immediate gain in exchange for the ability to make unique or unusual music that they enjoy more, while working to change the taste of the audience, little by little. This makes the underground a snapshot of the future. This has already proven the case in Japanese hip hop – Ian Condry's *Hip Hop Japan* (2006), researched in the underground clubs of Tokyo in the mid to late 1990s, is rife with the names of artists, like King Ghidra and Dabo, who have since become respected institutions and huge financial successes. Though they may be marginal as this is being written, Origami is part of a generation of artists moving up to take those prominent positions, and bring new sounds with them. If they eventually become as successful as

today's biggest stars, Japan's next generation of hip hop musicians will bring to national audiences a much different set of ideas and practices.

According to Condry, Japanese hip hop up to now can be roughly divided into three eras. First were those fans and followers who, starting in the early 1980s, began to introduce hip hop to Japan, and to slowly and tentatively create a Japanese version. The most prominent artists from this era included Itou Seikou and Takagi Kan. Though many of these artists – particularly DJ Krush and Major Force – created music that was enduring in its own right, they also worked hard to simply teach Japanese people, particularly youth, about hip hop. This project drew to a close with the entrance of hip hop to the mainstream in the 1990s, in the form of hit songs like East End X Yuri's "Da.Yo.Ne." and Scha Dara Parr's "Konya wa boogii bakku." (Condry, 2006, 70)

By the late 1990s, artists could assume an audience at least somewhat familiar with the fundamentals of hip hop. This allowed them to work on establishing the parameters of a specifically Japanese version. In these attempts many artists drew very closely on the sounds and styles of American "hard core" rappers, crafting driving songs based on (frequently American) soul and funk samples. Here we find many of the artists who would become, by the mid-2000s, the most popular rappers in Japan – names like Zeebra, Twigy, and Nitro Microphone Underground. Condry describes in particular depth the perceived importance among this group of tapping into "reality," which was equated with oppositionality, tough attitudes and, more or less explicitly, African-American political ideology (*ibid.* 71, 79). When I spoke with Zeebra, he said that one of his ambitions had been to give Japanese youth something they could be proud of, as Japanese. This aspect of second-wave Japanese rap is sometimes expressed by the very catchphrase that Origami rejected when I met them – the drive to "Represent Japan."

This desire has dramatically faded amongst artists of Japan's third era, in part because they come from more diverse backgrounds in terms of ethnic identity, economic status, and even national origin, than either of the previous two waves of Japanese hip hop. Examples abound, from the rising Zainichi Korean star Hannya to Osaka's Shingo Nishinari, whose identity is so tied to his poverty-stricken neighborhood that he decided to share its name. Perhaps most dramatic of all is small but noticeable presence of American expatriate artists who have chosen to start their musical careers in Japan's underground, rather than in hip hop's American home. Among these is DJ Psi-Kick, aka Jeff Valbuena, a Philipino-American and part of Origami's Temple-ATS crew.

Simultaneous with the fading centrality of a unified Japanese identity has been the rise of a radical aesthetic adventurousness that has increasingly detached Japanese hip hop from any easily identifiable American model. Going back to my teenaged discovery of American albums like DJ Shadow's *Endtroducing*, hip hop for me has been first and foremost about a certain strangeness and experimentalism, a trail to be followed through the Afrofuturism of Anti-Pop Consortium, the illbient grime of Dalek, and the lo-fidelity tape collages of cLOUDDEAD[4]. These became a door to the further realms of free jazz ala Anthony Braxton and Steve Lacey, who captivated my college years, and to the folky, lo-fi improvisers of the so-called New Weird America movement that occupied my mind in my late 20s so much that I started my first band.

Given my own background and taste, he proliferation of weirdness and diversion in Japanese hip hop was my invitation to familiarity. Origami caught both my ear and eye like catnip from the first encounter. That came with a mix of care and luck that nicely sums up

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4 Fans will note many of these artists are not black.

how a lot of the information in this dissertation was acquired – I was in a neighborhood, Shimokitazawa, with a vague reputation for attracting artistic types, wandering through a record store called Jetset, looking rather aimlessly for something interesting. My eye was caught by a CD with a strange cover, a painting of a man's face that looked like it had been drenched in rain until its colors ran. This was *Tsuki wo Nakushita Bousama*, or *The King Who Lost the Moon*, which had just been released. At this remove I can't quite remember, but it's likely that the first track I cued up on the listening station was the album's opener, "Monday."

The track was produced by Onimas, who makes the majority of Origami's backing tracks. It opens with a single, slightly wavering organ tone. Buried deep beneath it in the mix is a nasal, repetitive chant in an indeterminate Asian language, seemingly taken from an old recording, and with a distinctly religious tone. Very slowly, other subtle elements enter – an aimless xylophone, a few disconnected electronic whistles, an echoing digital snare, nothing coalescing to create a rhythm or melody. Nearly two minutes in, with little prelude, a fast breakbeat is faded into the track, not quite syncing to the persistent chant. A turntable begins scratching along, and it seems that perhaps the song proper is finally about to begin. But only moments later, the breakbeat stutters as if the CD were skipping. It regains its footing again, but then fades out just as quickly as it appeared, and the final half-minute of the track treats us to the simple sound of flowing water.

To begin a hip hop album in this fashion carries a strong message. These four minutes and sixteen seconds contain no rapping, and in fact no apparent input from the two men who are the ostensible authors of the entire work. The track is not structured by a predictable syntax, either the verse-chorus-verse alternations of a traditional pop song or even the iterative, layered unfolding typical of certain rhythmic music. Like its other

imagined listeners, what the track gave me was not a variation on an established structure, but the experience at once of pure sound – warm, analogue, resonant – and most importantly, of waiting for them to resolve into something recognizable, ready for categorization and interpretation.

Though the album eventually moves to at least slightly more traditional hip hop territory, "Monday" initiates *Tsuki wo Nakushita Bousama* with a kind of anti-manifesto, a wordless rejection of ideas often venerated in hip hop – first, that there is a particular blueprint or set of aesthetic rules to be followed, a tradition that must be adhered to, and second, that the powerful, individual personality of a rapper drives the art form. The next track on the album makes this somewhat more explicit - it is entitled "Rokkustaa no Higeki [The Rock Star's Tragedy]," and it closes with Nanorunamonai and Shibito chanting mournfully, "Kill the Rockstar . . . Kill the Rockstar." Though the sentiment is overtly directed at 'rock,' the 'rock star' is a much broader symbol of the authority and respect the public invests in a handful of highly visible figures.

In subsequent years I followed the trail that began with Origami, meeting their friends and fellow travelers. Most of them shared this underlying commitment to challenging musical forms or individual artists felt to have become too complacent and predictable. The community animated by these sentiments was necessarily stylistically fragmented, a mess of variation and experimentation, held together by a common ethos of adventurousness more than any single sound. There were playful poets like Candle, whose jazzy signature song is about a 'Streetcorner Clown,' and menacing characters like MSC, who shared their Shinjuku home with "unsleeping criminals." Musicians like Temple ATS' Kaori mastered the MPC, that most iconic of hip hop samplers, while Killer Bong banged a broken cymbal while croaking slow, menacing vocals in the band The Lefty.

There were some recognizable common threads amidst the confusion, most notably a surge of interest in dubstep, a style from England that relied on tinny electronic sounds and a high-speed version of reggae's signature riddim. Origami themselves exercised a distinct gravitational pull, particularly on producers. The group used a variety of trackmakers on each album, and these collaborators tended to seek their own version of a distinct 'Origami Sound.' Zigen, who painted the cover for *Ousama* and several other Origami projects, and also occasionally produces tracks for them, describes this as the process of "taking their emotions, and their thoughts, and making them clearer, and higher."

Back on the road, Yoshimoto and I passed into spreading acres of green rice paddies, discussing music, tradition, and society interchangeably. He was, he said, frustrated with the young people of his own generation. He saw a lack of purpose, a malaise that he blamed on economic prosperity – even after its prolonged downturn, the relatively small nation remains the globe's second wealthiest. "They have so many options, they can't choose to do anything." One can see plenty of signs of this in Tokyo, where fashion-obsessed youth clutching shopping bags are a constant sight. Such a critical perspective is obliquely expressed in the song "Rihabiri Densha" [Rehab Train] from *Ousama*.

As we eventually pulled into the driveway of a small, tile-roofed home, I saw that as I'd suspected, "farm" wasn't quite the word. Behind the house, owned by Yoshimoto's parents, was a garden of about a fourth of an acre, full of eggplants, cucumbers, zucchini, tomatoes in droves, and *kuushinsai*, or "air-heart-plant" – something like soft, short, edible bamboo. Shibito overturned protective crates resting on the ground, showing me beautiful watermelons, then pointed to a trellis hung with long gourds, some as long as my forearm, barbell-shaped. He explained to me that these gourds, emptied and dried, had been used to carry water in ancient Japan. With duck boots and garden shears, we set about harvesting.

Throughout that day, Shibito told me about the garden and what it meant to him. Though the garden was idyllic and calm, his motivation had a sense of refusal and rebellion. Kaori, Jeff's partner in Memory Storm and Shibito's friend since high school, once described him to me as a revolutionary without a gun. One of his alternate weapons was this garden and the principles of *jisuujisoku* – subsistence agriculture. Shibito felt people had become too dependent on the systems that surrounded them, including the grocery stores that fed them. The deeper problem, he said, was the way that people submitted so easily to accepted ways, usually imposed by authorities ranging from government to corporations. He considered one potential 'rehab' for this, and for the related shallowness of Japanese youth, to be a return to the values of his grandparents, the generation who were very young during the War and grew up in the severe privation of postwar reconstruction. He emphasized particularly the importance of craft – of making things. He praised farmers simultaneously as political actors, able to dissociate themselves from webs of social dependence, and as artists. "Look at people who grow peaches – people who make things, in general. You look at the things that they make, and you think, wow, this is incredible, this object."

The connection between his praise for the farmer and his own methods of producing music was clear. Temple ATS is an independent label, built from the ground up and with no financing from large record companies like Sony. It is run out of a tiny apartment in the Takadanobaba section of Tokyo. What Shibito praises the farmer for is something rare in modern society, but also available to the independent musician – a direct connection between themselves and their product, the ability to hold something in their hands that they have produced, and at some point benefit from it directly. Karl Marx wrote about the modern plague of alienation – the distance imposed between the worker and his product by the structure of capitalism, one that reduces human social relationships to the

relationships between objects. For Shibito, Japan's shopping youth, their comfort undermining any possibility of a real relationship to production, are in this sense alienated from their own reality, while a farmer, or anyone else who can hold the product of their own work in their hand, has avoided alienation.

Amaterasu's Mirror

> Multiple traumas of identity were embedded in this quest for a "modern self": acknowledging personal failure; repudiating one's own history and culture; looking for models in a Western world that itself had engaged in repression, imperialism, and war. Nonetheless, the appeal of foreign models to a remorseful intelligentsia was immense. To one degree or another, many nonintellectuals also felt this attraction, and likewise shared the heady sense of being now firmly embarked on the path of 'inevitable' historical progress. Just as often, however, the intellectuals themselves called attention to the opening of a great divide between their cosmopolitan radicalism and the sentiments of those who still held on to the comfort and security of familiar ways.
>
> John Dower, *Embracing Defeat*

As anywhere else, identity in Japan is largely determined by discourse. One of the most important threads of Japan's discourse about identity is the lengthy struggle over whether the Japanese people make up a singular national body, or are a group of free individuals. Yoshimoto's condemnation of his dependent, conformist compatriots illustrates that the American vision of Japan as a nation of uniform, compliant salarymen is shared by some of its citizens. A Japanese selfhood that requires sacrifice for the collective good has been constructed through centuries of rhetoric and image, and though it has often been constructed in terms of relationships between Japan and foreign cultures, it is distinct from the rhetorics of Japaneseness found abroad. Some scholars have speculated that rice growing formed the deep historical basis for the intense group consciousness of Japanese

society, as the necessity of draining paddies at the same time forced villages to work in sync (Naff, 1996), but this amounts to little more than speculation. Much more accessible, concrete, and recent has been the development of a few key themes of "Japaneseness" since the Meiji restoration, identified by Eiji Oguma as including the uniqueness of the Japanese people, the divinity of the Emperor, and an emphasis on filial piety, loyalty, and hierarchy (Oguma, 2002).

Oguma finds that one of the foundations for the development of these ideals of Japaneseness are the so-called Kiki myths (xxi), a set of stories, which Oguma compares to the Bible in cultural import, in which gods settle the Japanese home islands. During the Meiji restoration of the mid-19th century, these myths were deployed with new force to remind the nation that, first, "there is not a single person in this land who is not descended from the Gods," (9) and second, that in this divine environment, the Emperor was uniquely divine, descended directly from Amaterasu, the sun goddess.

Among the Kiki myths, the story of Amaterasu is central. It is said that, in response to a slight from another god, Amaterasu once isolated herself in a cave. As the sun goddess, her absence had devastating effects on the world, and the other gods struggled mightily to draw her out as crops withered and people starved. What finally succeeded in drawing her from isolation was the proclamation that there was a beautiful woman outside the cave. Driven by jealousy and curiosity, Amaterasu exited, only to find, instead of a flesh and blood woman, a mirror, now holding her own image.

Amaterasu can be, here and elsewhere, taken as synonymous with Japan. Between the Meiji Restoration and the end of the Pacific War, the idea of the Emperor as her direct descendant was aggressively promoted, and the mirror that represents her is part of the Imperial regalia. Other connections between Amaterasu's story and that of Japan are less

emphasized – particularly the element of paranoid narcissism. Oguma argues that, just as Amaterasu was driven towards her own image by the fear of another's imagined beauty, the very intensity of Japan's self-fascination is frequently in response to those outside of Japan. There is often an element of competition, as in the Meiji fetishization of Western technical knowledge as a means if 'catching up,' the stoking of nationalism by late 19th century fears of Western colonization, and the wartime characterization of Japan as an engine of prosperity for the putatively backwards Koreans and Chinese.

The Kiki myths, insofar as they formed a foundation for the Emperor's divinity, also formed a foundation for authoritarian control of the Japanese people. During the war years, the doctrine of "poor people, strong state" summed up the view of Japan's military dictators towards their subjects – as dispensable tools. We know that the Japanese themselves were no more or less fundamentally credulous of such ideas than any other group of human beings would have been. Many Japanese bitterly resented the manipulations of their military leaders, and not all were subscribers to the ideology of imperial divinity (Silverberg, 2007).

The leaders themselves were sometimes comically cynical, as when stockpiles of war materiel were looted and funneled into the black market in the days just after Japan's surrender. It is in some ways not surprising, then, that the American victory soon came to be celebrated by Japanese progressives as the "Potsdam Revolution," the treaty of surrender figured as a new empowerment of the common people (Dower, 1999). Initial reforms instituted by the occupation included the purge of many former nationalists from government, the dismantling of the giant *zaibatsu* conglomerates, the release of various communists and liberal political prisoners, and the jailing of organized crime figures and violent right-wing zealots. Here as elsewhere, the competition between visions of the Japanese people as compliant, loyal followers and as free individuals was one front in the

conflict between Japan's ruling elite and less exalted Japanese subjects. Origami position themselves clearly in this dialectic with songs like *Ousama*'s "Muchi Kokyuu Kyoushitsu [Ignorant Breath Classroom]" which takes a bumbling high school teacher as its symbol of illegitimate authority.

At first, the American occupiers were seen as on the side of the individual. But the "Potsdam Revolution" collapsed with remarkable swiftness, as democratic idealism was replaced as early as 1947 with what was known as the "reverse course." The purge of nationalists from government ceased and was even reversed, the *zaibatsu* were allowed to reform, and some prominent right-wing thugs and organized crime figures were released from prison. Even the leaders of Japan's militarists were only inconsistently pursued – as Iris Chang points out, while German war criminals were either executed or lived out their last days in ignominious exile, Japan's war criminals often not only stayed in Japan, but retained their positions of prominence (I. Chang, 1998). The reasons for this were multiple, but it was largely the result of emerging cold-war paranoia – the Japanese people had in fact embraced democracy too enthusiastically for America's liking, for instance by constructing a meaningful Communist party. The Americans chose to allow Japan's old bosses to return and combat these leftist forces – in exchange, of course, for their ongoing loyalty to America itself. This situation has largely continued to the present day - the conservative Liberal Democratic Party, backed by Japan's right wing and, not infrequently, organized crime, has held power for most of the last half-century.

The consequence has been that the most anti-individualist strains of Japanese social and political thought have retained both concrete power bases and ideological currency in contemporary discourse. Miyoshi and Harootunian, writing in 1993, described the ideology of Japanese modernity as "the recycling of older elements in the national myth of racial

homogeneity and familial consensuallity . . . capable of eliminating opposition and criticism and allowing claims to cultural uniqueness." They claim the result is "a social imaginary marked by a network of tight social relationships modeled after the patriarchal household [and in turn] severely inhibited the spirit of criticism and opposition within all areas of Japanese society." (Miyoshi et al., 1993) This is a gross overstatement if taken to stand for Japanese society as a whole, but it does accurately capture at least a powerful element within it.

Independence is still subtly devalued by Japan's dominant discourses, regarded as a threat to order, peace, and national power. "Freedom" in the U.S. is a cloak under which is practiced various kinds of ideological sleight of hand, primarily a disregard for the concerns of the supposedly "free" poor. But in Japan 'freedom' – *jiyuu*, meaning literally self-caused or something done for the self – retains a negative connotation, as it shades over into 'selfishness' in a way the American concept of "freedom" does not[5]. One Japanese demographer summed up this assessment: "In America, an individual still stands before God and tries to play a role in society. A Japanese individualist is far more of an egoist, someone who keeps to himself or herself and has no relationship with others. They tend to be more egocentric and self-reliant, and that ends up causing more problems for our society." (Zielenziger, 2007)

Various moral panics in Japan in recent years have been driven by a distinct nervousness about individuality. In a later chapter, we will look at "Freeter," nontraditional laborers who are blamed, with gross empirical inaccuracy but great emotional fervor, for Japan's recent economic woes. Yoshimoto was himself tied up with another one of these

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5 But perhaps should.

panics through the rumor, circulating on the internet early in Origami's career, that he was a *hikikomori*. Hikikomori are shut-ins, usually males between the age of 15 and 30 who retreat completely from society, refusing to go to school or work, usually completely dependent on their mothers. Many *hikikomori* and mothers interviewed by Michael Zielenziger attributed their retreat from society to their inability to accommodate themselves to the demands of Japanese society – particularly, the demand to fit in. The mother of one shut-in claimed that "A person who challenges, or makes a mistake, or thinks for himself, either leaves Japan or becomes a *hikikomori*." (Zielenziger, 2007, 18)

This can be put in terms of the *hikikomori*'s failure to successfully utilize the division between *tatemae* and *honne*, or outward face and inner feeling, a separation that many Japanese consider fundamental to the nation's social life. *Tatemae* is a socially acceptable front, an effort to obscure and smooth over difference in favor of constructing social harmony, an effort that is generally highly valued. As Zielenziger and his subjects interpret it, the *hikikomori* are unable or unwilling to make this effort, and therefore become outcasts. As one *hikikomori* put it to Zeilenziger, "Regular people have an ability to hide their true feelings just to be able to get along with others in the world." (18) Zielenziger outlines in great depth the intensity of social pressure to conform enacted in Japan through everyday practices, such as bullying, which he claims rules not just the schoolyard but Japanese professional life as well (50-52). Perhaps the coldest summation of the strength of social pressure to conform is Japan's astronomical rate of suicide, which is often regarded as a method of atonement for wrongs committed against the group, and stands around 36.5 per 100,000, as compared to 17.6 in U.S. and 18.8 in South Korea. (196)

By choosing the pseudonym "Shibito" – literally, a person driven by his own will – Yoshimoto seems to have invited the same social distrust levied against the *hikikomori*.

When I asked about the circulating rumor, Zigen, Origami's artist and occasional trackmaker, leapt to his friend's defense.

> Shibito is a little different from guys his age. He spends time alone, thinks a lot about things . . . That's the way he uses his time, and it's different from a lot of people. Just spending time by yourself, in your house, that's different from renouncing life.
>
> . . . If you compare him to a stereotypical rapper who's out in the clubs every night and picking up girls or whatever, then maybe he looks like a stereotypical *hikikomori*. But it's not like that – he's just a regular person.

Being both a self-directed person and a social creature may be more difficult in Japan than elsewhere. This became acutely clear to me as I got to know Shibito and saw the absurdity of the suggestion that he is a shut-in or isolate of any kind. Though deeply dedicated to art, he is connected to a large network of friends and collaborators. But his introspective nature, occasional social awkwardness, and, perhaps, his radically adventurous music, was enough to earn him a label that many in Japan consider a psychological disorder.

Ceci n'est pas une Subculture

In my description of this musical 'underground,' with its misfit members and sometimes oppositional stance, those familiar with the last half-century of social thought will see connections to the work of a particular group of British scholars, including Dick Hebdige, Angela McRobbie, Stuart Hall, and others associated with the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS). These thinkers blazed a trail in their studies of

British musical subcultures such as the Teddy Boys, punks, and eventually ravers, providing explanations that transcended previous discussions of youth 'deviance'. Historically and structurally, there is much to be said of the parallels between my own subject and those of the so-called subculturists. In particular, Hebdige's treatment – in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Hebdige, 1981) – of the connections between black reggae and white punk in 1970s Britain inevitably informs my discussion of the similar interracial borrowing of blackness in Japan.

But the BCCCS' Marxist turn has become a problem for studies of subculture, weighing them down with an inflated sense of the linkage between class and culture. The term 'subculture' itself was originally coined to describe not music cultures, but lifestyles outside of the supposed mainstream for class reasons, encompassing both working-class daily life and criminal youth gangs, with music only emerging over time as an important focus. Thus studies like *Subculture* assume a great deal of correspondence between musical subculture and class consciousness, as seen in Hebdige's statement that "I have interpreted subculture as a form of resistance in which experienced contradictions and objections to . . . ruling ideology are obliquely represented in style" (133). This statement ties the content of the resistance being lodged against ruling ideology to "experience," and elsewhere Hebdige is clear that he is referring to the experience of members of what he broadly paints as "working-class youth cultures" (45) a category in which he includes the mods, the teddy boys, and the punks.

Hebdige also reinforces the correspondence between experience and expression through an explicit shifting of the terms of discussion away from 'art' and towards 'culture' (128-133). While he allows that class consciousness is a product of discourse, he insists that "each subcultural 'instance' represents a 'solution' to a specific set of circumstances . . ." (81)

This supports the overall perspective that expressions like punk, dance, and hip hop are the outgrowths of certain lifestyles and backgrounds, rather than being themselves in any way constitutive. This mirrors the Marxist base-superstructure model of culture in which economy, or at a stretch social institutions, are determinant of subjectivity, and culture merely the visible aftereffect of this process. Hebdige's strong debt to a structuralist theory of subjectivity is made most clear in a preamble that is, in fact, more Althusserian than Althusser, taking the actual physical shape of a school building as an example of the "structures" of an Ideological State Apparatus (12). On this basis, Hebdige privileges 'first generation' punks as understanding their practice "at a level which remained inaccessible to those who became punks after the subculture had surfaced and been publicized." (122) "Once removed from their private contexts" – that is, from the 'real situations' of the putatively working class subculturists – "by the small entrepreneurs and big fashion interests who produce them on a mass scale, [subcultural signs] become codified, made comprehensible . . ." and are therefore 'incorporated' and basically drained of significance. (96)

If the current study subscribed to this purely economistic structuralist perspective, the entirety of Japanese hip hop could be summarily denied any significance, since it is by definition a second-order phenomenon, already codified and comprehensible. It would, more specifically, be denied any power to shift the consciousness of fans or artists. Hebdige refers to the mass distribution of subcultural symbology as "defusion," a play on 'diffusion' meant to get at its loss of transgressive power. If one is at the end of a subcultural "cycle" (100), implicitly a consumer, there is nothing left in the signs that can offer a path to a new understanding or new life. In fact, the term 'cycle' is itself misleading, for though Hebdige acknowledges that subculture almost inevitably has an element of commercial exploitation,

this is for him a one-way, inevitable decline from radical creativity to irrelevant reproduction (95). There is no room for the idea that any transformative power might lie in culture that has travelled any distance from its class or social origins. In terms of the theories of subjectivity discussed in Chapter 1, he seems a structuralist coming and going, for whom a working-class position elicits the subject's resistive expression, but the opposed power structure inevitably reclaims it. In this he perfectly fits Paul Smith's damning summary: "Orthodox Marxism still by and large holds to that view of the 'individual subject' which installs it as an abstraction, fit only to be assigned a class and thence to be superseded by the processes of history." (Smith, 1988)

Of course, in comparing punk to other working-class subcultures, Hebdige finds that it is special, uniquely able to overturn convention and challenge power. It is as if punk is at once a symbol of the historical, structural process of working-class resistance, and powerful exactly because of its ahistorical uniqueness. This combination of structuralism and an underlying Romanticism is no less troubling because he admits it (1981, 138). It mirror's Smith's further observation "the 'individual' destined to appear at the endpoint of Marx's historical processes is yet another version of the familiar liberal 'subject.' Freedom, as it is used in Marx's texts and in the writings of many of his followers, implies a release for the 'subject' from its alienation in the social and . . . ideology." (7) For Hebdige, the punks are ahistorical in their particular brilliance, invested with the same Romantic-liberal agency that vulgar Marxists posit to emerge 'after' ideology. However, since they didn't ultimately do much for The Revolution, Hebdige must paint the picture of a totally neutralizing co-optation that follows their messy innovation. This idea of subculture as a flower from the dustbin, doomed only to be exploited and destroyed by the machine, has been the strongest legacy of Hebdige's work.

But the painful inconsistencies of this model of subjectivity, history, and subcultural production emerge even within that work. The non-cycle of subculture is described as the tendency to "feed back into the appropriate industries," (95) a phrase that, unintentionally, suggests a mutual link – the latter does not simply feed the former, it feeds *back*. This is the closest Hebdige comes to acknowledging the original feeding of subculture on the signs that surround its members, including mass-produced, commercialized signs – many of which, even in the late 1970s, were versions of previous subcultures. Such an admission would contradict the thesis of "defusion," blurring the line between subversive subculture and insignificant mass culture. A similarly unsettled passage comes when, in a discussion of punk fashion, Hebdige states that "The safety pins and bin liners signified a relative material poverty that was *either directly experienced and exaggerated or sympathetically assumed*, and which in turn was made to stand for the spiritual paucity of everyday life." (115, my emphasis) If removing working-class subcultural signs from "their private contexts" is best described as "defusion," it is inconsistent to claim that the signs of poverty remain legitimate when exaggerated or simply assumed, and then transubstantiated into an abstract message about "spiritual paucity."

What these two moments of self-contradiction point to is Hebdige's ultimately futile struggle to understand symbols as both linked to the 'real experience' of class, and free to transform that situation. While he seems to seek desperately for the degree zero of reality, his subject is symbolism, and between those two there is an unbridgeable, fundamental gap. If there is an agenda to the current project, it is to de-emphasize such evaluative claims, and to instead explore the mechanisms which operate in common across a broad spectrum of cultural politics. Both those who would transform society and those who would maintain the status quo move in the fantastic distance between reality and representation – neither

have any special claim to eliminating it. If anything, what I want to celebrate is a certain self-consciousness that amounts to caution about direct claims for cultural and symbolic power by artists and musicians.

Hebdige's taste in theory may at first suggest an interest in the gap inherent to signification, but he steers his ship unwaveringly through the complicating waters of semiotics and back to the shores of materialism. His near-final analysis of punk's "meaning" relies on Julia Kristeva's thesis that certain uses of language can in fact disrupt signifying systems and, in turn, disrupt the positioning of subordinate groups in language. "The signifying practices embodied in punk," says Hebdige, were "'radical' in Kresteva's sense . . . they gestured towards a 'nowhere' and actively *sought* to remain silent, illegible." (120) He marks a distinction between punk's "attention on *the act of transformation*"and the conservative Teddy Boys' "attention on the *objects-in-themselves*." (124, Hebdige's emphasis) He further emphasizes the importance of such distinctions with reference to Roland Barthes, for whom the "floating" signifier is disruptive of the Law (126).

These statements immediately precede Hebdige's claim that the innovators of the style have a special grasp of its inner essence, so Hebdige is arguing that punk's originators have a privileged semiotic connection to the fundamental lack of any semiotic connection. This strange claim is enabled by Hebdige's Marxist structuralism and his romantic misreading of semiotics. He assumes a class origin for punk that legitimates a pre-symbolic invocation of "experience," then shifts terrain to the symbolic, through which his "experienced" punks can use the floating signifier to disrupt society's normality. But – and this is Hebdige's really crucial misreading of semiotics – the floating signifier is not a *kind* of signifier, with unique revolutionary properties relative to other kinds of signifiers. It is, as Barthes states even within the passage that Hebdige quotes, "the very form of the signifier."

The floating signifier as described by Barthes, and Saussare before him, floats over some signified, in a relationship that is uncertain in the absolute, but that is relatively fixed in any given social moment – a fact that applies no less to the punks than to anyone else. Those bin liners and safety pins rely just as much on the socially-constructed network of signs as any volume of Wordsworth. But Hebdige can barely flirt with the idea that the subjectivity and signifying practices of punks may owe a debt to the network of signs preceding them, that they are anything other than *sui generis* products of class position, of punks' ability to see the 'reality' of social relations and translate them (albeit, he says, only inarticulately) into uniquely powerful language. Signs are toys and tools for expressing the disaffection born of punks' nonsymbolic class identity, and the Sign's effect is always outward, never inward. This is why Hebdige can offer neither any systematically consistent explanation of the substantial role of non-working class people in punk rock, nor any compelling argument for why punk's symbols, so supposedly powerful in themselves, should be assumed to lose that power when they are removed from the realm of "experience." Most profoundly, he is unable to truly engage the question of why one becomes a punk – for him, it is simply the working class youth subculture of its era. The children of the middle class, by contrast, necessarily and automatically become hippies (148).

There is obvious resonance between these ideas and those of the academic and popular critics of hip-hop globalization, those for whom a genre or form is naturally, and should indefinitely remain, firmly tied to a class or racial position. Bynoe claims that "While rap music has been globalized, Hip Hop culture has not been and cannot be," (Bynoe, 2004) and cites commodification as a cause of this Hebdige-style 'defusion' of the culture. More difficult to pin down is the nature of the relationship to art that precedes this defusion. Bynoe lists everyday life, history, and "racial and socioeconomic realities existing in

America" (79) as the foundations of hip hop, but she is careful to dissociate culture from common racial or socioeconomic position. This recreates the problem of choice and determination hidden in Hebdige. Though she hammers on the idea of 'experience,' she does not ultimately base any linkage firmly on it – Bynoe can see better than Hebdige the difficulty of any outright totalizing claim that, for instance, only poor, black Americans can belong to "hip hop culture," which within her lexicon stands against simply being a fan of "rap music." While occasionally hinting at such a link, she bases the distinction most explicitly on a series of concrete knowledges of history and politics. But since these are available to all, they cannot serve to establish a firm and universal boundary between a relationship to music based on deeply rooted group identity, and one based on mere consumption or (to use a less loaded term) education.

Detailed criticism of pieces such as Bynoe's will always find their limit not in the realm of cultural or textual analysis, but of political strategy. The claim of cultural imprimatur is always a claim of power in the face of encroachment. This is not intended as a dismissal, but to highlight the deeper importance of identification as a process, and inextricability even from talking about itself. For all his desire throw the 'floating signifier' against the Law [sic], Hebdige's ethnographic process, abetted by the theoretical shortcomings of Marxism, led him to over-empathize, and perhaps even identify, with the 'true punks' whom he eventually granted the power to signify in meaningful ways. As a black activist on issues of racial justice in America, Bynoe has every reason to protect African-American's unique access to cultural forms they have a primary historical claim to, and which have been consistently useful in political struggles. This project is significantly aided by attacking those who appropriate such significations.

In attempting to refute these same notions, I am, if anything, far more superficially motivated. Like Hebdige, I am subject to the bias of the ethnographer. I know and like the Japanese people I am writing about, and the seriousness of what they're doing makes their friendship useful to my ego. Both in the U.S. and Japan, I bask in the reflected glory of my research's romantic element – I am the intrepid, globe-trotting ethnographer. Furthermore, I'm a white kid who grew up listening to hip hop in the suburbs, particularly the sort of aggressively weird hip hop in which blackness was more likely to appear as either a metaphorical subtext or a broad political message than a more personalized reference point of experience (I've always been a bigger fan of Kool Keith than Snoop Dogg). So, I am particularly predisposed to revel in a free-floating difference and decentering. The idea that the only legitimate way one can relate to cultural texts or styles is through a direct experience shared with their producers is a profound threat to all of these aspects of my identity. It's not surprising, then, that I am working against such strategy, or even that my tendency is to take rather predictably liberal positions in the various aesthetic and political splits around which this dissertation revolves.

At least as important, of course, is the fact that I am an American who spent a substantial portion of my childhood growing up in Japan. In this regard most of all, my story reveals the dark side of liberalism. I was able to have such a radical experience, with all its formative challenges to my self-image, because my father is highly educated, because my government exercises great international power, and because it has in various ways encouraged the shifting of world resources towards military use (my father designs fighter jets). Furthermore, my white skin may, thanks to the representations that I grew up with in America, have helped make me particularly confident about 'who I am,' and more able for that very reason to enjoy the various cultural options and differences I've encountered.

While class and race are only two relatively well-understood elements in the matrix of identity, and neither I nor anyone else likes to think that our identities can be reduced to such terms, my own story shows that they are nonetheless crucial even in the ways we attempt to leave identity itself behind.

Isle of View

I am, in part because of my class and race, inclined to champion the innovation and creativity of my research participants as resistance against a long and continuing tradition of Japanese authoritarianism and authoritarian consciousness. At the same time, I have seen boundless evidence that, while Japanese hip hop arises out of the particular social position of citizens of a wealthy nation, it is equally produced by the decentering force of various elsewheres and alternatives. My observations can be divided into two categories. One I've already suggested as grossly absent from Hebdige may appear at first as its own kind of structuralism – the idea that the sign system preceding subjects has a determining force on them. This is formalized as Lacan's concept of the agency of the Letter. The second decentering force active here, and in subculture more generally, is participants' sense of being surrounded by people who are judging, and whose judgment must be understood and responded to. This is an unconscious sense, and it is one we all share. Lacan was particularly preoccupied with this process, and we encounter it variously in his work as the *speculum mundi*, the desire of the Other, and, most comprehensively, the *objet petit a*.

Instances of the agency of the Letter in the production of subjectivities in Japanese hip hop are legion – in fact, constant. For all their current radical experimentalism, Origami told me that they were originally exposed to hip hop via such crass, mass-marketed channels

as the fluffy global star MC Hammer and the television show *Yo! MTV Raps*. We can see here how massified, commercialized, "defused" signs can in fact remain very much explosive. It is More importantly, it is a demonstration of the materiality of the signifier, what Lacan refers to as the letter, and can be read to imply not just the physical form of the signifier but the network of economic and political relationships that produce it. In this case, Origami's artistic path was in some sense determined by America's strong cultural and economic power in Japan during the early 1990s, itself of course caused in part by the Japanese 'economic miracle' that made the nation such an attractive market.

Some further examples provide a counter to any sense of strict determinism. The rapper Ari 1010 told me that he first heard American hip hop in the early 1990s on a mixtape given to him by a friend, which had no artist information, only a series of dissociated sounds. The mysterious, unlabeled tape helped spark his 15-plus year career as a musician pushing hip hop into strange realms of sludgy metal and experimental noise. Ari speculated to me that the lack of information was crucial to this journey: "Now you have the internet, and tons of magazines, so you can find out anything you want . . . If I was a kid [now], I don't think I'd like it as much. Would you feel like starting something new, with all this information around?" Eventually he found that his favorite music was by the American group Cypress Hill.

Kaori, the associate of Origami who we met briefly at the opening of Chapter 1, had his own run-in with MC Hammer. In one of Hammer's early videos, he told me, there was a DJ in the background, though the song itself contained no elements of turntablism. "He wasn't making any sound. It was just for show." This silent DJ, spinning two records behind MC Hammer, was the inverse of Ari's unlabeled tape – an image without sound to bookend sounds without names. I find myself wanting to explain this fascination more than

Ari's, as if sound is more direct and obvious than this disconnected image; as we will see in more depth in the next chapter, Japanese kids like Kaori are well versed in that unquantifiable thing called "cool," in all its specific blackness, and so it might have taken no more than a pair of sunglasses, a sideways b-boy stance, and a few reserved movements to turn Hammer's DJ into something Kaori wanted to become. At any rate, the image fascinated Kaori, driving him to discover exactly what it meant to be a DJ, and eventually to become a world-class one himself.

These illustrate, first, the basic linguistic principle that Hebdige's Marxism cannot encompass – the absolute bar between signifier and signified, the idea that "no signification can be sustained except by reference to another signification," that the relationship between sign and signifier is ultimately arbitrary, a concept that "has been elaborated since the reflections of Antiquity." (Lacan, 2004). Here that idea is literalized, as pure sounds and images of hip hop are stripped of much (but not all) of their social and historical context in the process of export. Particularly in conditions of globalization, the bar between the signifier and the signified grows huge, and the signifier is left to gesture almost vainly across it to some sense of a source. This is distinct, of course, from saying they are meaningless – in addition to the significant understanding of blackness and black culture that preceded them to Japan, they very quickly came to be integrated into the new grammars of their new context, becoming links in a 'signifying chain' in which each element depended for meaning on others.

