

DIGGING IN THE CRATES.  
PRACTICES OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING IN A  
TRANSLOCAL RECORD COLLECTING SCENE

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degree of Ph.D. in Sociology

Goldsmiths College, University of London.

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own<sup>1</sup>.

Gábor Vályi, 27th September, 2010

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed discussion of the copyrighted audiovisual material that is included to illustrate the thesis is given in Appendix 1.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a multi-sited ethnographic study of the practices through which a sense of identity and belonging is produced and experienced in the crate digging scene, a hip hop related translocal record collecting collectivity.

Affective attachments are rarely theorised within popular music studies, and are largely neglected or taken for granted in empirical work. Whereas the emergence and prevalence of a sense of companionship and collective identity is less surprising in tightly-woven collectivities that frequently gather in public venues in a particular locality, it demands more of an explanation in spatially dispersed musical worlds, like the transnational crate digging scene, in which regular, locally based face-to-face interaction takes place in small friendly circles that consist of a handful of enthusiasts at most.

The thesis reworks earlier, more elusive definitions of the notion of scene – a shared cultural space in which a range of coexisting and interacting musical practices work towards producing a sense of community – in a way that is more specific both with regarding what kinds of practices – aesthetic, distinctive, and spatial – shall be taken into consideration in accounting for the sources of attachments in musical collectivities. Furthermore, through its empirical chapters it outlines and connects particular areas of inquiry – the collective cultivation of a certain form of musical appreciation, the performance of distinctive practices, the acquisition and passing on of scenic sensibilities and customs, the places of scenic practice, as well as a shared understanding of spatiality – in which the productive “work” of these practices could be be more closely observed and understood.

Through a micro-sociological study of the collective practices organised around the consumption of second hand records, the thesis also engages with the sociocultural significance of the transforming technological regime of music consumption.

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**Attached illustrative material:**

Two DVDs containing music in mp3 format. Details about their contents are given in Appendix 3.

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# 1. A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO BELONGING

*The guy in the black windbreaker jacket and baseball cap comes waving towards my car at the arranged spot. He seems to be more or less my age, late twenties, early thirties. Judging by the DJ bag he carries, I'm quite certain that he is the Norwegian DJ I'm supposed to pick up here. Andy Votel, a fellow collector, DJ, ex hip hop producer, and executive of the Finders Keepers record label in Manchester put us in touch when he heard that his friend was about to visit Budapest. Andy asked me to show Leo the main record spots in town, and to introduce him to some of the Hungarian records he would appreciate: local modish beat stuff, progressive and psychedelic rock records with loud, syncopated drums. When Andy had a DJ gig with Leo in Oslo, he found out that the Norwegian guy had an extra copy of Bonnie Dobson's Good Morning Rain LP he knew I was looking for since I've heard a song from it on a Finders Keepers compilation album of female folk singers. When Andy phoned me regarding his friend's visit, he told me that Leo will bring me the Bonnie Dobson record. Although this is all I know when I pick up the Norwegian who will tag along for my radio show tonight, we strike up a lively conversation as soon as he settles in his seat and we pull off. During our journey through the lazy, early autumn Budapest, we talk mainly about music, records, Andy Votel, and DJing. I find out that, just like Andy, Leo started out as a hip hop DJ, and gradually gravitated towards exploring the sampled original recordings beyond classic hip hop tracks, and then ventured out in the direction of prog, fuzz, psych, glam, and folk. The conversation floats really easily; it seems like we have a lot in common in terms of the music we like, the DJs, labels, and records we know, and the experiences we had behind the decks over the years.*

*I park the car close to the old industrial building where the studio is based; we grab our bags, climb the stairs, and arrive just in time to begin the show. I take over the mixing desk from the previous DJ, put on a couple of longer tracks to make some time for unpacking my DJ bags. Leo leaves shortly in order to bring some beers from a shop nearby. In the meanwhile, I proceed with the regular routine of starting the programme: I look through my records, and make up a loose running order of what I will play in the first half an hour. I introduce the show briefly, then, after Leo's arrival, I shift gears, and start playing more drum-heavy Hungarian rock records from the late 1960s and early 1970s in quick succession, not letting them run longer than a few minutes each. We only have about an hour and a half left, and there are so many records I would like to show him. We also seem to share an appreciation of the breakbeat – the few bars where the rhythm section bangs out a funky backbeat while the rest of the band plays*

*only minimalistic riffs and stabs, if even that – as the most fascinating element of many of these recordings; so I concentrate mainly on the breaks, occasionally extending them, going back and forth between two copies of the same record. Leo is constantly nodding his head to the rhythm, looks at the record sleeves that I pass him, and keeps telling me how this stuff is completely unknown, but at the same time, absolutely fascinating to him. Although I thought Leo had brought the Bonnie Dobson record to sell or trade, he gave it to me as a gift, when I began the show. I try to return the favour with a few Hungarian records I happen to have extra copies of.*



Leo Lateks, digging in the crates at a flea market. Oslo, 2010.

*It is strange, but he already feels like a friend. It could be the beers, but also that he appreciates the rare, overlooked, or forgotten records that my local circle of collecting friends spent years to dig up from the stacks of unorganised vinyl in rural used book stores, flea markets, or the garages of girlfriends' parents. It is not very often I meet people who share my enthusiasm for this type of music, and have an understanding of how much work and fun it has been to unearth these records. In a way, it feels like these are the encounters that make collecting efforts worthwhile. It is great to meet a like minded collector who is eager to listen to your finds and stories, and, in turn, is able to introduce you to music you've never heard before. Leo's stories about Norwegian hard*

*rock bands, and record buying trips to forgotten music stores in Swedish small towns evoke images of distant, yet uncharted musical territories in my minds' eye.*

*Although such encounters are usually good fun, I've met collectors that were too obsessive to talk about anything but records, record spots, and prices, or too greedy when it came to trading or exchanging information. Fortunately, Leo is cool. We already talk about going for a bar crawl together with Jess – his girlfriend – later during the week, and schedule a meeting for our tour of the local record stores for the next day.*

*After the radio show is over, we go for a drink, and talk about music and collecting, but also heartbreaks, and Budapest in a casual, yet attentive manner that an unaware observer would easily mistake as a sign of a long-standing friendship. The ways in which we react to each others' stories and in-jokes make apparent more than just a mere similarity of our musical preferences and a number of reference points we have in common: the immediacy of our communication also radiates a sense of shared enthusiasm and companionship.*

#### **ADDRESSING ATTACHMENT IN TRANSLOCAL MUSIC SCENES**

Digging in the crates, beat collecting, crate digging<sup>2</sup>, beat mining, are some of the expressions that are used to describe the particular kind of hip hop related record collecting that is practiced in the transnational scene that this thesis explores. Although the distinctive aesthetics and ethos of collecting older recordings across conventional genre boundaries with an ear for hip hop's "conceptual approach toward sonic organisation" (Eshun 1999: 14) could be traced back to a small, tightly knit community of disc jockeys in the Bronx that pioneered a new mixing style focused on playing shorter rhythmic segments rather than whole songs (e.g. Allen 1999; Toop 2000; Schloss 2004; Chang 2005), their achievements inspired successive generations of hip hop DJs, producers, but also, a wider circle of record collecting enthusiasts – hip hop fans, record dealers, music journalists, and so forth – who were often less directly involved in music making practices. Although the crate digging scene still overlaps and interacts with the social worlds of hip hop DJs and producers to a significant extent, it is

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<sup>2</sup> In recent years, the idiom "crate digging" has spread beyond the specific hip hop related collecting scene I explore here, it is now occasionally used by some as a synonym for the practice of record collecting in general.

a world unto itself that is distinguished by and structured according to its specific criteria of aesthetic and moral excellence which revolve primarily around collecting practices. Many renowned beat collectors who put together mixtapes and compilations, play records in bars and clubs, or make sample based music, are not necessarily considered among the hip hop DJing and music production elite. Conversely, hip hop DJs that are praised for their turntablist skills or producers admired for their beats do not necessarily aspire to become prominent diggers, and spend relatively little time, effort, and money on amassing substantial record collections.

In contrast to other hip hop related art forms – rapping (Rose 1994; Alim 2006; Rose 2008), graffiti writing (Macdonald 2001; Rahn 2002), b-boying<sup>3</sup> (Schloss 2009), DJing (Poschardt 1998; Smith 2000; Fricke and Ahearn 2002; Katz 2004) and music production (Rose 1994; Schloss 2004) – crate digging remains largely unexplored in academic accounts with two notable exceptions. Joe Allen’s (1999) pioneering paper discussed the origins, development and aesthetic significance of beat collecting practices, while Joseph Schloss’s (2004) ethnomusicological account of sample based hip hop production in the United States described crate digging in relation to music making. These accounts, however, tell us little about values and customs that characterise the wider, transnational collecting scene that has emerged in the wake of hip hop’s popularity from the 1980s onwards. My aim, however, is not merely to fill this gap by providing an ethnographic description of the historical narratives, aesthetic sensibilities, ethical principles, institutions, collecting practices, and places that are specific to this community, but also to further the capacity of the social sciences in understanding the ways in which spatially dispersed, loosely connected cultural collectivities are defined and held together.

