

The Reography of Reason: Australian Hip Hop as Experimental History and Pedagogy¹

Tony Mitchell, University of Technology, Sydney

Introduction: Australian hip hop vernacular

In its thirty-year history, hip hop has developed strong pedagogical dimensions which relate not just to imparting the skills of MCing, DJing, graffiti and breakdancing, but also in terms of promoting lived practices of subcultural identity and skills workshops for fledgling hip hop artists and disadvantaged youth. Hip hop embraces a series of epistemologies which enable a wide range of young people of many different ethnic backgrounds to express personal, social and cultural oral histories and philosophies through music, sound, movement and visual art. Arguably hip hop has become a form of experimental history for the members of the 'hip hop nation', enabling them to express investment and affiliation with the history of hip hop, from its 'old school' days of Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash and Africa Bambaata to the present, as well as providing a means of embodying, illustrating and vocalising personal histories and connecting them with broader local, national and global social and cultural histories. Hip hop has a wide range of educational tropes in its lexicon, from the notion of 'dropping science' to the various self-appointed grandmasters, doctors, professors and teachers who inhabit its history. As such it can be seen as a form of experimental history, in the sense used by Francis Bacon when he states:

History of arts, and of nature as changed and altered by man, or experimental history, I divide into three. For it is drawn either from mechanical arts, or from the operative part of the liberal arts, or from a number of crafts and experiments which have not yet grown into an art properly so called, and which sometimes indeed turn up in the course of most ordinary experience and do not stand at all in need of art.²

Bacon includes a History of Music in his catalogue of 130 'particular histories', and within his historical taxonomy, hip hop could be said to belong to his third category of artistic practice, insofar as it has not yet been defined as a 'legitimate' art form, and is strongly related to 'ordinary experience'. Further, hip hop is arguably not served usefully by being defined as an art form, since it is a vernacular form of popular expression originating in the rapping, DJing, graffiti and breakdancing practices of marginalised youth. In the past ten years hip hop has globalised extensively, taking on local cultural, rhetorical and social attributes as it has spread rhizomatically from sound systems and DJs toasting over dubplates in Jamaica in the 1960s to its US 'origins' in the South Bronx in New York in the mid 1970s, and beyond these to become rooted in global youth cultures from Greenland to Aotearoa/New Zealand (see Mitchell 2001).³ Despite prominent US hip hop academic Robin D.G. Kelly's recent attempts to reassert 'the centrality of the U.S. in the culture and distribution of hip hop culture' he has acknowledged that '[hip hop] artists incorporate local cultural forms, language and stories that speak specifically to their experiences'. And yet, he suggests, local hip hop artists' 'clothing styles, dance styles, vocal styles, even down to their stances and poses, mirror the

styles of African-American urban youth. The content might be different, but the look and the sound of hip hop around the world shares much in common with what emerged out of the States'.⁴ This claim is widespread in the USA but remains highly contestable, given the strong degree of indigenisation that has occurred in hip hop outside the USA, along with the enmeshing of indigenous clothing styles (eg. Pacific Island tapa cloth and traditional African clothing in the case of the Senegalese hip hop group Daara J), dance styles (eg. Brazilian *capoeira* and Samoan *siva* – see Henderson 2006),⁵ indigenous languages such as Creole, Wolof, Arabic, Bambara and Ligara (see Helenon 2006),⁶ and philosophical concepts such as *ujumaa* (familyhood in Tanzania – see Lemelle 2006),⁷ into forms such as the hybrid hip hop, reggae and Hawai'an music styles of 'versa-style' hip hop in Hawai'i (see Imada 2006).⁸ Within hip hop in Australia, many of these forms of indigenisation can be found enmeshed amongst the multicultural practitioners of local hip hop scenes.