These stories also illustrate that it is this very bar that keeps Lacan from simply reiterating Marx's economic determinism in linguistic drag. For as Kaori and Ari 1010 help us to understand, there is a deep human desire to leap that bar, to pull together signifier and signified into some sense of identification and connectivity. Regarding the way boys and

girls progress in their relationship to the signifiers of their gender, Lacan states that "Gentlemen and Ladies will henceforth be two homelands toward which each of their souls will take flight on divergent wings, and regarding which it will be all the more impossible for them to reach an agreement . . ." (2004, 144, SE 501) The image of souls in flight towards an impossible goal suggests that the sliding of the signifier is motivated by our inevitably romantic desire for what we want to find behind it. We seek out some form of solidity – the real group that produced a song, the real practice of DJing, the 'real meaning' of something we take only for a surface – and in this seeking we in fact create a great deal of the meaning we are seeking out. Though Kaori never met the DJ in MC Hammer's video, or in any other way had an 'encounter' or 'experience' with the thing that he initially desired in the image, he nonetheless constructed himself partly as he projected through the image to what he imagined lay behind it.

Decentering is also seen in Japanese hip hop in the form of the *objet petit a,* the desire of the Other, the paranoia of the Other's desire which structures the self. This comes tantalizingly close to appearing in Hebdige's treatment of the moral panics surrounding punk. After all, mustn't there be something in these responses of significance for the punks themselves? Some degree in which society's response matters to them? But in typical fashion, Hebdige focuses all of his psychologizing power on the need of the 'mainstream' to rationalize and incorporate the affront of punk, while granting the punks no cognizance of being watched, reiterating that their subculture is "engendered by history, a product of real historical contradictions" (96-99). One simple way Hebdige might have deepened his image of the gazes being exchanged would have been considering his own. Though we know that he engaged in some ethnography, he does not depict his own process of observation, a move that positions him as an omniscient observer. This is particularly damaging because, as an

academic, he cannot be automatically granted any distance from the mainstream against which the punks arrayed themselves.

The same kind of reflexive complication is certainly at play in my own case. My very access to the artists and musicians I was interested in was frequently facilitated by my position as an American journalist and researcher. More importantly, the aspects of their selves offered to me was always strategic and desiring, the attempt to construct an image for the audience I was seen to represent. The most spectacular instance of this was my encounter with Zeebra, perhaps Japan's most successful rapper at the time of this writing, whose palpable desire to be understood by an American audience constitutes the heart of the following chapter. But I cannot deny the importance of this force even in my interactions with those who I consider both more respectable artists and closer friends than Zeebra.

It is perhaps cold to subject to this sort of analysis the day that Shibito and I spent together at his farm. It was, as I sat there, a great day shared by two friends in the country, indulging in simple pleasures of food, conversation, and silence. I certainly hope that's what it was to Shibito as well. But forces bigger than our own enjoyment pinned us into a situation we had no choice but to play out on some level – the encounter between a researcher and, yes, I will use the coldest term, his subject. I can be generous and allow that to Shibito I was both a friend and a writer – but it was clear he never forgot the latter. He's well known to indulge in philosophizing even among friends, but in this case his discussion of the differences between Western and Japanese aesthetics, or his emphasis on the revolutionary politics of subsistence agriculture, or his opinions on the degenerate slide of Japanese youth into self-indulgence, were clearly not just for my benefit, but for that of an imagined world whose gaze came through my eyes.

This was just one instance of the constant self-positioning that in fact makes up the very substance of 'subculture.' Sarah Thornton, just one of many scholars posing fundamental challenges to Hebdige's romanticism, drew on Pierre Bordieu in her discussion of "subcultural capital," essentially the idea that subculturists engaged in competition to establish their own authority to define the meaning of their identities (Thornton, 1996). What I saw play out before me in talking to Japanese hip hoppers was, almost as much as any opposition against a 'mainstream,' an effort to define friends, enemies, respectable and non-respectable artists within hip hop itself. There was no consensus – while some discussed hip hop pioneer Itou Seikou as an artist who attempted to create a really Japanese form of hip hop as early as the mid-1980s, others dismissed him as "just fashion." Many insisted that Japanese 'thug' rappers were bringing to light a previously unheard reality of Japanese street life, while others dismissed them as continuing the tradition of uncritical copying of America.

The constant resurfacing of America in reference to Japanese hip hop was unmistakable, and it cannot be separated from its direction at me specifically as an American writer. Artists agonized over how to convey to me a sense both that they were loyal to some underlying essence of hip hop found originally in America, and that they were their own creatures, able to create, innovate, and contribute rather than, in the phrase dismissively used by a non-musician friend when I mentioned my interest in Japanese hip hop, "just copying." Here is Homi Babha's ambiguous 'join' – the search for the break along which difference meets, the simultaneous and conflicting desire to sever and cement it. This relationship to the join is a founding pillar of our human agency, constituting at once our pinning by the gazes that precede us and our ability to freely imagine the unknowable desires beyond them. "We are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world. That which makes us

consciousness institutes us by the same token as *speculum mundi*." (Lacan, 1998) That is, we become subjects to the extent that the world is observing us, or, to give the full weight to that 'spectacle of the world,' to the degree we *experience* the world, which "appears to us to be all-seeing." We exist as we watch ourselves being watched. The ethnographer, however they may attempt to escape this role, *is* the *speculum mundi*, the watching world in one person.

Part of what Shibito conveyed to me that afternoon was a desire to evade just this kind of trap. His interest in *jisuujisoku*, subsistence farming, is a metonym for the broader desire for independence, individuality, innovation, and uniqueness that I found in many Japanese rappers' self-image. There was no easy distinction to be drawn here between the 'underground' and other stylistic or economic groups of artists – take for instance the rapper Mars Manie, who copies the American thug-rap style to a T yet declares in the spoken intro to his album *Block to Block* that "I have no influences. It's just me." (in English). What Manie makes painfully obvious, of course, is that such protestations always fail, because to declare one's independence is to declare it for the benefit of another. Even the *hikikomori*, the utter shut-in, is performing for the eye of the Other that lives in their mind. The refusal to perform becomes a performance on a grand scale, and it has successfully attracted the attention of Japanese society.

What is unique about Shibito is that he so obviously works to balance and integrate this impulse with its opposite – he wants to join. The yukata that he and Nanorunamonai wore to our first meeting gestured towards the join of nation. His reverence for farmers was inflected at once with an awe at their self-sufficiency and their importance to society. His Rabbit in the Moon does not only see the various versions of himself, but the various faces of the society around him. The most striking example of this is the track "Enmura Kazoku [Yentown Family]," in which he plays the interlocking roles of children, father, mother, and

obaa-chan as a Japanese family begins its entirely typical day. This is the desire to cross the bar of signification, to know and understand deeply – and as we will see, it is rarely so benign.

That Shibito's own particular kind of retirement from society is a performance does not discredit it or condemn in him some low motivation. To demand that any transformative figure would act only from some internal and self-winding mechanism is to revert to a vision of the subject as an asocial atom. I truly believe that Shibito is among those working to reshape the relationship between the self and society that constitutes the diffuse core of ~~Japaneseness~~. But the site of the break or shift found here does not have the radical character of what Alain Badiou would call the Event (Badiou, 2006). It is rather, in the context of a society for the moment so enmeshed in language and structure, a slippage, at once inevitable and intentional.

Most of the artists I met expressed deep misgivings and hostility towards both Japan's leadership and many of their fellow citizens. They were, in various ways, in their society but not of it – at least not in the way intended by the shifting cast of militarists, oligarchs, bureaucrats, and dictators that led Japan into modernity. These declarations (and the lifestyles which were themselves declarations) had audiences, were intended to fulfill the desires of the various imagined figures for whom they were presenting Japanese culture to be seen. These audiences included Japanese political elites, Chinese and Korean activists, corporate bosses, mothers, sons, and friends. But in the maze of desires between which these Japanese subjects legislated, one seemed to consistently loom in the background – the multifarious, contradictory, and fragmented desire of America.

CHAPTER 3

THE LANGUAGE OF THE OTHER: ENGLISH IN JAPANESE HIP HOP

I first met the members of Origami when interviewing them for an American music magazine. Both came dressed in yukata, traditional men's summer clothing similar to women's more formal kimono. They took me along a back alley, where small, dimly-lit wooden buildings housed a variety of businesses. One was a tiny *izakaya*, a traditional Japanese bar, where a portly, balding man stood over a tiny charcoal grill tending skewered meat. The izakaya had only two tables, and, after removing our shoes, our group was seated upstairs at the larger of them. It was a low table, and we sat on mats, where the proprietor served us a succession of traditional Japanese bar food - grilled fish, pickled cucumber, tofu with bonito flakes. I conducted the interview (at this early stage, with the help of a translator) as we ate and drank.

Anyone familiar with today's Tokyo will recognize that this scene is fairly removed from its daily life. Like most Japanese, Shibito and Nanorunamonai wear Western-style clothing almost all of the time, including at performances. They had chosen the yukata for the benefit of not just myself, but of a documentary filmmaker and a photographer along to take publicity shots. To get to the quaint, tiny wooden bar, Shibito guided us first along a jam-packed street lined with shouting electronics salesmen and touts for bigger, more modern bars, chain outlet izakayas which, for most Tokyoites, would have been just as good. In fact, Shibito told me that night that the small bar and its immediate surroundings were facing imminent destruction as part of a redevelopment plan.

It is tempting to sneeringly point out the obvious – the substantial artifice, planning, and effort required to achieve such an 'authentic' Japanese experience in modern Japan. But I think the deeper point that Origami drove home to me at our first meeting was that the effort was worth it. In part thanks to the pocket of calm and somewhat otherworldly atmosphere so carefully cultivated amidst the noise and garishness of Tokyo, the evening found us steeped in discussions that continue to resonate with me to this day. Later, when Shibito informed me that the restaurant had, indeed, been demolished, we shared a moment of silence, as if paying tribute.

The episode is representative of a broader agenda, as Origami work to reconcile the love of hip hop that is foundational to their artistic and personal identities with the cultivation of a sense of Japanese-ness. Their ambivalence on this issue is palpable, as they recognize the risk of being seen as performing an artificial or romanticized vision of the Japanese past. One element of their strategy for avoiding simplistic self-essentialization is their nuanced take on the Japanese language itself.

> We don't want to 'represent Japan' in some big, dramatic sense. But we think the sound of Japanese is quite beautiful, there's something deep about it. We grew up in this linguistic environment where, yes, there are lots of foreign loan words, but we still listen to thousand year-old folk songs, and learn Japanese history. Even though we don't think of ourselves as representing Japan, the uniqueness of Japanese language, and of Japaneseness, is something we'd like to express. We'd like to be a group that expands the possibilities of Japanese.

The contradictoriness and difficulty of such an aim is made clear even in the statement of it, which acknowledges the deep interpenetration of English into Japanese. Shibito is a student of Japanese aesthetic theory and poetics, and his group has advanced the

art of a uniquely Japanese form of wordplay that makes use of the multiple interlocking meanings of Japanese kanji characters. But among the Japanese literati that he admires are many figures like Natsume Souseki, who spent a miserable but transformative period in England, and whose novels, radical in a Japanese context, were fundamentally shaped by his study of English literature (Nakamura, 1983). Souseki and today's rappers are instances of the same problem: how does an artist achieve difference, self-identity, and the ability to represent a community – intentionally or otherwise – in a cultural context where some other place, some other tradition, is held up as an idealized model? Finally, why is the difference between expressing "the uniqueness of Japaneseness" and "representing Japan" so crucial? For that matter, what exactly does it mean? These issues are bound up in every aspect of hip hop in Japan, from the sounds used to the details of public performance. But partly thanks to the fraught position of English in Japan more broadly, and partly because of the centrality of language to hip hop, it is an issue of particular weight.

The Influence of English in Japan

It is estimated that words adapted from foreign languages make up between 5 to 10 percent of everyday Japanese vocabulary – and of these, somewhere around 80% are derived from English. (Stanlaw, 2003, 12) These are numbers that may in and of themselves trigger a kind of pitying scorn in Westerners, being easily taken as yet another example of the supposed Japanese tendency for imitation. This is exacerbated by what can seem like the frequent mis-use of English as it is transformed in Japan, highlighted on popular Western web sites such as Engrish.com, showcasing humorous (for their audience) examples of Japanese (and now other Asian) English. For Japanese usage of English is a hopeless

attempt to mimic an object of admiration. As in many such perceptions, there is a seed of truth to this.

English loanwords in Japan are often used to confer on the speaker "cosmopolitanism, youthfulness, informality, and good humour" through an association with the West (Hogan, 2003). This is a link of long historical standing, though, not something forged by Japanese passion for 50 Cent. As far back as the mid-19th century, language was an important element of the more general move by the dominant Meiji elite to reverence Western scholarship and society. The most striking example of this is Mori Arinori, a Christian and devotee of Western englightenment values who both constructed Japan's modern education system and campaigned openly for the adoption of English as the national language ((Lie, 2004); (I. P. Hall, 1973); (Cobbing, 2002); see also (Shiga, 1955)). Also significant is the huge influence of Western literature on Japan's most accomplished modern writers, such as Souseki, who, along with Akutagawa Ryunosuke, is often name-dropped in Shibito's rhymes.

The depth of interpenetration of English into Japanese society remains profound. English is a required subject for all students from middle school through the end of high school, and plans are afoot to extend this down to the elementary level as soon as 2010. English proficiency testing is a component of the formulas for promotion into management level positions at many major corporations, regardless of a manager's actual need for the skill (Arita, 2003). As has been chronicled by various scholars, English is now so deeply enmeshed into Japanese everyday language that it would quite literally be impossible to communicate much without it (Hogan, 2003); (Stanlaw, 2004).

Status conferral is the Western critic's easiest interpretation of the presence of English in Japanese hip hop. From naming to performance to lyrics, many Japanese hip

hop acts are clearly lifting terms, styles, and phrases wholesale from American hip hop. Most striking to an American observer is the use, by artists who want to project a tough image, of terms and phrases from gangsta rap in the U.S. Such usage, much like the clothing trends for American streetwear, comes across as a particularly crass kind of imitation. But this interpretation is complicated by the long history of Japanese English, what amounts to its interweaving through the fabric of Japanese society both from the top down and the bottom up. While English study in school is required, the constant flow of English-derived catchphrases through youth culture seems unforced. Not all usage of English is even self-conscious enough to be properly described as such – words like *tabako* have been in circulation long enough that most Japanese would be surprised to hear them described as foreign in origin. Even some very conscious uses can operate in ways that confound a theory of servile imitation – English is simply a part of the Japanese machinery of communication, up to and including its use to express more "subtle value judgments about the West" (Hogan 47).

In this chapter I provide a picture of the usage of English amongst my informants, attempting to evaluate the significance of the appearances (or non-appearances) of English in names and lyrics, as well as examining their own perception of English used by others. My focus here is slightly different than Ian Condry's in a similar chapter. Where he was interested in the transformative effects of hip hop lyrical style on Japanese usage, I want to hone in specifically on the operation of English linguistic influence – though as we will see, this has a strong effect on the usage of more or less 'pure' Japanese.

This focus is in service to my broader theoretical interest in issues of intercultural representation and identity. I was inspired here by a set of subtly startling claims made in James Stanlaw's *Japanese English: Language and Culture Contact*. Stanlaw is generally committed

to undermining the idea, according to him dominant in the study of World Englishes, of 'borrowing' as a mechanism of linguistic transfer. He seeks to replace this, particularly in the Japanese case, with a less straightforward conception that English may "motivate or inspire" more "home grown" items of Japanese English (2004, 35). One study he cites found that only about 50% of Japanese high school students questioned could accurately translate the meaning of the English advertising slogans that suffused their daily lives (Haarmann, 1989). On the basis of this and other evidence, Stanlaw concludes about Japanese English usage that "in the realm of the personal, meaning is sometimes constructed and negotiated by speakers in a particular context, for particular and private purposes." (31) That is, English in Japan is available to be deployed for purposes disconnected from any meaning enforced by a community of 'native speakers,' and it is this very alien-ness of English that makes it more available as a resource for the fashioning of Japanese selves.

Though Stanlaw never refers to him, this insight can be understood more deeply through Lacan's theory of language. After his initial description of the Mirror Stage, Lacan proposed a further dimension of the individual's development into a self-conscious subject – the entry into language. In its simplest terms, this is the process of learning our native tongue, whose meanings allow us to interact with those around us. But for Lacanian theory the most arresting dimension of this process is not the community that is gained, but the elements of life beyond language that are suppressed. For as we learn the meanings of words, we are learning to define ourselves and our experience in terms that precede us, over whose fine contours we have little if any control. "With the cut of the signifier into the libido, our whole biological organism undergoes a massive change . . . what once was whole becomes fragmented. The body is broken up by language and drive into partial objects (breast, anus, eyes, mouth)" (Kay, 2003). This is a division not just of the infant's

undifferentiated self into discrete parts, but of the world into things with particular boundaries and relationships, all of them defined not by the individual, but by the community into which they happen to be born.

This linguistic training is also training in how to be a subject – among other things, how to behave in a world of others. Lacan goes so far as to say that the "psychical and somatic functions" of human life "serve [language] in the speaking subject," that "It is the whole structure of language that psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious [and] the idea that the unconscious is the seat of the instincts may have to be reconsidered." (Lacan, 2004) This is a refiguring of Freud that replaces the unconscious instincts or drives, such as those towards sex and food, with the fundamental structuring power of language to carry value and direct action. Whereas for Freud it is some underlying animality that drives man, for Lacan it is that most human feature – language – that robs us of any true individuality. Lacan asks the disturbing question – "whether, when I speak of myself, I am the same as the self of whom I speak." (2004, 156) The answer, for most subjects, will initially be *no*. The entry into language ends with a subject, not possessed of new gifts for self-expression, but rather speaking the language of the Other – because our words do not belong to us, when we speak, we are not ourselves. Only under great strain and effort can a subject, through the process of analysis, reach a different relationship to its own speech.

The core question of this chapter is not addressed in current psychoanalytic theory. If the language of the community one is born into acts as a determiner of subjectivity, what is the effect of another Other, a second language beyond the language that inaugurates our subjectivity, and traps us in it? For Japan's hip hop musicians, debate over the usage of English is a public proxy for issues of independence, a debate over whether Japanese hip hop can establish its own, new place and become truly Japanese – or whether such a goal is

even desirable. But below this level of political position, what does the practice of English usage show us about the space opened by a second language? Does English, as Stanlaw seems to suggest, hold out the hope of greater freedom, an escape from the entry into language to a more personal form of expression? Or does it constitute, as some critics seem to think, an even more slavish, because conscious and proactive, form of imitation that further sacrifices the self to a language that is even more "other" than Japanese? Despite the bleakly structuralist outlook that is sometimes misattributed to him, Lacan did ultimately maintain the possibility of a free subject, one able to negotiate its own relationship to the images and language imposed upon it from without. This chapter is an attempt to evaluate the role of foreign language in this process of becoming the self.

The Entry into Hip Hop

> What can be read (and perhaps what should be read) is not just meaning, but the lack of meaning.
>
> Shoshana Felman

Origami, by their own admission and as seen in the development of their music, only came to their current emphasis on Japanese language and identity over time. Like many artists who I met, English-language rap, though now certainly on the wane relative to local product, was fundamental to the group's early fascination with hip hop culture. Though early Japanese groups like Scha Dara Parr and Microphone Pager were frequently cited as influences by younger artists, it was almost always alongside American musicians. And despite the constant presence of English in Japan, the interpretation of fast-paced, slang-

laced rap is beyond most young Japanese. This means that much Japanese hip hop is heavily influenced by the absorption of language patterns whose content remained largely opaque.

Artists had varying responses to this situation. In some cases they stated that the impenetrability of English lyrics formed a kind of barrier to their full absorption of hip hop music and culture. Origami cited MC Hammer ("A huge hit in Japan"), De La Soul, and Yo! MTV Raps as early influences, but for Nanorunamonai, there was something incomplete about that early listening. "When you listen to music in English, you can't really get the content, so it's just music. But when Japanese rap started coming out, I understood what they were talking about, what the values where, and that's what made me want to come out and do it." This sense of incompleteness was echoed by Chinza Dopeness ("Dopeness Enshrined"), a rapper with the group Kochitola Haguretic MCs, when commenting on the early development of Japanese hip hop culture: "Since lots of rappers couldn't understand the lyrics, they just mimicked the sound."

Not all pioneers of Japanese rap were content with such a second-order relationship to meaning – some, like the group Buddha Brand, made extraordinary efforts to reach a deeper, realer understanding of the music. From the late 1980s until the mid 1990s, members NIPPS, Dev Large, CQ, and DJ Master Key lived in New York, where they set about learning not just the craft of hip hop, but the subtle contours of the lifestyle that informed it. According to one Tokyo hip hop fan, the band's initial goal was to become a successful American hip hop group, to understand and adapt so well that they would be accepted in the homeland of rap. They were not successful in this, but after coming back to Japan, they became one of the most respected hip hop groups in the country – no doubt helped by the legitimacy conferred by their time in New York.

Other artists I spoke to had a less intense desire for direct understanding. For Rumi, a female rapper whose first beloved hip hop group was Mobb Deep, "You look at the titles, and you don't understand what they're about – only a few words here and there. But it's fun to imagine what they might be talking about." Similarly, the rapper Candle said that "You may not be able to understand exactly what they're saying, or even what they're doing, but you can tell when someone's a real MC. It's a feeling you get from what they're doing." This was in reference, notably, to Mikah 9, a member of the California group Freestyle Fellowship, and one of the most notoriously fast-paced, referential, and generally obscure rappers in history – as I noted to Candle, he's difficult even for *me* to understand. Here the impenetrability of language is not seen as a barrier, but as simply tangential to accessing something deeper in the performance.

As I can attest from my own experience of absorbing Japanese hip hop, these are not irreconcilable responses. Though my Japanese is more than adequate to holding long, sometimes intense conversations about the nature of inspiration, art, and society, it remains frequently stymied in the face of the storm of slang, allusions, half-sentences, and metaphors that the most adventurous rap is full of. In writing this dissertation I frequently set about overcoming these barriers, sitting for hours with two dictionaries and a lyric sheet to get at the complexity of meaning that I already knew lay beyond. But even more often, while walking the streets of Tokyo or Iowa, I was quite content to let the complexities of language pass me by more or less completely and, instead, appreciate the evocative performances that transmitted it.

Each of these responses represents a different rubric of value applied to vocal communication, as well as a more specific dichotomy of values within hip hop. In the first case, the desire to understand is focused on meaning as conveyed by words. This is

particularly important in listening to rap because of the value placed on wordplay, puns, clever rhymes, put-downs, or poetic lyricism. These values have been smoothly transmitted to Japanese hip hop – for example, the term *kotoba asobi*, literally word-play, was sometimes used by people discussing Origami's lyrics. The second evaluative logic regards the denotation of individual words as less important than the power of the voice, as deployed in rap as a tool for performing rhythm, emotional inflection, personality, and other elements not fully captured by the language which the voice carries. The single term that captures this most effectively is "flow" in English, and has, like wordplay, been literally translated to Japanese – *nagareru.*

Mladen Dolar, in his consideration of the division between voice and word, identifies exactly the logic that can make rap you don't understand nonetheless compelling (Dolar, 2006). As Dolar puts it, the human voice "points towards meaning . . . raises the expectation of meaning." (14) It is the nature of the voice itself, that central element of hip hop, that encourages Rumi and I alike, from across the language barrier, to "imagine what they might be talking about." The structure of the voice/language split further directs our imagination in particular ways. The act of speaking language is one of the most important ways we would like to conceive of ourselves as subjects, as freely acting individuals – "the process of enunciation points at the locus of subjectivity." (23) But as Dolar points out, formal language, the signifier, is that which is "pinned down and fixed – fixed in view of its repetition." (16) This is the consequence of the Lacanian entry into language. All of the words have been spoken, all the meanings determined, before we pick them up.

Even more profound than the barrier that exists between languages is this barrier that exists within them – the barrier between the language we have been given and our ability to use it to truly speak of ourselves. One of the greatest joys of hip hop in any

language is the way that it constantly works to transcend this barrier through the unending transformation and innovation of language[6]. When we encounter the incomprehensible, the arrow of the voice directs our hope towards finding some kernel of true freedom, not just within language, but more broadly. Dolar finds that we inevitably encounter this sentiment in the face of beautiful singing: "let the voice be the bearer of what cannot be expressed by words . . ." The signifier is only "the limit to transcend . . . the voice appears as its surplus-meaning." (30) In the uncomprehended signifier, we find the voice, and we are drawn to seek a truth greater than that found in 'mere' words[7].

At the same time, though, it must be remembered that speech in English does not consistently have this character of the 'pure' voice for Japanese audiences. First, this is because English is widely understood, if only in fragments, or in localized forms that have little relation to the English spoken elsewhere. Second, because even when the meaning of

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6 Though the examples are endless, perhaps the best is the American rapper Ghostface Killah, who is particularly notorious for using words in unorthodox ways, things that leave a listener stumped until they undertake a leap towards meaning.

7 This may offer an explanation of the degree to which Japanese use of English seems sometimes to exceed possible attribution to either any historical naturalization or practical necessity. One prime instance is the huge size of the *eikaiwa*, or English-language conversation, business in Japan. This includes both multimillion-dollar corporations like the now-defunct Nova system, and a vast informal network of private instruction. Jeff, aka Dj Psy-kick of Memory Storm, frequently works in both the Japanese public school system and the *eikaiwa* world, and in conversations with him and other English instructors an interesting picture emerged. Though a large portion of the business for *eikaiwa* is made up of students cramming for tests or businessmen readying themselves for promotion, another sizable chunk could be characterized as 'social learners.' For them, *eikaiwa* was more a chance to unwind than to learn English, and, according to the observations of their teachers, their main goal seemed to be socializing with instructors and fellow students. Some teachers told me of students who shared profoundly personal thoughts and feelings in the course of teaching. These instructors felt that the context of English encouraged some students to exceed the limits of normal Japanese socialization. In this sense, the surplus of English students in Japan may correspond to the 'surplus' of significance with which English is imbued beyond its mere power of signification.

English words and phrases presents a barrier to meaning that excites the imagination of what might lie beyond, the meaning of "English" itself, though not quite fixed, is multiply determined by Japan's long engagement with the English-speaking West. Even more specifically, in the context of Japanese hip hop, English evokes multiple meanings as a whole – it is not just a powerful sign of the West and America, but of African-America and its multiplicity of associations.

These broad associations are joined in various ways to the local – local language, local concerns, local subjectivities – in Japanese hip hop. In the specifics of these articulations we find a clear and specific set of meanings attributed to English words and to the use of English itself, as well as a force that impels those meanings further with the force of fascinated misunderstanding. The element of the super-semiotic, the meaning of speech behind, above, beyond the sign, is activated in all of the frequent uses of English within Japanese hip hop, the pure voice as the "arrow of meaning." But this arrow points towards nothing simple, instead open to usage in multiple contexts and 'aimed' at multiple purposes.

Four Lyrical Englishes

Before looking more closely at lyrics, it's important to make one general distinction. This is the division between what is termed *wasei eigo*, English-derived words that have become part of everyday Japanese usage, and English proper – or, more exactly, language that is assertively marked out as English for an intended Japanese audience. I will try to highlight cases that illustrate the distinction as I encounter them, but there are a few general points. First, *wasei eigo* usually consists of nouns (or verb-shifted nouns) written in *katakana*, the Japanese syllabilary script reserved for borrowed terms. More self-conscious usage of

English proper is usually marked by being written in Roman characters, using English rather than Japanese spelling of terms. Phrases, catchphrases, or slang are often in this category.

Shingo Nishinari: English as a Lever of Social Values

One of the Japanese rappers who makes the most striking use of English goes by the name Shingo 西成[Nishinari]. Nishinari is associated with Libra records, also home of Shinjuku's MSC crew[8]. Here's a selection from the song "I'm Still," from Shingo Nishinari's debut EP, *Welcome to Ghetto*. The song is, in contrast to much of the rather complicated or downbeat music I've focused on, cleanly-recorded, heavily melodic, and cheerful, in the vein of such American hip hop mega-hits as the Notorious B.I.G.'s "Hypnotize." In order to clarify the distinction between English and *wasei-eigo* in this passage, these lyrics are in their original written Japanese, rather than transliterated into Roman characters. All the passages in Roman text appear that way in the lyrics sheets and are performed in English on the record. On the right, I've provided a translation, with phrases that were already in English italicized.

Chorus:	Chorus:
止まらない、終わらない	I won't stop, it's not over
いつも地元　Of my Mind　（x 4）	The hometown's always *of (on*[9]*) my mind*.

[8] MSC are very important figures in today's underground scene, and even helped introduce Origami early in their careers. I was told by a third party that Origami are "only known" because they performed shows with MSC early on, highlighting the fact that despite the apparent divergence between one group's artistic, poetic bent and the other's focus on society's dark side, they share common cause at a deep level.

[9] I think "Of my Mind" is a mistranslation or misperception on Nishinari's part of the English "On my mind." This is speculative.

Verse 1:

Welcome to Ghetto！ポリ署目と鼻の先で人生 The End は No!や

ハローワークじゃなくてゲットーワーク！れっとうかん;劣等感じゃなくゲットー感！

Good Morning じゃなく Ghetto Morning！大い盛り上がれば Don't Worry!

まだウオーミングアップ Rap ラプソヂイ、共に歌う路地うば Homies!

Verse 1:

Welcome to Ghetto! Even right in front of the police, the *End* of life is *no!*[10]

It's not "Hello Work," it's ghetto work！We don't feel inferior, we feel ghetto!

It's not *Good Morning*, it's *Ghetto Morning*! If you're getting worked up, *Don't Worry*!

I'm still just warming up my *Rap* rhapsody、singing with my alleyway *Homies*!

As much as any artist whose work I cover here, Shingo Nishinari fits the portrait of the "Yellow Negro" Joe Wood sought (and found elusive) (Wood, 1997). He adopts black American slang with abandon – here 'ghetto,' but over the course of the "Welcome to Ghetto" EP he shouts out his "Party people in the place to be," inviting them to "rock the house," while also acknowledging the importance of "Roots & Culture" and calling on the strength of his "brother men, brother men." Lines like this might amount to a red flag of inauthenticity for critics of a certain stripe. Certainly this is a rampant misuse, the deployment of black lingo as a 'spice' for the bored youth of the Japanese middle class, just as it was first borrowed by white Americans (hooks, 1999)?

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[10] A less literal translation would be "life doesn't stop." This is likely an indirect reference to the widely known lawlessness of Nishinari, where "life" – that is, drug dealing and other forms of criminality – is simply ignored by the police.

Context is key here, though. "Nishinari" is not this rapper's real name, but a tribute to his home, the Nishinari section of Osaka. Nishinari is one of the relatively rare areas well-known for its poverty in ostensibly egalitarian Japan. It was the site of notorious 1990 worker's riots that saw many dead due to police brutality – a rough Japanese equivalent of the Los Angeles uprising – and in the economic downturn since then, its populace has come to be highly dependent on welfare payments ("Osaka's Impoverished Nishinari District Kept Afloat by Welfare," n.d.). It is considered a lawless area, where drug dealing is common and yakuza are highly visible, and it is rumored to still be the hideout for fugitives from the Aum Shinrikyo sarin-gas attacks on the Tokyo subway system in 1995.

Knowing the rapper's background allows a more nuanced evaluation of his use of English. Perhaps the key point of this verse is the passage 'rettoukan janaku gettoo kan!', which simultaneously rhymes and contrasts the Japanese term for 'inferiority complex' (*rettoukan*) with the neologism *gettookan* - 'ghetto complex' or 'ghetto mind.' The phrase rejects the inferiority complex foisted on those from Nishinari – and more broadly, on all Japanese who are poor, different, and therefore excluded – and replaces it with a 'ghetto feeling.' This is an attempt by Nishinari to apply, through invoking the English term 'ghetto,' an entirely different value system on his background. Aside from the song's relentlessly upbeat backing track, this comes across in the couplet "It's not Hello Work/It's Ghetto Work." This is a reference to the book *Juusansai no Haroo Waaku* [A Thirteen-year-old's 'Hello Work'], released in 2003 to much popular attention (Murakami, 2003). The book is a career guide for youngsters, apparently at least partly aimed at stemming the growth of uncommitted, unprofessional part-time work among young adults, a phenomenon which will be discussed in a later chapter. But *Haroo Waaku* is clearly intended for relatively privileged children – for example, among the dozens of career choices described at a sixth-

grade level is that of post-doctoral researcher. As one commentor on Amazon complained, "If a 13 year old were to read this book, I think it's very likely they would take for granted social discrimination against people in certain [non-elite] jobs."

The cheerful half-English title and the book's class bias represent one particular way English is taken up in Japan. *Haroo Waaku* would be understood for its essential meaning by most Japanese people, but it is a recent borrowing rather than *wasei eigo* – that is, its 'Englishness' is foregrounded. Though some teenagers may adopt a cheerful "Haroo" as a slightly idiosyncratic way to greet friends, and many grade-schoolers seem to prefer it when lobbing practice English towards a suspected foreigner, it has not entered common usage – in contrast to, for example, "bai-bai," a casual goodbye even among grown men. *Waaku* is rarely if ever used in conversation to replace the Japanese "hataraki." The display of English is self-conscious, not incidental, and its tone is notable – English is here, as we will see elsewhere, used to capture an upbeat cheerfulness, a sweetly optimistic tone, as if beyond the cover lay office cubicles lit by rainbows and smelling faintly of lavender.

Nishinari uses a different kind of English, to different ends. He alternates between the English word 'Ghetto' ["Welcome to Ghetto!"] and the Japanese 'ゲットー [Gettoo]' ["Rettoukan Janaku, Gettoo kan!"]. As a loanword written in katakana, 'gettoo' appears in Japanese dictionaries and would be widely understood. In fact, as with 'ghetto' in English, its usage in Japanese long predates hip hop, and it is similarly used in reference to pre-World War II Jewish ghettos. But the alternating use of the English 'ghetto,' a distinction as clear in Nishinari's pronunciation as it is in the written lyric sheet, reinforces the term's connection to poor African-Americans as represented in American hip hop. In that context, "ghetto" isn't a wholly derogatory term, usually invoked instead as an expression of solidarity and affirmation of roots. Even more importantly, the ghetto in American hip hop always

implies its own transcendence, the ascent from poverty to success that is simultaneously the definitive American myth and, in the 20th century, of particular significance for African-American society.

By affirmatively contrasting "Hello Work" with "Ghetto work," Nishinari is contrasting a value system that gauges success by academic and professional standards with the Horatio Alger story of self-empowered African-American ascent. He makes this clear by alternating *wasei eigo* with English, which gestures to a less fixed realm of meaning. What's going on here is not the appropriation of an exotic term to 'spice up' a stereotypically banal and conformist Japanese life, but an attempt, through the use of borrowed terminology, to shift Japanese values to accommodate a life that doesn't fit dominant Japanese norms. Nishinari is attempting to channel the manner in which American hip hop affirms the value of life in and from the ghetto, and he is doing so, in part, by attempting to increase the degree to which the terms' counterpart in Japanese carries connotations of contemporary America.

This short passage is representative of Nishinari's lyrics and outlook more broadly, particularly in the cleverness of his rhyming between Japanese and English, and his extensive use of English outside of the normal palette of hip hop slang. Like more than a few of my informants, he speaks a smattering of English, which he attributed to the community of travelers that pass through Nishinari. The district is full of business hotels offering very inexpensive bare-bones accommodations, some catering to the area's impoverished day-laborers, while others (as far as I could tell, largely separate) get the international backpackers. This odd combination of the high and low, painfully local and joyfully international, seems to have left Shingo-san with a simultaneous attraction to the signs of

foreignness, and some skepticism towards attempts to use those signs to represent a shallow optimism.

Chiyori: English and the Personal Self

Though in the case of Shingo Nishinari there is a strong and specific association between a certain kind of English and what might be termed 'hip hop values,' this is far from the only significance of English usage in Japanese 'black music'. The reggae singer Chiyori, a friend of the Temple-ATS crew whose album was released on the Mary Joy label alongside Candly and Ari 1010, cited almost entirely different motivations when we discussed her choice to write many of her songs with English choruses and/or titles, such as "Shooting Star" and "Call Me."

"Using English at the climax of a song, changing from Japanese to English, has more impact," she said. "It's more catchy . . . You can imagine more when you hear it in English." Though this sentiment resonates strongly with comments about listening to American rappers and, as Rumi put it, "imagining what they might be saying," there's an important distinction in that Chiyori does intend and expect the literal meaning of the English phrases she uses to be understood. She told me that any Japanese would understand the meaning of short, simple phrases like "Call Me." That listeners could nonetheless "imagine more" suggests that though the basic meaning of such a phrase will be easily grasped, it is in some sense not as complete an understanding as of a native term. In reference to the song "Shooting Star," Chiyori said that "there are really a lot of songs called 'Nagareboshi [Shooting Star]' in Japanese, and the English just sounds a little more . . . spacy[11]."

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[11] Without missing a beat, Chiyori here used a Japanese word of English source – "speeshii"

Both the English and Japanese terms are 'spacy' in the more direct sense of something having to do with stars and outer space, but the English is also 'spacy' in the sense that, as Stanlaw finds with English in Japan more generally, it is more open to highly individualized interpretation – it allows more 'space' for the self. In contrast, the Japanese term is fixed through its frequent use – as Dolar puts it, "pinned" – in a sense that extends beyond a mere fixity of meaning to a more internal and subjective experience in which a native language is heard as deterministic or boring. In this sense, the use of English serves Chiyori's artistic ends, which are often focused on decidedly personal, inward-turning sentiments. For example, "Call Me" was a song written during her first few months in Tokyo, when she began to feel lonely, and increasingly doubtful about the likelihood of succeeding in music. For her, the request to "Call Me" is in part a reminder to others who might feel discouraged that human connection can be a source of strength.