The global circulation of American hip hop on records and in music related media – from the early 1980s onwards – contributed towards the development of numerous local scenes beyond the United States in which the various art forms that make up hip hop culture are cultivated (Mitchell 2002; Basu and Lemelle 2006). Simultaneously with the transnationalisation of rapping (Bennett 1999a; Condry 2006), graffiti writing (Macdonald 2001), and b-boying (Lee 2008), hip hop DJing and sample based

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<sup>3</sup> Commonly known as breakdancing. “Breakdancing” is a generally disdained term within the b-boying community, because it is generally seen to be related to attempts at commodifying the art form in the 1980s (Schloss 2009: 58-63).

production has also become adopted in many places around the world, along with the kind of record collecting that – as Schloss rightly observes – provides the foundations to these appropriative music making practices in terms of both musical education and finding raw material to work with (Schloss 2004), but just as importantly, also enables hip hop enthusiasts to enhance their understanding and appreciation of the creative work of producers and DJs.

The geographical dispersal of crate digging is not an exceptional case of musical translocalisation. In fact, it could be argued to fit with the observations regarding the globalisation of culture in general (e.g. Morley 1992; Robertson 1992; Lash and Urry 1994; Morley and Robins 1995; Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996; Tomlinson 1999; Lull 2000; Morley 2000), as well as the transnationalisation of musical worlds in particular (Straw 1991; Kahn-Harris 2000; Hodkinson 2002; Connell and Gibson 2003; Bennett and Peterson 2004b; Whiteley et al. 2004; D’Andrea 2007). The emergent translocal music scenes were discussed mostly within the context of the larger theoretical debates aiming to reconfigure British subcultural theory from the end of the 1990s (cf. Muggleton 1997; Bennett 1999b; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003; Bennett and Peterson 2004a; Hodkinson 2007). The participants in this debate aimed to move beyond the main strands of subcultural theory that had been developed by researchers of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (e.g. Cohen 1972; Hall and Jefferson 1975/2002; Hebdige 1979/1988), and put forward new concepts and approaches that fit better with the contemporary empirical reality of youth cultures based on ethnographically founded work. Apart from bringing to light the misconceptions and inadequacies of earlier work, this new wave of studies also explored the ways in which larger social transformations associated with late- or postmodernity (Harvey 1990; Giddens 1991; Jameson 1991) – the increasing prominence of consumption in the making of identities (Featherstone 1991; Miller 1995), the shift from mass production to niche markets (Lash and Urry 1987, 1994), the fragmentation of the media landscape and the diversification of media audiences (Castells 1996), the increasing fluidity and electivity of collective identities based on reflexive lifestyle choices (Chaney 1996), and the globalisation of cultural flows – affected youth cultural worlds since the 1970s. The transformation of subcultural theory could be characterised by the following main tendencies: the growing acknowledgement of the ways in which media and commerce contributes towards the development of subcultural forms (Thornton 1996; Hodkinson 2002; Kahn-Harris 2007); the shifting of

interest from class, deviance and resistance to consumption and expressivity in exploring subcultural identities (cf. Kacsuk 2005); as well as the recognition of the diversity of individual stances, styles, preferences, pathways within and across increasingly blurred group boundaries (Muggleton 2000).

Whereas the less fruitful strand of the debate mainly revolved around the appropriate notion – subculture, scene, neo-tribe, genre – to use in describing internally diverse, fluid, often hazily bounded collectivities (e.g. Bennett 2005b; Blackman 2005; Hesmondhalgh 2005), a number of fascinating ethnographic studies – most prominently, but not exclusively the work of Sarah Thornton (1996), Paul Hodkinson (2002), Keith-Kahn Harris (2007) – provided important theoretical insights regarding translocal collectivities that cluster around the cultivation of particular musical forms, most notably with regard to the centrality of the networks of commerce and media in their emergence and development, and some of the substantive elements and distinctive strategies through which participants define and delineate such groups. Still, these ethnographic accounts seldom, if ever address explicitly the issue of attachment – understood both as a sense of community and belonging among participants, and as the affective character of personal identification with shared histories, sensibilities values, and places.

*Affective engagement in social worlds clustering around particular preferences is most often a taken for granted element in studies of popular music consumption.* Apart from a few notable if less empirically grounded exceptions (Grossberg 1984; Frith 1996a; Hennion and Gomart 1999; Hennion 2007), it is presented as a given property of music fandom that demands little explanation or documenting.

The production and experience of belonging and shared identity might indeed verge on the trivial in scenes that are made up of larger, tightly connected local groups that frequently gather in public venues in order to play, listen to and discuss music. In such collectivities, a sense of community could be easily explained to stem from a significant number of immediate acquaintances and friendships, as well as the unmediated experience of communion that is arguably part of such regular gatherings. In such surroundings, participants' awareness of and adherence to shared tastes, values and customs also begs less of an explanation: these competences are often learnt and passed down through a close-knit network of personal relationships, in which virtues are rewarded and transgressions are sanctioned.

However, in spatially dispersed musical worlds, like the transnational crate digging scene, in which regular, locally based face-to-face interaction takes place in small friendly circles that consist of a handful of enthusiasts at most, the presence of attachment – a deeply felt collective identity and a sense of companionship – among geographically and socially distant participants is less self-evident from a scholarly perspective, even though it is a common experience among the enthusiasts that – like Leo and me – spend substantial amounts of time participating in such collectivities.

Crate diggers, as other kinds of music enthusiasts, rarely ask themselves the kind of questions this thesis seeks to explore: What are the distinctive features of this form of musical appreciation and record collecting? Through what kind of subtle ways is the collective identity of this scene defined and shaped? How is a sense of belonging produced and experienced? What is the importance of artefacts, mediations, and places in the forging of attachments? Although the scholar in me would rigorously pursue these issues, the crate digger that I have become simultaneously with the unfolding of my pathway into academia in the last decade is hesitant, even suspicious because many of these questions appear outlandish, fabricated, even forced from the perspective of everyday scenic participation. I'm anxious because of the necessarily appropriative character of the ethnographic project: scholarly inquiry dissects and reassembles the cultural worlds it studies on its own terms, in ways that are suited primarily to extract novel theoretical insights. For all that is gained, something is always inevitably lost in the process: the doubt of ignorance, arrogance, simplification, trivialisation, and reification lurk behind every written page. Trying to balance the goal of advancing knowledge with that of providing a reasonably accurate and respectful representation, this thesis aims to find answers to the questions above by maintaining a very practical approach, and focusing on issues that crate diggers discuss extensively: records, collecting practices, and places where records change hands. A necessarily flawed compromise, but also a relatively unexplored path in scholarly inquiry.

### **MATERIALISING BELONGING**

How shall we begin to conceptualise notions as abstract as “belonging” and “collective identity” in transnational scenes by focusing on as mundane artefact as a vinyl records?

Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community” offers a possible point of departure:

“[The community of the nation] is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each of them lives the image of their communion. [...] In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (or perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.” (Anderson 1983: 6)

By focusing on the “style in which” a sense of communion is evoked among fellow-citizens, Anderson approaches the sources of national identity in a very concrete manner, focusing – among other things – on the mass-scale circulation of printed matter within national boundaries.

Both Paul Gilroy (1993a) and Sara Cohen (1998) pursue a similar insight when they describe the role that circulating gramophone records played in the production and experience of collective identities within diasporic communities. Gilroy notes the significance of the translocal dissemination of music – in the form of live performances and recorded artefacts – in eliciting the Black Atlantic, a social, cultural and political space that connects black individuals and communities regardless of whether they have actual roots – kinship-ties or places of origin – in common. He describes “gramophone records” along with “tracts, books, and choirs”, as “key cultural and political artefacts” (Gilroy 1993a: 4) that played an important role in creating a shared musical vernacular, and in evoking a sense of a shared temporality, fate, and identity by communicating political ideas and creating a common pool of knowledge about events, and issues across the diasporic space (Gilroy 1991b, 1993b).

Cohen (1998), in her paper on the Jewish community of Brownlow Hill, Liverpool provides an illuminative account regarding the ways in which the circulation of records – along with sheet music and other printed matter – contributed towards the maintenance and strengthening of personal connections within the local community in the 1920s and 1930s.