In 2006 Anglo-Australian hip hop group the Hilltop Hoods' album *The Hard Road* went straight to number one in the Australian Recording Industry (ARIA) Charts – the first time a local hip hop group had achieved such a feat. The Hilltop Hoods went on to win two ARIA Awards in October 2006 for Best Urban Release and Best Independent Release, following on from Canberra duo Koolism who won Best Urban Release in 2004 and promptly dedicated the award to "the whole Australian Hip Hop Community ... and all the Australians who "keep it real" for want of a better phrase. Be yourself. Enough of that American wannabe trash'.⁹ Australian hip hop continues to be fundamentally an autonomous, Do-It-Yourself subcultural field which has little or no music industry input or support, and tends to distance itself from those who do, such as Figkidd, a doomed attempt by Sony Records to manufacture an Australian equivalent of Eminem. A number of small recording labels, producers and hip hop clothing manufacturers such as Elefant Traks, Obese, Nuff Said, Crookneck, Invada, etc. have formed from the ground up – using community radio stations such as 2SER, PBS, 3ZZZ and websites such as Ozhiphop.com to promote their music and their clothes, as well as organising their own gigs and tours, and in the case of Obese and Nuff Said, their own shops. These local practices, while influenced by a wide range of predominantly 'underground' US hip hop practitioners, tend to distance themselves from any direct US influence, projecting a distinctively local hip hop subculture. This also extends to the field of hip hop fashion and clothing; as Damien Arthur has argued, 'symbolic representation within Australian hip hop culture takes the form of consumption of brands congruent with the values of authenticity and self-expression at the core of the Australian hip hop culture' (153).

There is a prevailing commitment to expressing strongly-defined notions of an Australian hip hop identity which include rapping in Australian accents and speaking about local issues and concerns, including historical issues, as well as partying in a distinctively Australian style. As Mark Pollard, editor of the Australian hip hop quarterly magazine *Stealth*, which has grown steadily in size and scope over its eleven year lifespan from 1995, has stated, Australian

hip hop maintains a wide-ranging diversity within its espousal of an Australian identity:

“What we’re about” takes many forms – from raps about BBQs, drinking beer, smoking pot and painting trains, to political and social inspections about race, class inequality and gender issues. The content of Australian hip-hop is as varied as its practitioners.¹⁰

Australian MCs are sometimes divided into ‘ockers’, ‘falafels’ and ‘wogs’, as George Stavrias has pointed out in his 2003 study of aspects of Aboriginal hip hop in Sydney and Melbourne.¹¹ ‘Ocker’ hip hop is mainly Anglo-Australian, insists on using a broad Australian accent, with frequent swearing and recourse to Australian slang, decries MCs who rap with an American accent as ‘wack’ (ridiculous) and often celebrates aspects of Anglo-Australian working class culture like barbecues, sport and pubs. Prominent exponents include the Hilltop Hoods, Brisbane’s Lazy Grey and Perth-based ‘femcee’ Layla. (Another sub-genre known as ‘beer hop’ is sometimes referred to, and would include groups such as the Sydney-based, comedy-inflected Two Up, who celebrate sport, RSL clubs and the like.) ‘Falafels’ is the colloquial term for ‘conscious’ rappers who generally express a left-wing or anti-government perspective in their lyrics, and are sometimes characterised as ‘hippies’ in their espousal of a critical, oppositional and even intellectual view of Australian issues such as the treatment of Aborigines and refugees and Australia’s involvement in the war in Iraq. Sydney group the Herd is perhaps the most distinctive example of this sub-genre, along with Melbourne-based ecological hip hop sound system Combat Wombat. ‘Wog’ rap refers to MCs of non-Anglo descent, mobilising a reverse identification with the discriminatory term ‘wog’ which arose after the stand-up comedy show *Wogs Out of Work* became widely successful throughout Australia in 1989. Prominent practitioners would include Lebanese-Australian MC Sleek the Elite, multicultural Melbourne crew Curse ov Dialect, and TZU, fronted by Eurasian MC Joelistics, as well as Koolism and Perth crew Downsyde. Some groups and individuals, such as pioneering Sydney crews Def Wish Cast and Brethren – who are also exponents of a Christian ethos - overlap these categories. And many of these groups and performers make reference to aspects of Australian history as a way of contextualising their expressions of local identity, as in the case of Curse ov Dialect, who have expressed their opposition to the colonisation and suppression of Australian Aborigines:

Australia's history is no mystery
An alien nation built on British colonisation
And genocide demonstrations, conquest, war
Terra Nullius insults the indigenous
Aboriginal people who weren't treated as equals
Their stolen generations aided forced assimilation.¹²

With regard to the widespread use of Australian accents and expressions in all categories of local hip hop, a 2003 sociolinguistic study by Renae O’Hanlon compared a representative sample of thirty tracks of Australian hip hop with the same number of tracks from contemporary Australian rock, pop

and country music. She found that Australian hip hop uses a far greater proportion of culturally-specific Australian slang and accents, including much greater concentrations of Australian English lexical, phonological and grammatical features, despite its reliance on US-derived hip hop terminology. Two-thirds of the hip hop tracks O'Hanlon analysed contained

at least one example of either Australian place names, cultural references, or abbreviations ... or uniquely AustE [Australian English] lexical items. Many of the songs are saturated with such examples ... In addition to broad phonological features, AHH [Australian hip hop] artists perform using non-standard AustE grammatical forms which are generally associated with the working class.

On the other hand,

The language of other youth music genres in Australia contains markedly fewer examples of AustE language. In fact, twenty-eight of the artists studied did not use any (non-phonological) linguistic devices that would identify them as Australia ... The majority of youth music genres in Australia, most notably pop and rock, are dominated by an imported cultural identity which relies heavily on the USA.¹³

O'Hanlon's study was partly based on the tracks on an Australian hip hop compilation released by Obese Records. Together with the widespread use of Aboriginal English by indigenous Australian MCs, and arguably the influx of various inflections of non-Anglo migrant variants of Australian English, it suggests that hip hop has provided a vitally important medium of renewed expression for colloquial and working class forms of Australian vernacular English. This, apart from providing evidence of hip hop's 'indigenisation' in Australia, suggests that it has also become an important repository for idiosyncratically local forms of uniquely Australian English. The content of many hip hop tracks also frequently refers to aspects of both the history of hip hop in Australia and Australian history. What follows demonstrates how this has occurred in the work of one Melbourne MC, and combines oral history with musical analysis and commentary.

'Melways': Straight out of Melbourne

The hip hop scene in Melbourne has been particularly influential in terms of generating an Australian hip hop praxis which embodies a community network of investment as well as drawing on a history of the development of hip hop in Australia since the early 1980s. It also embodies the three typographies of Australian hip hop outlined above, with the Obese label, Art of War and MC Reason arguably representing 'ocker rap'. As MC Reason has stated:

the best memories of my youth are all about walking around my suburb, walking around tall and proud of being a Melbournian. It was Melbourne hip-hop, later it was Aussie hip-hop, but it was Melbourne hip-hop that was the most important thing to me. And having the opportunity to have been around since the local rivalries, the local territories and being very much a part of the local gang cultures, which were around in the late

'80s. Still to this day there is a sense of that, a heritage that has been passed on, to be proud of where you come from, of your local 'burbs, and I think people carry the flag from generation to generation. And at the end of the day that pride is about being Australian MCs embracing Australian culture, not Australian MCs embracing US cultures. We are going out on a limb to be recognised for making culture that is distinctly from here, for here, for this great country of ours. I think it's part of the true Australian spirit, whether it's on a community level, whether it's on a sporting stage, our pride as Aussies is renowned across the world, and hip-hop is continuing on with that legacy.¹⁴