Zeebra: Lyrical Gangster

Zeebra is one of the biggest rappers in Japan as of this writing, and the shifting strategies of English usage over the course of his long career capture many dimensions of the significance of language in translated culture. He began making music in the mid-1990s as part of the group King Gidhora, along with DJ Oasis and MC K Dub Shine. K Dub Shine seems to have set the group's policy regarding English, resisting it in favor of working to develop a purely Japanese style of rap. This was part of a much larger debate going on at the time, in which one side asserted that certain features of the Japanese language made it simply impossible to adapt to hip hop, and the other asserted that Japanese, like other languages, was a perfectly capable vehicle for the flowing rhythm, rhyme patterns, and general linguistic creativity that made up good rap. King Ghidora turned out to be hugely

important in that debate, producing a body of high quality work that demonstrated the viability of rap in Japanese.

By the time I spoke to Zeebra in 2009, though, his priorities had changed. After the slow dissolution of King Ghidora as a group, Zeebra had established a solo career, and become one of the most commercially successful rappers in the country. His solo records, though, in contrast to the work of King Ghidora, contained a lot of English. For instance, on his most recent album, 2007's *World of Music*, only one song out of sixteen has no English in the title. Most of these are hip hop catchphrases familiar to fans of American hip hop, or variations on those themes – "Stop Playin' a Wall," "Lyrical Gunman," "We Leanin'," etc. Aside from the titles, the songs are thick with English – for instance, "Lyrical Gunman" is roughly half English, including the chorus, while the verses switch back and forth from English to Japanese easily. Zeebra's themes on this album consist of little beyond clichéd hip hop bravado, making the line between recycled catchphrases from actual rapping in English, but the facility of the lyrics does reflect Zeebra's nearly fluent command of English. This is in notable contrast to K Dub Shine, whose solo output has maintained the earlier group's focus on Japanese language as a core value.

The reasons for these stances, and changes in them, are remarkably complex. K Dub Shine is an overt and open Japanese nationalist, arguing for the uniqueness of the Japanese people and promoting anti-foreign sentiment. Zeebra, though less articulate and explicit in his views, has argued for the reconsideration of Japan's World War II actions, a common nationalist position. Michael Billig has said about language and nation that "national languages also have to be imagined, and this lies at the root of today's common-sense belief that discrete languages 'naturally' exist . . . The assumption that different languages 'naturally' exist illustrates just how deeply nationalist conceptions have seeped into

contemporary common sense." (Billig, 1995) K Dub Shine's insistence on rap in Japanese operates on this logic, equating Japanese strength with creativity in the Japanese language. This is in line with the politics of figures like Masahiro Fujiwara, whose *Kokka no Hinkaku [The Dignity of the Nation]* was a bestseller and contained substantial arguments against the interpenetration of English into Japanese daily life (Fujiwara, 2005).

But the case of Zeebra shows that thinking beyond a constructed national language can be compatible with nationalism. When we spoke, he suggested that the project of promoting rap in Japanese was no longer as relevant as it had been in the 1990s. "Now rap in Japanese is everywhere," making it unnecessary to continue proving the point, and opening up the possibility of measuring the use of English vs. Japanese according to different priorities. On the one hand, this seems to have brought him to a certain kind of cosmopolitanism, an understanding of hip hop as universal.

However, Zeebra seemed conflicted about this English-based universalism, showing some resentment of the conditions he occupies. "[Japanese youth] didn't have shit. They just listen to U.S. music like it's some kind of God or something... they love outside the country. They love America, they love Europe..." But he seemed more than willing to accept what he saw as the reality of the field that he competes on. "That's why we [Japanese] have to come up with the most updated hip-hop, image, and fashion and stuff – to make sure, to just have the feeling that we're not late . . . I'm trying to give them a dream." This is the dream of success and even dominance on the international stage, which he compared to the successes of Japan's national baseball and soccer teams in the late 2000s. That this level of success, the goal of being a truly international hip hop star, requires the adoption of English as a lingua franca seems to sit with slight discomfort.

It also requires a particular conception of English's function. In contrast to Chiyori's use of English as a way to break open the fixity of the Japanese linguistic matrix and find a place for less determined meanings, Zeebra calls on English itself as a fixed and certain node of signification, one that can even provide at least some element of understanding between Asian nations. This suggests English as a fixed center around which international hip hop orbits, a significant contrast to the idea that English exists as a realm 'elsewhere,' an opening up to difference and flexibility.

Origami: Ironizing English

Zeebra's stance clarifies the importance of Origami's distinction between 'representing Japan' and, on the other hand, exploring Japanese language and Japaneseness. Ironically, the former is compatible with the adaptation of foreign elements, because it assumes an unchanging essence that cannot be located in any form of expression, but resides instead within the Japanese person. Origami's commitment to Japaneseness is, as Futatsugi clarified for me, an interest in "Japanese culture and art" – the specific forms that shape a nation, not an underlying essence. This mindset demands a more critical attitude towards the importation of 'foreign' words, though defining exactly what is foreign remains tricky. Nonetheless, the upshot is perplexing – for an overt nationalist, English and foreign culture more generally are unproblematic because they cannot trouble the Japanese self, and only represent a field of competition in which the Japanese must excel. On the other hand, for cosmopolitans such as Origami, foreign culture is regarded as problematic exactly because there is no underlying essence, leaving form the only substantial element of "Japaneseness."

This polemical stance emerges, for instance, in Origami's "Sanzu," a song named after the Buddhist equivalent of the River Styx.

Tengoku to jikoku	Heaven and Hell
Mai ni narareruka hai ni narareruka	Will we enter dancing, or crawling?
genkoku to hikoku	Plaintiff and traitor
Uttaeru gawa utairarerugawa	The accuser or the accused
Sono hasamata no Sanzu no kawa	The Styx flows in the gap between
ittai	Who's the ruler of
Dare ga	This *Shiney* land of *Sunshine*
Shihainin	
Shiney	
Sunshine furu tairiku	

When I asked Shibito about it directly, he insisted this passage is both highly personal and highly abstract – a set of questions that each person must ask themselves. But it simultaneously suggests a more politicized and social reading. *Tairiku* is a term literally meaning "island nation," and is sometimes used to suggest Japan specifically, making the question of plaintiff or traitor, accuser or accused, a collective one. It is tempting, of course, to connect this explicitly to past war crimes, but this is only one limited reading of a more general skepticism towards rulers, one that could rightfully be directed toward any developed imperial nation, encompassing not just a shadowy past but an exploitative present in which all citizens are implicated.

What interests me here is eruption of English into the place of this guilt, laid at the feet of rulers, but also, as Shibito emphasized, the individual. The defensive strategy against the guilt of belonging to an advanced society is to evade engagement by declaring Japan a "*Shiney* land of *Sunshine*." The evasion is multiple – the praise of sunshine is, at the level of meaning, a switch from the political to an unconnected reverence for the natural. It is also

an evasion at the level of connotation, since the praise of "the sun" in Japanese would inevitably summon up not just natural beauty but the Sun Goddess Amaterasu and the Rising Sun flag, still tied up with the ghosts of war and militarism. The stark contrast between, on the one hand, heaven and hell in the balance and a supposedly "Shiney, Sunshiney" Japan is ultimately that between serious engagement and a fantastical detachment from the issues, and English is specifically identified with fantasy, evasion, and the refusal to face a complex issue.

The use of English here is identified specifically as a defensive strategy of Japanese officialdom, a sort of false claim to positivity and progressivism that in fact conceals stagnation. These can be linked to real-life rhetorical moves made by the Japanese government in recent years, who have used English to attract attention to policy initiatives. Some of these are apparently innocuous, but illustrative, such as "Cool Biz" – a catchphrase coined to encourage business workers to remove their ties and jackets in offices in the summer and thus save energy on air conditioning. Another example is the "Green New Deal" (Guriin Nyuu Diiru), a proposal to prioritize investment in clean energy solutions advanced by both of Japan's leading political parties in early 2009. The concept, and its name, were lifted quite directly from then newly-elected U.S. President Barack Obama.

The skepticism towards such phrases was obvious among my leftist friends. As I sat with Terada and Futatsugi one Wednesday at the vegetarian cafeteria run by members of the Shirouto no Ran anarchist collective, Terada commented, to noone in particular, that "This 'Green New Deal' Aso is talking about is all lies." But rather than critiquing the policy itself, Terada quickly found himself explaining just what the English phrase meant – "The first New Deal was under Roosevelt . . ." etc. Japanese will recognize the meaning of the individual, very simple terms "Green," "New," and "Deal," but are less likely to have a

frame of reference for the idea of the "New Deal" and its historical context. Even the English phrase "Green" is rarely equated in Japanese discourse with the kinds of efforts it is used to connote here, which are more often labeled with another borrowing - "Eco." For those with less critical and skeptical mindsets, the phrase itself constitutes a kind of impenetrable, but for that very reason important and powerful, symbol. It falls into the category of English described by Stanlaw as intended to impress and intimidate, rather than communicate.

Though this verse does not characterize Origami's treatment of English as a whole, it is a crucial example because it emphasizes that many Japanese recognize English coinage as a bearer of false optimism, cynical manipulation, and deception – including self-deception. Origami are pointing out the shortcomings of looking 'beyond' the local or national language and heritage for local solutions, and this critique is not confined to politicians. Though it is important to remember that they do themselves use English more neutrally in other lyrics, and acknowledge its inextricability from their lives and artistic work, lines such as those examined above express a deep ambivalence towards the meaning of that usage.

Naming, Industry, Destiny

> Thus the subject, too, if he can appear to be the slave of language is all the more so of a discourse in the universal moment in which his place is already inscribed at birth, if only by virtue of his proper name.
>
> Jacques Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious; or Reason Since Freud."

Aside from the use of English in song lyrics, the vast majority of Japanese hip hop acts have names derived from English, and particularly from hip hop slang. This extends to

less-known and underground artists, with some examples encountered in Japan in 2009 including Essencial, El-One, and Ken the 390. These names even mimic transformative and referential strategies common in American rap names – compare to Mystikal, El-P, and Royce the 5'9". Even many who don't imitate English names, such as by using their own proper names, write them in Roman script. The alternative is often to write a name in kanji, the Japanese adaptation of Chinese Hanzi pictographic script, and it is not insignificant that this would erect an obvious and clear barrier to any imagined Western onlooker. Though a Japanese name written in Roman script may be somewhat opaque to a Westerner, and *wasei eigo* names in Roman letters often end up exemplary of so-called "Engrish," the kanji alternative is completely meaningless to most non-Japanese[12], and proper names in particular are often challenging even for Japanese readers. Since the start of hip hop in Japan, the proportion of groups with 'native' Japanese names has increased dramatically, but these remain overwhelmingly underground and the most popular Japanese hip hop acts still have names like Thug Family and M-flo[13].

There's a special significance, then, to Origami's choice to identify themselves in kanji, and moreover to use a particularly Japanese style of wordplay. The group's name is actually 降神, a neologism which is read phonetically as "Origami" and means 'descending gods.' The name is something like a pun, and even Japanese unfamiliar with the group often

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12 Though most Chinese readers could wring some meaning out of these names, the phonetic readings of kanji in Japanese and Chinese are different.

13 Though still "English", the name of the very popular mainstream group Rip Slyme is an ironic comment on this practice. As pronounced in Japanese, in which there is no distinction equivalent to that between the English L and R sounds, the name can be just as easily heard as "Lips Rhyme." This reversal is spelled out in the title of the group's first album, and though its exact intent is ambiguous, the pun (?) clearly highlights the distance between Japanese use of English and English proper.

mistook it for the homophone meaning "paper folding" (written 折紙). Aside from its frustration of domestic expectations, this name choice forms a significant barrier to easy international exposure for the group. First, there is the fundamental practical problem kanji useage that faces any Japanese artist – when I write about Origami or other Japanese groups who normally write their names in kanji in American magazines, it is essentially impossible for my American readers to independently locate information about them intended for a Japanese audience, for example through internet search engines. But arguably more significant is the semiotic confusion that will adhere to the group's name for any American. Origami in its more common sense is of course widely known in America, where books like *1000 Paper Cranes*, often read in American primary schools, strongly link paper art to Japan and Japanese identity. When writing about Origami, the group, in English, it is impossible to dissociate this meaning from their entirely different name. The almost inevitable perception is that the group are engaged in a kind of self-Orientalizing kitsch that is, at the very least, simplistic compare to their real strategies for articulating and exploring Japanese identity[14].

This multiply-determined linguistic entrapment is one direction from which to read the name chosen by Shibito's partner, Nanorunamonai. This is actually a phrase, and can be translated as "I call myself unknown" or "No name to call myself". Though of a highly personal resonance, it's a sentiment that also reflects on the Japanese linguistic position. On the one hand is the inescapable influence of English, which both at home and abroad triggers accusations of inauthenticity and 'mere' appropriation. On the other, the Japanese language is marked, particularly for any international audience but almost as much so for

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[14] By contrast see the conscious and intentional – one is tempted to say 'genuine' – self-Orientalization of the Teriyaki Boyz, a 'supergroup' of Japanese rappers who are goofy and self-deprecating in a way that recalls the Beastie Boys.

Japanese themselves, as an assertion of otherness, a self-conscious element of "Japaneseness" as such. This is particularly true within hip hop, where English and Roman characters are essentially so much the norm that to write in one's own language is a self-conscious gesture. Neither set of words/language is truly natural, leaving no name, no word, left able to capture the unique self.

This can be contrasted with the more apparently straightforward Shibito – "Self-willed Person." This is a name that expresses ultimate faith in self-identity, in the idea that all action and significance comes from within. It is a name that, in a sense, disavows the significance of naming – for what needs a name, or for that matter language, when all meaning comes from individual will and action? This assertion is particularly significant in the Japanese context, in which the obliteration of individuality was an explicit aim of the emperor-worshiping wartime militarist regime whose shade still lingers. It can be connected to a much more immediate context through the rumors that Shibito was a shut-in. In part by declaring himself "Shibito," a person driven by his own will, Yoshimoto seems to have invited the sort of social skepticism supposed to have driven the *hikikomori* in their retreat from Japanese society.

In these two names we find two different ways of understanding the contradictory pair of claims with which we began – at once, the disavowal of any desire to "represent Japan," while also retaining a deep interest in Japanese language and culture. To not hedge that bet is to become someone like, for example, the rapper Uzi, who as described by Condry self-consciously piles on markers of Japanese identity, including samurai swords and ornate calligraphic kanji. In Lacanian terms, a cultural nationalist like this is fully trapped by the language – including iconography and rhetoric – he was born into. But no less trapped are figures like Thug Family, who wrap themselves in the iconography and language of

American gangsta rap, as in song titles including "This is My Life," "Gangsta Music," "Criminal," and "Thug Life."

Origami seem to be attempting to evade this dual trap, in at least three ways. Nanorunamonai, he with no name, also primarily explores topics of love and family, writing about, for example, his young children. This is contiguous with his declaration that he has no name, for love is in one sense a loss of the self in another. Shibito, on the other hand, attempts to evade the trap in which language places the self through an even more fierce concentration on the self, a delving inwards into his own psyche that will perhaps reach a location beyond culture. Both of these, of course, are formally failed efforts – while love may be a loss of the self, it is also a kind of ultimate narcissism in which one begins to find oneself in everything and everyone. And to pursue the pure self is to chase turtles all the way down – particularly for a lyricist, who must use language in those explorations.

We Turn Our Voice To Thee

Ian Condry claims that while from outside, the use of English in Japanese hip hop can look like 'westernization,' its local significance is as a critique of "notions of ethnic difference derived from assertions of the timeless character of the Japanese language," (2006, 137), a link explored by Harumi Befu (Befu, 2001) and Roy Andrew Miller (Miller, 1982). More generally, Condry characterizes English as an attempt to change "old, elitist ways" in Japan (162). This claim harmonizes with other research, notably Stanlaw's conclusions that English often represents modernity and progress. These conclusions are based largely on surveys of Japanese people's own impressions of what English connotes to them.

Most of these assessments aim towards the uncovering of the 'hidden' meaning behind English in Japan – the ascent from the literal meanings of words towards an understanding of what the use of those words themselves suggests or evokes. This exploration of second-order connections is part of a common mode of literary or cultural criticism, sharing features Shoshana Felman finds in the Freudian school of psychoanalytic reading (Muller & Richardson, 1987). Simply put, such approaches are focused on depth, on the 'behind' of signification. Felman contrasts this with the Lacanian approach to reading, which she declares radically different. This second approach seeks not to understand either the manifest or the 'hidden' content of signification, but the relationships between people (readers) that are structured by their relationship to signs. What must be read is not the hidden referential content of a sign, but "the superficial indication of its textual movement." (148) This approach is exemplified for Felman in Lacan's "Seminar on the Purloined Letter," and I will use that essay as a model for evaluating the differential relationships that are structured around and by the various uses of English we have seen here.

Lacan's seminar is an analysis of Edgar Alan Poe's short detective story, "The Purloined Letter." In it, an incriminating letter is stolen from a Queen by a conniving Minister, then recovered by the keen detective, Dupin. Lacan's analysis is focused on how, far from being the story of three figures in competition over a mere letter, this is the story of how the movement of the letter determines the motivations and even personalities of the three figures. For instance, the Queen, falsely assured of the blindness of the King, initially hides the letter in plain sight, only to have it filched by the perspicacious Minister. But the Minister, rather maintaining his sharpness, as would a self-identical and stable subject, is overtaken by the same misplaced sense of security as soon as the letter is in his grasp – only to have it in turn stolen by Dupin. The manner in which the position of the letter changes

these characters is a very specific exploration of Lacan's fundamental idea that "it is the symbolic order that is constitutive for the subject." (Muller & Richardson, 1987)

The actual content of the letter is not mentioned in or relevant to the events of the story – all that matters is that the players in the drama care about it and compete. Lacan takes advantage of this odd feature of Poe's story to highlight the more broadly applicable divide between what he calls (using the terms in a way not necessarily compatible with their usage elsewhere in his own work) the levels of the sign and of the symbolic. The sign is the territory of the "seer," narcissistically certain of their own competence and safety. The sign is presumed, by the subject operating at its level, to be the bearer of significance. But the shortcomings of this faith in the sign are obvious from the level of the symbolic, the viewpoint accessible to the "robber," encompassing the whole structure of the intersubjective relationship, revealing that the sign itself is only relationally significant. It is awareness of the irrelevance of the sign's content that allows the "robber" – first the minister, then Dupin – to divest the "seer" of the illusion of safety.

This model is important to understanding intercultural linguistic borrowing because it captures the irrelevance of the ability of 'new' or imported signs to express new meanings or to open the path to new ways of thought. 'New' words are never radical, because they are captured with every use further in the network of significations, given a place and a task and a way in which to will canalize desire and the world. New words drawn from a second language as overdetermined by history as is English in Japan have even less potential to produce any radical break in the effect of language as a determiner of reality. Observers find in Japan's fascination with English the effect or impression of modernity, newness, or resistance – but they often fail to clarify that this is only an effect. Condry is representative

in mistaking the sense of transformation that accompanies English, its linguistic gesture against the taken-for-granted, for an actual transformation.

A more sophisticated reading must move beyond locating the signified object that the sign points to, and beyond the imaginary wholeness that the sign might suggest or evoke, to an attention to the way the sign orients its reader(s). The above examples, themselves only tiny instances of a much broader social dialogue, show not just strategies of English usage, but a series of different attitudes or positions about that usage. I would associate these positions (implicitly or explicitly claimed) with the positions Lacan finds in Poe's story. This is not a neat or schematic correspondence, and the examples above are far from exhaustive, but the core question around which I orient them is of 'possession of the letter.' That is, the examples above contain, implicit in their use of English in a Japanese context, far more than political attitudes about English or globalization – they contain a variety of theories about the relationship between language, truth, and the subject. These different beliefs about the possession of the sign, in turn, place their holders into different structural positions vis-à-vis one another.

Zeebra's encompasses the belief that above all language corresponds to the thing it refers to, including the ability to convey the innermost essence of a subject that predates it. In his belief that English can act as a means of communication between Asians, he imagines a world liberated from positionality, in which language is frictionless and without its own agency. Further, as we will see in more depth in the next chapter, Zeebra is a stalwart believer in the importance of "correcting history," gaining mastery over the world and making it 'correct.' The world assumed here exists only on one level, with no gap between language and experience. In Lacan's reading of "The Purloined Letter," this is the position

of the police, who, in their ignorance of the function of language, subdivide space itself until it "sheds its leaves like a letter," and they lose control of it – the fate of all naïve empiricisms.

But Zeebra's stance also contains elements of the position of the "seer," possessed by the belief not just in his ability to use English to understand the world and express himself, but to dominate the field of communication by complete mastery. This is central to his assertion that he wants to be a symbol of success for the depressed youth of Japan, and is made explicit in designations of himself as, for instance, a "Lyrical Gunman" who wields language as a tool to his own ends. This is the position of the Queen, who though she has defied her position as a mere vassal of some other source of power (the King), comes to believe that she can solidify independence power merely through control of the letter.

This belief in a second language or a new signifier's ability to push the individual 'beyond' the restrictions of a native tongue, or its accompanying political system, is also present in the approaches of Chiyori and Shingo Nishinari – the only real variable is in the size of the unit for which each artist claims to be speaking in their bid for independence. While Zeebra aims to speak for Japan as a whole national unit, against a perceived inferiority supposedly thrust upon its citizens by international forces, Nishinari wants to articulate the spirit of his downtrodden neighborhood against scorn within Japan, and Chiyori wants to find a safe space for the individual. All, in their bids for independence, turn to English. While the consistency of this choice is determined by historical factors, the structure of the turn itself is ahistorical – and of course, even in contemporary Japan other languages, particularly French, can be seen in hot pursuit of the same goals.

This goal is, in a word, satisfaction itself. If Lacan was ever fully honest in his insistence on having simply 'returned to Freud,' it was in his acceptance of Freud's thesis that the search for an original lost object is the fundamental motivator of human action,

which because it has only this one imaginary goal, is a repetitive compulsion. This object is that which would recover for the subject, after its self-division by society or language, the wholeness it remembers having had in union with the mother. Though this remembered wholeness is only relevant as a fantasy, the search for it is *the* founding impulse of the subject – it is what arises at the very moment that an individual realizes that they are not coextensive with the world itself. What this suggests for the current case is, most fundamentally, that insofar as it evokes distance and unattainability, the use of English puts that language and its associations in pursuit of the *thing* whose possession would bring wholeness, whether by capturing unnamable individual emotions or capturing the truth of a collective identity.

Finally, though, we arrive at the ironic and critical position of Origami, who, in contrasting the confusions of difficult moral choices with the exaggerated simplicity with which English is called on to solve them, capture skepticism about any escape from language. This skepticism is of a piece with what we have already seen about their hesitance to assert any singular individual identity, and their hesitation to "represent Japan" in any simple way – though it should be pointed out that they themselves use English for its evocative power elsewhere in their work, highlighting that all of these assessments are less of individual artists, than of positions. But, in this moment, they are apparently able to see the whole situation, occupying Lacan's position of the robber, their criticism aimed at undermining the powers of those, whether government propagandists or other hip hop artists, who lean on English and its evocations of a fantastic wholeness to be found elsewhere.

Their case against such a fantasy is made more explicit by Mladen Dolar. He describes of how the voice itself naturally points us towards meaning, and elaborates how the foreignness of language may provoke various imaginings of a 'beyond' in the voice as

heard. But as he further points out in no uncertain terms, "the voice as the bearer of a deeper sense, of some profound message, is a structural illusion, the core of a fantasy that the singing voice might cure the wound inflicted by culture, restore the loss that we suffered by the assumption of the symbolic order." (Dolar, 2006)

We see in Japan only a more developed instance of what occurs in any instance of the introduction of a 'foreign' language. Its bits of meaningless Babel are given their own value not exterior but interior to the language system in which they appear, ceasing to be foreign. It is only the imagination that imbues them with whatever fantasized special-ness they might retain. Lacan states that "a letter always reaches its destination." In the current case, we paraphrase this to "English is always spoken for the listener." That is, just as for Dolar the cough, sneeze, laugh, and even the cry of the infant child are instantly taken up and given semiotic meaning – pinned and defined – so is the utterance of a 'foreign' word or phrase immediately the center of a process of defining that inevitably makes it as pinned as any 'native' word. For all this, it is worth remembering one thing – until the 'robber' removes the letter from circulation, its power is very real. Japanese government, businesses, and musicians continue to deploy English because there has been a relative lack of 'robbers' who would, like Origami, venture to point out the emptiness that lies beyond the glamour of English's supposedly transformative power.

CHAPTER 4

THE ~~BLACK~~ PACIFIC: THE DIMENSION OF FANTASY AND THE INDOMITABLE MAGIC NEGRO

or

SHINMIN NO MICHI: PATHS THROUGH MISREADING TO NATIONALISM

> Because to influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him.
>
> Oscar Wilde

Upon climbing up from the Ebisu JR stop, a Westerner may be allowed a moment of uncertainty. Stretching out in front of them in the night will be not Tokyo's expected towers of epileptic neon, but an expanse of dimly lit columns, wide promenades, burbling fountains, and couples walking quietly. The ornate 18th century (maybe) courthouse or government bureau building at the end of a long courtyard, with its spindly-armed clock atop a short tower, is not out of place. As almost nowhere else in this often hostile cityscape, there are many comfortable benches, next to neatly groomed bushes, all between two long rows of high-end clothing and confectionary shops. The place deserves reproduction marble statues of curly-headed young men and naked women with water pitchers. Ebisu Garden Palace is a

carefully planned commercial development, whose underlying goal (on the way to selling expensive merchandise) is to bring to life in one city the fantasy of another, unspecified and distant.

The Westin, a hotel just past the clock-building, was where Zeebra, Japan's most famous hardcore emcee, had asked me to meet him. The call had come less than an hour before I took that walk through Ebisu's dream of Europe, an oddly gruff voice over the cell line giving me the time and location. The suddenness added somewhat to my slight apprehension. I was long comfortable with talking to musicians whose work I liked, and who were glad to have my attention, but that sort of mutual respect didn't hold this time around. In fact, I had managed to get access to someone as famous as Zeebra by writing a vitriolic, ad hominem attack on him and his work for an American music web site, wherein I had accused him not just of making terrible music blatantly derivative of American rappers, but of holding offensive political views. I also asserted that he "deserves to be punched in the kidneys until he pisses blood," a phrase that's not usually in my critical vocabulary.

I'd been started down this hapless path by a discussion with the hip hop journalist and left-wing activist Shin Futatsugi in an antiquated postwar coffee shop. He mentioned in passing that an interview he had conducted with K Dub Shine was coming out soon in the urban music magazine *Remix*, and that I might find it interesting. As Futatsugi explained, K Dub Shine, who had been a member of mid-'90s Japanese rap group King Giddra with Zeebra, had some very unusual political viewpoints, all more or less related to an unabashed Japanese nationalism. For example, he had little use for foreigners, thought that Japan's WWII soldiers should be treated as martyred heroes, and wished to revise the history of that conflict in a way that would put Japan's role in a better light. These seemed to me like odd

stances for a hip hop artist, inclined as I was to regard my favorite music as supporting diversity and openness to difference.

What Futatsugi explained next struck me like a thunderclap. K Dub Shine's political conservatism and apparent racism did not conflict with his immersion in hip hop, nor was it even incidental to it – instead, he directly linked the two. As Futatsugi first put it to me, K Dub Shine's opinion was that the Black Nationalism of the Nation of Islam and other groups was comparable to Japanese nationalism, including the sort that had motivated and justified Japan's imperialist past. When I later sat down to read the interview, I found more detailed explications of this viewpoint, most directly in K Dub Shine's claim that "If you ask me why I decided to link Japanese spirit to hip hop, it's because I think the exploitation of blacks by America and the exploitation Japan received from America are a shared experience." In a photo accompanying the interview, K Dub Shine can be seen wearing an oversized Barack Obama T-Shirt, while in the body of the piece he describes the Black Panthers as "the right wing of black politics" and draws parallels to his own right-wing philosophy.

The most extreme manifestation of this worldview may be *Kyouki no Sakura*, [The Sakura of Madness], a 2002 film on which K Dub Shine served as a casting advisor and which featured music by Shine and King Giddra. *Kyouki* tells the story of three bedraggled Tokyo youth who decide to form a "Neo-Tojoist" streetgang, in homage to Japan's notorious wartime general. They proceed on a campaign of brutal violence directed particularly at foreigners in Tokyo's Shibuya ward, who are depicted as criminals corrupting Japanese society. Futatsugi described the film as "overflowing with right-wing aesthetics and ideas" and "perfectly synchronized with Japan's right-wing leanings in the first half of this decade." The film itself is full of hip hop used as incidental music, and King Giddra

released a music video that used clips from the film. That song, titled "Generation Next," suggests that today's young Japanese people will grow up to throw off the weakness and self-loathing that has characterized Japanese identity, and take up a stronger, more assertive mode of being, as exemplified by the film's heroes.

As I spoke with Futatsugi and read the interview, I experienced a kind of Copernican revolution in my perception of hip hop. It had never occurred to me that it was even possible to articulate the music to such hostile sentiment – after all, the project of revisionist Japanese history is tied to a sense of Japanese exceptionalism which K Dub Shine openly acknowledges as not just nationalist, but 'ethnicist' [*minzokuha*]. I found myself overtaken by an indignant rage, the feeling that something that belonged to me had been violated – though that sense of ownership is itself obviously worthy of more reflection than I have space to give it here. I had recently bought a copy of *World of Music*, Zeebra's most recent album, which had been in a cutout bin for about six bucks U.S. Now acutely motivated by these revelations about his bandmate's politics, I gave it a first listen. I found music that embodied all the worst features imagined by critics like Bynoe and Cornyetz – derivative in sound and content, sensationalizing black America in cartoonish form, lifting American clichés out of whatever meaningful context they might have once had and repeating them as high-energy anthems with names like "Stop Playin' a Wall" and "This is How We Ride." The unlistenable machismo of the songs and the connection to K Dub Shine gave me all the warrant I needed to make it a convenient target of my anger.

The review I quickly put together hinged on a hasty and emotional equation of Zeebra's album with K Dub Shine's politics, made using overwrought connections between sound and politics. I claimed that as a rapper, Zeebra "stomps on beats with all the creativity and freedom implied by his frequently violent, militaristic rhymes, constantly

planting his feet in preparation for an imagined assault," and concluded that "the whole hard-edged package reeks of the sort of unironic gorilla machismo that usually masks a pitiable insecurity." (Morris 2009) Re-reading these lines now, it's easy to see my own racism in them – I'm not sure I would ever have written the same thing about an African-American rapper, but I was comfortable calling out the inauthenticity of an Asian. It was also easier for me to write with such vitriol because I assumed there was no way Zeebra would ever read it. You can imagine my surprise when, a few weeks after the piece appeared, I received a pair of calm e-mails from Zeebra, in English, inviting me to meet with him and conduct an interview to parallel that between Futatsugi and K Dub Shine. I had a vague sense of being caught red-handed at a petty crime.

And so, I now found myself walking into the Westin Hotel at Ebisu Garden Palace, looking for a Japanese man in cornrows. The Westin, in perfect consonance with the rest of Ebisu, was a hotel in the grandest style of Western opulence, with deep shag carpeting, vaguely Edwardian furniture, and buttoned-up bellhops, all of it making me feel distinctly uncomfortable in my ripped jeans and scuffed sneakers. It seemed an oddly genteel place to meet a rapper who came on so gruff and aggressive – but simultaneously, it did vaguely bolster my perception of Zeebra as a big-money baller, another important part of his public persona. As I sat, waiting either for Zeebra to appear or for one of the concierges to eject me into the street, I strategized the interview. I had been conciliatory in my subsequent exchange with Zeebra, describing my review as 'entertainment' and expressing the hope that we could find some common ground. I was ready to have my careless attack deconstructed and thrown back in my face, to apologize profusely, to engage in a collaborative and probing discussion about politics and hip hop.

When he arrived, I was not entirely surprised to see Zeebra had brought company. What did surprise me was that while one of his wingmen was a Japanese rasta in tam and polo shirt, the other was a black guy who I eventually learned was from West Virginia, and had produced some music for Zeebra. Though the atmosphere was predictably tense, we all shook hands like adults and sat down in the hotel bar, empty except for us. I checked (in Japanese) to make sure that it was okay to conduct the interview in English, which Zeebra had already suggested a few times via email and phone. The rebuttal I had anticipated began quickly, with Zeebra and his posse quizzing me on my knowledge of various Japanese hardcore hip hop acts, those who, like him, adopt public images of brash toughness and aggression, with heavy reliance on prominent American 'gangsta' rappers as formal models. As they started rattling off names – Scars, Norikio, Seeda – I was not too surprised that I didn't know many of them. To them, this was proof positive that I had no right to critique Zeebra. We also spent some time discussing Zeebra's work to advance hip hop as a whole in Japan, with him claiming that his high profile advocacy benefits even the most obscure or offbeat rappers. As he put it, "If it weren't for [commercial rappers] do you think the underground could even eat?" Then, finally, came the real heart of the matter. "Why did you call me right wing, dude?" Zeebra asked this with an incredulity that made me quite ready to have my too-loose equivalency between the politics of the members of King Giddra undermined and ridiculed.

What I got instead was a confirmation of my loosest speculation – I sat on the edge of my seat as, just after rejecting the right wing label, Zeebra launched into a note for note recitation of some of the major talking points of Japan's conservative xenophobes.

> It's pretty hard to correct the history. Something might happen, something might not. Like, okay, if somebody bumps into your car, maybe you wanna put some other scratches into the same [accident claim] budget. Maybe you say it's something that's not really happened. I don't blame other people or other countries who do that, because that's how it is.
>
> [But] you gotta correct the history, one by one. Like not looking at everything like, maybe Japan did *this*, Japan did that – because [other countries] wanna say it, they wanna get more. I'm trying to be cool with those other countries in Asia, especially artists and [people of] the same generation. Because we gotta build it from zero, or maybe under that.
>
> But at the same time, we gotta correct the history, one by one, because like, it has been so much... anything that has an impact, it goes around the world, because it's interesting news. But if somebody says it didn't happen, the news won't go around, because it's not shocking. Most people look at the news like entertainment, so if it don't have that shocking news, it don't go around. So maybe if somebody from, I don't know, like China or Korea, they come up and start saying like, 'Japan did this,' and if that news is shocking, people will be like, 'Oh my god, Japan did that?!" But if you come up with that like, correct history, and [you show that] that didn't happen, that news don't go around.

Compare this with Rumi Sakamoto's summary of the main ideas driving nationalist efforts at historical re-evaluation:

i) It is natural and healthy to love one's country, and Japanese people should be proud of Japan.

ii) Post-war Japanese public discourse had been dominated by the left, which has presented a "distorted" and "masochistic" history to the public and children in particular.

iii) Japan need not apologize (or has apologized enough) over its war-time deeds

iv) China and Korea's anti-Japanese sentiments and actions are unreasonable and irrational.

v) China and Korea are using history as a diplomatic card. (Sakamoto, 2008)

It was only after this that I found out that during their final years as a formal group, Zeebra and K Dub Shine had already been pouring their shared ideology into their music, including collaborating on tracks linked to *Kyouki no Sakura.* Over the course of our interview, Zeebra would cover other of these points, particularly on the importance of national pride. Call it dumb luck or instinct, but it turns out my slander wasn't slander after all.

Perhaps even more interesting than the clarification of his beliefs in his own words were Zeebra's efforts to justify them. After all, labeling someone a 'nationalist' is only a scathing critique from a certain perspective, and with few exceptions a person holding strong views has their own reasons for them that start from different premises. For Zeebra, as for many Japanese conservatives, his revisionism was fueled by a belief in the importance of restoring national pride. When he looked out on the landscape of Japanese culture, what he saw was youth for whom being Japanese was an actual handicap to any sense of self-worth. "They [don't] have shit. They just listen to U.S. music like it's some kind of God or something... they love outside the country. They love America, they love Europe... That's why we [Japanese] have to come up with the most updated hip-hop, image, and fashion and stuff – to make sure, to just have the feeling that we're not late." "I'm trying to give them a dream," he says, a symbol that Japan can compete on the world stage – a rapper to match the baseball and soccer teams that he also cites as recent sources of morale-boosting for Japanese youth. This same team has been cited by Rika Kayama as a touchstone for "petit

nationalism," a supposedly depoliticized and superficial understanding of nationality that he distinguishes from true patriotism (Kayama, 2003).

As Futatsugi wrote with grand understatement in the preface to his K Dub Shine interview, "'*The Sakura of Madness'* may show a moment of tension in the political meaning of Japan's hip hop culture." (Futatsugi, 2009) In fact, it is one of several such moments. The members of King Giddra were not isolated outliers, but represented a broader presence of nationalism in Japanese hip hop – by no means dominant, and rejected outright by almost all of the artists and fans I met during my time in Japan, but clearly present. One example, perhaps even more shocking than *Kyouki no Sakura*, is the graphic design of the album *Patriots: Pearl Harbor*, by the group Brash Ball Crew, which approvingly juxtaposes images of the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941 with the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001. Some groups use nationalistic or militaristic language in ambiguous ways – for example, the name of the group Yamato Minzoku refers specifically to the mythology of Japanese racial homogeneity, but the group's cover art features them in Vietnam-era American military gear, and the tone of their album, far from angry and aggressive, is light and humorous.

But other groups have expressed Japanese nationalism in hip hop form even more explicitly than K Dub Shine. The group Arai Raise was formed in response to a contest seeking "Songs that make you love Japan," sponsored by Yasukuni Shrine in 2006. Yasukuni is near the center of the controversies surrounding nationalism and war revisionism, as it houses the souls of thousands of Japan's war dead, including several Class A war criminals. Arei Raise's submission, set to a jazzy, even cheerful hip hop beat, was among the winners eventually included on a compilation CD commemorating the end of what nationalists refer to as "The Great East Asian War." (Tanaka, 2008; Mouri, 2009; "Pro-

Constitution Revision Rappers and Protectionist Kansai Obaasan," 2007). The song included the following lyrics:

> People always survive, thanks to the sacrifice of others
> But the important thing is what we do with that sacrifice
> It has been sixty years since the war ended
> It's now time to respect the spirits of war heroes and the end of the war
> Japan's war was noble and grand, whether it was right or wrong
> To fight the enemy, knowing you would be defeated
> To fight to win from time to time at the risk of your own life

As Yuki Tanaka puts it, again with almost inevitable understatement, "It is ironic . . . that rap is now eagerly adopted by groups like Arei Raise, which promote national sentiment and thus endorse the anti-minority policies adopted by Japanese state authorities." (Tanaka, 2008) This chapter will first unearth the political logic that links a music of black liberation to Japanese nationalism, and will then link theories of aesthetic influence to the discussion of identity. Nationalism is one of the strongest and most direct forms of the struggle for identity, and an examination of its appearance in hip hop is revealing of some of the deepest complexities that constitute individuals' self-understanding.