“Referring to the recordings that his relatives listened to, Jack said, ‘And somehow those records came around. And one person got hold of one, and it was passed around... And bit by bit we used to have records.’ This description conforms with Jack’s depiction of Liverpool Jews

living ‘in one circle,’ a spatial metaphor for neighbourhood that incorporates Jewish records and songs as part of the circle, and part of the process defining it.” (Cohen 1998: 274)

Cohen – in a manner that resembles Gilroy’s observations – also describes the significance of record trading in connecting Brownlow Hill to other Jewish communities: the local record merchant supplied Eastern European migrant families with their traditional Yiddish music imported via a London based Jewish wholesaler. Through recorded music, but also the chain of economic and interpersonal connections that facilitate their circulation, the inhabitants of the Jewish quarter were linked to their previous homelands, as well as other diasporic communities.

Apart from echoing Anderson’s observations, both Gilroy and Cohen offer more specific insights regarding ways in which records contribute towards a sense of shared identity and belonging within diasporic communities. Shifting the focus of their discussions from the mere *circulation* of musical commodities and information to *the social practices* that revolve around their consumption and exchange, their accounts provide some of the most important inspirations for the argument I will develop throughout this thesis.

“The artefacts of the pop industry premised on the individual act of purchase and consumption are hijacked and taken over into the heart of collective rituals of protest and affirmation. Music is heard socially and its deepest meanings revealed only in the heart of this collective, affirmative consumption.” (Gilroy 1993b: 38)

Gilroy’s account calls attention to the collective ritual practices of listening to, discussing, playing, and reworking music, that – as he suggests – are not only productive of distinctive meanings and appreciations, but are also central to constituting the community in which these shared sensibilities are cultivated.

Cohen’s discussion of the reminisces of Jack, an old Brownlow Hill musician, takes an alternative route and focuses on the role musical practices play in the “sensus production of place”:

“Songs, sounds, and musical phrases evoke personal memories and feelings associated with particular places [... Spatially imagined relations of kinship, affinity and alliance] are maintained,

strengthened, and transformed through musical practices and interactions. [...] Music thus takes a hidden and often taken for granted role in the production of space.” (Cohen 1998: 288)

Describing a range of musical practices such as dancing at local dancehalls, peddling pirated sheet music door-to-door within the Jewish neighbourhood, and listening to records from afar, her ethnographic account illuminates a number of ways in which – apart from the reinforcement of social ties – *the engagement with music and records also contributes towards an imagination of attachment and identity that is heavily spatialised: a geography of belonging.*

In a way, both Cohen’s and Gilroy’s insights resonate with Orvar Löfgren’s suggestions regarding the ways in which *the micro-sociology of consumption* – focusing on “ordinary objects and everyday routines” of using them – could serve

“as back-door research entrances to general problems. In many ways, small remains beautiful in this kind of research. Thick descriptions and detailed ethnographic micro-studies of certain situations, commodities or routines often show us how a lot of cultural energy is condensed or crystallized.” (Löfgren 1997: 110)

Among the larger theoretical issues that a research imagination which concentrates on seemingly mundane objects and practices could help to address, Löfgren mentions the embeddedness of national differences – as well as experiences of home and away – in the materialities of everyday life.

In the field of popular music studies, Löfgren’s observations were adopted by Will Straw in a series of insightful essays that explored what we could gain by exploring the significance of the material culture of recorded music. His more general papers addressed the ways in which the circulation and sedimentation of records could be analysed in understanding the transformation of local and national aesthetic sensibilities (Straw 1999, 2000, 2002a), as well as the particular circuits through which cultural forms travel (Straw 2005), while his more specific work provided particular case studies of a specific record format – the 12” single – (Straw 2002b), and the space of record stores (Straw 1997a) in a similar framework. Straw’s work clearly demonstrated the capacity of a “micro-sociological” approach to material music consumption practices to bring forth profound, often unexpected insights regarding cultural change at both local and national scale, as well as forms of interaction and cross-fertilisation within

particular musical worlds and among spatially or temporally distant collectivities. In terms of the ways I will approach my subject in this thesis, I'm indebted to Straw's work on music and materiality that had surprisingly little influence in the study of popular music.

Record buying and collecting practices are mentioned in passing as important forms of affiliation in ethnographic accounts of particular musical worlds (Thornton 1996; Hodkinson 2002; Kahn-Harris 2007), however these studies do not offer more systematic discussions of the ways in which collective identities are embedded in the everyday materialities of "collective, affirmative consumption" (Gilroy 1993b: 38). While studies of record collecting groups (Jamieson 1999; Dougan 2006) provide more insight regarding how group boundaries and internal social hierarchies are constituted through collective rituals of record consumption and use, their analyses are based on a very simplified version of Bourdieu's theory of distinction (cf. Bourdieu 1979/2002) and provide a rigid, structural model that is in stark contrast with the empirical reality of the crate digging scene<sup>4</sup> – and most probably, with that of other geographically dispersed collecting worlds. Furthermore, *neither the above mentioned studies of musical worlds, nor the more specifically collecting oriented works engage with the actual ways in which collecting practices are productive of collective identities and attachments, and leave issues of spatiality largely unexplored. Concentrating on "the style in which" (Anderson 1983: 6) the crate digging scene is imagined as a shared space of belonging, my discussion will focus primarily on the collective, ritual practices through which scenic participants engage with vinyl records.*

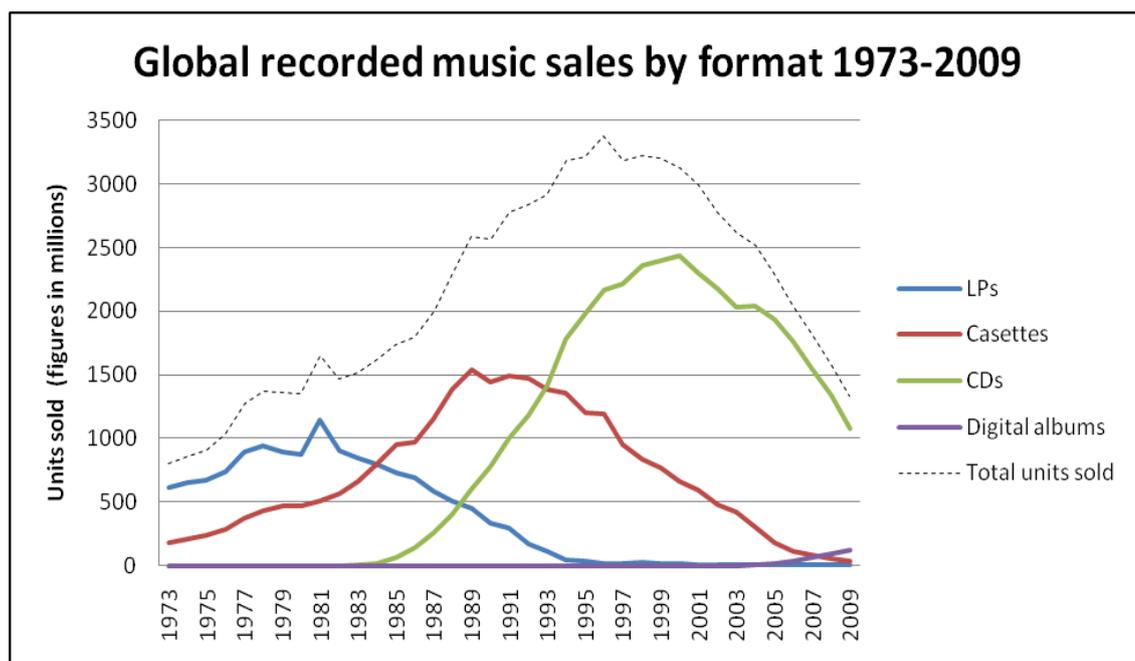
As Anderson's (1983) work suggests that practices of belonging are always situated within particular historical times, and are ultimately connected to contemporary technological regimes of information dissemination, I will now, briefly, explore this larger context of my discussion.

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<sup>4</sup> I will provide a more detailed discussion of collecting related literature in the next chapter.

## ENGAGING WITH THE SOCIOCULTURAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE TRANSFORMING TECHNOLOGICAL REGIME OF MUSIC CONSUMPTION

Consuming and collecting recorded music in the form of physical artefacts was an important means of engaging with music and the social worlds that clustered around particular styles and genres – throughout the twentieth century (cf. Gronow and Saunio 1999; Straw 2001a). However, from the mid 1990s onwards, the increasing use of the internet for musical exchange, and the growing popularity of new digital music storage and playback devices signalled that the everyday materiality of music consumption has entered a stage of profound transformation (Bødker 2004).