This has involved a gradual shift from a small, self-sufficient, DIY underground subculture to a more widely accepted musical and cultural practice which is beginning to gain mainstream acceptance. Reason is a key practitioner in the Melbourne scene and records on the Obese label, having produced two EPs and two albums to date, *Reography* and *One Step Ahead*, which have been important in terms of contributing to a distinctively Australian hip hop linguistic idiom, history and identity as well as a concern with a range of political and social issues. He has also been extensively involved in the local hip hop scene as both an educator and a producer of experimental histories of Australian culture and politics. By day Reason is Mr. Schulman, a dedicated history and science teacher at Mount Scopus Memorial College, where apart from teaching Australian history he has also organised hip hop jams by peers such as the Hilltop Hoods and run graffiti workshops and DJ events at school carnivals. As he told me in an interview in 2004, he is able to combine his roles as a teacher and an MC with few modifications:

I think I'm able to maintain a constant level of education in everything that I do. And definitely I do enjoy doing, let's say, party tracks which are still indicative of real life, but I'd rather talk about social issues, social commentary, indigenous issues, land rights, the Australian environment, the Australian political system. It's something that I rap about and I'm also a history teacher and a humanities teacher, so I get to impart that knowledge on students in the classroom ... [My students] support me, they go out and buy my albums and come to the underage gigs and they love the fact I am able to wear two hats. I go into the classroom and work well with them, I work with my students rather than teach at them and you use those sorts of modern day approaches to teaching. And then they hear me on the mic, and I don't rap too far away from the person in the classroom. I don't have a teacher voice, I don't have a special MC voice I put on – there is a little bit of persona that comes with [being] on stage – but my variations as a person are not great.

Majoring in Aboriginal Studies at Melbourne University, and now in his mid-30s, Reason is a veteran of the 'second wave' of the Melbourne hip hop scene which he has been involved in since the mid 1980s. In the 1990s he was involved in the Push, an educational program which took workshops on hip hop and contemporary urban street cultures to young people in outer regions in lower socio-economic regions of Victoria. He was also the DJ of *Hittin' Switches*, the longest running community radio program featuring

Australian hip-hop which operated on PBS for over 15 years. Reason's range of musical expression extends beyond hip hop: his track 'Out on the Patio' is a witty Melbourne-based palimpsest of rock group Gangajang's iconic 1985 Queensland hit 'Sounds of Then (This is Australia)' which offers observations on the contemporary Australia of Prime Minister John Howard; and he includes politically militant Australian rock group Midnight Oil among his major influences.

One Step Ahead, which includes remixes of a number of tracks from his 2002 album *Reography*, is an unashamedly patriotic, autobiographical but critical celebration of a wide range of aspects of Australian culture. The opening track, 'Have You Ever?' challenges the listener to think about a scattershot range of issues, some historical, some self-referential. The track catalogues a number of features of both the Australian hip hop scene and Australian and world public and political life and history. It is presented as a series of questions to the listener, asking if we think he's professional and like his accent, emphasising that Aussie hip hoppers are proud of where they're from, and that he has been around on the Melbourne hip hop scene since the 1980s. Later he namechecks *Hitting Switches* along with pioneering Sydney group Def Wish Cast's first album in 1994, and the website Ozhiphop.com. He queries whether John Howard will ever say 'Sorry' to indigenous Australians, as he was pressured to do in the 1990s, and mentions the 2002 Bali bomb blast which killed a number of Australian tourists, the September 11 Twin Towers attack in New York in 2001, and refers to the desirability of peace in the Middle East alongside vegetarianism and giving up your seat on public transport to the elderly. He refers to the importance of remembering the past, his occupation as a schoolteacher, and claims 'this song is all true' in the sense that it is all based on real events, experiences and facts. There is a sense of social reality and responsibility embodied in the song, and seemingly trivial events from everyday life are enmeshed with important public historical events.