The Context of Hip Hop Nationalism

The statements of Zeebra, K Dub Shine, and other hip hop nationalists reflect and reinforce right-wing positions that, though more spectacular than influential, can be found elsewhere in Japanese media, politics, and society. Rather than one monolithic and singular set of talking points, these might be best described as a set of recurring themes subject to

substantial variation. They include advocacy of specific initiatives, most prominently the desire to repeal Article 9 – the so-called "peace clause" of the Japanese constitution – and reinstate a full-fledged military. One can see the strategic link between this and the effort, also common on the right, to re-evaluate Japanese war history in a more positive light. What Zeebra was less explicit about was that there are strong further links from these to what K Dub Shine describes as "ethnicist" viewpoints, exemplified in the depiction of foreigners as a corrupting influence in *Kyouki no Sakura*. Efforts to assert Japanese exceptionalism are at least in part justified and supported by denials of Japanese war crimes against the rest of Asia, including the enslavement of Koreans, remembrance of which would make Japan unconvincing as the victim of racial 'corruption' from without.

Positions within this right-nationalist constellation have been particularly identified with a few figures and groups. These include the Society for the Production of New History Textbooks [Atarashii Rekishi Kyoukasho wo Tsukurukai], Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintarou, and manga author Kobayashi Yoshinori, in addition to the plethora of small groups who deploy their infamous 'black vans' to patrol the streets of major cities blasting militarist slogans. Futatsugi later speculated to me that it was Kobayashi who had the closest connection to Zeebra and K Dub Shine, simply by virtue of the immense popularity of his *Shin Gomanizumu Sengen* series among young people during those artists' formative years of the 1990s. This peaked with 1998's *Sensouron* ("On War"), a sustained work of unrestrained Japanese chauvinism, which dismissed peace as "sickening" and praised self-sacrificing Kamikaze pilots. It has sold 650,000 copies (Sakamoto, 2008). The Tsukurukai, along the same lines, has attempted to place textbooks in Japanese classrooms that question the reality of the Nanking Massacre, while Ishihara is notorious for "negative comments about Tokyo's

foreign residents, [conducting] large-scale emergency drills and [making] patriotic rituals such as singing the national anthem mandatory in Tokyo's schools." (Penney & Wakefield, 2008)

Such examples have been repeatedly and forcefully deployed internationally as part of depictions of a resurgent nationalist and militaristic right in Japan. But Penney and Wakefield make a convincing argument that the treatment of the Japanese ultra-right in the Western press is exaggerated and "histrionic," pointing out for example that despite the success of "Sensouron," right-wing manga are not more generally popular, and that many popular manga series in fact embody strident left-wing and peace messages. I would take the "histrionic"/hysteric diagnosis here in the psychoanalytic sense of an externalization of internal doubts and fears. Depictions of Japan's 'rising nationalism' can take their place alongside previous Western "scares" about Japan, such as the 1980s fears in the U.S. of a future dominated by overwhelming Japanese economic power. These discourses say as much about Japan as a figure useful in constructing and mediating the identities of other countries as about Japan itself.

But to acknowledge this, and to further point out, as do Penney and Wakefield, that Japanese public opinion is strongly against the positions of the nationalist-militarists, is not to deem these discourses unworthy of our close attention. I believe that such ideas, given current circumstances, have little chance of leading Japanese society back towards an imperialist militarism that might again threaten world stability or regional human rights. This is strongly supported by the 2009 election defeat of the long-ruling conservative LDP by the more progressive DPJ. But given all of that, circumstances are subject to change, and understanding the logic of Japan's far right may prove crucial at any given point of future policymaking and international relations. The need to pay attention to these efforts is articulated quite clearly in "Generation Next," whose explicit aim of influencing the thoughts

of Japanese youth is shared by many nationalist artists and public figures. With such projects in mind, this chapter treats nationalistic sentiments as at least potentially influential.

Less immediately, looking at the articulation between hip hop and ultranationalism forces us to re-examine many easy assumptions about cultural politics and identity. Specifically, the interplay of discourses between the African-American liberation struggle and Japanese pride has produced an ambiguous overlap between progressive universalism and an exclusivist nationalism that is often more subtle and complex than the artists' outright statements. Under what logic, for instance, does it make sense for K Dub Shine to appear in a Barack Obama t-shirt on the opening page of an interview where the declares that "Japan should be for Japanese people"? There is indeed a logic, one that I hope to make clear, but which forces us to ask difficult questions about what we tend to take for fixed and monovocal traditions of thought and action.

One concrete example of this counterintuitive articulation is the King Giddra track "9/11," from the album "Saishuu Heikii," or Ultimate Weapon[15]. Like many tracks by the group, this one is formally conventional, anchored by a slow, simple breakbeat and a soulful hook sung by a woman encouraging listeners, in English, to "Remember that day/that day/ that day." Western reactions to the song have emphasized its general anti-war sympathies and its expressions of solidarity with New Yorkers who died in the attacks. Also drawing comment have been K Dub Shine's sympathy for the peoples of the Middle East and his incisive declaration that thinking about the causes of the attack is at least as important as mourning the losses. There is continuity here with American hip hop's frequently

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15 "Saishuu" is more likely to mean 'final' than to carry "ultimate"'s implication of power, but the double meaning here is appropriate, given the record's frequent references to the atomic bomb, and the fact that it was King Giddra's last album as a group.

outspoken questioning of more broadly accepted historical or political narratives, and many American hip hop groups posed similar questions, particularly about the role of the U.S. government's interventionist foreign policies in precipitating the attacks.

But this apparent common frame may have made it too easy to overlook more disturbing elements of the song's message. The song's video opens with archival footage of a nuclear blast, evoking the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and in one verse Zeebra raps :

> *Sonna Media senryaku, yuragu zeigaku/ ukabu genkaku ha kako ni otachi genbaku*
> [The media's strategy [is to] push good and evil/I have a vision of an atom bomb that fell in the past.]

In the context of his comments about history and representation, Zeebra's implication is clear. The lyric asserts, in line with many members of the global left and the American hip hop community, that the media are simplifying the story of 9/11 by painting the perpetrators as pure evil and the victims as transcendently good, ignoring the political and social circumstances in which it took place. Since the Palestinian people play such a central role in many discussions of the 'neglected causes' of the attacks, this questioning stance is also in line with hip hop's frequent attention to political underdogs and oppressed ethnic groups. Zeebra's lyric, however, uses the September 11th attacks to extend these impulses to suspicion of the media's treatment of Japan's war history. Here this is evoked by the atomic bomb, a real horror that has been deployed by Japanese nationalists as a symbol of Japan's status as an underdog political victim of white racism. In his verse, it is not just the 9/11 terrorists, but wartime Japan that has been unfairly painted as pure evil.

More subtly, K Dub Shine's sentiments throw into sharp relief one of his lines:

Houfuku ni yoru houfuku ni yoru houfuku / Itsu ni nattemo erarenai koufuku

[Retaliation for retaliation for retaliation/ never brings happiness.]

Certainly, this is a sentiment most American anti-war activists, anti-imperialists, and anti-racists could get behind. But does it mean something different when coming from a man for whom the end of retaliation would apparently include the rehabilitation of the reputation of Japanese leaders responsible for a war of aggression? Despite the song's insistence of the value of memory, "9/11" suggests that what may be required to end one kind of retaliation – that is, the unjust retaliation King Giddra feel Japan has been subject to for half a century – is a very strategic forgetting. It also illustrates that the position of marginalized underdog on which much hip hop rhetoric relies is available to be claimed by a wider variety of speakers than its originators might have imagined, such as by defenders of the world's greatest and most rapacious former empires.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Fascism (Watching Roots in Koenji)

> Emphasis on the genocidal processes in which fascisms have culminated should not diminish our sensitivity to the proto-fascist potentials secreted inside familiar everyday patterns of government, justice, thought, and action.
>
> Paul Gilroy, *Against Race*

There is always some logic to misperception and misinterpretation. The interpretation of hip hop as an appropriate vehicle for nationalist sentiments is based on an already existing history of Japanese and African-American identity politics, a point of overlap where ideas of loyalty, tradition, and even blood have been paramount. Japan's hip hop nationalism depends on certain parallels, such as what K Dub Shine called a shared history of exploitation. These articulations make blackness a term of contention, a symbol over whose meaning right-wing and left-wing Japanese political thought struggle. This is likely to be disturbing to those within the American symbolic, where, especially on the left but even for many to the right, the narrative of the black rise from slavery has become a fairly fixed synecdoche for the most lauded elements of America's small-l liberalism and tolerance more generally.

It must be emphasized, however, that this is not simply a corruption or misreading of hip hop's 'correct' politics, or the more general politics of racial liberation to which it is often articulated. Much work has been done to systematically highlight the error in understanding anticolonial and anti-white supremacist movements, impulses represented in hip hop by groups like Public Enemy and X-Clan, as inherently liberal. About the relationship between Africa and Asia, Vijay Prashad emphasizes that "solidarity among Asians and blacks in the streets of the United States was developed from both the fascists and the Communists, from the Right and the Left," and that internationally, anticolonial liberation movements were just as likely to be driven by new nationalisms and racisms as any more inclusive ethos (Prashad, 2002). Paul Gilroy is even more explicit in *Against Race*, a powerful condemnation not just of white supremacy, but also of the various ways minority and/or oppressed groups conceive of themselves as untroubled identity units. Citing examples such as Marcus Garvey, who proclaimed his movement the "first fascists" (Gilroy,

2000), Gilroy makes no bones about the association between the thinking of certain kinds of liberation struggles and the greatest evil of the 20th century. While emphasizing the fundamental role of oppression in constituting movements like black nationalism, Gilroy finds in these not untroubled 'resistance' but evidence that "Nazism and other related versions of populist ultranationalism have found new adherents . . . in all sorts of unlikely locations." (28)

This was first truly brought home to me several months before my meeting with Zeebra, when I was invited to a screening of the miniseries *Roots* by Takeuchi Hitohara, a freelance writer and editor for leftist political and arts magazines. Hitohara was a member of the radical anarchist collective Shirouto no Ran [Amateur Revolution], based in Koenji. The organization is broadly committed to anti-authoritarianism, autonomy, and liberation movements worldwide, and black music and the narrative of black struggle are very important both to individual members and to the group's public events and image. For example, the organization sold a t-shirt declaring the "Koenji Uprising" [Koenji Ikki], which combined Japanese script with images of Angela Y. Davis and other Black Panthers - the same figures who K Dub Shine invoked to much different ends.

I had not seen *Roots* before, though I had certainly absorbed enough secondhand pop-cultural knowledge about its story of liberation to know basically what to expect, in part because it has become such a touchstone for U.S. hip hop. I was struck by how, throughout the miniseries, culture becomes strongly articulated to a sense of self as handed down through both time and biological lineage. Very early in the miniseries, the sound of an African drum draws Kunta Kinte towards the promise of freedom, and the drummer he encounters exhorts him to "remember the old ways." A mother whose daughter is being sold away passionately declares that "As long as you know where you come from, you know

well be strong, no matter how far apart we be." This connection is partly guaranteed by the daughter's African name, language here playing much the same role as music as a guarantor of legacy and identity. By contrast, of a character who eventually goes far away from his roots in slavery, it is said that "Sam wasn't like us. He didn't have anyone to tell him where he came from, so he had no dream of where should be going."

In the broader context of the miniseries, these moments are productively ambiguous – *Roots* frequently explores the tension in black history between nationalism and liberalism, mostly through the character of a white revolutionary ally who meets occasional resistance from blacks who mistrust him. The left-wing activists I was watching the film with were likely less focused on the importance of blood or lineage than on the solidarity and mutual support that is the most concrete source of its characters' strength. But it must be acknowledged that, from its title on down, *Roots* frequently offers itself to be seen emphasizing lineage as a guarantee of identity and, in turn, power. In the commentary of the DVD set of *Roots*, actress Cicely Tyson makes this particularly obvious when she refers to the importance of "blood" for empowering African-American liberation movements.

Thus the logic of ethnic resistance, though deployed in the context of the struggle towards a tolerant liberal society, smuggles in a deep conservatism and essentialism. This is apparent much more broadly as one strain of African-American politics. In fact, in a fascinating instance of historical circularity described by Marc Gallichio, black conservatism has taken substantial inspiration from Japan's effective resistance to imperialism, even as it became an imperial power within its own sphere of influence. Though today W.E.B. Dubois is often viewed as representing in his era the liberal counterpoint to conservative Garveyism – the Martin to Garvey's Malcolm – it was Dubois who became one of the most powerful American voices for the view of Japan as a "champion of the darker races." Dubois

undertook a controversial 1937 tour of Japan and areas of then-occupied China including Manchukuo (Manchuria) and Shanghai, and returned to vigorously defend Japan, drawing stark distinctions between its actions and those of contemporary Italy and Germany. It's quite chilling now to read of Dubois' belief that Japanese occupation was helping China "progress," (Gallicchio, 2000), a phrase familiar from the wrong side of American debates about slavery. Sentiment in the black street was divided, with many African-Americans supporting Japan before America entered the war, while others – such as Adam Clayton Powell – understood Japanese aggression as of a piece with other global fascisms, whatever the prosecutors' color (Gallichio 76).

The same conservatism taken up by Garvey, X, and even Dubois, is certainly available in readings of American hip hop. Zeebra's debut album as a solo artist was titled *The Rhyme Animal*, in homage to Public Enemy's Chuck D. Public Enemy, much like *Roots*, was progressive within the context of American realities of race, but made profoundly conservative cultural messages available to audiences. One example – particularly relevant since it would have translated across any language barrier – was the S1Ws, a group of dancers in the style of a precision drill squad who accompanied Public Enemy while dressed in dark military uniforms and carrying mock rifles. On occasion the group's conservatism was more explicit, as in the purported anti-Semitic statements of group member Professor Griff in 1989 (Toop, 1992). Other American rap groups prominent in the late 1980s and 1990s, such as X Clan, adopted varieties of black nationalism, including frequent invocations of the Black Panthers, held up (with whatever degree of inaccuracy) as representatives of 'militant' resistance to white supremacy. For K Dub Shine, this is the hinge between hip hop and nationalism, a hinge that opens the door letting Japanese folk spirit – including a corollary disdain and disregard for Japan's internal ethnic minorities – into hip hop.

Is Japan Postcolonial?

The reason American liberals have been so sympathetic to the conservative nationalist elements of African-American politics, from Garveyism to Public Enemy, is that African-Americans have been subject to such intense racial oppression throughout American history. It is easy to see that black self-essentialism is a strategic response to this oppression, the organizing of a power block on terms set by another. The crucial question to answer before we can evaluate the parallelism being asserted by Japan's hip hop nationalists is whether Japanese people, or Japan as a nation, have been subject to a similar set of forced choices. Is the strong, singular national/racial identity asserted by Japanese conservatives as much a product of the experience of oppression as the same impulse among African-Americans? Is it a fair comparison?

The circuit from external oppression or exploitation to internal authoritarianism and essentialism has played a huge role in Japanese international relations, domestic political culture, and self-understanding for much of the past two centuries. In the current era, we are inclined to think of America and Japan as approximate equals, both first-world countries with advanced technological consumer societies. But on a longer scale Japan's current power is attributable to a series of effective efforts to resist various forms of Western, and most specifically American, imperialism. The Japanese government had a "single-minded determination not to become dependent on foreign investors," (LaFeber, 1998), as had China, India, and other countries that were thus turned in part or whole into de-facto colonies.

This resistance often involved adapting Western technology and ideas. Fukuzawa Yukichi, perhaps the late 19th century's most important advocate of Western learning, lauded such values as independence and the equality of men – but often with significant differences from similar Western ideas. Fukuzawa's praise for American independence is less in pursuit of a universal human value than of a national strategic goal. Similarly, his emphasis on equality eventually took the form of a meritocracy whose purpose was primarily to put the most talented Japanese in the best position to serve the national interest. And resistance to external imperialism also often meant institutionalizing various forms of domestic hierarchy and exploitation. This included "the diversion of agricultural products abroad for profit rather than use at home . . . [and] forced savings" by the Japanese populace (LaFeber, 46), an emphasis on domestic capital accumulation and export-orientation that continues today, at the cost of the Japanese people's comfort and wealth. Of a piece with this was the decision, advocated by Fukuzawa himself, to treat "Asians the way the West treated Japanese," (49) – that is, as objects ripe for exploitation. Walter LaFeber has emphasized the degree to which Western observers of Japan's late-19th century transformation into a world military and industrial power mistook its resistance to imperialism for Westernization (1998, 37), for example not fully absorbing the implications of the constant Meiji-era invocation of "Japanese Spirit, Western Intellect," which Harumi Befu claims indicated Japanese belief that "they had what it took spiritually to transform Japan into a modern nation" (Befu, 2001). This instance of mis-reading holds important lessons about the current case.

If Japanese modernization became at times grossly inhumane both domestically and internationally, it is because Japanese elites learned the lessons taught to them by the Western powers, from the clear might-makes-right message of Perry's gunboat diplomacy to the racism and economic expansionism on which imperialism was premised. In most

accounts of modern Japanese history, what completes Japan's elevation out of Asia and into the circle of world powers is not the founding of a university or the publication of a significant treatise, but its victory in the Russo-Japanese war in 1905. In this sense Japan is the absolute Other of the colonialism, a really existing alternate history in which the Hegelian Slave summoned the will to overpower his Master, taking on all of the latter's features in the process. But as Frantz Fanon points out, the oppressed desires, even in the overthrowing of the master, to retain all the anger brought on by unjust oppression, and the goal of Japanese nationalism since Japan's rise to become one of the world's then-four 'great powers' in the early 20th century has been to hold the position of both victim and victor. There is some support for a view of Japan as a continued victim of racial scorn even after its amazing rise. Neither its effective Meiji industrialization, its early military victory against 'white' power, nor its postwar economic dominance have granted the nation an unproblematic place at the international table, a fact exemplified by the early veto in the League of Nations of an anti-discrimination clause, and a series of offensive U.S. restrictions on Japanese immigration at the same time (LaFeber).

Jared Diamond, in a survey of theories of Japanese ethnic origins, somewhat unintentionally captures how such treatment by the rest of the world has put Japanese identity on unsteady ground: "Unlike most other non-European countries, Japan preserved its independence and culture while emerging from isolation to create an industrialized society in the late nineteenth century. It was a remarkable achievement. Now the Japanese people are understandably concerned about maintaining their tradtions in the face of massive Western cultural influences." (Diamond, 1998) Diamond's phrasing suggests that the Japanese are insecure about identity exactly because they were victorious in defending their autonomy, a suggestion that may be more true than intended. An identity based on

opposition and resistance – an identity form common to most postcolonial nations in the present – may be more simple and effective in binding people together than one based on assertions of true uniqueness, and one of the great struggles of Japanese identity has been the balance between a colonial oppositionality and an imperial self-confidence. In the 20th century it has been America and the West that played the role of both model and antagonist, a monopole of imaginative power only slightly counterbalanced by considerations of Japan's place in Asia (see Befu 2001, 74). This is neither a simple slavish imitation nor (despite dramatic exceptions) a total hostility, but one in which America forms a node around which various vectors of resistance and identification arrange themselves.

According to Befu, this troubled sense of national identity has deep roots, beginning with the "shame" of Perry's arrival in 1853, which "became a legacy indelibly imprinted on Japan, and defined one of the basic modes of identity discourse until the present time." (125) In Masao Miyoshi's account of the first Japanese Embassy to the United States in 1860, we see that this 'mode' was not simply one of self-loathing. The Embassy were given a firsthand view of how dramatically unbalanced was the power relationship between Japan and the United States, a revelation that was particularly disturbing given the self-image of Japanese power and predominance that had often been espoused during the Tokugawa era. But this awareness of a reduced position often triggered overt hostility and self-importance, as in the expedition leader's declaration, based on his observation of the person of the President and the strange custom of elections, that "this system of government cannot last long." (Miyoshi, 1994) This kind of comment can be seen as an assertion of identity in the face of total dominance and subsumption into and loss of identity in another. In the succeeding century and a half, Japan has been heavily influenced by the U.S. in ways that are difficult to clearly classify as either willing, conscious adoption or unwilling 'cultural

colonization. Regardless, this influence has continued to be greeted with a measure of hostility.

Sometimes more powerful than negative plaint, however, have been the positive theories, such as the *Nihonjinron*, or 'theories of Japaneseness,' which posit some fundamental Japanese essence, delinked from any outward form or practice, locatable only in the Japanese person as such. What Befu points out about the *Nihonjinron* applies more generally – theories of Japaneseness are often monolithic and essentialist because they are defenses against Western generalizations. Similarly, widespread discourses of Japanese exceptionalism, such as that which legitimated the militarist's push to 'civilize' Asia in the 1930s, have been, ironically, supported by particular recurring ideas of Japanese weakness and vulnerability. Visitors to Japan even today are often struck by Japanese perceptions of their own nation as *semai* – narrow, cramped, and crowded. Though its mountainous terrain does in fact reduce arable and habitable land substantially, Japan is nonetheless geographically larger than Great Britain, pointing up that this smallness is at least as much a mindset as a fact. One explanation of this sense may be that huge countries, each in some sense the product of imperial expansionism, surround Japan on all sides – China to the West, America to the East, Russia to the north, and Australia to the South. Similarly, despite Japan's economic power, the fact that it remains in either inferior or dependent political relationships – dependent on the U.S. for protection and fearful of a rising Chinese economy whose population dwarfs its own – may help explain the reactive structure that triggers the searches for national pride of which Zeebra and K Dub Shine are representative.

My discussion with Zeebra was shaded by a mix of belligerence and insecurity that speaks to this mindset. I found it curious, first and foremost, that a wealthy and successful musician like him wanted to meet with me in the first place, given that I had written a small

article for a relatively unimportant website, in which I had shown nothing but an open (albeit rhetorical) hostility. The article was brought to Zeebra's attention by his American producer, and I can only read his response as a confirmation that America is not only a source of aesthetic and political inspiration for him, but is an entity whose collective opinion he considers important. This is despite the fact that, as he admitted to me, his small American audience is made up almost entirely of Japanese expatriates and Japanese-Americans. At the same time as his actions revealed the regard in which he held American opinion, though, he and his manager's behavior and speech showed some hostility towards it, through me. As I will argue in more detail, this is the nature of a sense of identity based on trying to become what some Other is believed to expect. Slavoj Žižek describes this as "identification *on behalf of a certain gaze in the Other*," (1989, p.106, his emphasis), consisting of a desire to please a particular imagined observer.

Identity and Aggressivity – Ian Condry and the Blindness of Liberalism

> There was, on the other hand, a deep mark of pessimism, a profound skepticism about the notion of progress and the possibilities of liberation, which made it difficult to range psychoanalysis unproblematically on the side of the struggle for democratic progress and produced an uneasiness about taking psychoanalysis for a trustworthy ally in left-wing politics: it rather seems to imply a limit to the progress of democracy.
>
> Mladen Dolar, "The Legacy of the Enlightenment: Foucault and Lacan."

The strange career of right-wing thought in anticolonial and liberation movements, and its ability to manifest in a popular culture form with a broadly assumed ethos of liberation, shows us at least two things. First, of course, it shows the terrible effectiveness with which the onset of modernity installed racial thinking across the globe, to the point that even responses to racism had to be framed in racial terms. But also, and perhaps more importantly, it highlights the unpredictability of the tightly related processes of subjectivation and ideology, and the inadequacy of the Althusserian 'hail' as a way of understanding them. Artists like Zeebra have without a doubt felt themselves 'hailed' by the voice and passion and rhythm of American hip hop, but their responses to that hail in no way represent the forced choice of Althusser's citizen to recognize himself in a policeman's call.

In fact, the trouble is so great it destabilizes our understanding of the call itself. As we have seen in critical assessments thus far, there is a powerful initial impulse to evaluate Japanese hip hop fans and musicians as either creatively redeploying or grossly misinterpreting some model of subjectivity 'inherent' to hip hop. Since most of this commentary (i.e. Cornyetz, Wood) predates the emergence of nationalism as an obvious element of Japanese hip hop, we can only imagine what the split would be today. It is clear, however, that this division is actually not found only in Japanese artists' various responses to

American hip hop, but in the original, ambiguous 'hail' of hip hop subjectivity – is it a liberal subjectivity of shifting identities and tolerance, or a conservative subjectivity, 'rooted' in lineage, blood, nation, and history? Hip hop is available to 'hail' both kinds of subjects into being, and can be seen doing both.

Further, this is not a question of some real, observable and discrete division within the rhetoric of hip hop – there are not 'two hip hops' existing side by side, but one hip hop with two meanings, simultaneous and opposed. For instance, though Public Enemy and the Black Panthers are obvious touchstones for Japanese hip hop conservatism, their uptake in the United States can be generally seen to have led to greater pluralism and decentering of ethnic identity, particularly on the part of white fans (though this holds its own complications). The 'hail' of American hip hop has played a role in calling two equally enthusiastic sets of individuals into markedly divergent kinds of subjectivity. This is exactly the contour of the problem Paul Smith finds in Althusserian subjectivity theory – that it presumes the individual that stands ready to meet the hail to already be enough of a subject to choose their response to that hail. If we are to use the case of Japanese nationalist hip hop to better understand the role of mediated culture in subjectivation, we must identify the specific points where the 'hail' breaks down, and the manner in which it does so.

First, though, we must be able to observe hip hop itself with an openness to its multiplicity, to which some Western critics have been remarkably blind. Instead of seeing hip hop as a multivalent cultural form containing various meanings or open to multiple readings, there is a tendency to view the genre as a singularly liberal, pluralistic discourse, a tendency that sometimes distorts and limits critics' interpretive abilities. One work displaying this limitation, with concrete and disturbing consequences, is Ian Condry's authoritative but acutely flawed *Hip Hop Japan*.

The book's problems rest largely on a subtle reification of race as a fundamental category, albeit within a framework of liberal multiculturalism. Following a discussion of a rap by Rhymester's Utamaru in opposition to the historical revisionism of the Tsukurukai, Condry lauds it as an illustration of the "emergence of a cosmopolitan identity" representative of "an emerging transnational cultural politics of race" which would promote "action on racial issues that transcend national borders" (45). There are sliding meanings here that are worth looking at closely. First, there is the parallel phraseology with which Condry links the "emerging transnational cultural politics of race" with Cornell West's "new cultural politics of difference," cited a few pages earlier (29). There is the subtle suggestion in this parallelism that the two are comparable, but they are not. Condry suggests that "a transnational cultural politics of race requires thinking not only of the multiple origin points of heritage but a reimagining of the links that can lead to a more promising future" (45), and in this language of origins and links we can hear advocacy of a tolerant approach to difference between established groups.

But West's "new cultural politics of difference" aimed to move past exactly this conception by highlighting the difference not between, but *within* groups – in West's case, African-Americans in particular. West describes early efforts at gaining representative power for black Americans as resting "upon a *homogenizing impulse* that assumed that all Black people were really alike," (1990, 5, emphasis in original) an impulse that he critiques for overlooking "how racist treatment vastly differs [within any racial group] owing to class, gender, sexual orientation, nation, region, hue, and age," and as primarily the domain of a limited group of privileged, heterosexual black male intellectuals (6). Furthermore, West, before even Gilroy, recognized "the manner in which most Third World authoritarian bureaucratic elites deploy

essentialist rhetorics about 'homogeneous national communities' and 'positive images' in order to repress and regiment their diverse and heterogeneous populations"(6).

Though Condry addresses West's fundamental and universal anti-essentialism, he seems to have a limited consciousness of its real implications – for example, he claims that "some Japanese rappers address racism in their own society by drawing inspiration from the racial underpinnings of hip-hop, as when Mummy-D calls himself a yellow b-boy" (29), when this self-description is clearly the sort of homogenizing gesture that West encourages moving past. This apparent misunderstanding is linked to the way Condry uses 'politics of race' as a synonym for 'antiracism,' when in fact thought or action along racial lines is inherently antithetical to antiracist deconstruction of the underlying concept. West valorizes "complexity, difficulty, variousness, and modulation" (West, 1990) as fundamental states, while Condry in fact retreats to a much older model of negotiation between fixed identity groups, and more specifically, seems to position all Japanese as racially subjugated by international whiteness.

Consequently, and despite frequent gestures, Condry is either unwilling or unable to capture the complexity of the way Japanese hip hoppers talk about race, nation, and identity – it seems that, to him, any discussion of race in Japanese hip hop amounts to the self-assertion of an oppressed group that will lead to greater visibility, and any politicization of race is a progressive move. West has a different perspective, pointing out in the very essay Condry cites the parallel between "the South African Army and the oppressed Black South Africans in the townships [and] the Japanese police and the Koreans living in Japan," and lists in comfortable sequence "powerful, xenophobic European, American, Russian, and Japanese imperial countries." It is not clear which one of them is right, or even that there is

a 'right' way to view the complex place of Japan in international social and racial hierarchies. But Condry's choice to leave the question uncomplicated is a serious shortcoming.

This historical-political blind spot seems to have informed or enabled another failure of seeing that is more deeply troubling – Condry's incomplete picture of the politics of Zeebra and K Dub Shine. King Giddra appear to have been major ethnographic sources for Condry, who describes several separate meetings with K Dub Shine, and *Hip Hop Japan* traces their careers from their first underground appearances in 1995 through the release of *Saishuu Heiki* in 2002, providing a brief and conciliatory overview of the controversy surrounding the album's purportedly gay-bashing single "F.F.B." But Condry does not mention the release of the film *Kyouki no Sakura* or its interdependence with the album, nor does he mention any ethnicist, nationalist, or otherwise right-wing views on the part of K Dub Shine. Though Condry praises the creativity of lyrics in which Shine invokes the "spirit of Japan waking up," he provides no hint that this invocation of "yamato damashii," from as early as 1997, is linked to larger discourses of nationalism. Ultimately he frames Shine's "emphasis on personal toughness and pride" as a strictly individual ethos derived from his rough upbringing (159-160).

There are parallels here to the misinterpretation of Japanese action that has accompanied many stages of the Japan-U.S. relationship. LaFeber, in a discussion of differing styles of empire in the early 20th century, points out the difference that lies at the center of much Japanese-U.S. miscommunication and misinterpretation – "While Americans believed their exceptionalism could be exported – whether by missionaries, corporate leaders, or education advisers – the Japanese saw themselves as too unique to be such proselytizers." (1997, 98) Condry, an American, sees the export of American-style liberalism

wherever he sees hip hop. But in fact, what America has successfully exported is sometimes quite different.

In a discussion of Carl Schmitt's critique of liberal democracy, Chantal Mouffe identifies how liberalism installs, at multiple levels, a divide in the political subject between "our identities as individuals and as citizens." (Donald, Squires, & Carter, 1995) Liberalism as a principle is in many ways premised on the erosion or illegitimacy of group identities (Schmitt, 2007), and is set instead on reducing the political process to a set of procedures and rules that facilitate rationalist debate in pursuit of a common good with space for all. Oddly, the strain of essentialists who claim to support a race-based politics of separate tolerance – take for example Garvey's cooperation with the Klu Klux Klan – are dependent on the similar assumption that distinct and pre-given groups can engage in rational, parliamentarian debate in pursuit of their collective interests, just as might discrete individuals. Condry's belief in the 'politics of race' as a simple process of the self-assertion of oppressed but unproblematically existing groups is part of a broader shortcoming of liberalism that rises out of its emphasis on tolerant pluralism and individualism, an emphasis that sees any group identity that may exist as inherent in individual group members. This contrasts with conceptions of group identity as the product of a structural antagonism that draws lines where none 'naturally' exist.

Mouffe agrees with Schmitt in dismissing idealist conceptions of liberal democracy as the replacement of conflict with procedure. For Schmitt, there is a fundamental contradiction between the representative or identitarian logic of democracy – that is, the idea that the greatest number will make the decision that suits them – and the compromise at the heart of any liberal concept of politics. He insists that this contradiction is an insoluble flaw of the system, ignoring as it does the fundamental element of antagonism that will always

escape any merely procedural politics and reconstitute it from the outside. This line of thinking seems to have at least contributed to Schmitt's eventual adoption of National Socialism. Mouffe, though she reaches far different conclusions than Schmitt, agrees in no uncertain terms that "a society from which antagonism has been eliminated is radically impossible," and that the idea of a pluralism that can transcend antagonism is "a dangerous liberal illusion which renders us incapable of grasping the phenomenon of politics." (252) We have seen evidence of this in how a frequently-recurring antagonism between Japan and America has been important to each country's identity formation in the modern era.

The preference for 'resistance' over a more omnipresent and multilateral 'antagonism' is at the core of the essentially romantic-liberal habits that drive much thinking on cultural politics. I have already dealt in depth with the way Dick Hebdige's picture of youth subculture regards its resistant creators as pre-given individuals, without paying attention to how subcultures constitute themselves as identity groups arrayed against an imaginatively constructed "other" of conventional society. This exemplifies the persistent idea that the pure and unfounded liberal individual manifests in certain cultural forms, from which it may proceed to deconstruct calcified and harmful notions of group identity and cultural protectionism. This presumption, in the form of an unproblematically progressive 'transnational politics of race' structured by the resistance of relatively dehistoricized groups against an equally singular global Power, underlies Condry's assessment of Japanese hip hop as progressive self-assertion. The compatibility of conservative, identitarian nationalism with the a culture as strongly linked to 'resistance' and liberalism as hip hop shows the flaws in this understanding of identity politics as a struggle for the recognition and equality of a pre-existing group that is silenced or invisible. A more realistic engagement with the intersections of identity, politics, and culture must confront the idea that all identities,

whether hegemonic or oppressed, are structurally similar, and both often rely on antagonism as a structuring tool when they are articulated in culture.

Luckily, we already have a highly developed toolkit for understanding identity in this more complicated way. When Schmitt and Mouffe assert the fundamental and unalterable nature of antagonism, their premises are psychoanalytic – namely, the idea that humans come into subjectivity as part of, and placed within, a field of significations that predates them. "Antagonism" is only a particularly powerful aspect of the idea that, if the sign itself is founded on difference, and to the degree that the subject is founded on the field of signification, then difference of one kind or another is fundamental to the constitution of subjectivity. Difference is not the only force structuring the sign, just as antagonism is not the only force structuring the subject, but we have seen many of the ways these are important in the construction of nationalism in Japanese hip hop.

To some degree, attention to antagonism and identity helps us understand the puzzling question of form in Japanese nationalist hip hop – that is, why would a foreign form be deemed appropriate for the articulation of strong ideas of local identity? Hip hop is attractive for discussion of Japaneseness not because of its positive content, but because it stands in for oppositionality and antagonism as such. That it may stand for opposition to racism is de-emphasized, with relatively more attention is paid to its oppositionality to "exploitation by America" – implicitly, white America. In highlighting the illiberal aspects of hip hop politics, Japanese nationalists can make room for their own essentialism.

Aesthetic Influence and the Identity Function

He tried to remember what the Fullness had been.

Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*

This does not exhaust the question of form. While the bulk of this dissertation is focused on artists who self-consciously react against reproducing older models or standardized sounds, the majority of the musicians who either profess nationalist views or play with nationalist themes hew to traditional or established hip hop tropes. We have seen critics deploying the idea of 'imitation' to delegitimize Japanese hip hop as a whole. There are at least two core assumptions to critiques of the 'misuse' of black culture in Japan: First, that the truths of Japaneseness and of Blackness lie in loyalty to aesthetic and cultural practices specific to each respective group; And second, that 'imitation' and 'originality' are features that can be attributed in greater or lesser measure to certain cultural traditions. It is difficult to state clearly just what these terms mean, or to reconcile their meanings – for instance, how do we assert any particular artist is 'original' while also praising their loyalty to an established cultural form? On the other hand, a second artist might be viewed equally as 'imitative' of a foreign tradition, or 'innovative' relative to his immediate cultural environment. This inconsistency highlights that the real struggle here is not over absolute values, but over immediate cultural power – specifically, invocations of 'originality' in discussions of cultural diffusion are used to assert control and legitimacy, acting as a sort of 'cultural copyright.' Within their own milieu, Japanese hip hop artists are no less likely to use originality, innovation, and imitation as levers in the struggle for position. But their position as second-comers makes their understanding of these values necessarily more complex –

though some do unreflectively make claims to 'originality,' most are more subtly engaged in negotiating their relationships to the American artists who they grant at least some centrality.

Zeebra is a particularly confounding nexus of the contradictions that must be reconciled through 'originality' as a value. His work shows an unswerving faithfulness to American hip hop as a model. Particularly striking is his voice, which he has cultivated into a deep, raspy growl, both on record and in person. A member of an opposing Tokyo hip hop faction told me that he "totally ripped [his voice] off [American rapper] DMX." He speaks English in a black dialect, using nonstandard grammar such as "he be like. . ." He also, in his solo work, makes extensive use of English catchphrases and lyrics. He wears American football jerseys, gaudy platinum or silver jewelry, and has his hair braided into cornrows, a loyal follower of American mainstream hip hop style. His music has been similarly imitative of American artists, starting with his work with King Giddra, which was part of Japanese hip hop's broader commitment to the New York sound of the 1990s[16]. Giddra's tracks follow the New York aesthetic in their gritty funk and soul samples, dark tone, and hooks frequently consisting of soul vocals. Zeebra's artistic career has continued to closely track changing U.S. hip hop trends, with his recent solo records relying largely on programmed electronic rhythms and synthesizers to produce a futuristic, electronic sound in line with American hip hop in the 2000s. It is while practicing this style that Zeebra has experienced his greatest success.

