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# Japanese Hip-Hop and the Globalization of Popular Culture

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*In this essay, Ian Condry gives us an account of the globalization of American popular culture. On the surface, Japanese hip-hop music seems a perfect example of the way American popular culture is taking over the world. But a closer look reveals that there is a dynamic process by which the meaning of hip-hop is reinterpreted to fit into the Japanese context. In particular, Japanese artists and fans identify nightclubs as the genba, or "actual site" of local hip-hop. These noisy, crowded, smoky, late-night clubs offer insight into the everyday activities that give rise to different styles of Japanese hip-hop and the families of rap groups associated with them. So instead of assuming that American popular culture means the same thing wherever it appears, Condry argues we should attend to the ways global cultural forms are mediated through local language and key sites of performance, a perspective he calls "genba globalism." This offers a productive way of resolving some of the challenges of using ethnography to study such a broad-ranging topic as the globalization of popular culture.*

## INTRODUCTION

Japanese hip-hop, which began in the 1980s and continues to develop today, is an intriguing case study for exploring the globalization of popular culture. Hip-hop is but one example among many of the transnational cultural styles pushed by entertainment and fashion industries, pulled by youth

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eager for the latest happening thing, and circulated by a wide range of media outlets eager to draw readers and to sell advertising. In Tokyo, a particular combination of local performance sites, artists, and fans points to ways that urban areas are crucibles of new, hybrid cultural forms. Hip-hop was born in the late 1970s in New York City as a form of street art: rapping on sidewalk stoops, outdoor block parties with enormous sound systems, graffiti on public trains, and breakdancing in public parks. In its voyage to Japan, the street ethic of hip-hop remains, but it is performed most intensely in all-night clubs peppered around Tokyo. This paper examines these nightclubs as an urban setting that helps us grasp the cultural dynamics of Japanese hip-hop. In particular, the interaction between artist-entrepreneurs and fans in live shows demonstrates how "global" popular culture is still subject to important processes of localization.

Anthropologists have a special role in analyzing such transnational forms because of their commitment to extended fieldwork in local settings. Ethnography aims to capture the cultural practices and social organization of a people. This offers a useful way of seeing how popular culture is interwoven with everyday life. Yet there is a tension between ethnography and globalization, because in many ways they seem antithetical to each other. While ethnography attempts to evoke the distinctive texture of local experience, globalization is often seen as erasing local differences. An important analytical challenge for today's media-saturated world is finding a way to understand how local culture interacts with such global media flows.

On one hand, it seems as if locales far removed from each other are becoming increasingly the same. It is more than a little eerie to fly from New York to Tokyo and see teenagers in both places wearing the same kinds of fashion characteristic of rap fans: baggy pants with boxers on display, floppy hats or baseball caps, and immaculate space-age Nike sneakers. In Tokyo stores for youth, rap music is the background sound of choice. Graffiti styled after the New York City aerosol artists dons numerous walls, and breakdancers can be found in public parks practicing in the afternoon or late at night. In all-night dance clubs throughout Tokyo, Japanese rappers and DJs take to the stage and declare that they have some "extremely bad shit" (*geki yaba shitto*)—meaning "good music"—to share with the audience. For many urban youth, hip-hop is the defining style of their era. In 1970s Japan, the paradigm of high school cool was long hair and a blistering solo on lead guitar. Today, trendsetters are more likely to sport "dread" hair and show off their scratch techniques with two turntables and a mixer. In the last few years, rap music has become one of the best-selling genres of music in the United States and around the world as diverse youth are adapting the style to their own messages and contexts.

But at the same time, there are reasons to think that such surface appearances of sameness disguise differences at some deeper level. Clearly, cultural setting and social organization have an impact on how movies and television shows are viewed (During 1997). Yet if we are to understand the

shape of cultural forms in a world that is increasingly connected by global media and commodity flows, we must situate Japanese rappers in the context of contemporary Japan. When thinking about how hip-hop is appropriated, we must consider, for example, that most Japanese rappers and fans speak only Japanese. Many of them live at home with their parents, and they all went through the Japanese education system. Moreover, even if the origin of their beloved music genre is overseas, they are caught up in social relations that are ultimately quite local, animated primarily by face-to-face interactions and telephone calls. So while these youth see themselves as “hip-hoppers” and “B-Boys” and “B-Girls,” and associate themselves with what they call a “global hip-hop culture,” they also live in a day-to-day world that is distinctly Japanese.