The video clip for the track starts with an elderly man sitting on a Melbourne street placing the pick up of an old 78 wind-up record player onto a record, then pointing to graffiti behind him on a street wall. As the music starts, the camera pans down the street, eventually revealing a young man wearing a grey hoodie who turns into the doorway of a building and starts going up the stairs. The protagonist in the hoodie then has a series of encounters with a group of street children, a busker playing a saxophone and a hot dog salesman before a series of buildings materialise on a sky scape. He then passes a young man begging on the street with a sign saying he is a victim of poker machines, followed by a Collingwood supporter - played by Reason - and is threatened by a couple of 'homies'. We then cut to a double shot of Reason himself in profile, followed by a break dancer, and return to the protagonist of the clip as he is embraced by a transsexual prostitute but breaks away from her, then passes a couple kissing passionately and two girls running in apparent flight from something down the stairs. The protagonist finally reaches his destination and takes the needle off the record we saw at the beginning of the clip. We see that the record on the turntable is Reason's latest album on the Obese label, a nice framing device for the clip,

which is after all promoting *One Step Ahead*, also referred to in the lyrics to the track. 'Have You Ever?' is a narrative of everyday street life for a hip hop head in Melbourne, with a couple of surreal touches and a nod to the active graffiti scene in Melbourne, as well as a comment on building speculation, with references to a number of significant hip hop and historical events.

Another track on *One Step Ahead*, 'You Never Know' deals with environmental issues, while 'Weather the Storm' (included in two versions) incorporates a 1980s 'cock rock' riff into a celebration of the history of Oz hip hop, epitomised in the conjunction of the old red railway carriages and hip hop homies from the suburbs: 'red rattlers and suburban battlers'. The title track is a personal statement of progress which even invokes historic Australian film character Skippy the kangaroo's hopping skills. 'Good Sport' celebrates supporting one's team in Aussie sport, and namechecks cricketer Richard Hadlee, the Ashes, Australian Rules football star Tony Lockett, TV sports commentator Eddie McGuire, and TV travel program *The Great Outdoors*, complete with reference to Aboriginal presenter Ernie Dingo. Reason even rhymes Aboriginal rock singer 'Archie Roach' with 'footy coach' and works in some didgeridoo in 'Danger Danger'. 'Day in the Sun' refers to eskies (Australian plastic picnic hampers), cricket, boogie boards (small surf boards) and the Australian summer, and has stand-out production by Brazilian-born, Adelaide-based MC and DJ Simplex of Terra Firma. There are numerous other guests on the album from gutter-mouthed Brisbane-based MC Lazy Grey to Newsense and Ciecmate from Canberra's Hospice Crew, as befits an ongoing sense of Australian interstate community, but the bulk of production duties are handled by Melbourne veteran DJ Vame. 'True Aussie Icon' starts with reference to Dorothea McKellar's famous Australian poem 'My Country' and proceeds on to a nationwide travelogue, taking in Melbourne's Yarra River, ski resort Thredbo, the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne bay side suburb Port Philip, Sydney harbour, Sydney's Princes highway, Aboriginal mining town Jabiluka, South Australian outback opal mining town Coober Pedy, the Great Barrier Reef, all the major cities, south Adelaide coastal resort Seacliff, the Torres Straits, Australia's most easterly point Cape Byron, the multicultural West Australian town of Broome, Alice Springs, Gundagai, and numerous other places, in a cartography of the country sketched by a history and geography teacher and drawing on the tradition of Geoff Mack's famous 1959 Australian bush ballad 'I've Been Everywhere', which topped the Australian record charts in 1962 in a version by Lucky Starr. As Reason has stated:

It's part two of a song called 'Melways', which was a song that was very Melbourne orientated in its lyrical content. I just wanted to take this one to a national level, an Australian perspective. So it's really about the places that I've been, the travels that I've done, the things that I've seen – whether it's drinking at the G or hanging out with coral on the Great Barrier Reef. Whether it's walking down Hindley Street [in Adelaide] putting up stickers, and I think the prominent thing about the song is my mentioning of famous Australian areas, suburbs and regions that people can latch onto. It's something that I'm very proud of, I'm very proud of the country we live in, I'm sorry for the mistakes that have been made in

the past on many different levels by governments, early settlers, etc. But I do believe that the only way we can go forward is by being positive, and that is something I pride myself in, and something that was in the forefront of my mind when I put together this project, for example, calling it *One Step Ahead*. Always just try and keep one step ahead, don't look back, and in a song like 'True Aussie Icon' it's basically just highlighting my pride for the Australian landscape that is very dear to me.

In 'Reography' he attributes his passion for geography and topography to his boyhood desire to be a forest ranger, and basically presents a biography of his life to date, mentioning events such as the Ash Wednesday fires in Victoria 1983 and its coincidence with the birth of the Melbourne hip hop scene with 'young B boys spinning on their heads'. The chorus to the track expresses the ethos behind most of his output:

Every now and then we have to stop and look back
See where we're from and how we got where we're at.¹⁵

This is a reference to US MC Rakim's celebrated expression 'It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at', which Paul Gilroy has appropriated to refer to what he calls 'the dialectics of diaspora identification' in 'black music' and African-American hip hop.¹⁶ But as Reason demonstrates, this can equally be applied to the rhizomatic growth of global hip hop outside the USA, and to its multicultural diversity in Australia. Reason, who is from a Jewish background, relates the multicultural aspect of Australian hip hop to its emphasis on positivity, community and friendship:

That's the beauty of Australian hip hop, you know, we're such a multicultural society, that's where people can't be judgemental about what people are doing, because you honestly don't know what's happening behind the scenes. I mean, you see only a face, you see only the artist, and sometimes you make a judgement on an artist, 'I don't like their shit!' But then you get to meet them and they are the best people, so nice.

Reason's output could be referred to as a representation of the politics of everyday life, a personal history which connects with the broader history of Australian popular culture and politics from its development from British colonialism into contemporary forms of multiculturalism.

Life's a lesson: Pedagogical hip hop

Reason's most recent EP, *Life's a Lesson*, engages directly and equally with both his teaching and his MCing. As he states in the title track:

Lesson one, welcome to my history class
It's the mystery of the past, vast armies invade
In Medieval times the bubonic plague
And in the Hague War crimes are heard and that's word

Religious and pagan, indigenous invasion
It's lesson preparation, detention to graduation
Hasten from the past to geography class
Teach topography a blast -volcanic explosion
Soil erosion, compass it's global
Polar caps meltdown just like Chernobyl
Keep it local suggest for refugees
Recess - go out and play
Be back for lesson three!¹⁷

It comes as no surprise that Reason does not experience many discipline or attendance problems in the classroom, a fact also reported by most hip hop MCs who have classroom teaching experience. The second track on the EP is called 'Many Dark Reasons' and features New Zealand MC Billy Wilson from Dark Tower, one of the few NZ groups to rap in 'natural' Kiwi accents which match Reason's broad Australian tones. To a gentle Pacific guitar strum, the track references the war in Iraq, pollution, children bearing arms, global warming, the Sudan, Ethiopia, poverty, nuclear fission, terrorists, separatists, suicide bombers, overpopulation and other global issues of import. 'Writing on the Wall' is not so much about graffiti as chalk on the blackboard, recounting the story of a Melbourne educational hip hop lifestyle – 'The words are invisible, their meaning is invincible /I'm a teacher climbing the ranks of principle' – with quotes from Midnight Oil's 'The Power and the Passion' along the way. 'It's All Good' is also about the linked experiences of teaching and MCing – 'so who's complaining when you're being entertaining' is its catchphrase – and the satisfaction it brings. 'Young Pete' is about a wayward primary school friend who 'grew up on the right side of the tracks', was busted and subsequently became a police informer, 'making us feel guilty when we were really innocent' and disappeared from school. Twenty years later, he turns up with his wife and eighth grade son at a parent-teacher meeting.