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[16] As the rapper Rumi put it to me, "If you weren't making New York hip hop, you didn't fit in at all." Under this pressure to conform, Rumi made the choice to stop making hip hop for some years, and upon returning to the fold she made music as part of the dubstep movement. As her producer Skyfish explained to me, dubstep, in contrast to the 'New York Sound,' is attractive particularly because it is not a prominent movement in America.

Reconciling all of this imitation with any sense of himself as an artist of importance requires Zeebra to place a much different significance on 'originality' than that implicit within American hip hop. When I spoke to him, Zeebra was surprisingly forthcoming and clear-minded about these differing values. I had expected him to argue that his music was more creative and unique than I'd given him credit for, but instead he made a case for why imitation is actually the essence of culture. "It's like, if an American person wants to do sumo, you've got to wear the little belt. Without it, it's not sumo... like, if you look at the most successful American hip-hop, Jay Z or whatever, they're not, like, different, you know." He regards this sameness as a sort of international status quo that lets him tap into some fundamental, universal element of hip-hop. "Wherever we go, it's just hip-hop." This was also his argument for the heavy use of English catchphrases — their universality. He used no English on the first King Giddra album, as part of the group's agenda to develop rap in Japanese, but now that Japanese rapping has become widespread, he finds that his problem is different: "I go to a lot of countries around Asia, like in Korea, like in Thailand, Taiwan... and they don't understand shit [in Japanese]." By the same token, he doesn't understand the Korean rap that gets handed to him by young wannabes. "But if I hear any English line in it, I can just relate to it, like maybe this song is about something like this, or, you know? That's how I felt that I needed to like say some words in English."

Zeebra's reference to Jay-Z, who has been particularly overt in connecting his work to a certain fixity of aesthetic tradition, highlights that this argument for predictability, tradition, and a consequent universality has a long and respectable lineage in hip hop. For instance, the title of Jay-Z's "Blueprint" trilogy attempts to position the work as a model for those assumed to be following him, and simultaneously a loyal act of following in its own right, by referring back to Boogie Down Production's "Ghetto Music: The Blueprint of Hip

Hop," which as early as the 1980s was self-consciously constructed as part of a deeply-rooted tradition. As of this writing, Jay-Z's latest hit single is "Death of Autotune," a diatribe against aesthetic change in hip hop. Though I as a hip hop fan recoil from the blunt assertion that America's hip hop stars are themselves "not different" – that is, not unique or innovative – Jay-Z undeniably advocates, at least rhetorically, traditionalism and adherence to form.

Such a sense of loyalty is part of the mode of artistic influence Harold Bloom calls 'tessera,' the attempt of a poet, or artist more generally, to provide "what his imagination tells him would complete the otherwise 'truncated' precursor poem and poet." (Bloom, 1997) For Zeebra, as perhaps for Jay Z, their work is just another link in an unchanging chain – "It's just hip hop." The *tessera* is a secret key, the proof of membership in a mystery cult, originally referring to a broken fragment of pottery that fits with a piece held by another member. "In this sense of a completing link, the *tessera* represents any later poet's attempt to persuade himself (and us) that the precursor's Word would be worn out if not redeemed as a newly fulfilled and enlarged Word of the ephebe [follower]." (67)

But as Bloom points out, "a 'completion' . . . is as much misprision as a revisionary swerve is." (66) Even to the extent that we can take them at their respective words, it is clear that both Zeebra and Jay-Z *cannot* fulfill their ideals of traditionalism and predictability. This is because, first, the models they aim to reproduce are idealized and reductive, the synthesis of a diverse and fractured cultural spectrum into a model that can, in the practice of reproduction, only be singular. Second, the very idea of 'tradition' is impracticable because the context in which these reproductions take place is out of the control of the traditionalist. This is the concept explored by Borges in the story "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," in which a 20th century French writer produces a line-for-line replica of Cervantes' Spanish

epic. Just as Borges points out the much greater richness of allusion in Menard's Quixote, thanks to historical events since 1602, hip hop in Japan inherently carries an array of significances and messages that could never be found in its American precursor – for instance, claims about international cosmopolitanism.

Finally, Bloom points out that in addition to the inevitably enriching errors of the imagination and context, the problematic/productive imprecision of the artistic process itself stands in the way of the staunchest traditionalist. Conceptually related to Lacanian 'meconnaissance,' and punning on the carceral where meconnaissance can be read as military, misprision is for Bloom the inevitable, even necessary, failure of reproduction, in the process of creating anew from old models. "Since the precursor [poet] is never absorbed as a part of the [follower's] superego (the Other who commands us) but as part of the id, it is 'natural' for the ephebe to *misinterpret* . . . [a poem is] a *mistranslation* of its precursors." (71, emphasis Bloom's) However self-consciously an artist may declare their loyalty to an older form, they inevitably, against their own will, split from it. Sometimes this splitting is in productive directions, with a sterling example being the production innovations of *The Blueprint Volume 1*, which take the hip hop template of gritty samples and push it in new directions through extreme manipulation. Sometimes, of course, the splitting is in the form of a decline – Zeebra's records are not particularly compelling, though he inescapably innovates in his attempt to precisely imitate American rap in Japanese.

What is remarkable in this is that far from just a theory of aesthetic influence, Bloom's idea of misprision advances a theory of identity, albeit one particularly focused on the identity of artists, whose very individuality he sees arising out of this and other forms of misinterpretation of their forebears. Bloom's campaign against what he sees as the reductive campaign of historicist and biographical literary criticism compels him to limit this structure

to an analysis of literary influence, but Lacan himself had no such compunction, allowing the chain of identity to pass through any of the symbols and images the individual (not just the artist) encounters on the way to becoming a subject. For Zeebra and many other Japanese 'hardcore' hip hoppers, including not just artists but fans, it is clear that the image of American gangsta rap has come to form the template for their artistic and personal identities – in Zeebra's case from his dress to his speech to his hair. The image or images that form the precursor of the self is the 'ideal ego,' the imaginary construction of what the individual wishes to become. And just as Bloom finds the true individual creativity of the artist in the inevitable failure of accurate imitation and completion, Lacan will locate the individuality of the subject in the impossibility of becoming the imagined ideal ego. We can see the exact nature of this impossibility in the current case – Zeebra can never 'really' become a gangsta rapper, not because he lacks some fundamental essence or even some legitimating experience, but because the rappers that are his models are themselves dependent on 'blueprints' for their public and artistic personae. What lies beyond this is the unsymbolized realm of pure experience, which cannot be accessed.

Though this inevitable failure/innovation applies to all artists, their responses to or interpretations of influence are more variable, and understanding these requires recourse to the other half of Lacan's two reference points for identity. While the ideal ego is the imaginary, fantastic image of what the idealized other is, and that an individual strives to emulate, the ego-ideal is the individual's image of what the other *wants* from them. This is related to the traditional Freudian superego, the social enforcer internalized by 'proper' training. While Japanese rappers of a certain sort occupy the realm of the ideal ego in their adoption of black American markers such as speech and dress, conscious consideration of the process of influence forces them to enter the realm of the ego-ideal, as they recognize

their own particular positionality – as non-American, and more speicifically as Japanese – and begin to consider the expectations that others place on that position. The trigger for these anticipations can be an interviewer or ethnographer – in my presence, Zeebra had to detach himself from the American-ness of his own ideal ego enough to reflect on his relationship to the aesthetic and social dimensions of hip hop. But more fundamentally, the ego-ideal, the desire of the other, exists in an infinitely extended imaginary realm that constantly monitors the subject from within their own mind.

Artists may, in their interpretation of influence, present to the observing ego-ideal one of two contrasting responses, either freely embracing the idea of influence or denying it to one degree or another. I got the latter response from Origami when I asked them what they felt about the rest of the Japanese hip hop scene – though they were glad to discuss their early interest in American hip hop, they claimed to have little interest in the music their Japanese contemporaries were creating, and even proposed that I refer to their music not as hip hop, but simply as "Origami," so unique it was singular. Mars Manie's recorded declaration that he "has no influences" is perhaps less objectively defensible, but essentially related. Self-interpretation as either a follower or an innovator each imply particular understandings of what is normative – of what the ego-ideal or superego expect. In this case, the ego-ideal being addressed is something like 'hip hop' in the abstract, and it takes quite different forms for different artists. Zeebra has clearly articulated his understanding of predictability and tradition as fundamental to hip hop, while artists like Origami take the more important value to be individuality, uniqueness, and aesthetic innovation.

This means that, ironically, every approach is in some way 'conformist,' at least insofar as it is locked into responding to what came before – there is no real escape from influence. Bloom, working through Freud, points out that in responding to influence there

is an inevitable battle within the subject between two powerful anxieties that can't ever really be resolved. On the one hand, to submit to influence is to indulge the fear of separation anxiety, the "anxiety of exclusion" that is modeled in the infant's initial separation from the mother. This is in Freudian terms a fear initiated by the very uncertainty of biological survival, but with Lacan's shift to the human as a symbolic animal, the fear of separation becomes the fear of symbolic uncertainty. For the self to not be equivalent to the symbol of the self in the mirror is a vertiginous terror, while to be firmly linked to some mother or source of influence is to be symbolically safe in one's identity. In constant competition with this logic of identity-as-safety, however, is the anxiety of symbolic death, of the over-identification with a model to the point of, again, losing identity. This is the "ego's fear of the superego," the anxiety of total inclusion, and the artist running away from it will deny and resist influence. (Bloom 1997, 58)

If we see each person as a site of forces in constant competition, we can't take individual artists' pronouncements on the issue of influence to capture their actual everyday practice or a constantly held belief. Instead, these are statements aimed at audiences, their purpose to angle for strategic advantage in the public eye, to establish greater respect or legitimacy, based on a sense that the post-facto interpretation they offer will be compelling. This is where my own position as a journalist/ethnographer has been most crippling – statements such as those from Origami and Zeebra have the character of publicity in its contemporary sense, their purpose the crafting of a relatively smooth and comprehensible self catering to the ego-ideal of an international public. Nonetheless, cracks and fractures do cross these images, their contradictory inability to fully embody their own claims the best evidence for the impossibility of any single, simple stance towards global influence. Zeebra embodies and asserts a unique Japaneseness that would seem to be troubling to the

traditions of hip hop he also espouses. Origami's assertions of uniqueness are in part dependent on their importation into the genre of centuries old Japanese poetics and aesthetics. These are not radically opposed positions on an absolute spectrum between originality and traditionalism, but slightly varied relationships to specific past, present, and future arts.

The inextricability of the impulses to difference and belonging, and the anxieties their tension produces, have in general been poorly captured in the analysis of culture, which again and again returns to a language of origins and borrowing that has already outlived the presumptions about agency that undergird it. The cases of Origami and Zeebra highlight the confusion of imitation and originality that emerges from any close analysis – our inability to neatly describe and understand the various intersections and overlappings of the imported and the native, or the respective powers and significance attributed to them. This problem is rooted in language and critical modes that presume a high degree of correspondence between the symbol and the subject, particularly the political subject. This is Robert Young's critique of even such a gifted contemporary critic as Said – that he was still in thrall to a romantic humanist conception of an entire people conceived as a unit, concerned above all with the misrepresentation of the genuine essence that could be distilled from their totality by those with eyes to see (Young, 1991). We have seen how, by the same token, Hebdige attempts to construct a tight articulation between the symbols of punk and the working-class identity he takes it to express. Circumstance and history are taken to be connected to image and cultural expression in ways significant and consistent enough to allow for readability and predictability. Though this relationship is not always taken to be the product of conscious craft, it does consistently take the form of an arrow rising from history to text.

This is a level of determinism that few in the human sciences would accept in the description of an individual. It is increasingly debatable whether an individual's 'self' develops in any meaningful, linear way specifically tied to their origins, much less soul or essence. What we have come increasingly to question is not just the controlled, decision-making agent – the "subject of consciousness" (Lacan, 2004, 283) – but even the predictable subject of history.

Should it not, then, be equally suspect to assert anything similar when it comes to groups of people, and the ways that they come to represent themselves? To what degree can we consider the flow of cultural history as so radically contingent as to be meaningless? There is a certain absurdity to the stories of transpacific inspiration we've heard so far – Japanese children fascinated with MC Hammer's fake DJ, listening to lyrics they don't understand, and from that building a displaced cultural movement. But such accidental connections form the stuff of cultural history even in traditions less likely to be held up as exemplars of contemporary cultural fragmentation, even in the history of the 'black' music that here plays the role of origin. This doesn't make either group of texts less important in their contexts, any more than the contingency of a single life makes it unimportant to the person living it. Accidents – of birth,of upbringing, of illogical accretions gathered to half-remembered childhood encounters – are fundamental to what makes us all individuals. But to trace a cultural form to one moment in the unstoppable trajectory of its becoming is a construction after the fact. To connect that moment to a particular group, whether defined racially, geographically, or socially, is to assert a boundary in a world where those are the exception, rather than the rule.

All Japanese hip hop artists of any sophistication necessarily accept the contingency of culture – they are used to having the oddity of their own situation shoved into their faces

by people like me. When I first began my research, one of my more savvy respondents asked me, unbidden, whether my work on Japanese hip hop was going to be concerned with globalization – he was familiar with this framing, one that placed the topic at the outside edge of a circle of diffusion, with its center elsewhere. Hip hop reached Japan only a few short years after it emerged in America, but a variety of circumstances, including language, race, and cultural power, have kept a sense of following and outsideness firmly in place. In a context where consciousness of disconnection, imitativeness and illegitimacy is this acute, the question becomes what one does with it.

One way of accepting the contingency of culture is radical, admitting of a core of instability held together by the accident (happy or not) of intersubjective positionality. This is the Lacanian vision of culture, that of Babha and Fanon, where lies and truth, origins and fabrications are taken to exist on the same plane (and the analysts can only hoist themselves above it by an equally illusory/necessary claim to expertise). It can include claims of individual originality, but not of collective essence.

There is another relationship to contingency, though, no less 'postmodern' in its abandonment of necessary connections, but reserving from the land of generative lies a big Truth that both guarantees the power of signification, and destroys that of any signifier. In the 18th century Motoori Norinaga, a Shinto scholar who disdained Buddhism and Confucianism as un-Japanese, developed the Shinto concept of *kotodama*, or the 'soul of language,' into a denial of linguistic influence as having any significance at all for the Japanese. Instead of influence from outside sources, Norinaga argued, the power of the Japanese language and culture was such that it simply absorbed outside influences while itself experiencing no fundamental change whatsoever. This is a clear instance of defense against the anxiety of influence, and as Diamond and others have emphasized, such arguments

about language are of a piece with assertions of Japanese ethnic homogeneity, exceptionalism, and uniqueness.

This disconnection between 'the people' and the content of their culture points to a significantly different interpretation of Zeebra's attitude toward influence. Though he may appear, in his sanguine acceptance of his own unoriginality, to be bravely confronting the anxiety of influence, I would argue for a second, perhaps simultaneously true interpretation. Despite his emphasis on the universality of hip hop, Zeebra also emphasized to me that his goal was to create something specifically for Japanese youth – a dream-symbol of specifically Japanese success and power. *Kotodama*, and the strong essentialism at its core, provides one interpretation of this seemingly contradictory meeting of universalism and nationalism. Just as Fukuzawa Yukichi adapted Western ideas to Japanese values, Zeebra sees no loss of an essential core of Japaneseness in his use of hip hop. Zeebra becomes a symbol of Japanese pride, even if his work does not reproduce or celebrate Japanese culture in any way, simply because he, a Japanese person, made it.

The Achievement of "X"

We see, then, that contradictory logics of signification and identity are simultaneously at work in Japan's nationalist hip hop. Zeebra, for instance, approaches hip hop as a form whose essence is guaranteed by signs, from particular production styles to clothes to catchphrases. Meanwhile, his ability to use these forms as a touchstone for a specifically Japanese pride depends on the assumption that Japaneseness as such has *no* relationship to the specific features of any form it is applied to, but impresses itself onto any form used by a Japanese person. This latter assumption reproduces exactly Norinaga's interpretation of

kotodama as an inherent property of Japanese people, who may adopt foreign words without their language becoming less Japanese. Slavoj Žižek has conducted a comparison of the two theories of linguistic signification at work here, descriptivism and anti-descriptivism, which as their names imply are conventionally assumed to be opposed (Žižek, 1997). Descriptivism is the belief that a word stands for a set of concrete features that allow it to identify a set of objects in reality, while anti-descriptivism is focused on the way a word's relationship to an object is constructed by an external causal chain of tradition, with its concrete contents purely contingent.

While the co-existence of these two stances within hip hop nationalism may seem contradictory, Žižek finds descriptivism and anti-descriptivism joined together by a shared error – the assumption that what is at stake is simply the nature of the connection between the signifier and an untroubled, really-existing referent. Žižek challenges this assumption and asserts that, in fact, it is the function of the signifier itself to "constitute the kernel of the object's 'identity,'" pulling together retroactively a collection of features or ideas connected *only* by the application of a signifier. Žižek particularly applies this logic in his consideration of political and racial 'master signifiers,' for instance, 'democracy.' " In the final analysis 'democracy' is defined not by the positive content of this notion . . . but only by its positional-relational identity – by its opposition, its differential relation to the 'non-democratic' – whereas the concrete content can vary in the extreme." (98) Similarly, he finds that true anti-semitism begins not when certain features are attributed to Jews, but when the application of the signifier "Jew" becomes a "purely structural function" in which "A 'Jew' . . . is in the last resort one who is stigmatized with the signifier 'Jew.'" (99)

This same retroactive, self-referential process underlies the strain of Japanese nationalism under discussion, though its goal is to valorize rather than denigrate a certain

group. Nationalism, far from describing the growth over time of some unity that has become the Japanese people, begins in the present day with the assumed coherency of the people or culture gathered under the sign 'Japan,' and the assumed special status or unique features of those so designated, assumptions that are then projected backwards through history. It is because these assumptions clash with an already widely distributed history of the sign of Japan that this history must be fought against. As Žižek puts it, "the only way the experience of a given historic reality can achieve its unity is through . . . reference to a 'pure' signifier." (97) The continued understanding of Japanese history as a complicated and compromised narrative, populated with flawed beings who must be turned away from in the present day, is presumed by nationalists to preclude any purity or unity in the signification of Japaneseness.

Žižek understands this process to be intended to fulfill a desire. "The 'rigid designator' aims, then, at the impossible-real kernel, at what is 'in an object more than the object,' at this surplus produced by the signifying operation." (97) He emphasizes, moreover, that this desire is impossible to fulfill – that "when we encounter in reality an object which has all the properties of the fantasized object of desire, we are nevertheless necessarily somewhat disappointed," (91) a disappointment inherent to the structure of master signifiers such as those of race, nation, or ideology. Such labels, which Lacan also calls *point de capiton*, or quilting points, do not 'capture' all of the positive features of a certain category, acting as a guarantee of meaning or a fixed point of reference. Quite to the contrary, what makes terms of, for example, national identity so compelling is their very *indeterminacy*, their ability to offer at any given moment an infinite panoply of options for who we, as national subjects, want to be. Ultimately, the power of signifiers such as

"Japaneseness," or for that matter "America," is based on the presence in them of a "lack, a chasm of non-sense gaping in the midst of ideological meaning." (100)

This helps us further understand the importance of antagonism of politics, as it is in the space of pure negativity, the not-X, that the possibility intimated by lack can find some form. Harumi Befu has claimed that Japanese essence is constituted fundamentally on the basis of opposition in discourses such as the *Nihonjinron,* largely relative to the United States or the West. Therefore, features that are supposed to be 'uniquely Japanese' are in fact most often those that are uniquely 'non-Western.' Befu asserts that, if the Muslim world held a similar imaginative power in Japan, Japaneseness might well be constructed as "uniquely monogamous," or along other terms which opposed constructions of perceptions of Muslim society. This antagonism relates to the assertion of the fundamental unity of Japaneseness partly through the anxiety of influence triggered by a consciousness of America's strong cultural sway over Japan. Bloom has shown us the constant balancing act artists must perform between their desire for two different kinds of identity which are ultimately incompatible – the desire for uniqueness and self-identity, expressed as the disavowal of influence, and that for belonging within a larger group, the guarantee of identity in a different register.

We can see in hip hop nationalism the desire to satisfy these contradictory desires through a series of intersecting vectors, on different levels. The inherent oppositionality attributed to blackness and black culture places artists against what remain hegemonic conceptions of Japanese identity as troubled and conflicted, while at another level the ethnic solidarity also available to be read in blackness gives access to a Japanese "ethnicism." Žižek points out that "the trait on the basis of which we identify with someone . . . is usually hidden – it is by no means necessarily a glamorous feature." (105) We have seen that, while

Japanese adoptions of Blackness as a symbol are often based on a desire to emulate the independence or freedom it represents, it can also be based on an attraction to the idea of 'strong' identity, to the rhetoric of nationalism and ethnicism that has long constituted one element of African-American politics and, in turn, culture. Simultaneously, there is the sense of belonging to a 'hip hop culture', which for the hip hop nationalists is achieved by the simple performance of certain aesthetic tropes, in the absence of any connection between ethnicity and cultural practice. It is to the seductive power of the satisfaction offered by these strategies that we can attribute participants' determination to disavow any fundamental contradiction that others might find in the meeting of these two identity forms.

But more than simply the quest for an object of desire, that satisfaction of identity derives from the development of the self into something appealing to the desire of others. In the closing of his interview with K Dub Shine, Futatsugi says that what the discussion made him think of most was the Japanese "complex" towards America, exemplified by the fact that America plays a large role in K Dub Shine's motivation (2009, 61). This may be a slight simplification, since the main point of identification is specifically African-American culture and politics. This symbolically resistant identification is perfectly consistent with the desire to reform a relationship to America-as-such that Befu characterized as beginning in the shame of inferiority and defeat. But as Žižek points out, at a deeper level, this "identification with the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves" (1989, 105) is also "always identification *on behalf of a certain gaze in the Other*." (106) What is implicit in Futatsugi's reflection on a Japanese "complex" towards America, while discussing artists' efforts to identify with certain forms of resistance to American oppression or hegemony, is that this is still at some level for the benefit of America. Hip hop is a viable channel for Japanese nationalism because that nationalism, its self-assertion, pride, and even its

understanding of 'Japaneseness' as a coherent and unified sign, are to at least some extent intended for the American gaze. Zeebra himself said something similar: "That's why we [Japanese] have to come up with the most updated hip-hop, image, and fashion and stuff – to make sure, to just have the feeling that we're not late." Given the content of Japanese youth culture, a great deal of the 'lateness' that must be avoided is in relation to America.

Žižek suggests a form of identity beyond this, one in which the subject progresses beyond "identifying ourselves with the image of the other inasmuch as we are 'like him,'" and towards identifying "ourselves with the other precisely at a point at which he is inimitable, at the point which eludes resemblance." (1989, 109). In part, he explains what is thus 'inimitable' as "a certain place in the intersubjective symbolic network," the occupation of which allows identification not just through the way we wish to be seen, but in fact "through features which are repellent." (110). This is the progression from imaginary identification based on resemblance, to symbolic, that is structural, identification. It must be admitted that, by this definition, while Japan's hip hop nationalists are stuck at the level of merely imitative imaginary identification, they are pointing towards one possibility for transcendence in their advocacy of an uncritical militaristic pride that has been, repeatedly throughout history, just the identity America has performed for Japan.

CHAPTER 5

OVERTIME ON THE MIC: WORK, FREEDOM, AND ARTISTIC PRODUCTIVITY

Who ain't a slave? Tell me that.

Ishmael

Skyfish and I perched on concrete traffic dividers marking the edge of a sidewalk in Shibuya – we'd tried to get a table at a coffee shop, but it was completely full. So now we sat with thick crowds streaming past us as he told me about his recent past. At 25, he had finally graduated from university, having spent six and a half uneven years in the process. "I was making music, and sort of stopped going to school, dropped out." It's clear that music is what matters to him – as of 2008 he was producing tracks not just for Rumi, but for the Haguretic MCs and for his own solo album, then in progress. As for college, "I didn't think it was that important. But it's important to have a job."

The sense of having to face up to an unpleasant but inescapable reality suffused his thoughts on the future. Having just graduated, he was momentarily unemployed, a freedom he seemed only grudgingly ready to give up, and whose loss he knew would entail serious change. "I think it would be good if I could keep the music coming, but right now I'm making four or five tracks a month, and I don't think I can keep that up if I have a job . . . That's a really rough thing about a job. But I can't go any longer without one."

Of course, there was a middle ground, as I pointed out to him – many of the musicians I knew, in Tokyo and elsewhere in the world, worked part-time or temporary, low-pay, low-pressure jobs, getting as much money as they needed while preserving the freedom to pursue their real interests. These were the so-called 'Freeter,' a category of worker first widely recognized in Japanese social discourse in the late 1980s. But while for Skyfish serious work was onerous, the alternative had forbidding long-term costs. "Doing only that kind of thing, only part-time work, is really hard. You can do it, but if you get to be 30 years old and you've only worked part-time jobs, that gets tough. If you go to other countries, that's okay, [but] it just depends on the environment."

What worried him, it seems, was less the immediately different rewards of part-time and "serious" work than the social perceptions that separated them. "In Japan appearances are so important. Working at a part-time job until you're thirty, that's like . . . Hierarchy here is very strong, like a pyramid. If you don't have a serious job, you can't get married, stuff like that . . . let's say you fall in love, and that person's mom sees that you're not working a serious job, they won't let you get married. That happens, so that's one reason I want a serious job." When first widely recognized, the Freeter were seen as positive embodiments of the new possibilities of life in a rich and powerful Japan, but their image has progressively eroded, to the point where they were even sometimes blamed for the recession of the 1990s.

Skyfish's grudging readiness to bend to social pressure encapsulates some of the complexity of Japanese youths' current relationship to work. After more than a decade of recession, Japanese industry's prior commitment to a seniority-based employment model that rewarded loyalty with stability has eroded. The results of long-term downward economic pressure, as summarized by Jeff Kingston, are that "the relatively privileged core labor force is shrinking as firms pressure older workers into early retirement and impose

wage and benefit cuts on many who remain. Firms are hiring less secure and lower-paid temporary or part-time workers to slash labor outlays and avoid costly, long-term employment commitments." As of 2002, 25 percent of Japan's workforce was made up of those in such "non-standard" work arrangements (Kingston, 2004). Non-standard employment was common among my participants. A very few, including Shibito and Nanorunamonai of Origami, had become able to sustain themselves on their music, but most still had to subsidize their creativity from other sources, and relatively few had jobs that promised long-term stability. Kor-One of Memory Storm worked as a customer service representative in a call center for a Japanese technology firm, while his partner Psi-Kick was doubly liminal, an immigrant constantly struggling to find his next job, mostly teaching English.

The place of work in the broader context of Japanese life is shifting rapidly. As supposed 'lifetime employees' were sent packing in increasing numbers through the 1990s, Japan's youth came to view the overwhelming demands placed on workers – the supposed cost of stability – with a jaundiced eye. Deep-seated Orientalism has helped make the iconic salaryman figure particularly powerful in the U.S. as a symbol of self-sacrificing loyalty and dedication. My young Japanese friends, seeing in this figure their own future, were deeply ambivalent about the self-sacrifice part of the equation. Kingston describes the fear of older Japanese towards 'alien' young people accused of shirking their social responsibility (269), but those very young people seem to regard this constantly-invoked duty as based on false premises. The 'salaryman' sacrifices his freedom for the good of nation and company, but the nation and company struggle and fail regardless, leaving nothing in return for all that noble sacrifice. The core of Japanese identity once consisted of the twin pillars of work and

family, but many young Japanese are ready to shift the balance, making their work life fit their personal interests and desires.

Thus, while many young Tokyoites are forced into low-commitment and low-wage part-time work by the lack of better employment opportunities, I also found that many genuinely felt it was a better lifestyle. This was particularly true for many musicians who, with followings too small to support them financially, were trying to balance their art with the necessities of life. This is a common problem for anyone whose passion isn't easily marketable, but Tokyo's musicians are of interest insofar as they represent, in more dramatic form, issues facing their society as a whole. A certain way of life, characterized by security, stability, and sacrifice of the self to a purported greater good or to future rewards, is unraveling. In its place comes a much less certain future, with smaller rewards, that allows – or perhaps forces – citizens to choose their own path. In the wake of the 2008-2009 collapse of American finance, this situation may seem particularly universal in its relevance.

Questions of work and self-sustenance are one of the most grounded ways of thinking about deeper issues of freedom and individuality, as shown in the very term 'Freeter'. As we have already seen in our discussion of hip hop's connection to the sound of the African diaspora and other African-American music, ideas of freedom, and the question of exactly what freedom means, resonate particularly powerfully in it. My musician friends' art inevitably reflected their place in this new world, articulating, in ways both subtle and direct, their stances on youth lifestyles in post-Bubble Japan. The most direct treatment came from the Kochitola Haguretic MCs, for whom work and the lifestyle of contemporary urban youth formed a primary artistic topic. Origami balance their commitment to more apparently 'traditional' values such as family, community, and craft, with an obvious disdain for the ineffectiveness of recent Japanese ways of being in achieving these goals. In their

lives as much as their art, amateur or aspiring musicians must constantly choose what matters to them in questions of productivity and achievement, where they wish to devote their time and energy, what their efforts mean to them. Ways of working are inextricable from ways of being, and there is no simple, definitive answer as to the "best" of these. Contradictions abound – even some artists who are vociferously anti-establishment in their associations and pronouncements choose to yoke themselves to high-pressure, demanding jobs, for reasons as unique and varied as they are.

'Freedom' holds an almost narcotic sway over the American mind, and its power in Japan is only increasing. But the lifestyle of the Freeter, and the high value placed on self-fulfillment in artistic subcultures, highlight the contradictions and difficulties inherent to the idea of 'freedom,' an idea that constantly threatens to mask the process of its own creation. My goal in this chapter is to retain such complications as I compare a variety of perspectives on work and life, as expressed in a few small, apparently simple stories – those of young artists trying get along in the world, while also trying to make art that might go out into that world and influence others.

Starving Artists

Chiyori is embarrassed to admit her dreams of stardom. She grants that as a child, she imagined becoming an *idoru*, or idol, one of the shiny, polished pop stars that, particularly during the 1980s, were manufactured by Japanese talent agencies, or *jimusho*. Idols and *jimusho* are analogues to fabricated American groups like N'Sync and their manager/manufacturers. But when it comes to her current ambitions, she's more coy. "I've really thought about it a lot – becoming something like an Idol. I don't want to become an

Idol anymore, but when I was a kid . . . well, I kind of wanted that." She laughs. "And, well, I still sort of want it."

She knows she'll never be an idol in the established sense, mostly because, though beautiful and accessible, her music is miles separated from the utterly saccharine dance-pop that defined the idol style during the '80s and '90s, and even from its more R&B-influenced contemporary trappings. Instead, she, with production help from Temple-ATS affiliate Yaman, makes a particularly melancholy, haunting brand of reggae. Her torchy vocals, far more ornate than typical reggae singing and ranging over the scale in ways strange to Western ears, bear the mark of years spent singing Japanese folk songs with her mother and grandmother. They would be impossibly challenging for the average *karaoke* singer, a venue Carolyn Stevens argues was vital to the Idol formula and motivated that genre's simple, catchy lyrics (Stevens, 2008). They further contrast even with most Japanese reggae singers, who – male and female – tend to mimic the gruff warrior sound of contemporary Jamaican dancehall.

Despite this position outside of two different categories, Chiyori struggles to articulate a viable alternative to becoming a stereotypical 'idol.' "There are so many indie labels . . . making something good, if you have talent and ability . . . people will respond to it. Some people will think it's good." What she's obliquely, tentatively describing is the path from independent musician, unaffiliated with a management company or corporate record label, to stardom. In the U.S. this is practically a highway, blazed by the Alternative boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s, and more recently traveled by a huge array of artists across genres. Japan has recently seen some bands, mostly hard-rock "visual style" acts (Stevens, 2008), following a similar path, probably smoothed by their flash and style. But Chiyori and Yaman, like many other artists I spoke with, continue to see a hard line between "indies"

music and major labels. "Majors don't have much respect for underground music," Yaman tells me. "Unless you're making really commercial music, you can't get onto a major label in Japan. If you're unusual or anything like that."

At work in this sort of statement is, perhaps as much as any concrete reality, a complex interweaving of perception. It is difficult to establish, objectively, that Japanese pop music is somehow more homogenous and less interesting than that in America or anywhere else. But the perception of pop's mediocrity, and a concomitant mediocrity of its audience – which is the Japanese people as a whole – was strong among Tokyo's hip hop musicians. In America, by comparison, I find a more frequently individualized engagement with artists on their merits, or an acknowledgment that certain music can be fun even though it's 'just pop.[17]' Chiyori is uncertain whether "people will respond to" her unusual music in large numbers without the conferral of approval that comes from appearing on television or being featured on television advertisements – the most common means of marketing 'pop' in Japan. Her hesitancy, and the more general perception that such a path is not just difficult, but nearly impossible, reflects a lingering sense among many independent artists that 'those other' Japanese people lack the ability to exercise independent choice.

Both the history of hip hop in Japan and more recent particular instances seem to suggest that the Japanese audience is more capable of making unusual, even iconoclastic choices in music consumption than Chiyori's fears suggest. Condry argues convincingly that hip hop in Japan had little or no commercial backing in its early days, and caught on because of the persistence and creativity of small groups of fans. More recently, there have been instances of hip hop artists ascending from the exact "underground" position occupied by

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[17] This slightly condescending approval is far more frequently conferred on hip hop and R&B than 'commercial' rock or heavy metal.

those in my study group now. The most dramatic example is Zeebra, who has managed to remain both highly controversial and very successful as he ascended out of the club circuit – though as we've already noted, his music has always been rather predictably indebted to American models. Another other great success story, though, are The Blue Herb, a group from Sapporo who, while still less widely known than Zeebra, have become highly successful with a more select audience. They have also managed to hang onto their designation as *angora* – underground – and have simultaneously expanded their audience while continuing to make adventurous, serious music of the sort Chiyori feels her own to be.

Despite these examples, rising hip hop artist's perceptions of their possible career paths remain limited by a fairly grim conception of the average Japanese person, and even the average Japanese hip hop fan. When I asked Shibito his opinion as to why hip hop first became popular in Japan, he felt the answer was important enough to muster up some English: "Japanese people is . . . very easy to brainwash." He felt hip hop was successful because it was pushed by an Adorno-esque industrial hype machine which took advantage of some fundamental conformity in Japanese people. This widespread idea takes specific form in the perceived divide between indies and majors, or between just getting by and being wildly successful, both of which are largely equated with the choice between making predictable, easily-accessible music and following one's own taste and desire. This strong dualism makes it difficult for Chiyori and others who regard themselves as unusual or innovative to, at the same time, fully embrace the idea of making a living as full-time musicians. Moreover, that future vision contains an almost inevitable whiff of compromise, entwining the dreamer with a dangerously specific definition of success, one embroiled in long-running debates over the contours of Japanese identity.

Productivity and the Value of the Self

It's clear that despite this conception of the difficulty or distance of great success, underground artists do hold out hope for it. It is as if they are working to overcome those ingrained (self)perceptions in order to entertain new possibilities. Though Chiyori can only haltingly admit to her ambition, they are suggested by her lifestyle, which entirely prioritizes music above career. Of her job in a flower shops, she says, "There's not much money, but I have time, and if I have a show and want to take off, I can do it, things like that. If there's an event on a weekday – I often have all-nighters on weeknights – I don't have to work. I want time." By contrast, a greater commitment to a profession would threaten serious artistic work. As Yaman puts it, "If you want to make music, and you become a salaryman . . . you can't do both."

The desire for time, freedom, and flexibility can be interpreted in at least two ways. When looking at the musicians themselves, what stands out is their commitment to the music that they consider their 'real' work, sacrificing not just money but massive amounts of energy and effort to the project of creation. They fit in many ways the Western archetype of the starving artist, one that has many precursors in Japan as well (Dower, 1999). Their commitment to themselves and their own individual creativity, at the expense of greater security and comfort, seems from one perspective a noble sacrifice.

But in the larger context of Japan's economic and social life, a different and more complicated picture emerges. Shibito frequently commented on what he saw as a kind of dissolution of Japanese youth, an inability to make strong choices and commitments in their lives exactly because of the huge numbers of options open to them. He was referring both to Freeter and NEET, an acronym for Not in Education, Employment, or Training

borrowed from Britain. The term is a euphemism for unemployment among young adults, and much like Freeter in regards to part-time works, suggests that unemployment is chosen, intentional, and even enjoyable. While he acknowledged that all of this was a product of social circumstance rather than individual character weakness, Shibito nonetheless seemed to regard the proliferation of such types as a rather sad, wasteful mass ennui. When he described these aimless youth to me, he emphasized their shopping specifically, in contrast with his effusive praise for farmers. It seemed that for Shibito productivity was a major criteria of human value – one of the many points at which his seemingly nonconventional lifestyle overlapped with the dominant values of the Japanese 20th century.

This emphasis on productivity and purpose makes it possible to separate one class or group of wayward youth from another. According to this way of thinking, a musician or artist taking advantage of lifestyle freedom to pursue a goal that is worthy but not self-supporting is in a different category from the Freeter who are so often the target of scorn from Japanese social authorities. What's most revealing about this logic is that the 'other Freeters,' those from whom productive musicians and artists can be distinguished, are often the very fans that musicians like Shibito address themselves to. Freeter and NEET, without work obligations that get them up early the next morning, make up a large portion of the crowds at overnight shows. Chiyori says she prefers playing those shows to earlier, evening shows, because people at the overnights are "weird," more like her in their nonconformity to the dominant forms of Japanese social life.