For those interested in studying the power of popular culture, there is also a more practical question of research methods. How does a lone researcher go about studying something as broad and unwieldy as the globalization of mass culture? One of the tenets of anthropological fieldwork is that you cannot understand a people without being there (Gupta and Ferguson 1997), but in the case of a music genre, where is “there”? In the fall of 1995, I began a year and a half of fieldwork in Tokyo, and the number of potential sites was daunting. There were places where the music was produced: record companies, recording studios, home studios, and even on commuter trains with handheld synthesizers. There were places where the music was promoted: music magazines, fashion magazines, TV and radio shows, nightclubs, and record stores. There was the interaction between musicians and fans at live shows, or in mediated form on cassettes, CDs, and 12-inch LPs. To make matters worse, rap music is part of the larger category of “hip-hop.” Hip-hop encompasses not only rap, but also breakdance, DJ, graffiti, and fashion. The challenge was to understand the current fascination among Japanese youth with hip-hop music and style, while also considering the role of money-making organizations. How does one situate the experiential pleasures within the broader structures of profit that produce mass culture?

As I began interviewing rappers, magazine writers, and record company people, I found a recurring theme that provided a partial answer. Everyone agreed that you cannot understand Japanese rap music without going regularly to the clubs. Clubs were called the “actual site” (*genba*) of the Japanese rap scene.<sup>1</sup> It was there that rappers performed, DJs learned which songs elicit excitement in the crowd, and breakdancers practiced and competed for attention. In what follows, I would like to suggest that an effective tool for understanding the globalization of popular culture is to consider places like Japanese hip-hop nightclubs in terms of what might be called “genba globalism.” By using participant-observation methods to explore key sites that are a kind of media crossroads, we can observe how globalized images and sounds are performed, consumed, and then transformed in an ongoing process. I use the Japanese term “genba” to emphasize that the processing of such global forms happens through the local language and in places where

local hip-hop culture is produced. In Japanese hip-hop, these clubs are important not only as places where fans can see live shows and hear the latest releases from American and Japanese groups, but also as places for networking among artists, writers, and record company people. In this essay, I would like to point out some of the advantages of considering key sites as places to understand the cross-cutting effects of globalization. To get a sense of what clubs are about, let's visit one.

## GOING TO HARLEM ON THE YAMANOTE LINE

A visit to Tokyo's Harlem is the best place to begin a discussion of Japanese hip-hop. Opened in the summer of 1997, Harlem is one of many all-night dance clubs, but as the largest club solely devoted to hip-hop and R&B, it has become the flagship for the Japanese scene (at least, at the time of this writing in February 2001). Nestled in the love hotel area of the Shibuya section of Tokyo, Harlem is representative of the otherworldliness of clubs as well as their location within the rhythms and spaces of mainstream Japan.

If we were visiting the club, we would most likely meet at Shibuya train station around midnight because the main action seldom gets started before 1 A.M. Most all-night revelers commute by train, a practice that links Tokyo residents in a highly punctual dance. The night is divided between the last train (all lines stop by 1 A.M. at the latest) and the first train of the morning (between 4:30 and 5 A.M.). The intervening period is when clubs (*kurabu*) are most active.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after midnight, Shibuya station is the scene for the changing of the guard: those heading home, running to make their connections for the last train, and those like us heading out, dressed up, and walking leisurely because we will be spending all night on the town. The magazine stands are closing. Homeless men are spread out on cardboard boxes on the steps leading down to the subways. The police observe the masses moving past each other in the station square towards their respective worlds. Three billboard-size TVs looming overhead, normally spouting pop music videos and snowboard ads during the day, are now dark and silent. The throngs of teenagers, many in their school uniforms, that mob Shibuya during afternoons and all weekend have been replaced by a more balanced mix of college students, "salarymen" and "career women," and of course more than a few B-Boys and B-Girls—the hip-hop enthusiasts in baggy pants and headphones. The sidewalks are splashed with light from vending machines—cigarettes, soda, CDs, beer (off for the night), and "valentine call" phone cards. A few drunken men are being carried by friends or lie in their suits unconscious on the sidewalk.