Declining sales of music in physical formats<sup>5</sup>

In Europe and North America, the recording industry – apart from limited editions aimed at audiophiles and DJs – had stopped releasing vinyl records by the early 1990s, the audio cassette market had practically evaporated after the millennium, and CD sales have been declining since around the same time. Although the resurgence of vinyl in the US and UK market was widely covered in the press, (e.g. Van Buskirk 2007; Williams 2008; Martens 2009; Hough 2010; Lewin 2010), vinyl represents only a tiny fraction of global recorded music sales that, in 2009, was still dominated by the shrinking CD market (Barnett 2010). The steady increase in digital sales (Crooks 2009) as well as the omnipresence of digital music in file-sharing networks, on music blogs, and other online

<sup>5</sup> Based on the data of the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI 2010)

platforms, however, suggest the *gradual* fading of the importance of physical media in the ways in which individuals and groups engage with music.

It would be a crude exaggeration however to present this thesis as the exploration and documentation of particular form of musical identification that is on the verge of disappearance due to the withering materiality of recorded music. Bearing in mind Will Straw's (1999) observations regarding the discrepancy between the relatively short initial commercial life-span of recorded music artefacts and their capacity to resist physical decay for a much longer term, it is likely that CDs and vinyl records will sediment in private collections and places of second hand exchange and circulate according to shifting waves of revalorisation among music fans and collectors for decades after the recorded music industry decides to abandon these formats in favour of digital downloads.

It is worth noting, however, that prevailing record collecting worlds are not left unaffected by the emergence of the networked, digital environment that plays an important role in music consumption. The development of online media brought along a profound transformation not just in the materiality of music, but also in how information about music, records, collectors, and places of exchange circulate within and across collecting scenes. Even in the early 1990s, the translocal dissemination of information regarding music within marginal genres was confined mostly to ephemeral print media with limited circulations – sporadic mentions in more generally targeted music magazines, fanzines, flyers, and mail order catalogues – and postal correspondence among enthusiasts. The emergence and growing popularity of thematic websites, message boards, music blogs, online radios, and discographical databases from the mid 1990s onwards has marked the end of an era of relative information scarcity, and opened an easily accessible, more participative space for the internal communication and organisation of marginal music scenes both locally and translocally (cf. Thornton 1996; Hodkinson 2002; Bennett and Peterson 2004a; Kahn-Harris 2007). Furthermore, the increasing online trade of vinyl records has disrupted local geographies of second hand record repertoires by intensifying the long distance exchange of titles that initially had a limited geographical distribution, and – by making apparent the global availability and desirability of specific items – diminishing previously substantial price differences across specific localities (Raine 2008).

The full exploration of how these complex and thoroughly interwoven strands of technological change present themselves in the everyday lives of participants in translocal musical worlds is beyond the scale and scope of my enterprise; however, I hope to contribute to understanding the sociocultural consequences of this transformation by focusing on the practices and experiences of a particular generation of collectors. Most of the crate diggers I have interviewed for this project in the US – in 2005 – and the UK – in 2007 – began their collecting careers influenced by sample based hip hop between the mid 1980s and the early 1990s, in a period when CDs made vinyl records obsolete, when the exchange of collecting related information was firmly embedded in personal relationships, and when finding particular records necessarily involved the laborious task of exploring places of second hand exchange in different localities. Although their accounts offer a necessarily partial picture of the scene, their reminiscences on how they became involved with crate digging and views of recent technological developments – supplemented with a range of online sources and my observations as a scenic participant – provide important insights regarding the ways in which the transforming technological regime of music consumption effects in the production and experience of scenic attachments and identities.

#### **PRACTICES OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING WITHIN THE CRATE DIGGING SCENE**

I have presented some of the most important insights that have informed the practical approach through which this thesis will explore the sources of a sense of belonging and identity in the geographically dispersed, loosely connected space of the crate digging scene. I close this introductory section with mapping out the main directions of my inquiry and explaining the ways in which the structure of the thesis works towards exploring these particular areas and illuminating the ways in which they are interconnected.

As I have suggested in the previous sections, my discussion will primarily focus on the collective rituals through which scenic identities and attachments are produced, reinforced, and experienced. *My discussion of these practices will revolve around a number of tightly interwoven areas of inquiry: (1) the cultivation of a shared tradition, (2) the forging of social relationships, (3) the circulation of records, information, and influences within the scene, and (4) the spatiality of scenic practices.* Rather than discussing these issues in separate chapters, I chose a different itinerary leading from a

shared history to a collectively traversed geography. *My aim was not merely to explore the particular forces and logics at play in each of these analytically separated layers, but to make apparent the ways in which they work together in the making of a sense of identity and belonging among scenic participants.*

In the following chapter, I will situate my inquiry at the cross-roads of the sociology and popular music studies, and discuss some of the key theories this thesis draws on, furthers or debates. There, I will explore the more general literature on the centrality of practices to the production of identities and attachments, then – through an overview of the debate within popular music studies regarding the theorisation of contemporary musical collectivities – propose the notion of the *scene* as the framework of my analysis. I will argue, that whereas Will Straw’s definition of this concept – a shared space organised around particular musical practices that provide a sense of belonging to participants – is often criticised for its imprecision, it could be refined and used as tool of describing loosely bound and spatially dispersed groups surrounding particular forms of music. I will propose a reworking of this concept by concentrating on three particular kinds of practices: (1) *aesthetic* – combining ideas from the sociology of creative worlds (Becker 1963/1991) and literary theory (Fish 1980; Willis 1990); (2) *distinctive* – making use of, but also rethinking the critical sociology of culture (Bourdieu 1977) to some extent; and *spatial* – adopting insights regarding the spatialisation of identities from philosophy (Lefebvre 1991), human geography (e.g. Massey 1984; Harvey 2001), and anthropology (e.g. Appadurai 1995; Basso 1996).

Chapter 3 is dedicated to exploring the methodological difficulties of conducting translocal research in an internally highly heterogeneous scene. The chapter describes the genesis of the project concentrating on methods of data gathering, and the empirical material collected. *It describes the ways in which field experiences, theoretical influences and personal interests – as an ethnographer and scenic participant – contributed towards the gradual emergence of the main themes and topics of the thesis, as well as the particular insights and constraints that contributed towards the delimitation of the scale and scope of the project. I aim to account for the epistemological status of my claims exploring the ways in which my subjective position – that is situated at the intersection of a number of subjective affiliations and the perspectives and experiences enabled by multi-sited fieldwork – might have shaped my understanding and interpretation of scenic practices.*

Chapter 4 explores *the break aesthetics*, not only as the distinctive mode of musical appreciation that is specific of the crate digging scene, but as an important means of belonging. Through a discussion of scholarly and scenic accounts that describe various stages of its development in the context of appropriative music making practices in hip hop, *this chapter is to illuminate the centrality of this collectively cultivated history to the appreciation of particular recordings within the scene*. Furthermore, *it argues that aesthetic practices – such as listening to, discussing and writing about music, as much as making mixtapes, producing sample based beats and putting together compilations – provide a way for crate diggers to participate in the scene – a community of appreciation – through their engagement with the collective cultivation of its shared tradition*.

Chapter 5 furthers the discussion of crate digging as a hip hop related tradition of record collecting. By shifting the focus of the discussion from the appreciation of “musical texts” to music in the form of material artefacts, it explores the ways in which *distinctive collecting practices* could be seen as *enactments of identity and belonging* among scenic participants. *I will describe the distinctiveness of scenic practices as a certain form of traditionalism: a collective performance through which crate diggers continually evoke the foundational principles of their shared traditions, and enact their commitment to the preservation of its customs and values*.

After having discussed musical appreciation and distinctive collecting within the scene as ways in which crate diggers participate in the cultivation of a shared tradition, in Chapter 6, I will discuss the practices through which scenic history, aesthetics, customs, and values are passed on and acquired. *My discussion will concentrate on the ways in which the embeddedness of scenic learning in personal and mediated relationships contributes towards the creation of attachments: both in terms of lending affective depth to scenic tastes and ideals, but also by strengthening and broadening a web of emotional ties to the social world of the scene*.

In Chapter 7, *I will explore the various roles that places of second hand record exchange – used record shops, flea markets, charity shops, record fairs, and specialist stores – play in fostering sociability and facilitating the circulation and organisation of scenic information and records*. I will discuss the ways in which *these places contribute towards the development and maintenance of scenic relationships, as well as the enactment of distinctive identities* in collective rituals organised around record shopping

and the discussion of record buying adventures. Furthermore, *I will then explore the roles that specialist stores play as taste makers as well as sites of sociability within particular local scenes, but also as focal points within the translocal exchange of music, news and collecting related information.*

In Chapter 8, I will first describe the ways in which a range of *spatial practices* – regular digging routes and routines, road trips, articles, photo essays, video documentaries, and scenic talk about record spots – weave together places of exchange into a larger alternative geography. I will then explore some of the forms and logics that structure this distinctive conceptualisation of space, and explore the ways in which this shared geographical understanding is productive of a sense of place – a feeling of familiarity and belonging – that is constitutive of a sense of commonality among crate diggers.