This reflects the deep interrelation of audience and artist when discussing small-scale music subculture. The relationship between a pop star and her nationwide audience, consuming her image and sound through commercial media, is that of a producer to consumers. But the audience for aspiring, underground, or grass-roots musicians is

proportionally more likely to see them in person or even know them personally, as part of a community organized around music. This community is important not just as a small but growing financial base from which musicians can expand their visibility, but as a social foundation in which even non-musicians can be friends and spiritual supporters. As we move from the massively successful pop star to the community-based underground or aspiring performer, it becomes more difficult to draw a line between the artist as someone making a productive sacrifice and, on the other hand, the fan who is engaged in unproductive consumption.

This is where Adorno, as a product of his moment, got things so wrong. It is becoming increasingly clear that the early 20th century (and perhaps much of the 19th) represents a kind of freak occurrence in the history of music and culture more generally. Thanks to a convergence of new recording technologies and the logic of mass production, music became, briefly, a commodity, produced in factory-like settings in nearly uniform batches. But we are now seeing the worldwide decline of music as a commodity form, and perhaps its destabilization as a fetish object fallaciously invested with the qualities of a person. Instead we see the resurgence, starting particularly in the 1980s but now accelerating exponentially, of music as an organizing principle of communities on a smaller scale. I don't wish to dismiss Adorno's aesthetic argument about the uniform nature of certain music's content, but his argument about the industrial form of its development seems to capture a smaller and smaller portion of the music world.

The line between fantasist consumer and self-sacrificing producer becomes blurred in 'underground' cultures, rendering consumption and production only provisionally, momentarily separate. The community supporting underground musicians can be seen not as purchasers of entertainment, but as one part of a collective project to produce it. More

concretely, when hierarchical, factory-like production structures are rendered obsolete, the transition from fan to producer becomes easier. By the same token, musicians who do not support themselves with their art can be seen as producers of their *own* enjoyment as much as of other people's, their musical instruments no longer tools of productivity, but themselves forms of entertainment. Though some imagined future benefit certainly enters into the equation of sacrifice, the pleasure of performing *today* is also important, sometimes more important than any ambition or career. Figures like writers may be commonly seen as suffering for their art, but all art involves some kind of enjoyment of the process of production, and hip hop musicians in particular produce within a genre that began life as party music.

There are historical reasons why thoughtful Japanese people might balk at embracing this rather hedonistic formulation and attempt to re-install the hierarchical division between producer and consumer. Japan is little more than sixty years removed from the memory of a postwar privation whose severity is hard to overstate, a half-decade marked by abject poverty and even frequent death by starvation – and accompanied by the spectacle of American occupation forces living a comfortable American-style middle class (or better) life (see Dower, 1999, 89-97). This is part of what Shunya Yoshimi has termed the "seduction" of Japanese by America in the postwar, and her choice of examples is illustrative. On the one hand, Japanese musicians were drawn to play jazz on military bases as a way to prosper in these deprived times (Yoshimi, 2003). On the other, the officer's residence at Washington Heights in Harajuku was "a symbol of 'American affluence' appearing suddenly like a mirage amid the surrounding burnt out ruins." (440) These two examples indicate music's rootedness in economic measures of success, from survival to prosperity. In the face of

such history, the idea of performing for one's own enjoyment may seem so inherently selfish that being financially rewarded for it remains hard to imagine.

In addition to being a genuine determining event in musical history, Japanese musicians taking up jazz in order to entertain the occupier is deeply and multiply symbolic today. Those of traditionalist sentiment might see it as a sacrifice of cultural heritage in exchange for financial security – of course, tending to ignore the fact that jazz in Japan substantially predated the War (Silverberg, 2007). Paralleling this is the connection between the West and Western culture and a hedonism that continues to be contentious in public understanding of Japanese youth culture. Japan's achievements since the war have been the continuation of a project of modernization that began with the Meiji restoration, perhaps intensified by memories of the immediate postwar's struggles, which no doubt helped justify the repression that achieved the economic miracle. The hip hop-obsessed youth that frequent all-night shows, no less than the fashion plates that cruise Ginza in aimless consumption, are products of the discipline that rebuilt the nation, an expression of its success and perhaps even its goal. But they are simultaneously a step away from self-sacrifice, an attempt to redefine the goals of the nation from pre-eminence and success for its own sake to enjoyment.

This is not, of course, how these musicians, or by extension other young people, understand themselves. They do not consider their lifestyles to be self-indulgent, Americanized, or transformative – the above is simply what is attributed to them, usually by older Japanese in whose minds the postwar necessarily looms larger. Though it is often said that Japan has fewer intergenerational conflicts than Western nations, the Freeter lifestyle has become a focal point for vehement debate. On the one hand, there is Masahiro

Yamada, whose *Parasaito Shinguru Jidai* ("Age of the Parasite Single") (Yamada, 1999)[18] blames various of Japan's social problems of the past two decades on what he characterizes as young people's willful refusal to work. The book has facilitated widespread 'youth bashing,' as Japanese society and authority used Yamada's catchy turn of phrase to demonize youth for their choices. The popular work of Gotou Kazutomo defends the Freeter life under strident titles like *Niito tte Iuna!* ("Don't call me NEET!") (Honda, Kazumoto, & Asao, 2006) and *Wakamonoron wo Utae!* ("Question the Criticisms of the Young!")

A similar (though quieter) desire to finally escape the postwar and its dictates of self-sacrifice can be detected in Skyfish's bleak description of the limited options open to him, and in his dreamy contemplation of different ways of being. He says that "in other countries," it's okay to be just a dishwasher or hold some lowly job, claiming that outside of Japan, even Japanese people may take such positions and "it's not a big deal" – that is, not subject to the social condemnation he fears within Japan. He fondly recalls his impressions of London, which is "still a big city, but so much slower – everyone's like, 'Time out, let's drink some tea." These impressions align with those attributed to Japanese youth by Kingston: Japanese culture and lifestyle seem "unattractive, stifling, and demanding of self-sacrifice for unconvincing reasons." (Kingston, 2004) Admiration for the spirit of leisure also manifests in the increasingly popular catchphrase "Mai Peesu," or "My Pace" – two words to capture both the freedom of self-determination and, implicitly, a slowness that should be everyone's to choose.

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[18] In another example of the role of English in legitimizing descriptions of social phenomena, "Parasite Single" is simply a Japanized version of the English words.

The Musicians of Bremen

The Kotchitola Haguretic MCs are ironic in their stance on work, making jokey, fun music that engages with these issues frequently, but rarely with anything like political seriousness. In most of their publicity photos, and occasionally in performance, the three MCs appear in matching zip-up coveralls, evoking the uniforms of such menial laborers as gas-station attendants and construction workers. Such photos appear prominently in the liner notes for their first album, *Hagulife*, which deals again and again with the themes of balancing work and play, duty and passion (or, just as frequently, their imbalancing). Haguretic seem joyfully reconciled to their always-contradictory, liminal situation. Against the persistence of the Japanese ethos of self-sacrificing hard work, they portray themselves (and others) as lazy and good-for-nothing within the context of Japanese corporate culture. Simultaneously, they are unapologetically hard-working artists, openly reveling in their mastery of their chosen form and declaring their dedication to craft. In a further reversal (and in some distinction to Origami's overt seriousness), their openly hedonistic music shows that their main goal is to have a good time.

The song that most succinctly sums this up is "Rappa Kun ha Oo-isogash' [Rapper's Very Busy]," which captures many of the contradictions of Freeter life. Haguretic start by bemoaning their poverty, but the chorus of the song repudiates the working culture that has defined the Japanese mainstream:

ラッパ君は大忙しい	Rappers are very busy
終日パーチ世話しない	I can't arrange the Party
残業ごめん出来まへん	Overtime? Sorry, I can't do it.
	Pardon me, I must be going.

お先に失礼～！

Haguretic excuse themselves with ironic politeness, shrugging off the corporate social obligations that fall heavily on salarymen, in particular *zangyou*, or the semi-compulsory overtime that has arguably contributed to the rash of deaths from overwork in recent decades. They also, more metaphorically, blow off the broader obligations to community that various Japanese authorities have argued for and tried to implement for centuries. "Rapper's Very Busy" is an explicit rejection of old models of loyalty to company and society, in favor of work directed towards self-fulfillment – one of the group's backup singers later asks, "Could you do some overtime on the mic?" Just as Shibito has gone from doing the group *taisou* to pursuing self-sustenance, Haguretic would rather devote energy to perfecting their art and themselves than to fulfilling social obligations they view as onerous.

In the same song, though, Haguretic reflect on the fact that this defiance of social norms comes at some cost:

いけ好かない事全部がエネミー	Disgusting things are all enemies
バビロン認定　攻撃開始	The attack on official Babylon begins
その前に振り込む 水道料金	But first, I need to pay my water bill.

By many standards, the life of a Freeter is not a particularly attractive one. Those of the "parasite single" type described by Yamada live at home, to a greater or lesser degree subsidized by their parents (thus, parasite). But many others support themselves within the uncertain environment of the 'nonstandard' labor pool. As Haguretic suggest, the difficult lives of such young people may frequently overshadow the 'freedom' they have gained or the

larger political transformations their lifestyles may signal or enable. While liberated from the hierarchies, formality, and unceasing demands of the Japanese *kaisha*, they are exposed to a perhaps greater, and certainly much more obvious, degree of risk and instability than the average *kaisha-in*. While Japan's Freeter have the almost incalculable benefit of a national healthcare safety net, they are more easily dismissed than traditional workers and their lives may be severely hampered by unexpected expenses.

The Japanese situation is part of the broader transformation of global employment models in developed countries, as the gains in stability and living standards made by workers in the mid-20th century progressively erode. Ulrich Beck has labeled this the "risk society," describing as early as 1992 a fundamental weakening of social institutions that left individuals increasingly to fend for themselves. Beck's analysis is not limited to work, where unions have faded into the background, but encompasses a decline in faith in expertise and in institutions, such as churches, which can anchor individual identity. Beck thus connects the rise of what might be called 'risk employment' on the one hand, and 'risk identity' on the other. Just as increasing global use of flexible labor allows for the rapid shifting of production in both industrial and service economies in response to unstable demand and market conditions, the decline of unchanging institutions such as the church and the 'culture industries' is compensated for by a more diffuse system of culture producers, appealing to more transient and generally smaller audiences (Beck, 1992). Many Japanese underground rappers live at the intersection of these two contingencies, outside of the formal working world, while also providing the temporary, hyperlocal, transient anchor for the identities of small and shifting groups of young people.

In America, the proliferation of underground music, film, and art cultures has been accompanied by an ideological celebration of risk employment as a lifestyle more broadly, as

employees are increasingly reconciled to the inevitability of uncertainty. Artists, rather than working their way up the ladder of some studio as a songwriter or editor before becoming a performer or director, are increasingly likely to take much greater personal risk to find a full and immediate expression for their talents – to "do it yourself." This can involve assuming great personal debt and, yes, working low-wage jobs that fit around one's personal creative agenda. The dominant elements of the culture industries in such societies, such as 'major' record labels and film studios, have de-emphasized Tin Pan Alley style vertical integration of culture production, in favor of functioning as scouts and distributors of these DIY products. The role of the major record label, for instance, is increasingly to pick and choose those musicians who promise to be viable for wider distribution (one element where the multinationals, at least for the moment, retain dominance), or can be quickly deployed in higher-profile, higher-budget settings.

For Beck, declines in employment security and in the certainties of identity force individuals to take greater responsibility for their own choices, not just economically, but in the creation of their own identities. His theory is easily caricatured as an apologia for the worst of neoliberalism and free trade in the IMF vein, but captures the absolute moral irresolvability of contemporary capitalism – that it is at once more free, and more exploitative than the hierarchical model that preceded it. This applies to cultural production as much as any other sector, as the decentralizing of the culture industries has left artists free to create on their own terms, but equally free to starve.

Hip Hop Image and Economic Ethos

Though the artists in this study are manifestations of this decentered and dis-organized model, their interpretations of their economic and labor situations varied widely. I perceived two broad and related differences between attitudes in the U.S. and Japan. First, there was less of the self-righteous defiance towards mainstream society that often buttressed artists' commitment to risky lifestyles in U.S. independent music subcultures. For instance, when Yaman commented that one "can't" be both a salaryman and musician, Chiyori corrected him slightly, saying that some people did do it, though it was very difficult to balance the two priorities, and that moreover, she admired those who managed to. This is obviously closely tied to my second observation – a widespread ambivalence about risky lifestyles, manifested in the desire to satisfy both the currently dominant values of success within a commercial hierarchy, and the emerging social values of independence and creative fulfillment.

The duo Deep Throat X were, by any objective measure, among those successful in pulling this balance off – but also demonstrated the limits of that 'success'. Terada and Nakamura both held jobs at a small telecommunications startup, and acknowledged that they in many ways lived the lives of stereotypical salarymen. They said it was incredibly difficult for them to carve out the time to pursue their artistic goals, presenting their jobs to me not as socially satisfying, but as an onerous burden. After interviewing them on a Sunday afternoon, the three of us and the journalist Shin Futatsugi went to a Chinese restaurant to unwind, where Nakamura quickly fell asleep at the table. A few months later, Futatsugi enthusiastically hustled the three of us into a grimy karaoke box off a narrow side street, explaining that he wanted me to "learn about the ugly side of Japanese culture." Once again,

Nakamura fell asleep, sprawled out on one of filthy vinyl benches. It was clear that, just like so many other Japanese white-collar workers, Nakamura was working himself to the brink of exhaustion, a condition surely not helped by his commitment to making music.

What is most amazing about this is that Deep Throat X are, in their imagery and commitments, arguably the most directly anti-establishment group in this study, and that, through their affiliations, their artistic ire is directed strongly against the economic and labor system to which they are simultaneously in thrall. They are close allies of the Shirouto no Ran anarchist collective, performing at fundraising events, participating in street demonstrations, and leading cultural activities hosted by the group. Shirouto no Ran's informal leader is Hajime Matsumoto, an activist defender of Japan's poor and an opponent of consumer capitalism. His book *Binboujin no Gyakushuu – Tada De Ikiru Houhou* [The Pauper's Revolt – How to Live for Free] (Matsumoto, 2008) provides practical advice for escaping the demands on time and energy made by Japan's hypertrophied capitalist system, which he describes as an unwinnable competition. The book describes a low-consumption, low-work, decelerated lifestyle that might be described as intentional impoverishment. Shirouto, which Matsumoto founded, is based in a collection of buildings in Tokyo's Koenji neighborhood, including several secondhand goods and used clothing stores that functionally embody the ethos of escape from productivity in favor of 'getting by,' relaxing, and having a good time. Terada and Nakamura seemed to be caught between this vision and the more traditional high-octane Japanese working life, trying to pull off both an artistic existence and a professional life. I wondered if that trick was humanly possible in the long run – the two men represented a very concrete instance of tension between two radically different lifestyles and values, and it sometimes seemed like it was pulling them apart.

The Haguretic MCs, by contrast, made no bones about treating work lightly, as something to be blown off when necessary in favor of a focused commitment to creativity. This rhetoric and symbolism of labor exists not just in the context of global or even local economics, but in a landscape of Japanese pop music images of life and work. Their gas-station attendant image reflects the distraught situation of Japan's laborers, providing a more realistic alternative to the 'blinged out' fashion that so many Japanese rappers and pop stars have adopted from America, and to the values – one might even say the theory of society – that image expresses. Zeebra is one clear example. Though he started his career as an underground rapper, his recent public image includes not just a wealth of gold jewelry, but on occasion bespoke suits. For Zeebra, hip hop is both art and a lucrative profession, and he is not shy about externalizing his institutional position with its shiny symbols. His jewels are his message, representing success and the single-minded drive for it in a way that harmonizes well with Japanese identity's longer-term investment in employment, social advancement, and success within hierarchy. The message is equally explicit in his music, for instance when he declares on a recent track (in English) that listeners should 'get that money.'

It's no insight to say that, just as with the many American acts delivering near-identical messages, this is a highly individualistic and anti-political version of hip hop's message of 'freedom.' While preaching success, Zeebra's image and message gloss over the complexities of the process of living in the world; to 'get that money' is represented as a matter of choice and will, with little or no attention paid to the role of larger social or structural factors. By contrast, Haguretic emphasize the trickster-like cleverness with which they have to provide for themselves while simultaneously practicing their art. They represent the process of compromise and decision-making, the balancing of the goals of

creativity and ambition with the everyday necessities of life. This is the operational reality of the risk society. This does not make Haguretic's more 'accurate' message a straightforward moral victory – they represent a new system of organization, but not necessarily a better one. Their message is, in part, that the 'gangsta' image is a fantasy that deserves to be debunked, and replaced with a more realistic portrayal of what it means to live in contemporary Japan. But on an even larger scale, this is just one moment in an ever-accelerating resistance to received identity that can be paralleled to the instability of employment that Haguretic themselves grapple with and, often, bemoan. In other words, Haguretic are, like industrial innovators, offering a new and different product that may serve to upend the economic dominance of an older order, represented by Zeebra.

In conversation with members of Tokyo's hip hop community, I frequently heard things described in just such terms of innovation and change. One such analysis came from Leak, an African-American who started doing production work for Primal and Kan of MSC while stationed in southern Japan with the U.S. military. He described the process by which Zeebra and other artists who rose to prominence during the 1990s were being supplanted by a newer wave of artists. He claimed, more specifically, that many in the previous generation of hip hop artists had been successful because of their family connections, had been backed up by wealth and power, a suggestion of entrenched hierarchy running deeper than just money-hungry lyrics. By contrast, he characterized the new generation of Japanese hip hop, of which he considered himself a part, to generally rise from more economically destabilized backgrounds. Leak emphasized figures like Tokona X, who grew up in public housing projects in Nagoya "worse than anything we have in the States." Regardless of the relative truth of these statements, they capture a certain ideological relationship between economic power and personal worth – specifically, the idea that being given something is less

impressive than creating it from nothing. This sounds commonsensical enough, but it can be seen as an internalization of the values of the risk society, and a valorization of the permanent revolution that keeps culture itself evergreen.

Risk, Reward, and the Self

In the risk society, the institutional practice of producing popular music isn't just a question of the moment at which a drum pad is struck or a microphone gripped. When the musician is not a paid, institutionally cosseted professional, the 'conditions of production' encompass his or her entire life. The act of making music is itself an assumption of risk, into which money and time taken from some other sphere of life are invested. In order for music to be made, some other aspect of life, judged less important, is being sacrificed, scraped away.

All this might seem too economistic, as if art were another job, or a futures market position. And for some, it may consciously be – a projection of gains or losses. Chiyori, however hesitantly, holds out hope of genuine and lasting success for herself, a hope that transforms the triviality of her flower shop job into a meaningful sacrifice, even a symbol of who she is. Shibito is already well on the way to building a viable business. For others, there is no such premise – Skyfish and the members of Deep Throat X implicitly consider their artistic commitments temporary or partial, important in one sense to their identity, but overpowered by other concerns, such as social acceptance or financial stability. For still others, the activity is an end in itself, justifying sacrifice even without any potential upside, for the pure enjoyment. The reasons for choosing any particular position are as widely

varied as are the positions themselves – but always, as with any element of the risk society, even choices not made on economic grounds have economic consequences.

This is the truth underlying Shibito's critique of the dissolute youth against whom he defined himself – what bothered him was not that they lived a life that was somehow despicable on its merits, but more fundamentally that they had not chosen at all – as he put it, they had so many options it was difficult to choose. But, as the cliché goes, not choosing is itself a choice, and a pitfall that emerges in particular moments in particular places. Just as fear of our own ignorance emerges alongside the Enlightenment's commitment to knowledge (Royle, 2003), so does fear of our own choices emerge alongside an increase in personal freedom such as that experienced after Japan's postwar economic recovery.

The fierceness of debates over the significance of Japan's 'free' youth reflect deeper anxieties about Japanese society as a whole, and what its future holds. It is significant that Japan's decline into the anomie of the 'lost decade' immediately followed the apparent culmination, in the 1980s, of its quest to match the West in economic competition. To the degree that this has been the single defining drive of Japanese society since the Meiji Restoration, the time since the peak of Japan's explosive Bubble Economy has been an interregnum of Japanese history, as the entire society works to find a new raison d'etre. The Freeter form a convenient symbol for Japan's long process of self-redefinition, a target for the ire of those who would like to see Japan returned to the pre-bubble state of super-employment, oriented entirely towards development.

What would be restored by such a return? Shibito blames the sad directionlessness of Japan's youth on their surplus of choices, on the absence of any limitation that might be imposed by worry or privation. This locates the dark side of ultimate freedom in the lack of any lack, in the discovery that the achievement of a goal – in this case, the goal of an entire

society to achieve economic pre-eminence – provides no final, ultimate solace. His nostalgic invocation of farming as an admirable pursuit highlights the importance of ultimate need to his vision of a happy life – in the constant confrontation with a human hunger that can never be finally fulfilled, the farmer is, perhaps more than any other worker, faced with a never-ending lack that is simultaneously the ultimate source of his imagined satisfaction. Compare this to the cultural worker - the frivolous inker of texts or crafter of beats, who can never quite know what need is being fulfilled by their work, if any.

Shibito's nostalgia hints at the reconstruction of culture as a commodity. Coming from a figure like Zeebra, the call to "Get that money" – if taken not just as a command, but as a description of what he himself is doing – Implies that art should be designed to satisify both audience and artists' desire, a simple commodity replacement for the farmer's well-crafted peach, a movement up the chain of Maslow's hierarchy that doesn't change the essential structuring relationship between producer and consumer. This means that even in a decentered risk society, success remains defined by money and volume, and we are returned to Adorno's "effects," in which a listener is offered the pleasure of hearing a self he has already imagined. This is the sort of relationship that makes the most sense for a professional musician, seeking to succeed.

But other young hip hop artists of Tokyo offer a possible turn from such nostalgic reclamation, away from a life made meaningful by struggle, an alternative path both for individual young people and the nation as a whole. The Freeter, "My Pace," the refusal of overtime – all of these are attempts to articulate a total escape from financial success and upward mobility as standards of personal value. Here the 'parasite' is celebrated, an exploiter of the flexibility and opportunity of relative affluence in service to the enjoyment of creativity in a less structured and directed way. We can see a turn away from material

commerce and career success in favor of cultural commitments – but this is only a real turn when it is accompanied by a departure from art *as* a commercial object. The Haguretic MCs, by refusing to cater to any presumed audience desire for glamour or opulence, offer a more complex and confrontational (though still fun) engagement with issues of work.

Raymond Williams described society as a constantly shifting mix of dominant, emergent, and residual characteristics, emphasizing that a broad transition in fundamental values never takes place smoothly or quickly (Williams, 1983). At best, resistance to the ideologies of self-sacrifice and hierarchical loyalty among Japanese youth, its signs visible in musical and other social and cultural forms, are nascent, and will remain for some time in competition with a valorization of work and productivity that dominated the Japanese 20th century, like that of the U.S. and Europe. Even after successful recovery from postwar devastation, Japan has been characterized as stuck in a 'development mentality,' in which the whole of the society's value system remains oriented towards catching up to the West that it has long since equaled or surpassed. It is a value system that Alex Carr finds best embodied in the array of unnecessary highways, unused cultural centers, and paved rivers, projects that justified the debt-subsidized 'construction economy' of the stagnant 1990s. These projects sullied Japan's natural landscape while ultimately failing to effect broader economic stimulus, all under the banner of development, and are just a particularly obvious manifestation of the centrality of work, for its own sake, to the sense of self of many Japanese.

Anecdotes of salarymen sleeping four hours a night and surviving three hour daily commutes, only to drop dead of *karoshi* at some late hour when their hearts fail in service to a conglomerate, have been particularly attractive to the Western media, as they cater to both the fear of an unfeeling Oriental rival, and the *schadenfreude* of witnessing chinks in that enemies' armor. These stories, though, have also obviously been cause for serious reflection

among Japanese youth, more and more of whom, like Skyfish, are asking the obvious in response to the heavy demands of work in the Japanese system – "What are we working for?" Many seem to be arriving at the conclusion that the life of the suffering salaryman is not worth living, and that a new ethos should be on the table – one promising enjoyment, relaxation, and creativity. This sentiment took a particularly arresting form when one of my participants, in the course of a discussion about work and life, took the opportunity to insist that "Japan is an Asian country." This could have meant any of a dozen things – Japan's Asianness was, after all, one of the primary warrants for its imperial expansion. But he went on to explain that he meant the Asia of white sand beaches and hammocks, a place of exotic leisure. He was seeing, beneath the grimy asphalt and hyperspeed commercialism of Shibuya, an alternative Japan, a Polynesian paradise island.

There are contradictions here – specifically, that between the idea that everything should be done at a more relaxed (perhaps, more 'Asian') "My Pace," and the accompanying drive to be successful in a career of one's own choosing, such as music. The demands of a self-made path, a path carved out of the uncertain landscape of the risk society, are often at least as great as those of success in a structured, hierarchical system. In particular, success in the realm of cultural production often requires a massive up-front investment in the self, the sacrifice of immediate benefits in stability and leisure. This investment, at least in a heavily commercialized context such as Japan, is difficult to disentangle from the expectation of reward down the road. The idea of dropping out of the rat-race, of deferring responsibilities in favor of a self-gratifying focus on making music, can seem anti-establishment or short-sighted, but it is constantly reframed into monetary terms, both by the real money that flows through the ongoing restructuring of the culture industries towards exploitation of contract and freelance work, and by the inescapable imagined money that is reinscribed on the lives

of disaffected, rebellious youth by social discourses that emphasize their economic value, against all appearances.

A sterling instance of this is the book *Minna no Baito Jidai [Everyone's Part-Time Era]* (Ohta Editorial, 2007). It consists of some hundred-odd short chapters, divided up into four sections – "Cook," "Laborer," "Sales Clerk," and "Miscellaneous." In it, celebrities from television presenters to pop idols are interviewed about their past in menial or service jobs, struggling to carve out time on the side to perfect their cultural craft and find success. Several rappers and hip hop groups contribute, including Rip Slyme. As a whole, the book is clearly on the side of defending Freeter, but it provides a very clear frame of interpretation for their motivations. While your Starbucks barista or Lawson clerk may look like a dead-end kid with no ambition or motivation, *Minna no Baito Jidai* sets out to make clear that he or she may be the next Tomoyuki Tanaka (Producer/DJ aka Fantastic Plastic Machine, p.121, former gas station attendant) or Nigo (Hip hop entrepreneur, p. 48, former curry cook), that in fact this apparent dropout may simply be making a strategic business decision with huge potential future upside, numerically quantifiable, something you'll get behind if you know what's good for you. This picture recoups the pure self-indulgence or hedonism often attributed to Freeter and NEET youth, making dissolution and its accompanying creativity into another kind of work. The evolution of cultural capitalism demands the flexibility of the risk society to provide it with a rich and essentially limitless pool of creative talent; every gas-station attendant who dreams of being a great rapper is simultaneously grist for the labor mill of the low-wage service sector, and that of the cultural powerhouse Japan is becoming regionally and internationally.

Such conflicted discourses and sentiments are by no means uniquely Japanese – I'm interested in them largely because of my own doubt-riddled relationship to work and play. I

wrote this dissertation largely while living on a grant from the University of Iowa – essentially, off of taxes collected from farmers and grocery clerks – and I constantly wonder whether the work that I'm doing in any way justifies the social investment made in it. Academics, like musicians and other culture producers, are often engaged in activities that ride an uncertain border between work and play, or more existentially, between external demand and self-motivated desire. I spent my time in Tokyo learning the landscape, getting to know artists, collecting flyers, going to concerts, buttonholing producers and shop clerks – all of this very, very fun, a tangled mix of alcohol and enlightenment. I transcribed these interviews, took copious notes, watching for a thread that would tell me what it all *meant* – slightly less fun, wracked with doubt. And now I'm writing, turning all that stuff, all that experience, into something that might be of use to someone else – occasionally fun, often boring, sometimes gut-wrenching. But through the whole process, I didn't go into an office, I didn't lift heavy objects, I did nothing that concretely earned my way in the world. I was constantly haunted by the thought that I was no real writer, just the beneficiary of a statistical fluke in an exam room, my way paved by real workers, by my parents, and by their parents before them. Like the caricature of a dissolute Japanese kid, I was as liquid as money and as light as air, my social value somewhere in the future.

When I looked around me at the musicians I was writing about, I saw the same sort of anxiety reflected back, as each of them dealt in different ways with the threat of being seen as a loafer, a leech, a good-for-nothing. Skyfish nervously contemplated finally entering the 'real' world of social and employment hierarchy. Chiyori overtly claimed to have little ambition to becoming a high-profile artist, but she slyly referenced her childhood dreams of stardom, of the path from outsider to insider, from amateur to star, a move that legitimizes play as work and puts to rest the ghost of production anxiety. My own strategy was,

perhaps, closest to that of Shibito, who sought to construct his own work as a kind of productivity on par with that of factory workers and auto executives. There is of course a contradiction at the heart of this thinking. Like Shibito, I sought to separate myself from folks 'going nowhere,' those it was easiest to think of as sad, lazy, and shiftless. But we both of us were also, in our own minds, producing something bigger than the mere forces of the market, something that transcended profit and loss and therefore justified recusing ourselves from that cycle. Like Shibito, I felt the need to think of myself as productive, as contributing, above all, as making some*thing* that was meaningful to those around me.

In this, I think there is common ground with critics such as Yamada, for whom the figure of the salaryman continues to be aspirational, his self-sacrificing hard work the means for Japanese self-assertion and self-fulfillment. But such a position always trips on its own feet, as the entire post-Bubble era shows us – if 'catching up' is a defining element of Japanese identity, what happens once that goal is accomplished? Similarly, rappers like Zeebra link the aspiration for musical professionalism to an often overt mimicry of American artistic style – but what reward awaits after the eventual achievement of this mimicry? Compare this to those who at the very least struggle with the tension between their own self-consciously uncommercial, inaccessible cultural products and the lure of success. This internal self-contradiction seems to simultaneously proffer freedom from the dictates of Japanese society's most hierarchical impulses, and from the spectral yet determining weight of America in its capacity as a model or standard that offers a supposedly safe and predictable yardstick for success and self-worth. Though different in its specifics, the structural contours of my own ambition are the same – to satisfy the standards of success laid out by the world of the academy.

Theorists like Beck operate on the persistent assumption that as the structure of rewards in capitalism shifts, the goal of individual actors in it remains this fixed sort of economic and social success. We can see the real persistence of these standards in certain desires by underground musicians to construct alternative channels for new artistic voices, in the dreamt-of overturn of the hip hop market that would only leave new dominant figures at the top, in the desire to remake public taste in a way that ushers in a new set of aesthetic leaders. We can see it in the continued commodification of music, even in nonhierarchical conditions of risk, outside of discrete institutions. We can see it in the clearly persistent and powerful pressures that make it difficult for some artists to fully conceive of a life outside of the pre-established structures that continue to define socially-recognized success.

But it seems social pressure hasn't truly crushed this desire to escape, hasn't snuffed out moments of longing for some radical escape from the demands of hypercapitalism. To varying degrees, always subject to capture and re-integration, participation in fringe music culture is an expression of the desire to blow off both forms of pressure and obligation – the quest to short-circuit success as either a cultural producer or as loyal employee. Whether in the Katchitola Haguretic MC's flippant dismissal of social obligation, or the more ambitious and explicit agenda of Shirouto No Ran in advocating poverty as a lifestyle choice, radical gestures towards recusing the self from the judgment of success are emerging in contemporary Japan. This emergence is fitful and contradictory, as most vividly illustrated in the full-blown contradiction of Deep Throat X's salaryman revolution. But these radical perspectives offer at least a nascent vision of reconciliation with the riskiness of the risk society, the abandonment of an old set of values that seem more appropriate for the relatively straightforward ascent of a social hierarchy, and their replacement with a more amorphous and generally hedonistic measure of one's own value.

CHAPTER 6

WATCHING/BEING/BEATEN: HOW HIP HOP MAKES US EXIST

My first concert was in 1991, in Nagoya, when my parents drug me along to see the Beach Boys. They weren't ever big music fans, but after a year in a very foreign country, I'm sure they appreciated as much as a reminder of home as any aesthetic experience. For me, at 11 years old already cultivating an acute disdain for pretty much everything, it was embarrassing and ridiculous. I had the strong, instinctual sense that going to an oldies concert with your parents wasn't cool – a word whose meaning I couldn't have even roughly sketched, but something I desperately wanted to be.

I couldn't tell you when the word reached me, but I suppose I was primed for it because me parents were so patently uncool. My dad's enthusiasm for music seemed to begin and end with P.D.Q. Bach, satires of classical music that as far as I could tell were unaccompanied by any enthusiasm for the originals. There was of course his euphonium, which lurked in the attic of our house in Fort Worth, intimating a musical history even more mortifying than none at all. My mom was at least slightly more culturally savvy, actually seemed to enjoy music. She'd done some record shopping in Nagoya, bringing home albums by the Beatles and Steely Dan[19], and her relics back home were slightly more respectable – a small LP collection and record player. But these were disconnected

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[19] These were, in retrospect, surprisingly shoddy repackagings – for instance, *Help!* bore a clip-art British flag instead of its original album art. I don't think they were bootlegs, though that's had to substantiate. I can't imagine such product would be allowed to exist in contemporary Japan, were reverent Beatlemania and a collecting culture focused on perfection combine to produce both astronomical prices for original documents and a huge market for expansive, well-produced classic rock collections.

fragments of a path not quite fully taken – she was a consumer, not what I would later come to think of as a 'music person.'

Now, for instance, she stood next to me, whooping like a teenager at every song. I'm pretty sure she couldn't have told you which of the Beach Boys' songs were from 1969 and which 1989, and she certainly couldn't have explained that cloying pap like "Kokomo" represented that band's descent into a cheap nostalgia that threatened to eclipse the genius of Brian Wilson and *Pet Sounds*. This was the sort of distinction and judgment that would become essential when I moved on to working in record stores, lurking in bars, growing my hair long and buying distortion pedals. These all came out of that same vague desire of 1991 – or rather, an acute mortification that left me huddled in my seat, afraid that I might be recognized in such a compromised situation, that someone might think that this was *who I was*. Naturally, this left me little energy to notice I was in a stadium full of specifically *Japanese* Beach Boys fans, much less giving a thought to what that might 'mean.' To me, they were all just uncool, and I wanted nothing to do with them. I haven't been to a stadium show since.

There is no such thing as *the* formative moment, no single event or trauma that definitively shapes a life, neurosis, or personality. My Beach Boys moment, like the various 'primal scenes' described by Freud in the course of his analyses, is at once a nexus of various other, smaller moments, and an explanatory frame intended to make sense, after the fact, of what I have become. It's only one, selectively articulated root of a life measured out in photocopied flyers, dank dives, and hearing loss. But it captures something that I share with all those in such 'marginal' spaces – the conflicted desire exactly to *be* at once marginal, and at the same time, important. It's important that the locations be hidden – that *someone* not know them, that some imagined square have not a clue what goes on in there, that we avoid

the screaming "Kokomo" masses. At the same time, though, we perform our own knowledge for one another – in our bodies, our fashion, our judgment and speech. In the contours of underground music culture, we pursue the intersecting horizons of invisibility and spectacle.

There is a learning process to entering subculture, full of uncertainty and discomfort. As a teenager, everyone around me seemed more confident than I, better looking, more knowledgeable. So I pursued the one of those I felt I had the best shot at grasping – knowledge – while fumbling to at least get a handle on the subtler ways and means, how to stand, when to show up, what to wear, rules both strict and constantly moving which, I intuited quickly, helped draw the line between inside and out. The reward at the end of that gauntlet of paranoia was the comfort of safety and belonging, the familiarity of smells and faces and stickers on the walls and graffiti in the bathroom. These were the mark of a home away from home, of the presence of people somehow like me, and wards against those who didn't get it. I came into myself just as I came into the space of the nightclub, the black walls reflecting back to me who I was.

When I first started going to shows in Tokyo, a decade and a half after that Beach Boys concert, I was once again an outsider, trying to learn the ropes, conscious of who was looking and what they might be seeing. A new place, in a new culture, surrounded by strangers, with a whole new set of mysteries to decipher. When was I supposed to show up? The flyer said 11pm, but in the states that translated to roughly 1a.m. Would Japanese clubs be more predictable? Would I be able to get in with my U.S. driver's license, or would I need my passport? Once I got inside, where should I stand? Could I smoke? Perhaps most importantly, how did I get the bartender's attention?

One of my classrooms was The Liquid Room, where I first encountered Tokyo's underground hip hop movement face-to-face. In August of 2007, I went there hoping to see a handful of up and coming rappers at a showcase called the ESP Sessions. Liquid is larger and more upscale than some places I would visit later, located in Tokyo's Ebisu neighborhood, just one train stop south of Shinjuku. Ebisu catches just enough spillover from its more famous neighbor to leave it at a kind of Tokyo averageness – between Daikanyama's overblown elegance and Koenji's suggestive decrepitude, Ebisu is full of chain restaurants and flower shops, but with its own share of low-lit sake bars off in the dark side streets. Liquid Room fills a futuristic, silver-and-red warehouse that echoes the area's neutral corporate polish, to the point that it's a bit tough to find. That first time, I showed up at 11pm, found out to my amazement that I was early, and stood with a crowd of other fans waiting for the doors to open. There were about two dozen people in line, and I noticed two other non-Japanese, of some sort of Asian extraction but speaking a mix of slurred Japanese and fluent English. Everyone here, like everyone at any show in Tokyo, was impeccably dressed – some in a universal hip hop style, others in certain local variations, showcasing, for example, the seemingly bottomless passion of young Japanese men for round, short-brimmed fishing hats. Three twentysomething guys with long hair streaming out from under such caps, and baggy shorts down to their calves, entertained themselves by running tiny skateboards over the walls with their fingers. Everyone stayed neatly in line, waiting their turn.