To get to Harlem, we walk uphill along Dôgenzaka Avenue toward a corner with a large neon sign advertising a capsule hotel, where businessmen who have missed their last train can sleep in coffin-like rooms. We pass disposable lamppost signs and phone booth stickers advertising various sex ser-

vices. An elderly man in the back of a parked van is cooking and selling *takoyaki* (octopus dumplings) to those with the late-night munchies. The karaoke box establishments advertise cheaper rates at this hour. Turning right at a Chinese restaurant, we move along a narrow street packed with love hotels, which advertise different prices for "rest" or "stay." In contrast to the garish yellow sign advertising the live music hall, On-Air East, about fifty meters ahead, a nondescript door with a spiffy, long-haired bouncer out front is all that signals us that Harlem is inside. It seems there are always a couple of clubbers out front talking on their tiny cell phones. Up the stairs, past a table filled with flyers advertising upcoming hip-hop events, we pay our ¥3000 each (around \$25, which may seem expensive, but is only about half again as much as a movie ticket). We move into the circulating and sweaty mass inside.

Traveling to a club instills a sense of moving against the mainstream in time and space. Others are going home to bed as the clubber heads out. When the clubber returns home in the morning, reeking of smoke and alcohol, the train cars hold early-bird workers as well. So the movement to and from the club, often from the distant suburbs, gives clubbers a sense of themselves as separate, flaunting their leisure, their costumes, and their consumer habits. During the course of my year-and-a-half of fieldwork, between the fall of 1995 and the spring of 1997, I went to over a hundred club events around Tokyo and I began to see that clubs help one understand not only the pleasures of rap in Japan, but also the social organization of the scene and the different styles that have emerged. This becomes clear as you spend time inside the clubs.

## INSIDE THE CLUB

Inside the club, the air is warm and thick, humid with the breath and sweat of dancing bodies. Bone-thudding bass lines thump out of enormous speakers. There is the scritch-scratch of a DJ doing his turntable tricks, and the hum of friends talking, yelling really, over the sound of the music. The lighting is subdued, much of it coming from a mirrored ball slowly rotating on the ceiling. The fraternity house smell of stale beer is mostly covered up by the choking cigarette haze, but it is best not to look too closely at what is making the floor alternately slippery and sticky. The darkness, low ceiling, black walls, and smoky murk create a space both intimate and claustrophobic. Almost everyone heads for the bar as soon as they come in. An important aspect of clubbing is the physical experience of the music and crowded setting.

Harlem is a larger space than most of the Tokyo clubs, and can hold upwards of one thousand people on a crowded weekend night. On the wall behind the DJ stage, abstract videos, *anime* clips, or edited Kung Fu movies present a background of violence and mayhem, albeit with an Asian flavor. Strobe lights, steam, and moving spotlights give a strong sense of the space, and compound the crowded, frenetic feeling imposed by the loud music. The drunken revelry gives clubs an atmosphere of excitement that culminates

Rhymester, featuring (left to right) MC Shiro, DJ Jin, and Mummy D. Promotional photo for their 1999 album "Respect" (Next Level Recordings/File Records, NLCD-026, Tokyo, Japan). [Photo courtesy of File Records]

with the live show and the following freestyle session. But an important part of clubbing is also the lull before and after the show, when one circulates among the crowd, flirting, networking, gossiping, or simply checking out the scene. Clubs are a space where the diffuse network of hip-hop fans comes together in an elusive effort to have fun. To the extent that a "community" emerges in the hip-hop scene, it revolves around specific club events and the rap groups that draw the crowd.

Much of the time is spent milling around, talking, drinking, and dancing. The live show often produces a welcome rise in the excitement level of the clubbers. Some events feature several live acts, often followed by a freestyle

session. The rap show will usually begin between 1:00 and 1:30 A.M. Formats vary depending on the club and the event. "B-Boy Night" at R-Hall (organized by Crazy-A) was held one Sunday a month and would start with a long breakdancing show, with many groups each doing a five-minute routine. Then a series of rap groups would come on, each doing two or three songs. At other shows, like FG Night, sometimes a series of groups would perform, while on other nights only one group would do a show followed by a more open-ended freestyle. Nevertheless, there were many similarities, and a characteristic live show would proceed as follows. Two rappers take the stage (or step up into the DJ booth), as the DJ prepares the music. For people enamored of live bands, the live show of a rap concert may strike one as a bit lifeless. The music is either pre-recorded on a digital audio tape (DAT) or taken from the breakbeats section of an album.<sup>3</sup> The flourish of a lead guitar, bass, or drum solo is replaced in the hip-hop show by the manic scratching of a record by a DJ who deftly slides a record back and forth across the slip mat laid on the turntable and works the mixer to produce the rhythmic flurries of sampled sound.