## 2. BELONGING THROUGH TRADITION

The collecting of vinyl records is frequently described – in documentaries, journalistic and literary accounts (e.g. Eisenberg 1987; Hornby 1995; Zweig 2000/2002; Milano 2003) – as a solemn activity of possessive males, an excessive gathering of objects that stands in the way of – or substitutes for – social relationships. Roy Shuker’s empirical study aims to defy the above stereotype by providing a more detailed account of this pursuit highlighting the significance of such aspects of record collecting as

“a love of music; obsessive-compulsive behaviour; accumulation and completism; selectivity and discrimination; self-education and scholarship” (Shuker 2004: 311).

Shuker’s account is important for recognising a range of individual motivations and approaches that are not uncommon in other collecting cultures (cf. Belk 1995). However, while he argues that “[a]s a social practice, record collecting presents itself as a core component of individual social identity and a central part of the life cycle” (Shuker 2004: 311), his inquiry focuses on self-characterisations, rather than social practices, and leaves issues of collectivity largely unexplored.

David Hayes describes the preferences of teenage record buyers in a similar manner, arguing that vinyl consumption practices are acts of resistance through which teenagers reclaim personal agency – in the context of mass marketed contemporary digital pop products – often motivated by a nostalgic longing for some form of “authenticity” residing in older musical texts and objects (Hayes 2006).

The individualistic focus of both of these studies reflects the way in which the vast majority of the broader literature on collecting (cf. Belk 1995; Pearce 1995) and consumption practices (cf. Miller 1995) revolves primarily around personal motivations, meanings, and strategies. This chapter will, however, explore an alternative pathway through theory that illuminates the ultimately social character of collecting focusing on how practices organised around the collective consumption of vinyl records contribute towards as a sense of identity and belonging within specific collectivities.

It is partly my interest in the significance of record collecting in the making of identities and attachments that disciplinarily situates my research within sociology, partly the centrality of ideas from the interactionist (Becker 1982), critical (Bourdieu 1979/2002), and pragmatic (Hennion 2003, 2007) sociology of culture to the theoretical framework of my analysis. However, my study will be an interdisciplinary one, as I will draw on

insights from other fields – most prominently literary theory and human geography, anthropology, and cultural studies, but also others – as well as popular music studies, the disciplinary varied area of research to which my work also contributes. However, while I engage with a number of perspectives from other fields, I will always do it on sociological terms, concentrating on the ways in which they contribute to our understanding of the social significance of music, records, and places.

Furthermore, as I have suggested in the previous chapter, whereas my study revolves around abstract concepts – identity and belonging – it does so by maintaining a micro-sociological approach and examining the practices organised around the collective consumption of vinyl records through ethnographic methods. It will thus neither provide an all encompassing account of the crate digging scene, nor a semiotic, psychological or psychoanalytic analysis of its subject matter.

In the first section, I will briefly discuss some of the key accounts that informed my understanding of the relationship between identity and the practices that revolve around the collective consumption of cultural artefacts and music. I will concentrate on the literature that describes *identities not as somehow already given, but as continually produced and remade in collective rituals*.

In the second section, I will review the recent debates regarding *the theorisation of contemporary musical collectivities within popular music studies*, and discuss my choice of the notion of the scene – a shared cultural space organised around a number of overlapping and interacting musical practices that provide a sense of community – (Straw 1991, 2001b) as the conceptual framework of my ethnography. While recent criticism (Hesmondhalgh 2005) rightly pointed out the ways in which the elusive and loosely defined character of this notion limits its analytical capacity, *I will argue that the weakness of this notion could be overcome by reworking it focusing more specifically on the ways in which three different kinds of practices – aesthetic, distinctive, and spatial – work towards evoking a sense of identity and belonging in these worlds*.

In the third section, I will explore the ways in which particular scenes could be understood as collectivities organised around the collective cultivation of a shared cultural *tradition*. This notion will be central to my discussion of the *ritual practices which are organised around the preservation, passing down, learning, maintaining and shaping of a particular form of musical appreciation, distinctive collecting customs,*

*and more profound moral ideals in relation to an “imagined” collective history throughout the thesis..*

## 2.1 BELONGING THROUGH RITUALS

Before discussing the significance of different kinds of practices in the production and experience of identity and belonging, I briefly overview some of the key academic accounts that have influenced my understanding regarding the relationship between the level of practice and that of abstractions such as shared values, meanings, ideals, affiliation, and togetherness. As a detailed exploration of the philosophical debate regarding the role of collective rituals in the constitution of the categories and hierarchies through which we makes sense of the world and our place in it is beyond the scale and scope of this project, I will merely highlight a few accounts that explain my choice of approaching these abstract issues primarily through the description and interpretation of concrete practices.

As most of the – aesthetic, distinctive, and spatial – practices that I will discuss in this thesis involve material objects – vinyl records – either directly or in a less immediate manner, it is perhaps best to begin my discussion with *The World of Goods*, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood’s (1979/1996) seminal book on the anthropology of consumption. Douglas and Isherwood argue that rituals are essential in setting up and maintaining shared meanings, values, and other conventions that define and demarcate kinship networks, occupational groups, and social classes. Rather than implying that social norms, shared categories, and collective identities are somehow already in place, they describe these as fleeting and fragile abstractions that emerge only – and are maintained – through regularly repeated rituals:

“The main problem of social life is to pin down meanings so that they stay still for a little time. [...] To manage without rituals is to manage without clear meanings and possibly without memories. [...] Goods, in this perspective, are ritual adjuncts; consumption is a ritual process whose primary function is to make sense of the inchoate flux of events.” (Douglas and Isherwood 1979/1996:41)

Similarly, in his anthropology of value, David Graeber suggests that abstract ideas emerge out of rituals (Graeber 2001: 60-63). However, whereas Douglas and Isherwood's approach implicitly relies on the philosophical assumptions of American pragmatism that underlies the symbolic interactionist perspective (cf. Blumer 1969) of their work, Graeber's argument is based in the empirically more founded observations of developmental psychologist Jean Piaget regarding the relationship between practices and human cognition:

“Piaget insists that the basis of any system of knowledge is always a set of practices: Mathematics, for example, is not derived from the ‘idea of number’ but from the practice of counting. The abstract categories, however important, never come first.” (Graeber 2001: 61, my emphasis)

Piaget's cognitive structuralism also profoundly influenced Bourdieu's theory of practice (cf. Lizardo 2009), particularly regarding the ways in which the French sociologist understood *culture and identity as dynamic processes* rather than fixed, already given structures. Bourdieu suggests that social conventions, norms, beliefs and meanings are emerging from – and internalised through – repeated, regular practices of individuals (Bourdieu 1977, 1990b). His main argument is that social difference is established and maintained to an important degree through distinctions, value judgments – regarding artworks and music, but also more mundane areas of cultural consumption such as food, clothing, and holiday making – that are either verbalized or implicit in our consumer choices and preferences (Bourdieu 1979/2002). As I will return to discussing Bourdieu's ideas regarding the practices that surround the consumption of cultural artefacts in more detail later, let it suffice now that he describes these continually ongoing rituals as doubly constitutive: productive and reproductive of group specific categories of value and corresponding social hierarchies, as well as of individual positions within collectivities stratified by different tastes (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 132-137).

Although Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) work on *performative character of identities* draws on different intellectual inspirations – most prominently from the field of linguistics and the philosophy of language – is focused primarily on the social production of gendered identities, and was developed independently from Bourdieu's ideas (Butler 1999), it comes to very similar conclusions, particularly regarding the

significance of *practices of enactment* in the iterative process through which both social norms and identities are reproduced, shaped, and embodied in performance (cf. Rooke 2004).