When we were finally let in, my driver's license worked just fine for the impassive doorman. Inside the Liquid Room, a hip hop fan will usually take a left turn and climb a flight of stairs to the second floor, where there's a small shop selling records and t-shirts, a restaurant, and the Liquid Lounge. The Lounge is where smaller shows are held, those that

draw fewer than, say, a hundred people. Sometimes – for example, if you're there to see a big name like DJ Krush – you'll go straight through the entrance, to the much larger downstairs hall, where there might be thousands of fans swaying in semi-darkness, or packed up against the stage. That night, I went upstairs, to the Lounge. As in any club in New York, Austin, or Oslo, the Liquid Lounge is dominated by a huge pair of speakers and, across the floor from them, a long bar stocked with everything from Corona to Campari. It's a far nicer place than the Texas punk dives where I cut my teeth, where its glass-topped tables and modernist couches would have been mauled to death inside a weekend. Young men and women stood around, drinks in hand, chatting amiably, but there were also plenty of loners, mostly young men, huddled in the chairs and couches. I felt an affinity for these misfits, and knew from experience that they were hoping this obscure music would resonate sympathetically with their own ill-fitting skin.

There was a second, much smaller service counter next to the bar, where a slight girl sold bowls of curry and yakitori skewers. Over the years I'd see food service at venues from swanky space-clubs like Liquid to the grimy beat basement Heavy Sick Zero to the warren-like Studio Dom. Dom, for instance, rented recording space by the hour, but one October weekend hosted a dance party, DJs crammed into tiny rehearsal rooms. On the roof, in the middle of an intense cold snap, a group of bundled entrepreneurs set up a makeshift kitchen, selling miso from a bubbling pot balanced precariously on a camping stove. The point of all these vendors is to fuel the festivities without a break, removing the need to depart the club's black-walled confines to go around the corner to 7-11 for a rice ball. Food makes the club a closed ecosystem, a pocket world cut off from the rest of Tokyo, a separate piece.

Like the venue, the music was both similar to and different from its counterparts around the world. That night, we were treated to Eribill Orchestra, a DJ laying down beats

for a jazzy keyboardist. Following that were the Kochitola Haguretic MCs, a couple of years before their debut album. Then Ari 1010 rapped with almost violent intensity over heavy, distorted beats and noisy bass playing from his producer, Mihara. And finally came Candle, closing the show with jazzy, almost gentle rhythms and sardonic rhymes. This was my first encounters with all of these artists, the night I introduced myself and started angling for the interviews that would eventually add up to this dissertation.

Next to the stage as these artists performed was one of the most unique institutions of Tokyo's live music scene – the "live paint." A woman dressed in a colorful, quite formal kimono stood in front of an expanse of butcher paper taped to the wall, an array of brushes and tempera on the floor. Over the course of the evening she would craft a six-foot tall peony, its explosively colorful mandala-like design evoking Tibet. As the concert got underway, she would occasionally stop painting long enough to face the stage and nod appreciatively, sometimes waving her paper fan to the beat.

I have difficulty thinking through what exactly I was learning to become in my own early days. But from the outside looking in, I could see the stakes of the nightclub for its Japanese participants with a little more clarity, or maybe just the reductive simplicity of ignorance. Moments such as the live paint, with its negotiation between marks of Asianness and a globally recognizable nightclub postmodernity, highlighted the project of balancing a particular Japaneseness with membership in the global cosmopolis. Of course, this cultural work sketches a particular version of that Japanese identity, in this case one emphasizing traditional arts rather than the nation per se. Japanese musicians and music fans often expressed to me a disaffection with their country, with their fellow citizens, with the political system, characterizing them as variously corrupt, conformist, and unthinking. More than the accuracy of any such characterization – the same sentiments can be heard daily from

musicians in the U.S. – what matters here is the sense of inadequacy itself. This (sense of) opposition is found equally in explicitly political gestures, the occupation of marginal space, or subtler aesthetic choices, such as my own piqued dissatisfaction with my parents' musical taste. Separated from any details of content, it is the most basic element of life at the musical margins.

The frequent conjunction of marginality and opposition make it difficult to determine exactly what the stakes are. These are small groups of people – perhaps a hundred at liquid room that night. They are not conventionally powerful, and musicians and fans alike seem as often as not to be abdicating any substantive social responsibility. To whatever degree, though, they are part of a long history of ideological tension between powerful Japanese institutions and groups emphasizing such values as loyalty and uniformity, and the many humanists who have contested the family state, placing priority on individuality and democracy. Clubgoing and music-making are important because, first, they are more constant presences in the lives of many young people than more 'official' intellectual and governmental battles. Though the audiences of marginal artists are small, their ideas and values are often prophetic, steadily moving towards the center over the course of decades – as has Zeebra since his own start in clubs much like Liquid Room. Finally, just as much as more prestigious and official messages, the world of music is a vector for the advance of novel social values, while being structured by those that came before.

Chris Small calls the details of music, setting, ritual, and practice "musicking."(Small, 1999) The term is meant to encompass not just the performers on any given stage or record, but the dancers in front of them, the listeners appreciating them, the bubbling pots of miso – the totality of the event of music. Small contrasts this with plain old "music" as studied by musicologists, who limit themselves to the structure of the notes on a page or traveling

through the air. In my first night at Liquid Room, I was already able to see or sense many of the values in play – the event advances particular ideas of community, creativity, consumption, and identity, all contributing to Japan's ongoing re-negotiaton of the relationship between the individual and society. By looking at musicking rather than just music, we can see how this moment of musical life, and the expanding network of moments which feed and are fed by it, transmits meanings and values. By its very nature, musicking acts on participants constantly and from all sides, but we can usefully subdivide elements of it for the sake of analysis.

I will be looking first at sounds, second at the techniques of their production, and finally at the scenes of their consumption. This structure mimics the ideal model of Communication Studies – a survey of message, sender, and receiver; or text, producer, and consumer, a 'complete' picture of the process of communication. But my analysis also finds leaks in this simplified model, points where the supposedly linear path of energy and ideas breaks, letting meaning seep in or drip out when it should be flowing smoothly upon its appointed route. Though the club is its own world, a closed black box from midnight 'til six A.M., the tracks that boom there were crafted in tinier rooms across Tokyo and New York, their creation structured by a web of forces and history spinning out to infinity. Artists and fans couldn't create a closed circuit if they wanted to – but most important of all, they don't want to. Just as I huddled in my stadium seat, afraid of being caught at a Beach Boys concert with my parents by someone who might think less of me for it, clubgoing as a whole is structured by the sense that one is watched. The consumer, no less than the producer, performs every act for the consumption of someone else.

Black Sound

The racial origins of hip hop are crucial to its attraction for Japanese audiences. In contrast to American euphemisms like "urban," hip hop and many related genres are grouped together as "black music" in Japan, a label that marks many of the record shops where crate diggers (collectors) go to find hip hop, jazz, or soul. Most often, it's written in English, and even poetically transformed, as in the jazz shop Ebony Sound in Tokyo's hip Shimokitazawa neighborhood. Japanese hip hop magazines are plastered with black faces – not just artists who happen to be black, but also black male models showcasing the fashions that are the focus of many such publications, making blackness a selling point for an entire lifestyle. Outside of larger Japanese clubs such as Harlem in Roppongi, Nigerian men work as touts, inviting in customers, a sizable chunk of the small number of black faces visible in Tokyo. They'll tell anyone who asks that they're from Chicago or New York. These visual and linguistic moves constantly reinforce the blackness of hip hop, but according to some, the African-ness of globalized "black music" such as hip hop and reggae is also signified by formal elements of the music proper. According to such arguments, black slaves torn from their homes retained both specific approaches and tools (for instance, the banjo and forms of dancing) and various elements of musical consciousness such as syncopation, polyrhythm, and call-and-response (Chernoff, 1981; Gilroy, 1993). These have, it is argued, followed the circulation of black music through a broad diaspora, maintaining a string of historical meaning.

In their thinking about hip hop, many of the fans and artists I worked with seemed to agree with such theories, at least in effect, finding hip hop evocative of the volatile and painfully contradictory meanings of blackness itself. The reggae singer Chiyori

unintentionally summed up the double and triple heartbreak the beat carries when she told me that "in black music, I can feel the freedom." How do we understand the music of people enslaved and degraded for centuries as transmitting this feeling of freedom? The converging images of Africans and African-Americans in Japan derive substantially from those in America. It is a dual image - on the one hand horrible, the grass-skirted savages found in *Little Black Sambo*, popular both in Japan and America, and reflected in homegrown Japanese imagery such as Shimada Keizo's *The Adventurous Dankichi* (Russell, 1991). On the other hand, blackness in both Japan and America evokes something mighty and awesome, the capacity of the human spirit to transform and overcome. We have seen how black uplift in the West, even in its struggling early days, acted in Japan as a model for an independent and advanced non-white society – see for instance the efforts of Hikida Yasuichi in the 1930s to forge alliances with African-American leaders and intellectuals in support of Japan's imperial ambition (Gallicchio, 2000). In Japan, as in America, the story of blackness, for better or for worse, is available for use by those of any race or background – the rise up from slavery inescapably embodied by every black person in the diaspora is a global symbol for individual liberation. This sense of overcoming is transformed from the imaginative to the physical in hip hop – with the ethical dilemmas of its attachment to race intact.

The elements that matter most in the transformation of blackness from image to performance include a song's rhythm, the texture of its sound, and the tone of a rapper's voice, while melody and the presence of dissonance or harmony are somewhat less definitive. These variations in beat, texture, and voice refer to a common pool of emotional understandings built up through the history of hip hop and its precursors, no less than the elements of language are built on what has been said before. Ari 1010's heavy, staggering beats and the noisy samples layered over them signified, in the very difficulty of creation

inscribed in their sound, the sense of struggle, of power against power, whose most well-known progenitor in the U.S. was Public Enemy. Like PE, Ari's beat didn't emphasize funk, with little micro-hesitation, changeup, or play with the listener's expectations; instead, layers of gravelly distortion produced a kind of angry narcosis encouraging hunched shoulders, or pumped fists, stances of direct resistance. On the other hand, the Haguretic MCs' samples rode the exact groove missing from Ari's, their funkiness and rhythmic unpredictability encouraging looser body styles, sampled drums swinging with the precision of James Brown and enticing limbs to bounce out and meet them. Moving feet and waving hands evoke a lightness and 'freedom' based on evasion rather than resistance, a playfulness of the sort found in the trickster-monkey of African tradition. Candle reached for a third place, his music without the crunchy bluster of Ari's or quite the swing of the Haguretics, gentle and jazzy, coming closer than either to the beat in its most steadily pulsing mode. The flowing, skittering pulse, the gaps of the beat closing with its demands for reaction, leaving the listening subject to subside as the sun rose in the window behind his last few songs.

Similarly, the vocal styles of these acts was each a different deployment of sonic meaning, completely separate from the lyrics. Ari's delivery was forceful verging on guttural, straining and heavy. Rhythmically, he tended to place line endings or emphasis on the four, the final beat of the bar, as if firmly stamping a period at the end of a sentence, or planting a spike in the side of a mountain, each a portion of a long ascent. By contrast, Haguretic incessantly played around or between the beat, heavily syncopating their delivery, their rhythmic emphasis irrepressibly mobile. They also mostly delivered in a higher register – though one doesn't rap in clearly identifiable notes, the differences between a 'high' voice and a 'low' one are important. Haguretic's 'high' voices were a response to sonic discourses according to which a certain kind of aggressive hypermasculinity is heard in a gruff or low

voice. The obvious example for our purposes is Zeebra, whose sandpapery, guttural rapping is part of a "gangsta" persona that also has him bragging about sexual conquest and his own general excellence.

Especially in a hip hop context, this brand of masculinity is based on an image of aggressive blackness, a connection made very direct by an African-American producer's assertion that Zeebra stole his vocal style from DMX, a black rapper with a hyper-aggressive persona. Haguretic's high voices and playfulness (along with their comedic subject matter) help position them away from this brand of masculinity, and away from the appropriation of some of the most problematic associations of blackness. The 'high voice' has been used in this way by ironists, jokers, and jesters throughout hip hop history. It has been deployed by rappers of all races and nationalities[20], but it largely entered public consciousness through association with white American rappers including the Beastie Boys and, much later, Eminem. Chinza Dopeness specifically cited the inspiration of the French group TTC, whose (white) vocalist Teki Latex has one of the highest and most jester-like voices in all of hip hop. The spectrum from high to low-voicedness becomes a proxy for both masculinity and race. Ari 1010 told me he intended his music, with its shades of masculine power and angst, to tap into the aggression of young men, and at the show there was plenty of stiff-necked head banging and hoarse shouts of approval.

Symbolic meaning, including the meaning of sound, is anchored by history, every sign encrusted with the fast barnacles of the time it has passed through and every meaning it has had. As tempting as it may be to find in it a stimulation of the body in some pure pre-

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[20] It would be negligent not to highlight the pioneer of the high voice in hip hop, Ramm-Ell-Zee. Ram was black, but clearly refused to buy into easy stereotypes of black masculinity, a choice linked to his association with New York's downtown art scene and figures like Jean-Michel Basquiat. Basquiat produced Ram's classic "Beat Bop" and drew the cover art, though the two later had a fairly epic falling-out.

symbolic sense, the rhythm and sound of hip hop, and the questions of freedom, of sex, of masculinity contained in black music, are no more free of such bindings to history than the occasional irruptions of English in its lyrics. As early as the 1860s, when Admiral Perry arrived in Edo bay with his black ships to open Japan to American trade, his crew performed an impromptu minstrel show for the present dignitaries (Russell, 1991). Since then, though black music has come to Japan from other parts of the Black Atlantic, America has been a determining force in Japan's relationship to black music, and has contributed many of the images and ideas of 'blackness' that circulate there. Japan's popular culture, and particularly its youth, have again and again taken up black music in ways that both echo various kinds of denigration of blacks, and hold black people up as symbols of struggle and freedom.

If the sounds themselves are no less embedded in time and culture than language, they equally form a medium in which individuals find themselves able to make decisions and distinctions. Each style and its associations were cheered by the small, dedicated crowd at Liquid Room that night, but not all responses were identical, those varied responses speaking to differences in the audience members' senses of self. Where do these variations come from? What do they manifest? At a later show in the same space, I would see the enthusiastic response of a group of women to Rumi, and assume that they were making strong identification with her as a rare female artist in a largely male subculture. But I would quickly find out that they were actually close friends of hers, there to throw an impromptu birthday party for her. Rumi's own declared enthusiasm was, as we have seen, for Mobb Deep, and her own music generally reflected their hard-edged, aggressive sensibility. These moments highlight the failure of a purely structural view of the relation between individual and art, as the contingency of personal history supplants the power of gender position, and the strange alchemy of sound likewise moves listeners away from the place prepared for

them. The question is, of course, how this happens – or, more reasonably, how we should talk about the process. How do individuals come to exist outside of or against a history they are reenacting even as they speak about it?

One possible answer is simply to conceive of global culture as a force that disrupts the boundaries of the national subject, creating newness in that disturbance. This seems to be supported by Japanese engagement with black music, which started in full force in the 1920s, when jazz became the soundtrack to social transformation. This was the preferred music of the *moga* and *mobo* (modern girls and modern boys) who epitomized a new spirit of consumerist frenzy and hedonistic self-indulgence (Silverberg, 2007). During the proceeding imperial era, Japanese authorities banned jazz along with other music of the enemy nations, but this only seemed to make it a more powerful symbol for democracy and freedom in the postwar period (Atkins, 2001). This continued through the 1960s and beyond, with the country's *jazu-kissa* (jazz coffeehouses) resembling the Greenwich Village gathering places of the student underground and radical elements (Novak, 2008). Some of the music was brought by U.S. occupation forces, and while the occupation itself officially ended in 1951, American musical influence was persistent, to the degree that Michael Bourdaghs, in studying the influence of British band the Kinks in Japan, states that the U.S. functioned as the "window through which this [non-American] music arrived in Japan." (Bourdaghs, 2006)

But this disturbance and overturning of the national is less easily seen as a form of radical transformation in the broader context of the power that enables it. The prevalence of American music was due to the mutual imbrication of Japan and the U.S. before, during, and after the occupation. In the immediate postwar, many Japanese musicians had to cater to an audience of Occupation soldiers in order to survive (Yoshimi, 2003), simply because no other audiences had money to pay for entertainment. Stevens lists Japanese emulation of

American styles almost as a litany, moving through trends for jazz, country and western, folk, rockabilly, and finally rock, several explicitly described as "mirroring" the U.S.(Stevens, 2008). This bind saw Japanese musicians "locked in a love-hate relationship with the United States" after the war (Bourdaghs, 2006) – hardly the image of unproblematic freedom or self-expression.

American cultural influence came over time to suggest two different and even contradictory things simultaneously. For some, it was a symbol of the weakness of Japan as a whole, and culture seen as representing "Japaneseness" was preferred. For others, particularly youth and students, American culture symbolized a yearning for, and the possibility of, democratic reforms. This divide can be seen in music specifically in debates such as that during the 1960s and after over whether it was more "authentic" for Japanese bands to sing in Japanese or English. These questions have become less crucial since then, as Japanese consciousness of the American-ness of music like pop and rock and roll has declined to the point that American culture is now "just another source of information." (Yoshimi 2003) seized through music as it settles in to a certain foundational position in the Japanese psyche. "Cultural adaptation has resulted in this Western tradition being viewed as Japanese." (Stevens, 2008) The choice to consume or produce "American-style" or "Western-style" music is, in a very real sense, no longer a choice at all, and therefore one without real significance within Japanese society, replaced by other criteria.

The ultimate example of this is the power of music in putatively Western forms to express varying kinds of "Japaneseness" – for example, the sentimental torch songs of *enka* are thought to express the "heart" of Japan (Yano, 2003), and deep nationalistic sentiment remains attached to the martial *gunka*, a form important to the propaganda campaigns of World War II, based largely on European marching music and carrying overtly anti-

American and anti-Chinese messages (Stevens, 15). These songs are still in circulation, sung by right-wingers on days such as the commemoration of the war dead, and deployed daily by the notorious sound trucks of ultranationalists. These instances can be read either as the endpoint of a cultural colonization so complete as to be inescapable even by its most aggressive ideological opponents, or as the establishment of a uniquely Japanese syncretism. These two interpretations share that the end of publicly articulated debate is followed by the integration of style into subjectivity in an unproblematic way – the end of consciousness of aesthetic foreignness forecloses variation within national identity.

Realms marked out as 'Black Music', on the other hand, remain socially marked as different. Hip hop stands less for any American-style democratization than for an individualism that includes opposition to American power. Just as the recent popularity of Okinawan music in Japan suggests an attempt to distance national identity from the negative aspects of Japanese history through the embrace of the periphery (Stevens 25), so the embrace of specifically black popular music distances consumers from the complicated image of American cultural dominance in Japan. This is a strange double displacement, the deflection of one distant influence with another, since despite its lengthy engagement with Africa-rooted music, Japan has little historical connection to the African diaspora. It was not part of the African slave trade of the 16th through 19th centuries, and the community of African-Japanese (most actually African-American-Japanese born to African-American soldiers) is miniscule. Japan's contact to the African Beat has been at second hand, through its various Atlantic offspring, mostly though not always in American forms. As Novak bluntly states, "whether the genre was jazz or classical music, Japan was a nation that listened to sounds from outside." We have seen the ways that this radical distance actually opens up space for the self, in the form of error, misunderstanding, delusion, and imagination. But as

we have seen in the case of nationalism in hip hop, this 'alliance of color' is subject to convolutions that lead back to the same claiming of the music as Japanese that turned enka and gunka into vehicles of national sentiment – to the end of the gap where creation starts.

This process of integration, by which difference becomes the same, is not just a matter of politics, but of the more personal tension between human desires for belonging and individuality. John Mowitt finds reads this tension into the "backbeat" of rock and roll, which he sees as a form of the "beating-back" essential to African-American music – that is, its resistive character, its permanent state of revolution (Mowitt, 2002). Black music and the enjoyments which accompany it in Japan offer this permanent revolution, fulfilling a desire for uniqueness, difference, and separation. But all such separation implies the movement from one particular group to another – from "American" to "Black,"from "Nationalist" to "Leftist," from "Cosmopolitan" to "Japanese". Revolution and resistance are not progressive moves themselves, but general sentiments whose vector can be easily varied, because they are driven as much by the desire for sameness as that for difference.

Though defined on all sides by the history and discourse we have just reviewed, this tension is brought to life for Japanese hip hop artists and audiences in the routine of musicking. The practice of music is a way of defining and redefining the intersection of social opposition and in-group belonging – the boundaries and proprieties of one group against another. Artists must negotiate the limits of convention and technology to produce a desired balance between imitation and innovation. At another point in the cycle, nightclubs such as Liquid Room provide the venue for performance, not just by the artists on stage, but by the audiences, who perform themselves for those around them, proving their belonging and difference in every move.

Bass and Superstructure

In Liquid Room, as the Kochitola Haguretic MCs began their set, fifty-odd audience members stood in front of the stage and watched MC Chinza Dopeness[21] ferociously bang out beats on a small, glowing-red sampler held in his hand – in my own case, watching with the fascination that comes with a new musical discovery. But almost everyone in the club was in some way engaged in their own performance, waving their hands, swaying their hips, even something so subtle as the steady, classic, and now international b-boy head-nod. When one of the raucous Haguretic MCs shouted at us – "When I say Hey, you say Ho!" – we shouted back. We performed for them, and for each other, a collective moment of appreciation. We were also, though, making individualistic displays, asserting our own identities against that of the group, hoping perhaps to demonstrate our understanding of the conventions of the scene, to show not just that we belonged, but that we belonged *more*. Everyone in the room was watching one another, and knew, on some level, that they were being watched.

It is a truism about music that through it we 'express our identity.' We fans demonstrate who we are to others through behavior, language, and other markers that identify us with a genre or style. By our presence at such a performance, our bodily participation in it, our clothes, those of us at Liquid Room that night were asserting our own status as members of a particular group – though in my own case, with a certain necessary marginality. This group-ness emphasizes the ambivalence of music as a self-expression – it is almost equally a truism to say that music shapes identity, that being exposed to certain

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[21] Literally "Dopeness Enshrined" – usually the "Chinza" is written in kanji, while Dopeness is in English.

sounds and their associated sociologies is less about finding forms that accurately capture our selfhood than about shaping that selfhood to a form that waits to receive us. Various moral panics surrounding popular music are driven by moments when the anxiety of negative influence by 'someone else' squares off against the embrace of empowerment of the individual. For example, official or high-culture response to Japan's jazz craze of the '20s and '30s often painted jazz as a force of foreign moral corruption, while those participating in that culture saw the same culture as a vehicle for self-expression and, less explicitly, a source of individual power (Atkins, 2001).

It is tempting and easy to think of values such as independence or materialism as ideas in minds, principles people have either chosen or have had 'forced' upon them by cultural influence. But for Mowitt, "music is involved in producing the very bearer of an identity – that is, a subject." (2002, 57) This model of musical influence is part of the broader theoretical shift away from early Marxist theories of subjectivity as constrained by the ruling classes and their institutions through ideological propaganda (e.g., those forces that had to be overturned to reveal the 'real' working class consciousness beneath), and towards the idea that the limitation of subjectivity is inescapable and, in a general sense, politically neutral. This latter subject is the product of a 'forced choice' – the moment of social joining that at once neuters 'pure freedom' by turning the individual into the bearer of history, and makes action and identity possible by providing the tools of social interaction

Setting aside for a moment its larger theoretical context, Althusser's example of the 'hail' of a police officer captures this dimension of the choice that rises out of unchooseability. The shout – "Hey, you there!" – finds an individual who cannot but respond, discovering to his shock that the policeman's call was always for him, in a specific way that disturbs the sense of self-sufficiency. "'It was really him who was hailed (and not

someone else)," (Althusser, 1972) despite the universal applicability of the policeman's cry. Althusser, for his part, emphasizes too the inevitability of the subsequent response, as the bearer of the "hey you!" turns, and "by this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion he becomes a subject." This metaphor, however, might make subjectivation too specific – for while the policeman's shout is always for me, is the 'me' it finds necessarily one that will so willingly turn to answer it? Might I not (knowing all the while that it is indeed, inevitably, me who is being spoken to) choose to ignore the hail? Or maybe to turn and throw a rock at the policeman? In the moment of contact with culture, likewise, one can listen, or dance, or deride – but these responses emerge only after the uncontrollable encounter with a statement of which one is the inevitable object. The only real alternative is the utter lack of response, either mental, emotional, or physical – a total disengagement only available to the deaf, blind, psychotic, or otherwise unsocializable in the medium of the hail. Expressions of opinion or judgment are the substance of agency, the moments when the subject of action comes to exist, but that against which agency arises cannot be chosen, tying together those who move in the same cultural realm

Music's specific role in subjectivity and ideology was pursued by Theodor Adorno in the 1930s (Adorno, 2001). Two of his lines of argument are particularly helpful in thinking about the content of music and the ways it is produced. He felt that the best music was that which expressed, in its sound and structure, a meaningful relationship between every single part, each aspect of it affecting and reflecting every other part. On the other hand, "bad" music was that in which individual parts were interchangeable and did not reflect a mutually-constituted totality, being instead oriented towards achieving certain 'effects' in its listeners. His own judgment was that certain forms of Western art music, including the works of Schoenberg, were exemplary of the best in music, faithful to their own internal logic. His

examples to the contrary sometimes make his arguments hard to swallow for the contemporary reader, particularly when they reflect his white-hot hatred of jazz. Whatever the accuracy of judgments, his criteria are formal and detached – for Adorno, what is most dangerous in music is the lack of real variation between pieces of music, due to an industrial process in which each 'part' is replaceable by another, which in turn eliminates the internal coherence and wholeness of any individual piece.

Adorno's analysis also furthers the comparison to consumer products by looking at the way music is produced and consumed. The uniformity of "bad" music, the interchangeability of its parts, was for him related to its production under conditions that emphasized its status as a commodity, with the purpose of profit. This increased music's orientation towards producing "effects" in an audience – enjoyment, sadness – rather than exploring an internal logic. It also exerted pressure towards greater efficiency, encouraging producers of music to compose along pre-established lines, making each song easier to write – you just have to slot in an A part, a chorus, a B part, a bridge, and you're done. The interest in a song came to reside merely in variations within these pre-established and unchanging structures, whose parts ultimately had no relation to one another.

Adorno was not concerned with the aesthetics and production of music because he regretted the decline of an art form, or because he bemoaned the working conditions of songwriters on Tin Pan Alley. Instead, he felt that these factors had deep and grievous effects on the character of individuals and, in turn, on the structure and function of society. In the uniformity and interchangeability within and between some kinds of music, Adorno saw a code for the uniformity and interchangeability of human beings, a code that spread its secret through "bad" music, subtly reducing the listener from a participant in the shaping of society to a part of something pre-planned, perceiving themselves as no more important to

the underlying structure than the chorus of a pop song, and equally replaceable without harm to the whole.

Essentially, Adorno saw that some forms of music trained people to be docile, to submit to authority, and to devalue their own individuality, through the performance of uniformity. Music which aimed for effects rather than developing ideas, and in which parts had no relation to the whole, was authoritarian. The line between subjectivity and ideology is blurry here, and necessarily so – Adorno argues that the ideological effect of commercial music is exactly to erode the individual agency that defines subjectivity.

The centrality of difference and uniqueness to Adorno's assessment of music brings us back to the role of international music in Japanese subjectivity. The elimination of the consciousness of difference in the integration of international music into Japanese culture seems to mirror in some ways the elimination of the unique 'internal logic' of certain kinds of music in favor of the effects and predictability of others. Gunka Enka, and nationalist hip hop alike derive their effects from musical gestures whose historical derivation they seek to either eliminate entirely from social memory or, as we have seen in the latter case, tie in with Japaneseness on a deep level. If Adorno worried that the elimination of aesthetic variation that reflected and encouraged individual difference would lead to authoritarianism, we might equally worry that the suppression of the consciousness of the historical roots of musical difference could hamper consciousness of and tolerance for human social and cultural diversity more generally.

His critique of mass-produced music is linked with Adorno's critique of capitalism and, in turn, his theory of subjectivity. According to Paul Smith's reading of *Negative Dialectics* (Smith, 1988), Adorno was working against both the universalism of Kant and the movement toward reconciliation that characterized Hegelian dialectical thought, whose

"identity with the subject is untruth."(Adorno, 1983). In particular, his opposition to Kant was based on the latter's presumption of difference between subject and object, which entailed a logic of objectification by which the subject "must cut itself loose from itself as much as from the cognitive object." (139) This is an acutely historicized critique of metaphysics, as Adorno links Kantian 'identity logic' directly to the "prepared and objectified form of the concepts which the cognitive subject faces" (145) in the world of commodity capitalism. The commodity interprets the world for the subject, cutting experience into pieces, assigning names and meanings to objects, an operation that is particularly powerful and obvious in the case of cultural commodities. When Adorno declares that "dialectics means to break the compulsion to achieve identity" (157), he is demanding a move away from the identifying and ordering function of commodity culture – exactly what he finds so threatening in popular music such as jazz.

This model of culture as ideology presumes a hierarchical relation. 'Capitalism' in the abstract doesn't create culture; instead, it is created, particularly in its mass, commodified form, by well-placed individuals, possessors or accessories of power, at the top of the pyramid of industrialized production and distribution. Adorno's thought, though not orthodox in its Marxism, is still aimed against the class structure and exploitation. Thus this early model maintains what Smith calls an "emancipatory" (60) view of subjectivity, which held that some non-capitalist aesthetics (e.g. in the realm of music, Schonberg) could lead the individual to an awakening, one in which the world was released from the deadening, agency-damping effects of cultural pre-interpretation. But just what lay beyond the structure imposed on reality by commodity culture remained as elusive for Adorno and the Frankfurt School as had the realm beyond ruling-class ideology in classical Marxisms (Smith 60). The

commoditized ideology he condemned as limiting man's relation to the world was difficult to distinguish, once and for all, from a non-ideological form of culture.

One possible way around this blockage is to expand the scope beyond the commodity form of culture, or even, to be less tendentious, its moments of existence as physical product – to look between the seams of the industrialized production process. Adorno finds a commodity, and its attendant implications for subjectivity, because he is looking at a commodity – he pays attention to jazz, for example, only in its recorded form, ignoring the "raw music improvised and developed by passionate groups of musicians." (Witkin, 2003) He likewise brackets to the audiences consuming music, in either live or recorded form. And while he was anti-romanticist enough to emphasize that music was shaped as much by the social conditions of its production as by a singular artist, he did not narrow this down to look at how, much more concretely, a participating audience might have actually played such a shaping role. Such a possibility would trouble his assertion that music was a totally alien, outside force that could alternately silence or awaken the listener's subjectivity. As much as Adorno opposed the objectification of Kantian identity logic, his own thought maintained a stark separation between an acting text and its passive listener. One of the goals of this dissertation has been a close attention to the circularity of listening and producing, and in the following discussion of production and performance we will see the commodity object variously removed, transformed, and dismissed from the process of culture-making, gestures that puncture Adorno's stark division.

Adorno's focus on the culture industries and their commodified products can be understood in large part in terms of the era in which he was writing. The first part of the 20th century saw the rise of electronic media which delivered identical cultural products to unprecedented numbers of people, particularly in the form of radio, film, and mass-marketed

musical recordings. This coincided with the rise of modern authoritarian nationalism, and Adorno's critique of mass culture was often oriented towards preventing its rise in the U.S. He was a refugee from Hitler's Germany, and propaganda studies in the U.S. mainly cited that country's fall to fascism as evidence of the dangers of 'mass culture' – but Hirohito's Japan[22] and, no less, Roosevelt's America could be equally cited as making use of mass media as a tool of indoctrination. The second half of the 20th century, while no slouch in crimes against humanity, has seen the rise of a more fragmented structure of smaller niche audiences, of which the small-scale, underground culture I'm examining is an example. The force of such niche cultures in shaping individuals is not like that which Adorno assigned to the mass media - the trajectory from creators to texts to fans is not linear or hierarchical. The very separation between producer and consumer is less clear, and art is created in a kind of real-time collaboration that, regardless of the formal qualities of the music, makes Adorno's model of passive listening much less applicable.

There is another force at least as important as this collaborative practice for subjectivity in Japanese hip hop – the moments of adaptation and translation that lie at its core. Japanese hip hop is essentially 'decentered,' a term I hope evokes both poststructuralist theories of the subject and a much more literal aspect of cultural adaptation – the music's origins are found elsewhere, and though its audience is firmly located, new entries in the genre continue to refer somewhere else. The existence of an origin elsewhere foregrounds the abiding anxiety of subjectivity, the fear of unoriginality, and gives that elsewhere a profound psychic hold on those who seek to identify themselves in and through

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[22] Though in sometimes unusual or unexpected ways. For example, it seems that much of the mystique of the Emperor cult derived from Hirohito's complete *absence* from broadcast radio – many Japanese at the time described the particular shock of hearing the Emperor's voice when he announced the surrender, and at that moment realizing that he was in fact human. (Dower, 1999)

it. This decentering, among other things, accentuates paranoia, the sense of being watched. In this, Japanese hip hop suggests an alternative to Adorno's emancipatory model of the subject, in which a wielder of capitalist structural or institutional power is less significant than an Other of the cultural imagination. It also suggests that the proliferation of fragmented niche culture does not entail a radical freedom, total difference, or escape from the top-down "mass" media. Culture in the so-called "long tail" (C. Anderson, 2008) is deeply enmeshed in networks of meaning and form that predate it, even when it attempts to situate itself strongly against or outside them. Outside the mass culture industries and the formal structures of the state, 'independent' music nonetheless brings the immediate and the imaginary together under the guidance of rules – among them, the semiotics of sound, the regularity of ritual, and the confinement of tools.

Beating the Skinned

All of the artists who performed that night at Liquid were united, among themselves and with other musicians across the world, by their reliance on rhythm to drive their music. The beat in one form or another suffuses most musics of the African diaspora, and has come to be seen as their distinctive feature. At its most spare, hip hop's version is a bass drum kick followed by a sharp, high snare, this answer as satisfying as any melodic resolution – boom-chick, boom-chick. Compared to reggae's floating syncopation, hip hop's 'break' feels so steady it's heavy, Paleolithic – boom-chick, boom-chick, like a dirge. Held up against techno's opposite extreme, two flavors of an unwavering pulse that stretches to infinity, hip hop's beat reveals its micro-engagements with time. The listener constantly leans out ahead of the kick drum, anticipating the spectral snare retort, and is constantly

brought back into the reality of its actual sounding. At its roots, this is the delayed gratification of funk – boom-chick boom-

chick,

a shifting pattern that plays with expectations. In his description of African polyrythms, Small emphasizes that the gaps in African music, the absences, are as important as its presences. The gap is where the dancer inserts into the beat, where music meets musicking. In hip hop the insertion is slightly different – polyrhythm invites a million different insertions that add to a texture, but hip hop demands *one*. A call must have its response, a kick must have its snare – but the location of this response is often uncertain. In hip hop the dancer and the listener alike are playing a guessing game, not simply choosing a place to be, but trying to predict where they are expected. Even in the subdued dances of a relatively passive audience – the head nod, the tapping foot, the gently swaying body – one's prediction of the beat is externalized, a badge of know-how and belonging.

The centrality of the convoluted beat to global popular culture makes Adorno's critique dated in another way. Even as the 'music industry' collapses into a thousand smaller engagements, the advance of recording and production technology has accentuated aspects of music that were often uncontrollable or unimportant in the era of sheet music, piano rolls, and relatively lo-fi playback technology. Western musical scores are designed to enable reproduction of the melodies and structural movement of a piece, and Adorno, fittingly, let his focus be drawn there. But digital hi-fi has moved the center, opening up control of sound, texture, and timing to a precision previously unimaginable. It is in part because of this that we can talk about the subtlety of the beat's game as it arrives in Japan from America, its migration primarily enabled by recording.

For Mowitt[23], the beat has the subject as its stake. The boom-and-chick of hip hop is the sampled, chopped, distorted sound of drumming – of skin stretched taught and beaten. In turn, the sound of the drum impacts the skin of the listener, of the ear and the body, engaging the subject "at its limit," at the point where the individual's dependence on and implication in the collectivity becomes most apparent. "'The beat is one species of acute contact between skin and world (or other skin), a recognition/enactment of human subjectivity's communally constituted nature" (Mowitt, 2002). This is not just an extended metaphor – the beat calls on the listener to dance no less than the 'hail' of authority demands response, but the context of the dance club accentuates the fact that in the moment of the hail, we are also being watched from elsewhere. In this sense, the beat, the speakers, and the club setting constitute just the sort of cultural technology that Jean-Luis Baudry found in the 'cinematic apparatus' (Cha, 1982) – even, I would argue, when we are beaten alone, when the social scene of listening is only implied, imagined, ghostly. The drummer and his beat, from outside, demand that the listener act, and that those acts mean something to a third party – a meaning that is never a mere repetition. The drummer calls the subject forth by beating on its limit.

Drawing explicitly on Lacan, Mowitt conceives this limit fundamentally differently than did Adorno when thinking about the meeting of text and listener. Most importantly, he knows that the beaten subject cannot evade identity, cannot choose some form of music that hews only to its own internal logic – that no-one can avoid the hail of subjectivating ideology. Or at least, not all the time – though the "interpellative call [of music] strikes and moves the body, hailing it 'into position'" (57), the momentary nature of that strike, its

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23 Who, significantly, provides the foreword for Paul Smith's approving evaluation of Lacan.

alternating attack and retreat, are fundamental. In the moment of impact, the moment of contact, the drum and the listener are continuous, and the meaning of the drum is the being of the listener, that move well-determined. But when the sound retreats, there opens a gap, a space where meaning is not determined, and the actor becomes unmoored.