The rappers begin with a song introducing themselves as a group. Every group seems to have its own introductory song of self-promotion:

<i>raimusutaa ga raimu shi ni yatte kita</i>	Rhymester has come to rhyme
<i>'doko ni kita? Shibuya!</i>	where are we? Shibuya!
<i>bai faa za dopesuto da</i>	we are By Phar the Dopest
<i>oretachi kyô chô gesuto da</i>	we are tonight's super guests
<i>makka na me o shita fukurô</i>	The red-eyed owl [You the Rock]
<i>ore tôjo</i>	I've arrived on stage

These songs tend to be brief, only a couple of minutes long. Between the first and second song, the rappers ask the audience how they feel. A common catchphrase was "How do you feel / My crazy brothers."<sup>4</sup> The group will introduce by name the rappers and DJ, and also make sure everyone remembers the name of the group. The rappers will comment about how noisy the crowd is. Crowds are more often criticized for not being worked up enough rather than praised for their excitement.

The second song tends to be the one the group is most famous for. On stage, each rapper holds a cordless microphone right up to his mouth, and a rapper might steady the mic by holding his index finger under his nose. The other arm is gesticulating, palm out in a waving motion at the audience. A bobbing motion in the head and shoulders can be more or less pronounced.

Between the second and third song, the group will usually demand some call-and-response from the audience, almost always as follows:

Call	Response	Call	Response
<i>ie yo ho</i>	<i>ho</i>	Say, ho	ho
<i>ie yo ho ho</i>	<i>ho ho</i>	Say, ho ho	ho ho
<i>ie yo ho ho ho</i>	<i>ho ho ho</i>	Say ho ho ho	ho ho ho
<i>sawage!</i>	[screams]	Make noise!	[screams]

The third and usually final song tends to be a new song, often introduced in English as “brand new shit,” a revolting image for English-speakers perhaps, but apparently heard by the audience as a cooler way of saying “new song” than the Japanese *shinkyoku*. If the song is about to be released as a record or CD, this information is also announced before the song’s performance. If there are other rap groups in the audience, this is also the time for “shout outs” (praise for fellow hip-hoppers) as in “Shakkazombie in da house” or “Props to King Giddra” and once even, “Ian Condry in da house.” After the third song, there is seldom talk besides a brief goodbye in English: “Peace” or “We out.” Encores are rare, but freestyle sessions, discussed below, are ubiquitous. After the show, rappers retreat backstage or to the bar area, but never linger around the stage after performing. The year 1996 was also a time of a “freestyle boom,” when most shows were closed with an open-ended passing of the microphone. Anyone could step on stage and try his or her hand at rapping for a few minutes. This has been an important way for younger performers to get the attention of more established acts. There is a back-and-forth aspect of performance in the clubs that shows how styles are developed, honed, and reworked in a context where the audience is knowledgeable, discriminating, and at times participates in the show itself.

It is important to understand that over the years, this kind of feedback loop has helped determine the shape of current Japanese rap styles. One of my main sites was a weekly Thursday night event that featured another collection of rap groups called Kitchens. Hip-hop collectives such as Kitchens, Little Bird Nation, Funky Grammar Unit, and Rock Steady Crew Japan are called “families” (*famirii*, in Japanese). The different groups often met at clubs or parties, at times getting acquainted after particularly noteworthy freestyle sessions. Over time some would become friends, as well as artistic collaborators, who performed together live or in the studio for each others’ albums. Such families define the social organization of the “scene.” What is interesting is how they also characterize different aesthetic takes on what Japanese hip-hop should be. Kitchens, for example, aim to combine a pop music sensibility with their love for rap music, and, like many such “party rap” groups, they appeal to a largely female audience. The Funky Grammar Unit aims for a more underground sound that is nonetheless accessible, and they tend to have a more even mix of men and women in the audience. Other families like Urbarian Gym (UBG) are less concerned with being accessible to audiences than with conveying a confrontational, hard-core stance. The lion’s share of their audiences are young males, though as UBG’s leader, Zebra, breaks into the pop spotlight, their audiences are becoming more diverse.