In my discussion of how collective practices of music consumption contribute towards a sense of belonging, I will draw on the so far outlined insights and approach *identity not as an already given property, but as a process*: the constantly on-going production of attachments and subjective positions through ritual performances (cf. Hall 1996). While my discussion will primarily focus on *collecting practices*, it does not mean that I will discount or neglect the importance of the *musical experience*. On the contrary, as practices of listening to music constitute an integral part of record collecting rituals among crate diggers and other record enthusiasts, I will follow Simon Frith's (1996a, 1996b) suggestions regarding the usefulness of concentrating on musical appreciation as a crucial way through which identities are produced and experienced:

“musical response is, by nature, a process of musical identification; aesthetic response is, by nature, an ethical agreement. The critical issue, in other words, is not meaning and interpretation - musical appreciation as a kind of decoding - but experience and collusion: the ‘aesthetic’ describes a kind of self-consciousness, a coming together of the sensual, the emotional, and the social *as* performance.” (Frith 1996b: 272, his emphasis)

My choice to concentrate on collecting practices is partly an attempt *to sidestep the problem of musical signification* that predominated in inquiries regarding the relationship between music and sociocultural identities within musicology, as well as the semiological strands of analysis within ethnomusicology (cf. Berger 1999; Born 2000) and popular music studies (cf. Frith 1996a). In the case of crate digging, where the significance of appreciated older recordings has often less to do with the circumstances of their initial production and reception than their subsequent appropriations in the context of hip hop related music making practices, it would be difficult to argue that music in itself reflects or represents collective sensibilities among collectors that could be made apparent through the “textual analysis” of the recordings they collect. Some of the basic assumptions of anthropological and ethnomusicological approaches that focus on musical practices (e.g. Finnegan 1989; Cohen 1991) offer a potentially more fruitful itinerary:

“music doesn’t have an inherent value, but is only valuable to particular people in particular societies; [...] the job of the ethnomusicologist [...] is] to understand how music works from the perspective of the people who make it and listen to it.” (Berger 2008: 64)

As I have explained so far, such an approach fits better with the ways in which I see shared values, meanings, and identities as constituted in practice, while it is also better suited to exploring the retrospective engagement with older musical forms, that is typical of the crate digging scene. Furthermore, shifting the focus of analysis from “the symbolic” to “the practical” is also more in line with the micro-sociological approach that I have outlined in the previous introductory chapter based on the work of Orvar Löfgren (1997) and Will Straw (1999, 2000, 2002a).

In this section, I have provided a brief overview of some of the key theories that have influenced my understanding of the significance of practices in the production and experience of identity and belonging. Now, I will proceed to a discussion of contemporary theorization of spatially dispersed and loosely connected musical collectivities, and explain my choice of the notion of scene as the framework of my analysis.

## 2.2 DESCRIBING MUSICAL COLLECTIVITIES

Popular music studies as a disciplinarily mixed area of research emerged in the 1980s with the increasing recognition of popular music and the wider culture surrounding it as a legitimate area of academic inquiry among scholars from different backgrounds – literary theory, cultural studies, musicology, ethnomusicology, and sociology. In the introductory sections of an early collection of essays on theorising pop, Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (1982) provide an account of the prehistory of this interdisciplinary field that begins with the study of commercial teen culture within 1950s American sociology, proceeds through Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel’s (1964/1990) insights regarding the “young audience” from the perspective of literary theory, and culminates in the study of youth cultures surrounding music – such as teddyboys, mods, rockers,

skinheads, and punks – within the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham throughout the 1970s. This particular version of subcultural theory became most clearly articulated in an anthology of CCCS works entitled *Resistance through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson 1975/2002) and Dick Hebdige's (1979/1988) *Subculture – The Meaning of Style*, and had a lasting influence in the description of popular music worlds. The prevailing legacy of British subcultural theory within popular music studies is not surprising, if we consider the lack of similarly focused efforts in theorising the collectivities surrounding pop styles in the same period: up until the 1980s, musicology concentrated on the history and literature of Western art music (cf. Middleton 1990), while ethnomusicologists focused mainly on the ethnographic study of traditional folk music in non-Western surroundings (List 1979; Cooley and Barz 2008).

#### **REWORKING SUBCULTURE**

A thorough discussion of subcultural theory would exceed the limitations of this chapter. However, a number of detailed accounts are available that have emerged from the debate regarding its applicability in the study of popular music worlds (Muggleton 1997; Redhead et al. 1998; Bennett 1999b, 2000; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003; Bennett and Peterson 2004a; Kacsuk 2005; Hodkinson 2007). This debate wrestled with the problem that whereas scholars of the CCCS have described subcultures as young, working class, resistant, stylistically coherent, locally based, stable, and relatively clearly demarcated groups, such a definition hardly fit the less age and class based, internally heterogeneous, hazily bounded, often geographically dispersed, and fluid forms of sociability that characterise contemporary musical collectivities. Besides issues of definition, the usefulness of semiotic analysis – the primary approach within the CCCS work on style (e.g. Hebdige 1979/1988, 1987) – has also been questioned. In the light of the lack of ethnographic engagement with the views of participants in subcultural formations regarding the significance of stylistic elements, the structural homologies through which many CCCS scholars explained subcultural styles as symbolic representations of underlying values appeared as little more than sophisticated armchair theorisation (cf. Muggleton 2000).

The participants in the debate regarding the reconfiguration of the study of popular music cultures have proposed a number of insightful solutions to the above

inadequacies. I will now briefly overview the most significant contributions to the theorisation of contemporary popular music worlds.

Paul Hodkinson (2002) aimed to rescue *subculture* as a useful concept in describing *relatively clearly defined and stabile collectivities* by redefining it from the ground up. Instead of looking for class, age or resistance, he outlined four constitutive elements of *subcultural substance*, that distinguish subcultures from other, more loosely organised forms of sociability: *consistent distinctiveness* – a relatively coherent set of shared attitudes and styles, *identity* – identification with the group, *commitment* – organising a significant portion of one's spare time and social relations around the subculture, and *autonomy* – the existence of a relatively autonomous network of subcultural media and commerce. In his ethnography of the translocal goth subculture, he demonstrated the usefulness of this definition as a research strategy that concentrates on these particular areas in describing subcultural formations. Although Hodkinson's work provides important insights for my research – particularly regarding the importance of media and commerce in the production and circulation of distinctive attitudes and the articulation of collective tastes and identities – it offers little help in addressing issues of spatiality and the affective dimensions of belonging. Furthermore, as Hodkinson's definition is focused on a substantive core of relatively consistent distinctive values and sensibilities, it does not provide sufficient tools for the description of more loosely organised collectivities within which a diversity of tastes, styles, and attitudes coexist and interact.

### NEO-TRIBAL FORMATIONS

Whereas Hodkinson's framework seems useful in describing relatively stabile, clearly demarcated, internally consistent forms of associations, *neo-tribe* – as outlined by Andy Bennett (1999b, 2005b) – is one of the most widely used concepts within popular music studies in describing the other end of the scale: fluid and ephemeral collectivities. Bennett argues that tastes and cultural affiliations are unstable, shifting, and fragmented:

“The nature of the urban dance-music event is becoming increasingly a matter of individual choice, the type of music heard and the setting in which it is heard and danced to being very much the decision of the individual consumer. [...] For many enthusiasts, ‘clubbing’ appears to be regarded less as a singularly definable activity and more as a series

of fragmented, temporal experiences as they move between different dance floors and engage with different crowds.” (Bennett 1999b: 611)

Bennett – grounding his argument in the wider literature on consumerism (cf. Featherstone 1991; Chaney 1996; Bennett 2005a) – approaches the process of identification as a highly reflexive project that is organised primarily around individual lifestyle choices. David Hesmondhalgh (2005) criticises Bennett’s work – among other things – because of its inconsiderate appropriation of Michel Maffesoli’s work on tribalism (Maffesoli 1996). Whereas Maffesoli describes *tribus* as a significant form of social organisation to counter theories of mass society by describing the ways in which these fluid alliances provide a sense of belonging, solidarity, and a space of counter-cultural politics, Bennett outlines his argument against the rigidity of Marxist structuralism that underlies much of the CCCS subcultural theory. Focusing mainly on fluidity and individual choice, he largely ignores the collective, affective, and often political character of these formations that Maffesoli, and later commentators such as Kevin Hetherington (1998), aimed to bring forth. Furthermore, Hesmondhalgh is correct to note that Bennett’s discussion lacks profound analytic insights apart from calling attention to that whereas

“CCCS subculturalists might have overestimated the boundedness and permanence of the group identities they were studying, but simply to offer instability and temporariness as alternatives does not get us very far. *We need to know how boundaries are constituted, not simply that they are fuzzier than various writers have assumed.*” (Hesmondhalgh 2005: 24, my emphasis)

Returning to Hetherington’s original formulation of the notion of the neo-tribe – that served as the source of Bennett’s term – offers more insights regarding the significance of cultural preferences in the formation of loosely connected, temporal alliances. Drawing on Maffesoli’s ideas regarding the ways in which belonging emerges as an embodied, affective experience in *temporal gatherings organised around cultural preferences* – at sport events, shops, urban avenues, even electronic bulletin boards – Hetherington elaborates on the significance of the performative and expressive character of consumption practices in producing and experiencing shared subjective positions and collective attachments. Anthony D’Andrea’s (2007) translocal ethnography of “expressive expatriates” – that often gather at particular electronic music

events, experiment with various versions of new age spiritualism, and share a range of countercultural political sensibilities – demonstrates the usefulness of such a more collectively conceived neo-tribalist approach in describing temporal associations that are brought together by similar lifestyle choices, worldviews and agendas rather than a relatively consistent taste and a clearly defined collective identity. Although D’Andrea’s account pays little attention to how boundaries are drawn, it provides profound insights regarding how particular gatherings organised around common themes, affinities, and sentiments – yoga classes, techno trance events, hippie markets – enable participants to experience

“non-ordinary understandings about [... participants’] own self and proper sociability [... marked by] considerable consistency, which is based on a pattern of religiosity” (D’Andrea 2007: 225)

that he describes as “nomadic spiritualism”.