In an interview in Sydney street press weekly *3DWorld*, Reason indicated that there are important links between self-representation and one's beliefs and views on both public and everyday life in Australian hip hop:

Hip hop is a medium which in Australia is very predetermined by one's beliefs, stance on issues and personal views. I have always ensured that every word that I utter on a track is truly representative of where I am at in everyday life. Egos and persona seem to dictate a small proportion of the scene these days and it is encouraging to see the other ninety percent being representative of themselves. My interest in such topics as the environment, politics and reconciliation come from a number of years studying at university and involve living out these concepts in everyday activities. Being a proactive member in society, whether in the hip hop scene or everyday life, is important to me.¹⁸

Reason has also acknowledged the important role that women have played in Australian hip hop history, from Charlene and Chrissie – prominent graffiti artists, MCs and DJs in Sydney and Melbourne in the 1980s – to more recent figures such as MC Que, MC Trey, MC Thorn, MC Trey, Macromantics and

Maya Jupiter. He has also admitted that Perth femcee Layla 'ripped us' when she played a Block Party gig with most of the male Obese crews at the Corner pub in Melbourne in October 2005, but he also refuses to dismiss or denigrate the male-dominated aspects of Australian hip hop, nor its non-educational, party aspects:

Hip-hop is predominately a male orientated culture for sure. I mean groups like Art of War do what they do, and they do it at the best level, they come at it with good lyrical content, not typical...they might have a style which is indicative of a harder, in your face style, they don't come out with the usual one-liners or the usual punch lines, they have created a style which still bleeds Australian. So Art of War, and the Hospice crew as well, they jump into a lot of party styles, and fun drunken styles as well, but they are pretty focused on keeping it raw, and they are the best at what they are doing. And I definitely think there is a place for that style in Australian hip-hop; I love that style, I think that style is equal to the other styles. I think there are different perceptions of Australian hip-hop, and that is one perception, that *that* is Australian hip-hop, or that misogynist bloke style is Australian hip-hop, but it's not. It's only one part. And Australian hip-hop is not all about being education, being socially and politically conscious, that's one part of it again, but I would hate it if that alone constituted Australian hip-hop to the mainstream ear.

Perhaps surprisingly, in terms of a career choice, Reason ultimately values his teaching more highly than his role as an MC:

My teaching is the most important thing in my life. It used to be seventy percent hip-hop, thirty percent teaching, but now it's sixty percent teaching and forty percent hip-hop. I just see my life in hip-hop for the next 10, 15, 20 years to be on increasingly different levels. I don't see myself rocking all the shows when I'm 40, but I definitely see myself conducting workshops or putting together gigs. Doing other things within hip-hop that are not necessarily on a microphone tip. Whereas with teaching, I see myself doing that for the next 30 years, easily. Teaching is my career. If I thought hip-hop would be my career, I would have left teaching and done it ten years ago, before anyone else was doing it now. A lot of people of my generation would have been doing it at a time when we could have had a true belief that it was going to be our career, but we knew otherwise, we knew it wasn't going to happen. It's only in the last five years that hip-hop can be a career, whether working in the store, or in merchandise, as an active artist, a DJ doing gigs every week across the country. So there's definitely a scope for a full time hip-hop job, but it's not something that interests me. I've travelled seventeen times this year interstate, so I've been able to maintain both teaching and doing shows. Leaving school on Friday, flying to Brisbane and flying home lunchtime Sunday, doing some marking and then going to school on Monday. People ask me how I do it, but I've just been doing it for so long now that I'd hate life without it. I like to be busy.