The lull that precedes and follows the on-stage performance is a key time for networking to build these families. In all, the live show is at most an hour long, at times closer to twenty minutes, and yet there is nowhere for the clubbers to go until the trains start running again around 5 A.M. It is not unusual for music magazine writers to do interviews during club events, and

record company representatives often come to shows as well, not only as talent scouts but also to discuss upcoming projects. I found that 3:00 to 4 A.M. was the most productive time for fieldwork because by then the clubbers had mostly exhausted their supply of stories and gossip to tell friends, and were then open to finding out what this strange foreigner jotting things in his notebook was doing in their midst.

Japanese cultural practices do not disappear just because everyone is wearing their hip-hop outfits and listening to the latest rap tunes. To give one example, at the first Kitchens event after the New Year, I was surprised to see all the clubbers who knew each other going around and saying the traditional New Year's greeting in very formal Japanese: "Congratulations on the dawn of the New Year. I humbly request your benevolence this year as well." There was no irony, no joking atmosphere in these statements. This is a good example of the way that globalization may appear to overshadow Japanese culture, but one needs to spend time in clubs with the people to see how surface appearances can be deceiving.

In many ways, then, it is not surprising that rappers, DJs, breakdancers, record company people, and magazine editors all agree you cannot understand the music unless you go to the clubs. There is an intensity of experience in hearing the music at loud volume, surrounded by a crush of dancing people, while drinking alcohol and staying out all night, that gives the music an immediacy and power it lacks when heard, say, on headphones in the quiet of one's room. Indeed, it is difficult to convey in words the feeling of communal excitement during a particularly good show, when one gets wrapped up in a surge of energy that is palpable yet intangible. It is this emotional experience that in many ways counteracts any fears that it is all "merely imitation," which is the most common criticism of the music.

At the same time, going to a club involves a strange mix of the extraordinary and the routine. On one hand, you visit a place with bizarre interior design, listen to music at exceedingly high volume, stay out all night and, often, get drunk. It is a sharp contrast to an ordinary day of school or work. We must also recognize, however, that while a club may strive to be a fantastic microcosm, it is still embedded in Japan's political-economic structures, characteristic social relations, and the contemporary range of cultural forms. It is not by chance that clubs tend to attract people of specific class, age, sexuality, and to some extent locale. Moreover, if you go regularly to clubs, after a while it becomes just another routine. It is largely predictable what kind of pleasures can be expected, and also the generally unpleasant consequences for work or school after a night without sleep.<sup>5</sup> Clubbing offers freedom and constraints. This tension is the key to understanding how clubs socialize the club-goers by structuring pleasure in characteristic ways.

I have only suggested some of the ways that clubs offer insight into the ways that global hip-hop becomes transformed into a local form of Japanese hip-hop, but we can see how an idea of "genba globalism" can help us understand the process of localization. Globalism is refracted and transformed in

important ways through the actual site of urban hip-hop clubs. Japanese rappers perform for local audiences in the Japanese language and use Japanese subjects to build their base of fans. In contrast to club events with techno or house music, hip-hop events emphasize lyrics in the shows and the freestyle sessions. There is a wide range of topics addressed in Japanese hip-hop, but they all speak in some way to the local audience. Dassen 3 uses joking lyrics ridiculing school and television. Scha Dara Parr is also playful, emphasizing things like their love of video games and the kind of verbal repartee characteristic of close buddies. When Zebra acts out his hard-core stance, he tells of drug use in California, expensive dates with girlfriends, and abstract lyrics about hip-hop as a revolutionary war. Rhymester's lyrics are often set in a club or just after a show, for example, describing an imagined, fleeting love affair with a girl on a passing train. Some songs refer to cultural motifs going back centuries, such as a song performed by Rima and Umedy about a double-suicide pact between lovers, remade as a contemporary R&B and hip-hop jam.

## UNDERSTANDING GLOBALIZATION IN LOCAL TERMS

Rap music in Japan offers an interesting case study of the way popular culture is becoming increasingly global in scope, while at the same time becoming domesticated to fit with local ideas and desires. At the dawn of the