Although – like D’Andrea – I’m less interested in tracing boundaries than in exploring common threads, choosing such a neo-tribal framework for my analysis would be misleading considering the more consistent musical tastes and more permanent collective identity that is characteristic of the social world of crate digging. Furthermore within the collectivity of record collectors this thesis describes such shared worldviews, lifestyle choices or counter cultural sentiments are less apparent or central than in neo-tribal formations. So far, I have occasionally used the term *scene* to refer the social world of crate digging, without providing a definition of this notion, or explaining my choice of this term. Now, I turn to discussing these issues.

## **MUSIC SCENES**

In her ethnography of amateur music making in the town of Milton Keynes, Ruth Finnegan (1989) uses *scene* with reference to *both the wider social world of local music making and particular smaller segments of it that cluster around particular generic forms*. Similarly, Sara Cohen (1991) describes the local context of rock music making as a particular scene. Neither of these authors, however, has used this term as a theoretical construct; they merely adopted it from general parlance. Barry Shank’s work on different generic worlds of rock music in Austin, Texas provides a more theoretically engaged discussion of the notion of scene as locally embedded, participative formations

that provide a sense of sociability, a means of expressing local issues and sensibilities, that provide alternative forms of identification that offer refuge from, or even challenge faceless and commercial “mainstream” pop:

“Such scenes remain a necessary condition for the production of exciting rock ’n’ roll music capable of moving past the mere expression of locally significant cultural values and generic development – that is, beyond stylistic permutation – toward an interrogation of dominant structures of identification, and potential cultural transformation.” (Shank 1994: 122)

Resonating with Maffesoli’s (1996) ideas, Shank argues that the feeling of scenic attachment emerges at collective gatherings around music as a kind of *embodied experience of identity that is interwoven with a certain countercultural sentiment*. Whereas Shank’s work is important for illuminating *the significance of participative practices* in evoking a sense of belonging and attachment, he presents a partial perspective on popular culture according to which locally embedded musical practices appear somehow more authentic and valuable than the consumption of translocally circulating “chart pop”, and leaves issues of translocal influences and affiliations largely unexplored.

Will Straw (1991) proposes a different – in some aspects conflicting (cf. Hesmondhalgh 2005) – pathway that revolves mainly around the interaction between local and the global, while it largely *avoids the symbolic and political aspects of popular music consumption* and concentrates on the significance of *musical practices in the production of spatially dispersed collectivities*. Straw presents the notion of the scene as an alternative to more conventional understandings of musical communities which – like Shank’s approach – focus on locally based, tightly knit social worlds organised around the cultivation of a geographically specific musical heritage. Addressing the question of how we could theorise *translocal musical alliances* and the ways in which globally circulating musical forms are adopted within specific localities, Straw – drawing on an earlier conference paper by Shanks – defines the scene as a

“cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization.” (ibid.: 373)

Straw's argument is that focusing on practices, connections and interactions, rather than boundaries, enables us to examine

“the ways in which particular musical practices ‘work’ to produce a sense of community within the conditions of metropolitan music scenes.” (ibid.)

Rather than providing a more detailed definition and offering a comprehensive account of the term's potential applications, he merely outlines a possible research strategy that focuses on different temporal and spatial “logics” at work in translocal scenes through an illuminative comparative case study of alternative rock and dance music scenes. Despite its incomplete and open-ended formulation, Straw's work became widely influential within the study of translocal musical collectivities (cf. Bennett and Peterson 2004b; Hesmondhalgh 2005).

In a later essay, Straw (2001b) has further elaborated on the origins and possible applications of scene, addressing some of the criticism regarding the elusive character of this term, particularly the multitude of ways in which it is used in everyday conversations, newspaper articles, as well as academic accounts:

“Is a scene (a) the recurring congregation of people at a particular place, (b) the movement of these people between this place and other spaces of congregation, (c) the streets/strips along which this movement takes place [...], (d) all the places and activities which surround and nourish a particular cultural preference, (e) the broader and more geographically dispersed phenomena of which this movement or these preferences are local examples, or (f) the webs of microeconomic activity which foster sociability and link this to the city's ongoing self-reproduction? All of these phenomena have been designated as scenes.” (Straw 2001b: 249)

Again, rather than attempting to offer a conclusive definition, his account merely lists a number of ways in which scene has been used within the study of geographically specific urban cultural milieus, and the insights we could gain from each of these approaches. Straw's discussion highlights some of the crucial elements that make this notion inviting for my study of the crate digging scene, in spite of the term's ambiguity: its (1) efficiency in describing spatially dispersed and hazily bounded collectivities within which a diversity of tastes and practices coexist, (2) this term is evocative of

theatricality and *performance* that resonates with the performative character of musical practices, (3) the intimate and sociable character of these collective worlds, (4) a certain *distinctive sensibility* at work in the ways we identify with or avoid certain scenes, (5) *spatial connotations* that make it appealing for research that concentrates on spatial aspects of practices and identities. Straw's argument is that the strength of this concept lies partially in its capacity to evoke such a wealth of associations, and that by resorting to a related, but more precisely, and narrowly circumscribed term – like subculture, community or art world – we would inevitably lose some of the insights it can provide.

### GENRE AND ARTICULATION

However, while Straw describes scene as a “usefully flexible and anti-essentializing” notion that enables us to describe “cultural unities whose precise boundaries are invisible and elastic” (Straw 2001b: 248), Hesmondhalgh finds the multiple, often incompatible senses in which this term has been used ambiguous, even confusing. Elaborating on the imprecision of the ways in which this concept is defined, he asserts:

“[e]ven if boundaries are invisible or hazy, processes of distinction and definition need to be captured in analysis.” (Hesmondhalgh 2005: 29)

Hesmondhalgh correctly identifies one of the little explored shortcomings of the notion of the scene. However, rather than proposing potential amendments to this framework, he draws up an alternative approach based on the combination of two theoretical concepts: that of genre and articulation. Hesmondhalgh suggests that his proposition bears the promise of being able to account for elements that are often ignored or downplayed in both neo-tribal and scenic frameworks of analysis, and provide accounts of fluid musical collectivities that are more attentive to both aesthetic and political issues, as well as the significance of class and race in musical identification. However, his rather crudely outlined proposal suffers from the very same inadequacy he holds against the notion of the scene: both articulation and genre have long histories – in social and literary theory – of different, often conflicting uses and definitions (cf. Hesmondhalgh 2005). Taking into account that Hesmondhalgh's essay contains a detailed discussion of the ways in which these notions have been adopted in popular

music studies<sup>6</sup>, and the lack of influence his proposal had on subsequent research, I will only briefly describe the insights these concepts offer for the study of musical collectivities.

Whereas *genre* served as a means of categorising particular texts according to stylistic conventions in literary theory for centuries, in recent years it came to be understood as the process of categorisation itself (Chandler 1997). This shift of interest from mere categories, stylistic conventions, and corresponding textual canons to the social and institutional contexts in which they are shaped is clearly present in Franco Fabbri's (1981) seminal account of the particular kinds of rules – formal and technical, semiotic, behavioural, social and ideological – that delineate genres in popular music, as well as the social processes of their “codification”. Simon Frith draws on Fabbri's work, and argues that

“[i]t is genre rules which determine how musical forms are taken to convey meaning and value, which determine the aptness of different sorts of judgment, which determine the competence of different people to make assessments.” (Frith 1996b: 95)

Presenting genre as the primary context that orients and lends meaning to distinctive practices in particular musical collectivities, Frith describes the ways in which musicians, critics, fans, recording industry marketing departments, DJs, and record shops make use of, and simultaneously, shape these aesthetic and ethical conventions. While Keith Negus (1999) provides a more detailed discussion of how generic contexts shape corporate strategies that aim to turn musical creativity into marketable commodities, Fabian Holt (2003, 2007) concentrates on the process of genre formation and offers a model that describes the significance of influential “center communities” – specialised listeners, musicians, and performance venues – in shaping genre specific conventions and mediating these to wider audiences.