In broader Lacanian terms, Mowitt here parallels the beat of the drum with the 'flicker of the subject' – the moment of contact between the acting individual and the discourse that gives their action meaning (Mowitt 87; Fink, 1996). When purely acting or being, the individual has no knowledge, which comes only from the surrounding discourse. The actions of a pure actor – that figure vaguely suggested by the longing dream for 'freedom' – therefore have no meaning, are not decisions, and have no trace of the agency essential to subjectivity. A dancer must have some sound to reply to, and a rebel – the one for whom freedom truly means action – must have something to rebel against. When purely knowing, by contrast, the individual is so immersed in the discourse of society, so firmly grounded in the products of what is not its 'self,' that it cannot be said to be a subject here, either. This is the problematic position of the subject in many forms of Marxist 'interpellation' – the choice of response to the hail is so forced that it is not a choice at all.

The Lacanian subject literally splits the difference between knowing and being, its agency emerging at the point where the two overlap. The discourses of society determine us most powerfully when we are not paying attention to them, moving us as if on rails, in ways we do not control. Equally, there are the automatic moments of existence, choices whose mystery is even deeper than discourse – the actions that arise out of our basic needs and individual histories. Neither of these, in themselves, can be the locus of the will – both are, in their own ways, automatic. Rather, it is in the conflict, friction, sometimes consonance between them that we can locate something approximating agency. "The opening and

shutting of the unconscious in the activity of a lived life . . . is to be regarded as a kind of surface in motion where the 'subject' is, exactly, *articulated* in its relation to language." (Smith 71) Likewise, for Mowitt, the subject exists between silence (the "other" is absent, we are simply "being") and the impact of sound (the Other arrives, we experience meaning, but lose ourselves). This is the moment when we must guess where the Other *will* be, and how we had best to answer.

Making Sounds Make Meaning: Sampling in a Sampling Culture

Of course, music is just one limited realm of subjectivation, whose product interacts, in the individual, with projections and futurities on other fields, other skins – though they may overlap, the musical subject is not coextensive with the political subject. But we are concerned now with the Other's anticipation in what Mowitt calls the "percussive field," the array of rhythms and sounds that exist around individuals, intersecting with their being. The percussive field is, like the field of language, and like the subjectivating force of music as conceived by Adorno, historically and culturally specific - for instance, Mowitt's claim that rock and roll's "beating" is formative of a specifically combative stance is tied up in its blackness, its urbanity, and its transitivity. The rock beat comes from just about everywhere, from the industrial percussion of city life as much as from the rhythmic traditions of the Black Atlantic.

The process of creating a text parallels the structure subjectivity itself, being just another, slightly more fixed version of the flickering, brief moment in which agency emerges from the all-encompassing background. Creation can only be conceived as a constant pulse of absorption and retransmission under certain political and economic circumstances. In

Japan, the U.S., and the cultural landscape formed between them, technology, material comfort, and spreading political liberalization have drastically lowered the barrier between production and consumption of music. Adorno's model, which places musical discourse on a plane of power separate from the individuals it crafts, has been replaced by an Ouroboros, a percussive field that constantly consumes what it produces.

Kaori, the deejay and producer professionally known as Kor-One, was exemplary of this circuit between consumption and production, a walking skin that resonated the impact of the beat back out into the world. He was an almost obsessive student of American soul and funk music, Jamaican reggae, and techno from Chicago, Detroit, and Europe, his thousands of vinyl records just one monolithic symbol of his even wider immersion in Tokyo's percussive field. In this he was just like the innumerable fans of black music catered to by hundreds of record stores across Tokyo, constantly haunted by consumers flipping through bin after bin of black plastic. In early 2009, when we sat down for a long talk about his creative process, he had just finished the unenviable task of moving those records – thirty stone-heavy crates of them – from the heart of Tokyo to the outskirts. He was renting a new, less expensive apartment, to save money so he could devote more time to music. It seemed to offer other advantages, too – he described taking a nap next to a stream near his new house, an image that struck me as almost surreal after months walking the banks of the city's concrete-entombed sluices. The situation sounded more appropriate for him, a better percussive field, given his taste in poetic, echoey loops, the sounds of nature in music.

What set Koari apart from most of Tokyo's other music fans was that he recorded his consumption. Using a pair of samplers – an Akai MPC 2000 and the slightly more advanced MPC 2000XL – he captured bits and pieces of the records he collected, and used those bits to construct tracks for Origami to rap over, or instrumentals released by Memory

Storm. He told me that the pieces of sound that became the foundations for songs were those that caught his hear, chosen "without thinking" as he listened to one of his thousands of records. When a sound seized him like this, he would capture it on one of his tools, fixing one moment of the flow of sound. He would loop that moment – setting the sampler to restart it every time it ended, a technique foundational to hip hop. He would listen to the sound for days on end, meanwhile using other parts of the sampler's toolkit to transform it – cutting it into pieces, making it play backwards, changing the pitch. Again, there is no planning here, no strategy – "just playing." Over time, as Kaori listened and played, an "image" would emerge.

The track that gives this dissertation its title – "Minzoku Madness," released on Memory Storm's self-titled debut – was initially inspired by the lonely loop of a didgeridoo, a deep, hollow, resonant sound that brought Kaori an image of people, at the dawn of time, living in caves. That image determined the rest of the song's development, a second stage in which thought and planning entered for the first time. After he had found the loop that he liked the most – whether reversed, distorted, chopped to bits – Kaori would consider which other elements might fit. He knew his 3000 record archive well enough to remember bits and pieces of it, to know where to look for the sounds out there that he wanted to use. These, too, would be explored, reversed, transformed until they fit the image that the first sound had brought to him. And so to the groaning didgeridoo of "Minzoku Madness" was added a pulsing kick drum, a steady shaker, and a light marimba melody, along with the semi-manic scratches of his partner, DJ Psi-Kick, aka Jeff Valbuena[24].

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[24] Jeff, a Philippino-American expatriate, was as invaluable an ally in my research as anyone, and his story and perspectives deserve more attention than I have been able to give them in the current version of this work.

What in Kaori is attracted to the bit of music that catches his ear – the didgeridoo that must be looped? And what decides how to transform it and add to it until it becomes something different and new? This seemingly random affective response to a sound, followed by its careful and persistent transformation within a well-defined tradition, is the creative form of the subjective oscillation between being and knowing. It is Kaori the individual that finds itself (not yet himself) in some particular sound, in a way that is inexplicable, 'without thought.' The attraction to a specific sound parallels the attraction to a specific person, a sexual fetish, a taste – such moments are the product of mysterious cathexes born out of a radically individual history of being, that pure singularity that is not yet agency. Equally incomplete is the percussive field itself, largely consisting of the social meaning of 'black' rhythm built up over the Japanese 20th century. It is in the alchemical transformation to which Kaori subjects the sound that he as an artist/subject can emerge. This liminal moment is in the same register as speaking a familiar word, or the turn of a meaningful limb in dance – uses that follow convention as they transform and add. It is in the moments of meeting of these two levels – as Kaori describes, the moment when he crosses a frontier of chance and play into the process of thought and choice – that a truly willful "I" sparks in the contact between the individual and the world. The sounds that emerge from this process in recorded form are only a slightly more stable version of the subjective 'skin' between every one of us and the social world around.

This description may sit uncomfortably with those who regard sampling as an uncreative process, as the mere regurgitation of sounds created by others. I pressed Kaori on this – how does one put the self, the creative stamp of the subject and its choices, into sounds first created by others? He agreed that, yes, this was difficult – but he denied any difference between this difficulty and that of, for instance, a guitar player. "A sampler

creates from nothing. When you first get it, it has no sounds." He argued that the sampling artist is in this way more creative than a guitarist – drop a guitar, and you will hear its voice, a 'sample' contained in the shape of its body, the metal of its strings, the soldering of its electronics. Drop a new sampler, and you'll get only the thump of gravity (or maybe the crunch of pricey damage).

This argument, of course, presumes a fundamental difference between physical structures and digital rules. The sampler may require at least as much choice on the part of the musician as the guitar, but even without a physical structure that produces sound directly, it still enmeshes – even entraps – the individual in discourse, not through the texture of sound, but the technology of sound manipulation. In his discussion of the trap set, or drum kit, that is the primary means for beat production in rock and roll music, Mowitt points out how the trap set "drums the drummer" (94) – the set represents the accretion over time of certain conventions and innovations, a history that takes physical form and in that form continues to dictate the present playing of countless musicians. The trap set is a piece of culture, bigger than and always pre-dating the individual, within which the individual must work. Mowitt's essential innovation here is to apply to music the point others – Lacan, Saussare, Levi-Strauss – have made so powerfully about language – that the structures predating individuals have a determining effect not just on what that individual can "express," but in fact structure that individual at the inmost level. Thus the drummer is not in any simple way 'limited' by the trap set, but is in fact produced by it, the limits of his or her desire to express dictated by inherited structures. "Man speaks…but it is because the symbol has made him man" – and by the same token, the musician plays, but only because his tools have made him a musician.

The sampler that condenses the history of hip hop music and music-making comes in a variety of models, with varying details, but hews to a basic common format. Pioneered in the late 1960s and coming into full flower in the late 1980s, sampling technology allows the capture and reproduction of previously existing sounds. This is fundamentally different from both acoustic sound technologies such as the piano and guitar, and from electronic synthesis as found in most synthesizers, and drum machines, which builds sound 'from the ground up' by combining waveforms. Sampling instruments are blank slates, with neither the physical characteristics of acoustic instruments nor the electronic construction tools of synthesis instruments. Instead, the sampler can only receive sounds from outside of itself, which it is in turn equipped to process, interpret, and reproduce.

To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, every musical technology is predicted by the practices that come before it. Far from offering entirely new avenues for expression, the sampler condensed many of the tricks and traps contained in the form of hip hop and other popular music of the 1970s and 1980s. Hip hop block parties in New York in the 1970s presaged sampling in the way that early DJs like Grandmaster Flash mined specific parts of records – primarily the "break," or drum section – for their rhythmic intensity. These DJs would use two turntables to extend the break by playing sections of records back to back, or even manipulate the sounds on vinyl, for example in the now well-known 'scratch' technique. The first major hip hop hit, the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," used a studio band to reproduce, in slightly modified form, Chic's "Good Times," making a sampler out of a group of human beings, *après la machine*. Many circumstances led to sampling's long dominance of hip hop production techniques, but a big one was the economic privation of the south Bronx of the late 1970s - a DJ soundsystem was a less expensive accompaniment to a party than a band. As hip hop music progressed into the

realm of studio production, sampling remained an economic choice, though also a creative one, with looped records standing in for much more expensive compositions. Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson have generalized the valorization of the lost, discarded, and devalued to black dance music as a whole, including under their rubric not just the 'old sounds' found on records, but old technologies such as outdated drum machines (Gilbert & Pearson, 1999).

These practices of appropriation were only later translated into circuitry. The most important of the machines that did so were 1987's E-Mu SP1200, followed a decade later by the various models of Akai MPC. As Shibito at one point took pains to point out to me, this defining tool of hip hop sampling practice was designed and produced in Japan. Among the proliferation of samplers there are several constants of layout, as well as usage. The MPC is the gold standard of hardware samplers, with its 16 touch-sensitive square pads, extremely responsive to the fingers that will trigger their associated sounds. Other samplers, including the Dr. Sample and the Roland SP-808 (my own sampler of choice) emulate this layout, though each with its own character. These 'pads' are a huge departure from the keyboard layout that characterized most early electronic instruments, such as synthesizers. All of a sampler's pads are of equal size, and are laid out on a 4-by-4 grid, making it impossible to discern the tonal relationships between pads – they are not intended to hold sounds with certain pitches. Sampled materials can include not melodic elements, but anything from snippets of movie dialogue to sound effects such as gunshots or birdsong, and the tonal relationships between such sounds are less important to hip hop than rhythmic timing – ensured by the sensitivity of the best samplers' pads – and texture, ensured by the machines' audio fidelity.

Recently the declining price of digital circuitry has triggered a massive proliferation in the power of samplers, simultaneous to a precipitous drop in price and a diversification of the market. For example, that night at Liquid Room, Chinza Dopeness performed with the Roland company's tiny Dr. Sample, an entry-level unit that retails for less than $300 but is in many ways more powerful than the original E-Mu. Another recent development in sampling technology has been of software sampling programs, such as FLStudio or Ableton Live, which eschew discrete hardware and rely on the processing power of a personal computer to perform sampling functions even less expensively than the cheapest hardware samplers. Yaman, a trackmaker for both Origami and Chiyori, used such software to produce the short album *Toumei Trax*[25], an agglomeration of classic soul samples evocative of sampling classics such as DJ Shadows *Endtroducing* . . .

Of course, these new technologies coincide with the drastic decline of sampling in American commercial hip hop, thanks to the rise of strict sampling clearance laws. In the early days of hip hop, other artists' music was largely appropriated for reuse without permission, a Wild West ethos brought to a sharp halt when strict enforcement of copyright in sampling began in the early 1990s. Particularly at the commercial level, where the risks of infringement and rewards of royalty are huge, sampling has become extremely limited, largely replaced by original compositions. Sampling practice is kept alive at the margins of the music world, practiced mainly by those with few assets to lose in a court case, or its products released on grey-market 'mixtapes' spuriously labeled "For Promotion Only." As Yaman put it, "We call it a mixtape, but it's an album." That is, while it's labeled as a

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25 "Toumei" is a reference to the train line running between Nagoya and Tokyo, which Yaman traveled frequently.

collection of other people's sounds, with no implied claim of originality or creativity, Yaman actually does consider himself its creator.

Many in Tokyo's hip hop underground share this marginal position, and sample with abandon, but their practice is part of a much different history than that of hip hop's Bronx originators. Though Japanese emulation of Western music was clearly the product of the economic constraints of the postwar, the appearance of hip hop accompanied the almost unheard-of expansion of Japanese wealth in the "bubble" economy of the turn of the 1980s/1990s. This wealth made Japan an attractive destination for American hip hop acts, who were greeted with immense enthusiasm, and whose tours helped to develop the local hip hop scene. So, while American hip hop emerged out of privation and making-do, Japanese hip hop as a whole is a testament to the Japan's return to global prominence and power after decades of war and reconstruction derailed the original success of the Meiji Restoration.

This economic contrast doesn't simply delegitimize sampling as a practice in Japan – it makes it subject to drastically different standards of evaluation. Sampling resonates on a deep historical level with a brand of cultural appropriation that has contributed to Japanese domestic affluence and global hegemony, a project that, while shot through with self-consciousness, caution, and fierce debate, has been fundamentally driven by an open acknowledgment of the need to appropriate ideas from elsewhere, particularly scientific and technological innovations from the West. The pre-Meiji regime was characterized by opposition to technology and institutions from outside of Japan, and its swift destabilization by the threat of a few American gunboats remains a profound symbol of the risks of such delusions of self-sufficiency. The subsequent reversal and aggressive adoption of foreign knowledge and technology led directly to Japanese military victories against China in 1894-95

and against Russia in 1904-5, and in turn to the establishment of a Japanese empire in Asia, showing that appropriation had large potential benefits.

But cultural appropriation at all levels of Japanese society has been, for more than a century and a half, guided by injunctions to adapt foreign things in a way that maintains a Japanese spirit. Japanese artists are familiar with a long tradition of defending their cultural appropriation, with attempting to assert the persistence of 'themselves' in a text that seems superficially 'other'. The important question for my purpose is whether that self is contiguous with a 'Japanese spirit' guaranteed by biological, historical, or geographical group belonging, or is more strictly individual. Most of my respondents had little use for the idea of Japanese essence, taking some of the features of official discourse and putting it to more individualistic ends.

Such attempts to balance the borrowed with the unique are instances to explain a self located between being and knowing, making the relationship between an artist and a sample a model for the Lacanian subject. To be completely in the discourse of the other, merely to carry forward speaking the language or imitating the actions that surround one, is to have no self or agency – to be, as the Marxists implicitly considered so many of us, only a 'subject' of ideology. To cling to a sense of complete self-sufficiency, on the other hand, is to rob oneself of tools and power, to be unable to speak or act for different reasons – one is tempted to think of pre-Meiji Japan in terms of the ultimate unsubjectivated human, the psychotic, cut off from the signification that makes the world and one's presence in it meaningful. Of course, it would be foolish to say that any individual or social collectivity could simply choose to be either a subject of ideology or a radical individual. The point is that however they may regard themselves at certain moments of consciousness, the reality of all of these existences is of a constant oscillation between the two; the Tokugawa shogunate

was far from 'psychotic', thanks to both the small amount of commerce with the 'other' that it endorsed, and the inevitable unplanned contacts that define humanity[26]. Nestled within and conceptually overlapping with any radical national individuality would be the individual person totally subsumed in the field of the national Other's meaning, and it is equally hard to think of examples of this that do not bear persistent exception – love surfaces even in *1984*, and North Korean defectors find their individuality all the time.

Like cultural appropriation as a whole, the sampler is rarely so simple in use and purpose as it may seem on first description. Though its basic function is to capture sounds from outside itself, it does not simply regurgitate those sounds. Though the specific compliment varies from one sampler to the next, all such machines have certain transformative tools that can radically alter the sounds they take in. These were the tools Kaori used in the second step of his composing process - digital pitch-shifting, time-stretching, reversal. A sample may be taken at a lower bitrate, modifying the character of the source sound. This was a much-lauded feature of the E-Mu SP-1200, whose 26khz and 12-bit sampling lent a distinct grittiness to everything produced using it. More recent samplers may have built-in effects units, allowing for almost limitless transformation of source material. In some ways, though, the most challenging transformations of source material are also accomplished in the most straightforward way – simply through the creative recombination of small fragments of sound from multiple sources. The 16 control surfaces of an MPC can be linked to dozens or hundreds of different banks, giving the machine the capacity to trigger thousands of individual sound clips. For many hip hop artists, sampling

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[26] Most famously in the form of shipwrecked sailors who were taken in by foreign crews and introduced, for instance, to American society. These sailors were a major means by which commerce and communication between Japan and English-speaking nations eventually became practical (Miyoshi 1977, particularly 11-20).

at its highest level involves the transformation of source sounds, while simply finding a good loop is looked down upon as uncreative. So, while an obsessive knowledge of old music is essential, this is not simply for the purpose of regurgitating that music, but so that it may be subjected to transforming processes. The sampler, no less than the drum, is an externalization of the surface of contact between the radically atomic individual and the expansive, dominating world of discourse. We have only the materials we are given, and perhaps even the modes of our transformation are encoded before there is any 'us,' but the possible results of the intersection between our surroundings and the mysteries of individual desire are essentially limitless.

While the position of the subject at the margin of individual transformations and collective standards is immutable, Japanese hip hop shows that discourse itself can alter perceptions of that boundary, and to some limited extent, its location. The early to mid 1990s saw the transition in Japan from poppy, upbeat 'party' rap to the generally rougher, more 'hardcore' sound rising in New York City at roughly the same time. The dominance of this sound was for a time so complete in Japan that, according to Rumi, "[In] 1995-1997, everyone [in Japan] thought New York was the only type of hip hop, or else it's not right – it's not really hip hop. If you sang, or rapped in a monotone, and didn't copy the cadences or the styles of American rappers, then it wasn't hip hop." This dominance of a single sound was rooted in a particular theory of the relation between self and discourse, for instance Zeebra's claim that uniformity with an original model allowed access to the real essence of hip hop. For Rumi, by contrast, the institution of rules was so onerous that for a long time she simply stopped making hip hop. These are the two extremes – complete subsumption or complete abandonment of the language of the Other.

The sounds that August at Liquid Room existed not at the extremes of theory, but in the productive middle of living where any subject is stuck. Still, they were self-conscious about doing their own thing – as 'samplers' of another culture, Ari 1010, Candle, and Haguretic found more obscure sounds and enacted more transformations of them than acts like Zeebra. Many of the rappers I worked with derided the predictability of Japanese rappers who imitated the sounds of New York hip hop, more broadly militating against the ethos of imitation it represented. At the ESP Session, the Kochitola Haguretic MCs performed a song that threw around many English hip hop slang terms, such as "pimp" and "ho." These had become stereotypical of American commercial hip hop in the 1990s, and had surfaced eventually in Japanese hip hop, as well. I was surprised to hear a group that seemed to come from such a dramatically different artistic stance throwing around terms that suggested simplistic imitation of American styles. But when I later talked with them about the song, they cleared up my confusion, making clear that the song was satirical, its protagonist a delusional 7-11 clerk who describes himself as a "gangster" because he refuses to pay taxes on his tiny salary. They described it as a critique of certain kinds of hip hop in Japan, commenting sardonically that, not unlike their protagonist, many Japanese rappers seemed to think that waving around a fake gun made them a gangster. These moments of extreme transformation and the satire of others' imitation were attempt to establish these artists own approaches as more true to their own uniqueness, even while continuing to participate in a broader group culture.

The tension between collectivity and individuality that structures each of us as subjects is played out not just in culture, or in our participation in culture, but also in discourses about it that interact and permeate it. At first pass, we can find a new vector on which to map Adorno's assessment of music as authoritarian or emancipatory. Artists who

regard the 'origins' of a musical genre as taking precedence over those who work within it reflect an attitude of deference to authority. This seems to be particularly applicable to the cases of Zeebra and K Dub Shine, whose stalwart dedication to New York as a model for all hip hop is accompanied by a singular concept of Japanese identity. Those who defy such dominant 'rules' of artistic reproduction and instead push towards an ideal of uniqueness seem more likely to carry, and pass on to their audiences, a way of being in the world tied up with individuality, innovation, and creativity. This certainly ties up with the leftist, even radical politics of many in the underground, occupying simultaneously the artistic and political fringes.

But these sets of values are more complicated than may be recognized at first. Those which can be claimed to most faithfully imitate a 'source' may deny that influence, as in the case of Mars Manie. Even those who embrace "imitation" in some abstract sense may assert values of individuality, as does Zeebra. Most importantly, their music will inevitably be different from that they seek to emulate, even if their goal is utterly faithful reproduction. On the other hand, it is impossible not to observe that those outside the 'mainstream' are nonetheless drawing their influence from third parties, and some are specific and open about the influences they've absorbed. Origami, just like Mars Manie, make a claim to absolute originality. At one point, Ari 1010 lobbed the same accusation against some of his underground colleagues that Haguretic lobbed against Zeebra and other "gangsta" rappers, claiming that some of them "just wanted to play Anticon" – a reference to an American collective producing unconventional, low-key hip hop with certain similarities to that made by Origami, Candle, and quite a few other Japanese acts. It seems there is no choice, in absolute terms, between being an innovator and an imitator. There is only the question of how one chooses to face the reality of constant influence.

Black Desire

If these struggles and anxiety center around the 'right way' of approaching this other sound, taken from somewhere else, then *for whom* must these practices be 'right'? In real terms, the arbiters of these constant debates/fights are the fans that choose to whom to pledge their allegiance and give their money. But the struggle is implicitly framed in different terms, with the judgment of African-Americans often subtly or implicitly appealed to as an arbiter of domestic Japanese debates over originality and imitation in hip hop. What's of concern is not the opinion of any black individual or group, but that of an omnipresent abstract blackness constructed by the self-consciousness of the re-producer.

The appeal to blackness takes many forms, most of them musical, or bodily, in modes of dress and ways of being. The most extreme example was no doubt the "blackfacers" that were common in the 1990s – Japanese youth who darkened their skin and altered their hair in an effort to look black. Regarding the "blackfacers," Joe Wood remarked that "their 'performances' do not seem to be aimed at other Japanese" (Wood, 1997). He found that they thought their style was 'cool,' even though many other Japanese disagreed – their standard of 'cool' was international, a performance on a global stage. They saw themselves under the survey, not of other Japanese, but of the black style mavens of the West, towards whom Wood found them directing their style as an imagined compliment and show of respect. Wood's essay illustrates how driven by a deep misunderstanding – *meconnaisance* – this metric of 'coolness' is. While he is too thoughtful to utterly condemn the

blackfacers, the African-American[27] Wood certainly does not regard them as 'cool.' More histrionic Western reactions which pointed to the blackfacers as symbols of a deep inauthenticity or offensiveness have corresponded with their near-dissapearance fifteen years later, which might speculatively be attributed simply to a continuation of self-consciousness about foreign observation. But the appropriation of symbols of blackness persists in less overt forms of clothing and hairstyle, for instance the continuing popularity of dreadlocks. Even in this modified form, such gestures constitute an appeal to a distant, imaginary figure.

In interviews, artists often expressed in words the force that operated more constantly in other semiotic registers, blackness becoming a strategically invoked figure, reshaped to provide a warrant for the speaker's purposes. K Dub Shine could call on blackness as a sign of reactionary conservatism, while Chiyori found in it the ultimate mark of freedom. Discussions about hip hop frequently got around to some invocation of the rightness or wrongness of something in reference to its origins, or to the values supposedly inherent to its blackness. There was also a more direct aspect to this struggle for approval, as seen in the frequent attempts by Japanese artists to gain a foothold in the American market. Two notable examples are Buddha Brand's unsuccessful trip to become rappers in New York City, and Shing02's nearly two decades in California, establishing himself as a minor force in American underground hip hop. Both acts have had success in Japan disproportionate to their accomplishments in the U.S., Buddha Brand as respected elder statesmen of the Japanese underground, and Shing02 as one of the most successful rappers in Japan, period. At the time I was in Tokyo, his album *Y-Kyoku* (Distortion) was being

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[27] Though again, Wood is too thoughtful to make any simplistic claim to 'realness' about himself, in fact highlighting his difference from the image some Japanese expect of him.

heavily promoted, and it was frequently emphasized that it was his return to rapping in Japanese after years of only making music in English.

Another example illustrates that even for the well-educated, empathetic, and 'politically correct,' Japanese hip hop appeals to a blackness that needs little grounding in any final reality. I saw Deep Throat X perform several times wearing balaclavas that projected a menacing air of robbers or hooligans, which Terada said were intended to pay respect to Mexico's radical Zapatista movement. Most interestingly, he said that sometimes American rappers wore such masks for similar reasons. I wasn't familiar with any who used that particular symbol as a major part of their public image, and I asked him who he was referring to. He reflected for a moment, but, seeming surprised and puzzled, couldn't name any specific reference point: "Well, I guess maybe there aren't that many, huh?" DTX's public image was justified by the implicit approval of a black revolutionary ethos whose specifics were at least partially imagined.

These appeals to a spectral, always-watching blackness whose favor and judgment are the ultimate arbiters of taste is one of two major ways in which Japanese hip hop illustrates the transformational role of intersubjectivity in global culture. Mowitt's chronicle of a beat foretold is based on the movement of the individual from the realm of pure being to the frontier of language, on the subdivision of experience by the sign that allows meaningful social action. This is the process of alienation in language. The installation of an imagined observer, with the power to provide approval and ensure the subject's ultimate rightness, is equally crucial to the conceptualization of a subject that is both socially determined and empowered to change. This second process is labelled the separation. As opposed to the encounter with the language of the Other, here the role of the Other is one with "the 'privilege' of satisfying needs [and] the power to deprive [the subject] of what

alone can satisfy them. The Other's privilege here thus outlines the radical form of the gift of what the Other does not have – namely, what is known as its love." (Lacan, 2004). The subject imagines the Other to have the ability to provide satisfaction – a kind of fantasized, ultimate satisfaction, an experiential fullness.

The influence of this Other is constantly present despite the absence of any concrete form that enforces it. As individuals, we can understand this easily – we all catch ourselves from time to time acting as if we were being watched when we are alone, perhaps by those people with whom we have particularly intense relationships. We may act as if we were hoping to impress them, or rebuke them, or offend them, even though they are clearly not able to see us in action. Simplified examples might include secretly cheating on one's spouse as a means of revenge, or relentlessly pursuing career success as a way to impress a dead parent. The Other is not a real person looking upon us, but a force 'in our heads', created by us. Lacan argued that any dark window can suggest to us the gaze of an observer (Lacan, 1991) – whether there is actually anyone there is irrelevant. This omnipresent Other is the repository of the ultimate satisfaction conceivable by the subject, the ultimate object of the other's desire. But, crucially, the reward is just as spectral as its holder. Love is, above all, "the gift of what the Other does not have."

Equally illusory are the standards by which the subject hopes to attain that satisfaction, through the appeal to the Other's own desire. Lacan describes this psychic structure as originating and rooted in the Oedipal family drama – 'separation' refers specifically to the moment at which the newborn discovers that it is a different being from the mother, with separate desires. From this moment, it is the fate of all humans to attempt to regain that wholeness, to regain our status as the most important thing in our mothers' world. But of course, the child's knowledge of the mother's desire is incomplete, and so it

clings to whatever incomplete signposts it finds – "The child latches on to what is indecipherable in what the parent says." (Fink, 1996) In the end, the supposed knowledge generated by such speculation turns out to be fatally flawed. The child is never able to fully correspond with what the mother wants.

This creative, generative appeal to the ego-ideal, to that figure whose approval we seek, is fully visible in social practice. One very concrete 'someone else' who lends meaning to musicking is the person who watches you dance (McRobbie, Cohen, & Nava, 1984). The music that evening at Liquid Room placed varying emphasis on the relationship between our private enjoyment – of the music and of our own bodies' relationship to it – and the public display of that enjoyment. While Candle's performance tended toward the inward, steady, and contemplative, the Haguretic MC's produced a music full of impacts against the self, demanding performance. Angela McRobbie captures this dichotomy in her description of nightclub dancing as containing "a displaced, shared and nebulous eroticism," something that goes beyond, for example, the "heterosexual 'goal-oriented' drive" (*ibid*) of a guy picking up a girl. The nightclub is a field of miniscule comparisons and evaluations, followed by reflexive self-evaluations – am I nodding on beat? Is that girl looking at me? Who does that guy think he's kidding? This is not a constant paranoiac crisis – as McRobbie emphasizes, the club is "a darkened space where the dancer can retain some degree of anonymity or absorption," but it is "simultaneously a dramatic display of the self and the body."

The oscillation between these two states – of intense self-consciousness and anonymity – is another axis of the 'flicker of the subject' that Mowitt finds in the beat of the drum. Just as we move between drowning in language and acting without its anchor, we are alternately conscious and oblivious to how our actions appear to others (Fink, 1996). The person next to us is just one manifestation of the imagined audience for all of our actions,

the ideal person or persons we seek to please in some way. That same figure exists in the music – specifically, in the beat whose demand we meet with the response of our bodies. Whether we are performers, bartenders, club owners, record collectors, we devote some part of our minds to imagining what our responses look like from the perspective of the caller, someone not exactly real, but whose unreal gaze creates us.

So is it also with the powerful influence of the 'original' of globalized cultural forms – while their practitioners cannot help but appeal to the originating masters of their forms, the purposes and intent of these originators is just as indecipherable as that of any mother, because they are just as incomplete as individuals/artists. To the extent that creators, either individuals or cultural groups, are installed as guiding lights for the expansion and continuation of a culture regarded as singular, these figures and images are necessarily produced by the elimination of inconsistencies and incompletions. This is a process in which they, of course, are often implicit, as cultural emergences that were little more than a series of happy accidents come to be reconstituted into mythic stories, driven by purpose and values.

That appropriators that follow after might take these stories as gospel is only mitigated by the inevitable failure of their attempts to imitate them – the failure that in turn constitutes the 'accident' by which newness enters the world. Note a profound parallel here with the entry into language: the failure of this process is what makes it 'work.' Lacan describes disorders at the extreme ends of the separation, for instance the mother who really *does* make a child coextensive with her desire – 'her whole world.' This, as with the psychotic who successfully resists the 'alienation' in language, is a sickness rather than the achievement of a goal.

Cultural parallels here are easy to find, as the preservation in metaphorical amber of aging cultural forms – their maintenance in the face of changing circumstance and social need – forms several cottage industries. I would highlight major strains of 'classical' music, as well as programs like Wynton Marsalis' Jazz at Lincoln Center, both of which are distinct from even the most unapologetic Japanese imitators of American hip hop in that they exist much closer to the historical and cultural circumstances that produced the forms they are preserving. This leaves less room for productive misunderstanding, for mistaken translations that become transformative, or for any forward progress towards tools for living in a changing world.

The proper place for the subject is not success, either in mastery 'of' (by) symbols, or in fulfillment of the desire of some Other who will provide total fulfillment of need, but rather radically between – constantly trying and failing to find some pure identity with language, or with the Other's desire. So while it is our fate to constantly hash out the degree of our faithfulness to models and traditions, even in the moment of this debate we are producing the mistakes that make action as such possible. In the effort to 'fit into' some place we hope to find prepared for us, a place that holds out the promise of self-identity and fulfillment, we are creating the parameters of that space in our own image – an image that will never match the real shapes of its target.

In order to historicize the Lacanian subject, we must allow that subjectivation through the desire of the Other is not simply a single moment, but takes place again and again with the repeated emergence of distinct Others. The history of Japan in the 20th century has made an imagined America a persistent occupant of this position, as for the half-century of the postwar, "Japan has been wholly under the political, economic, and cultural hegemony of the United States," to the extent that "For Japan, the world is the United

States." (Miyoshi & H. D. Harootunian, 1991) As Japan worked to rebuild its economy, and particularly up through the 1970s, "the wartime feeling of unease towards 'America' turned into yearning" (Yoshimi, 2003) - America as a whole was the Other to be pleased, the holder of power, the place where people were already happy, and with the power to spread that satisfaction.

This historical relationship is triangulated by the role of African-Americans. In the early 20th century in particular, "Japanese leaders were inclined to view African Americans as a model for young Japan." (Koshiro, 2003) Koshiro describes the 'dualism' of Japanese racial identity since that time, pulled between an 'honorary whiteness' that helped elevate it to a (kind of) equality with Western powers, and an association with nonwhiteness, taking concrete political form in the "courting" of African-Americans as wartime allies in the pursuit of Pan-Asianism. (197) Nina Cornyetz captures this particularly well as a tension "revealing moments of slippage and indeterminacy, mirroring the concurrent, subtle repositionings of dominance between [Japan and America] (Cornyetz, 1994).

Cornyetz thinks through the relationship between blackness and Japan in terms of the "fetish," arguing most specifically that "Japanese refabrications of elements of black youth culture . . . operate on the level of signs originated elsewhere and split from their referents" (129), and that these commodified, detached signs all refer to a black masculine sexual prowess that "would invert the 'feminization' imposed by the occupation forces." (124) Thus, for instance, "[hip hop] outfits imagistically bound to African American black youth promise to transform the wearer into a stud." (125) This is the reappearance of the ideal ego, the imaginary, fantastic image of an idealized other that we strive to emulate.

But the different, and I think more productive, way to think about the relationship is in terms of the ego-ideal, the imagined Other not simply as a sign or image to be consumed

and reproduced, but as a source of structuring desire. This conception has greater explanatory power when looking at the full spectrum of Japanese hip hop, where the complicated and contradictory struggle for status is not simply a question of who can be 'more black' in either a purely imagistic or sonic sense, instead centering around a debate over just what the values of hip hop are. While unselfconscious versions of Cornyetz' 'fetishism' do reside on one end of the spectrum, the other is occupied by a kind of pure aestheticism that claims only a contingent, even accidental relationship to 'origins,' while in the middle lie variously permuted claims to both local uniqueness and global belonging. What binds these together is that even those with no apparent interest in 'blackness' as an image appeal to values like freedom and independence that retain an association with black people.

Cornyetz' typical Japanese hip hop fan idealizes blackness and its signs, fixed things drawn from pre-existing discourses, and does not directly address what a less 'fetishistic' form of hip hop might look like. Her conclusion praises 'fetishism' for troubling Japanese racial systems, but her central term often implies an opposite that is somehow more 'real' and less concealed by mere signs. So, though she finally reclaims disturbance and displacement as productive, the bulk of her essay, in its basic focus on object fetishism, points towards some realm of pure Japaneseness that would be found in the absence of this self-deception and distraction, perhaps one in which the taiko drum and shakahuchi flute remain central to Japanese musical self-expression. What we are left with, at any rate, is a fairly strict dichotomy between blackness in Japan as a pure, fixed image that is necessarily a disruptive outside force, and some radical 'reality' in which there is no displacement of sentiment onto partial objects. In this, we see a resonance between Cornyetz' reading and early 'psychoanalytic' literary criticism that approached artistic works as 'symptoms' of a

particular poets' neurosis, with Japan here figured as possessed of a 'feminizing' sickness to which some Japanese subjects react with a neurotic attachment to blackness through hip hop.

I don't disagree with this absolutely – I think that Zeebra's conjunction of hypermasculinity and fetishism supports her thesis, even fifteen years later. But this schema relies on the power of discourse to totally determine the content and uses of blackness. By contrast, a description in terms of hip hop's blackness as an ego-ideal – the imagined observing Other – can better accommodate the many variations in fan and artist practice. It emphasizes the fact that the figure of blackness is created at the borderland of the individual and the collective. The imagined desire of blackness, while structured by national/cultural history, is also mutable at the level of the individual. The ego-ideal of hip hop, the conferrer of legitimacy as to what is right and true to the tradition of the art, can be seen by its bearer as truly universal – for instance, when K Dub Shine asserted in his interview with Remix that he felt it was the role of hip hop magazines to support the community singlemindedly, he was asserting a singularity of cultural correctness. This absolutism, which imagines a black Other whose approval can be gained through a focus on symbol, might be close to the 'fetishism' Cornyetz describes, but is only one of many different ego-ideals running around out there. Anarchist revolutionaries, sensuous dreamers, fun-loving goofballs, and nationalist thugs all consider themselves in some way to be satisfying the demand of the Other – though they all may seem to be united by a single figure of emulation, that figure is different for each of them.

The Lacanian model that installs the desire of the Other as a fundamental structuring force in subjectivity, then, gives us a way to think about cultural globalization that reconciles the proliferation of images and models with the preservation of individuality and creativity.

This preservation does not require the insistence on some persistent underlying strata of native values in the face of foreign influence. Rather, it recognizes the imperfection that always hamstrings the effort toward emulation as inherently, inescapably imperfect. Far from being some distasteful instance of a copying that creates uniformity, the desire to please an imaginary Other becomes an essential aspect of the coming into being of an acting individual – and in the case of music, a necessity for artistic innovation.

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