Miss Monday, DJ Etsu, and Umedy (left to right) of the hip-hop collective Kitchens, before their show at Club Core in Roppongi, Tokyo. Summer 1999.  
[Photo by Ian Condry]

twenty-first century, entertainment industries are reaching wider markets and larger audiences. The film *Titanic*, for example, grossed over \$1.5 billion, the largest amount ever for a film, and two-thirds of this income came from overseas (Riding 1998). In music, there are global pop stars too, like Britney Spears and Celine Dion. In rap music, the Fugees could be considered global stars. Their 1996 album "The Score" sold over 17 million copies worldwide. More recently, Lauryn Hill's 1998 solo album revealed that the transnational market for hip-hop is still growing, and most major rap stars do promotional tours in Japan. An important feature of pop culture commodities is that they tend to be expensive to produce initially, but then relatively cheap to reproduce and distribute. Compact disks are one of the most striking examples. Although studio time is expensive (between \$25,000 for a practically homemade album to upwards of \$250,000 for state-of-the-art productions), the CDs themselves cost about eighty cents to produce, including the packaging (Vogel 1994). Obviously, the more one can sell, the higher the return, and this helps explain the eagerness of entertainment businesses to develop new markets around the world.

Less clear are the kinds of effects such globalized pop culture forms might have. The fluidity of culture in the contemporary world raises new questions about how we are linked together, what we share and what divides us. The spread of popular culture seems in some ways linked with a spread in values, but we must be cautious in our assessment of how and to what extent this transfer takes place. It is safe to say that the conventional understanding of globalization is that it is producing a homogenization of cultural forms. From this perspective, we are witnessing the McDonaldization (Ritzer 1993) and the Coca-Cola colonization of the periphery by powerful economic centers of the world system. The term "cultural imperialism" captures this idea, that political and economic power is being used "to exalt and spread the values and habits of a foreign culture at the expense of the native culture" (Tomlinson 1991:3). In some ways, anthropology as a discipline emerged at a time when there was a similar concern that the forces of modernity (especially missionaries and colonial officials) were wiping out "traditional cultures," and thus one role for ethnographers was to salvage, at least in the form of written documents, the cultures of so-called "primitive peoples." Many people view globalization, and particularly the spread of American pop culture, as a similar kind of invasion, but the idea that watching a Disney movie automatically instills certain values must be examined and not simply assumed. In some ways the goals of anthropology—combatting simplistic and potentially dangerous forms of ethnocentrism—remain as important today as when the discipline was born.

The example of Japanese hip-hop gives us a chance to examine some recent theorizing on globalization. The sociologist Malcolm Waters offers a useful overview of globalization, which he defines as follows:

A social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede, and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding. (Waters 1995:3)

A key aspect of this definition is not only that the world is increasingly becoming one place, but that people are becoming increasingly aware of that. This awareness may lead to a heightened sense of risk, such as global warming or the "love bug" virus, or to a rosy view of increased opportunities, for example, to get the most recent hip-hop news in real time or to download the latest music instantly via the Internet.

It is important to recognize, however, that globalization involves much more than Hollywood movies and pop music. Waters does a good job of analyzing three aspects of globalization, namely, economic, political, and cultural. He contends that globalization processes go back five hundred years, and that the relative importance of economic, political, and cultural exchanges has varied over that time (Waters 1995:157-64). From the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, economics was key. In particular, the growth of the capitalist world system was the driving force in linking diverse regions. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, politics moved to the fore. Nation-states produced a system of international relations that characterized global linkages with multinational corporations and integrated national traditions. Now, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, cultural forms are leading global changes in both politics and economics. Waters argues that a "global idealization" is producing politics based on worldwide values (e.g., human rights, the environment, anti-sweatshop movement) and economic exchanges centered on lifestyle consumerism. The key point is that while economics and then politics were the driving forces in globalization of previous centuries, it is cultural flows that are increasingly important today. If he is right, and I would argue he is, this points to the importance of studying the kinds of ideals that are spread around the globe.

What ideals are spread by hip-hop in Japan? Clubbing certainly promotes an attitude that stresses leisure, fashion, and consumer knowledge of music over other kinds of status in work and school. Although it is important to recognize that the effects of lyrics are somewhat complicated, it is worth considering, to some extent, the messages carried by the music. Although rappers deal with a wide variety of subjects, one theme appears again and again, namely, that youth need to speak out for themselves. As rapper MC Shiro of Rhymester puts it, "If I were to say what hip-hop is, it would be a 'culture of the first person singular.' In hip-hop, . . . rappers are always yelling, 'I'm this.'" Such a message may seem rather innocuous compared to some of the hard-edged lyrics one is likely to hear in the United States, but it is also a reflection of the kind of lives these Japanese youth are leading. In Japan, the education system tends to emphasize rote memorization and to track students according to exams. Sharply age-graded hierarchies are the norm, and may be especially irksome in a situation where the youth are likely to live with their parents until they get married. Moreover, the dominant ideology that harmony of the group should come before individual expression ("the nail that sticks up gets hammered down") makes for a social context in which the hip-hop idea that one should be speaking for oneself is,

in some limited sense, revolutionary. At the very least, it shows how global pop culture forms are leading not to some simple homogenization, but rather adding to a complex mix that in many ways can only be studied ethnographically through extended research in local sites.