Over the fifteen year period between 1990 and 2005 Australian hip hop has developed its own distinctively multicultural, indigenous and localised identities, accents, expressions and frames of reference which bear increasingly less relation to either the US forms of commercial rap music which dominate global music media broadcasting, or to US hip hop in general. And in its espousal of an educational field of activity, and in some cases, a strongly politicised engagement with national social and historical issues, it has become a powerful vehicle for self expression, self-awareness and historical knowledge among Australia's youth. If hip hop can generally be defined as an 'experimental', non-legitimate form of creative expression, in the sense used by Francis Bacon, practitioners like Reason cement that form of expression within an alternative educational historical praxis which at times overlaps with conventional educational institutions, but is firmly rooted in 'ordinary experience' and has not been validated by conventional notions of career and professional practice either within teaching or the music industry.

Bio note

Tony Mitchell is a senior lecturer in cultural studies at the University of Technology, Sydney. He is the author of *Dario Fo: People's Court Jester* (London: Methuen: 1999), *Popular Music and Local Identity: Pop, Rock and Rap in Europe and Oceania* (University of Leicester Press, 1996) and the editor of *Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop Outside the USA* (Wesleyan University Press, 2001). He is currently researching Australian hip hop on an Australian Research Council grant.

¹ This article is based on a paper given at the conference 'Re-thinking the Past: Experimental Histories in the Arts', held at the University of Technology, Sydney, July 28-29, 2006.

² Bacon, Francis. 'Preparative Toward Natural and Experimental History: Description of a Natural and Experimental History such as may serve for the Foundation of a True Philosophy'. (1620)

<http://www.constitution.org/bacon/preparative.htm>.

³ Tony Mitchell (ed.) *Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop Outside the USA*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 2001.

⁴ Kelley, Robin D.G. 'Foreword'. Ed. Basu, Dipanita & Sidney J. Lamelle. *The Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip Hop and the Globalization of Black Popular Culture*, London: Pluto Press, 2006: xiii-xiv.

⁵ Henderson, April. 'Dancing Between Islands: Hip hop and the Samoan Diaspora'. In Basu & Lamelle (2006). 189.

⁶ Helenon, Veronique. 'Africa on their Mind: Rap, Blackness and Citizenship in France'. In Basu & Lamelle (2006). 158.

⁷ Lamelle, Sidney J. "'ni WapiTunakwenda": Hip Hop Culture and the Children of Arusha'. In Basu & Lamelle, (2006). 230.

⁸ Imada, Adria L. 'Hip Hop and a Hawaiian Nation "On the Rise"'. In Basu & Lamelle, (2006). 88.

⁹ Arthur, Damien. 'Authenticity and Consumption in the Australian Hip Hop Culture', *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 9.2 (2006). 140.

¹⁰ Pollard, Mark. 'Australian Hip-Hop'. *Ministry* (April 2003).

-
- ¹¹ Stavrias, George. 'Identity and Appropriation in Aboriginal Australian Hip Hop'. BA Honours Thesis, Department of English with Cultural Studies, University of Melbourne, 2003. 25.
- ¹² Curse ov Dialect. *Curse ov Dialect*, 8-track EP, Psy Harmonics, Melbourne (2001).
- ¹³ O'Hanlon, Renae. "'Gather Round for Some True Aussie Underground": A Comparative Study of the Language of Hip Hop and Other Youth Music Genres in Australia'. BA Honours Thesis (Linguistics), University of Queensland, 2003. 43, 54, 56.
- ¹⁴ Except where otherwise indicated, all quotes from Reason are from Tony Mitchell, Interview with Reason, Melbourne (2 October, 2004).
- ¹⁵ Reason. *Re-Ography*. Melbourne: Obese Records (2002). Reason. *One Step Ahead*. Melbourne: Obese Records (2004).
- ¹⁶ Gilroy, Paul. 'It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at' in *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*. London: Serpent's Tail (1993). 142.
- ¹⁷ Reason. *Life's A Lesson* Melbourne: Obese Records (2006).
- ¹⁸ Pollard, Mark. 'Reason Being'. *3D World* 638 (2002). 90.