

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

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Thesis Declaration

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Abstract

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

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

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