Another important theorist of globalization is Arjun Appadurai (1996), who proposes that we consider contemporary cultural flows in terms of movement in five categories: people or ethnicity, ideology, finance, technology, and media. He adds the suffix “-scape” to each to highlight that the deterritorialization of cultural forms is accompanied by new landscapes of cultural exchange, thus we have “ethnoscapes, ideoscapes, financescapes, technoscapes, and mediascapes” (others have added “sacriscapes” to describe the spread of religion, and one might add “leisurescapes” for the spread of popular culture). The key point about these landscapes is that they are “non-isomorphic,” that is, they don’t map evenly onto each other. Appadurai notes, for example, that the “Japanese are notoriously hospitable to ideas and are stereotyped as inclined to export (all) and import (some) goods, but they are notoriously closed to immigration” (1996:37). Migration and electronic mass media are the main driving forces in Appadurai’s theorization. One of the problems with Appadurai’s theory, however, is that the notion of “-scapes” draws us away from considering how flows of technology, media, finance, and people are connected. An alternative is to consider key sites, *genba* if you will, of various sorts depending on one’s interests as a way to see how new, hybrid forms of culture are produced. “Genba globalism” aims to show how artists, fans, producers, and media people are actively consuming and creating these new forms.

One thing that anthropologists offer to the advancement of human knowledge is a clear sense of the ways people interact in specific places. At one time, anthropologists would choose a village or island to map in elaborate detail. Now in a media-filled world, we face different analytical challenges, but the techniques of fieldwork—learning the language, participating in daily life, observing rituals, and so on—can still be used. One of Appadurai’s conclusions is that exchanges along these different “-scapes” are leading not only to a deterritorialization of cultural forms, but also to an increased importance of the “work of the imagination” (1996:3). In other words, as identities can be picked up from a variety of media sources, the construction of “who we are” arises increasingly from how we imagine ourselves, rather than from where we live. Life in urban areas seems to make this aspect of identity—as imagination and as performance—all the more salient. What I hope I have drawn attention to is the way the hip-hop nightclubs give us a chance to bring some of this work of the imagination down to the level of daily life.

## CONCLUSION: GLOBAL POP AND CULTURAL CHANGE

In the end, the globalization of popular culture needs to be understood as two related yet opposing trends of greater massification and deeper com-

partmentalization. On one hand, the recording industry is reaching larger and larger markets, both within Japan and around the world, as mega-hits continue to set sales records. On the other hand, there is an equally profound if less visible process by which niche scenes are becoming deeper and more widely connected than before, and in the process, new forms of heterogeneity are born. Although I have only been able to touch on a few of its aspects here, Japanese rap music is a revealing case study of the social location, cultural role, and capitalist logic of such micro-mass cultures. It is important to recognize, however, that these micro-mass cultures also have the potential to move into the mainstream.

The distinction between “scene” and “market” highlights what is at stake when we try to analyze the cultural and capitalist transformations associated with globalization. Information-based and service industries are growing rapidly, promising to reorganize the bounds of culture and commodities, yet we need close readings of how such emerging economies influence everyday lives. Although B-Boys and B-Girls go to great lengths to distinguish the “cultural” from the “commercial” in their favored genre, it is rather the linkage of the two in the circuits of popular culture that offers the deepest insight. In the end, the winds of global capitalism that carried the seeds of rap music to Japan can only be grasped historically with a close attention to social spaces, media forms, and the rhythms of everyday life.

Walking to a hip-hop club in Tokyo, one is confronted with a tremendous range of consumer options, and it is this heightened sense of “you are what you buy” that has in many ways become the defining feature of identity in advanced capitalist nations, at least among those people with the money to consume their preferred lifestyle. At the same time, it is important to be sensitive to the ways that, outward appearances notwithstanding, the consumers of things like hip-hop are embedded in a quite different range of social relations and cultural meanings. It makes a difference that B-Boys and B-Girls, listening to American hip-hop records, still feel it is important to go around to their friends and associates with the traditional New Year’s greeting of deference and obligation. This is an example of the ways social relations within the Japanese rap scene continue to carry the weight of uniquely Japanese practices and understandings.

It is likely, too, that “global pop” will become more heterogeneous as the entertainment industries in other countries develop. There are reasons to think that, in music at least, the domination of American popular music as the leading “global” style seems likely to be a temporary situation. In the immediate postwar period in Japan, Western music initially dominated sales. But sales of Japanese music steadily grew and in 1967 outpaced Western sales. Today, three-fourths of Japan’s music market is Japanese music to one-fourth Western. Moreover, although American music currently constitutes about half of global sales, this is down from 80 percent a decade ago. It is quite possible that as local record companies mature in other countries, they will, as in Japan, come to dominate local sales. Certainly, multinational

record companies are moving in this direction of developing local talent and relying less on Western pop stars (White 1997). Moreover, although Japan is a ravenous importer of American popular culture, it has some notable exports as well. Some are more familiar than others, but they include the Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers, karaoke, "Japanimation," *manga* (Japanese comic books), mechanical pets, Nintendo or the Sony PlayStation video games, and of course, Pokémon.

Just as it would seem strange to Americans if someone claimed Pokémon is making U.S. kids "more Japanese," it is dangerous to assume that mass culture goods by themselves threaten to overwhelm other cultures. The anthropologist Daniel Miller has been a proponent for taking a closer look at the ways such goods are woven into everyday lives. He argues that mass commodities are better analyzed in terms of an "unprecedented diversity created by the differential consumption of what had once been thought to be global and homogenizing institutions" (Miller 1995:3). Miller's emphasis on the active and creative aspects of consumption is characteristic of a broad trend within the social sciences to view global commodities in terms of their local appropriations, and to represent local consumers with a greater degree of agency than found in other works that emphasize "cultural imperialism." It is this perspective that seems to me the best characterization of what is going on in Japan.

It is easy to see how the "sameness" aspect of globalization is promoted. Music magazines, TV video shows, and record stores promote similar artists whether in Japan or the United States. A new album by Nas is met with a flurry of publicity in the Japanese and English-language hip-hop magazines available in Tokyo. This relates in part to the structure of record companies and their marketing practices. In this sense, the widening and increasingly globalized market for popular culture does appear to be leading to greater homogenization. But it is primarily a process of homogenizing what is available, regardless of where you are. I would argue that the global marketing blitz of megahit productions like the film *Titanic* and the music of Celine Dion and Lauryn Hill reflect a homogenization of *what* is available, but not *how* it is interpreted. Although it is more difficult to see, in part because it is hidden beneath similar clothes, hairstyles, and consumption habits, different interpretations are generated in different social contexts. By attending to "actual sites" of cultural production and consumption, we can more clearly gauge the ways local contexts alter the meanings of globalization. "Keeping it real" for hip-hoppers in Japan means paying attention to local realities.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The word "genba" is made up of the characters "to appear" and "place," and it is used to describe a place where something actually happens, like the scene of an accident or of a crime, or a construction site. In the hip-hop world the term is used to contrast the intense energy of the club scene with the more sterile and suspect marketplace.
- <sup>2</sup> Hip-hop is not the only style for club music. Techno, House, Reggae, Jungle/Drum 'n' Bass, and so on, are some of the other popular club music styles. Live music tends to be performed

earlier in the evening, usually starting around 7 P.M., and finishing in time for the audience to catch an evening train home. In contrast to “clubs,” “discos” must by law close by 1 A.M.

- <sup>3</sup> The term “breakbeats” refers to the section of a song where only the drums, or drums and bass, play. It is the break between the singing and the melodies of the other instruments, hence “breakbeats.” This section can be looped by a DJ using two turntables and a mixer with cross-fader, and produces a backing track suitable for rapping.
- <sup>4</sup> In Japanese, *chôshi wa dô dai / ikareta kyôdai*. The masculinity of Japanese rap is here indexed by the calling out to “brothers” and also by the use of the masculine slang *dai* instead of *da*.
- <sup>5</sup> Youthful Japanese clubbers use the mixed English-Japanese construction “all *suru*” (do all) to mean “stay out all night in a club.” For example, the following exchange occurred between two members of the female group Now. Here, the sense of routine outweighs the excitement. A: *konban mo ooru suru ka na?* (Are we staying out all night again?) B: *Tabun*. (Probably) A: *Yabai*. (That sucks.)

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