If genre provides a way to engage with processes of musical differentiation by bringing together musical texts, producers, mediators and consumers in analysis, the notion of *articulation* is geared towards exploring the relationship between musical forms and collective identities. According to Hesmondhalgh's (2005) account, articulation offers a

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<sup>6</sup> Fabian Holt's (2007) review of the literature on genre in the study of popular music provides further insight regarding the multiplicity of existing definitions and approaches.

means to account for homological correspondences, but also to transcend them by taking into consideration the complex and subtle ways in which economic and cultural positions – such as race or class – enable and exclude particular possibilities (Middleton 1990), or the musical practices through which cultural forms are appropriated in order to reflect everyday experiences of a particular group (Toynbee 2000), as well as the ways in music may contribute to the formation of novel identities as much as it enables already existing groups to express and reinforce shared sensibilities (Born 2000). Hesmondhalgh argues that even though articulation conveys multiple meanings, used in combination with the notion of genre, it

“provides a much more promising theoretical basis for theorising empirical research than the recent alternatives” (Hesmondhalgh 2007:35)

As Hesmondhalgh does not discuss the ways in which genre and articulation could or should be combined, and leaves questions of practical applications largely unexplored, it is difficult to consider the usefulness of his proposal. However, it is clear that whereas this framework might provide important insights for research projects that aim to explore the relationship between musical qualities and socially situated identities, it might prove less useful in other types of inquiries. Although both *genre and articulation* bear the promise of a musically more engaged sociology, these *concepts tell us little about the distinctive collectivities* that cluster around particular musical forms *with regard to issues of sociability, spatiality, and the affective character of affiliations.*

#### **SCENE AS A FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS**

The so far outlined debate regarding the appropriateness of particular theoretical constructs – subculture, neo-tribe, scene, and genre – in describing musical collectivities has contributed towards a fuller exploration of the subtle differences among their different conceptualisations and applications, as well as the kinds of insights each of these approaches offers. Still, what often seems obscured in the heat of the debate is “the essential constructedness of conceptual frameworks” (Kahn-Harris 2007: 21). Asking whether the translocal collectivity of crate diggers is a “scene” or “subculture” runs the risk of slipping “from the model of reality to the reality of the model” (Bourdieu 1977:29). In order to avoid presenting the framework of analysis in a way that would enable mistaking the metaphor for an objectively existing thing, we must bear in mind

that it offers a necessarily simplified and abstracted account of the complexity of the empirical reality of musical collectivities: it is *a model* that enables the researcher to concentrate on a limited set of issues and phenomena that he or she interprets according to a strategy that serves particular scholarly aims (Giere 2004). Although the tension between providing useful analytic insights and representing the empirical complexity of a multitude of practices, situations, histories, views, and positions is impossible to resolve, it could be eased by reflecting upon the partial, abstracted, and incomplete character of the representation they offer, as well as choosing a reasonably inclusive framework of analysis (Kahn-Harris 2007).

Jonas Dahlgren – a Swedish artist who created a number of film installations recorded in architectural models – describes models as environments that facilitate both imaginative experimentation and control:

“Models allow you to realise fantasies and allow access to otherwise difficult environments. You are able to exercise control over situations as well as narratives.” (Jonas Dahlgren quoted in Stjernstedt 2001)

His remarks could be thought through in a way that illuminates the ambiguity inherent in sociological inquiries: whereas theoretical constructs could be applied in cultural description to illuminate certain connections, tendencies, and logics that otherwise would remain hidden in the messy complexity of everyday experience, their selection and adaptation also grants an uncomfortably high degree of control to the researcher in setting the terms and stakes of analysis. Dahlgren’s account also enables us to think about theoretical models as tools of a necessarily situated research *imagination*, rather than infallible means of producing objective knowledge.

### **REWORKING THE NOTION OF THE SCENE**

In this light, the vagueness of the notion of the scene in Straw’s original formulation – a shared space within which a diversity of musical practices co-exist and interact within and across geographically specific localities – paradoxically becomes its strength: it enables us to avoid the risk of drawing clear boundaries where they might be blurred, and presenting stable, well defined and consistent values and attitudes where these would be understood and applied rather differently from person to person, and place to place, and could transform over time. However, the inclusiveness of this term also

seems to limit its analytical capacity. Considering the increasingly “complex connectivity” of globalised culture (Tomlinson 1999), it could be argued that all musical practices coexist and interact to some degree in a single shared space that is made up of locally and translocally interconnected networks. Indeed, this is the argument Kahn-Harris seems to make:

“Let us make the initial assertion that *all* musical and music-related activity takes place within a scene or scenes. [...] The assertion also creates an all inclusive scene, encompassing everything from tightly-knit local musical communities to isolated musicians and occasional fans, all contributing to and feeding from a larger space(s) of musical practice. [...] The consequence of this assertion is that everything within a scene may exist within a number of scenes. [...] Similarly, it follows that scenes with varying degrees of autonomy may exist within other scenes. Scenes themselves are constantly shifting, splitting and combining – any coherence can only be contemporary.”  
(Kahn-Harris 2007: 21-22, his emphasis)

Whereas Kahn-Harris’s observations resonate with the empirical reality of the complex interconnectedness of particular social worlds of music enthusiasm, the questions remain: How shall we define and distinguish smaller “scenes” within such an all encompassing web of contemporary musical activity? What are the interactions, circulating intensities, and internal similarities among particular nodes in this wider network that draw them together in more tightly-connected clusters within which participants experience a sense of shared identity and belonging?

My proposal here *is to specify more precisely the kinds of practices that shall be taken into consideration in describing the sources of identity and belonging in music scenes*. The model that I outline throughout the thesis partly draws on and extends two already existing sociological approaches – Howard Becker’s (1982) notion of the “*art world*” and Bourdieu’s (1979/2002, 1993/2007) notion of the “*field*” – that are often used in combination with the notion of scene in order to provide more specific analyses. Furthermore, it also builds on Henri Lefebvre’s philosophical insights (Lefebvre 1991) regarding the “*production of space*”, an approach that resonates with much of the work on the spatialisation of identities within human geography (e.g. Massey 1984; Harvey 2001), and anthropology (e.g. Appadurai 1995; Basso 1996).

From a theoretical perspective, the ethnographic chapters of this thesis could be read as an experiment in outlining and connecting particular areas of inquiry – the collective cultivation of a certain form of musical appreciation, the performance of distinctive practices, the acquisition and passing on of scenic sensibilities and customs, the places of scenic practice, as well as a shared understanding of spatiality – in which the productive “work” of *aesthetic, distinctive* and *spatial practices* could be more closely observed and understood.

As the theoretical foundations upon which my discussion of distinctive and spatial practices is based will be discussed at length in the ethnographic chapters, I merely concentrate here on the ways in which Becker’s notion of the “art world” could be appended with insights from literary theory, history and cultural theory in order to make possible an aesthetically more engaged sociology of music. My discussion – that revolves primarily around aesthetic practices – is partly to demonstrate the ways in which my reworking of scene enables this notion to achieve what Hesmondhalgh (2005) rightly demanded: *the bringing together of musical texts and tastes with audiences and institutions in analysis*. Furthermore, it seeks to demonstrate that thinking about *scenes as forms of sociability that are organised around the collective cultivation of a shared cultural tradition* has more to say about identity and belonging than genre. First, because *it illuminates the participative character of scenic practices in their relation to issues of preservation, passing on, and furthering tradition*. Second, because *it makes apparent the centrality of a shared historical imagination underlying not only forms of appreciation, but also distinctive customs and more profound worldviews within scenes*.

### 2.3 TOWARDS AN AESTHETICALLY ENGAGED SOCIOLOGY OF SCENES

Becker’s discussion of the “art world” became highly influential within cultural sociology, perhaps, because it convincingly demonstrated the ultimately collective character of the production of creative works that stood in stark contrast with more conventional approaches to discussing art – strongly rooted in the romantic aesthetic – that concentrated primarily on the role of individual artists in the creation of art works,

and often assumed the aesthetic significance of these creations as an inherent property:

“Art worlds consist of all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that art world, and perhaps others as well, define as art. Members of art worlds coordinate the activities by which work is produced by referring to a body of conventional understandings embodied in common practice and in frequently used artefacts. The same people often cooperate repeatedly, even routinely, in similar ways to produce similar works, so that we can think of an art world as an established network of cooperative links among participants.” (ibid.: 34-35)

“Art worlds produce works, and also give them aesthetic value. [...] The interaction of all the involved parties produces a shared sense of worth of what they collectively produce.” (ibid.: 39)

Describing “art worlds” as networks of cooperation Becker does not only bring to light the ways in which the tasks of the creative process are distributed among different participants, but also highlights *the collectively constructed character of the aesthetic conventions that define particular art forms and describe how their value and meaning shall be assessed*. Although Becker’s discussion revolved primarily around fine arts, his ideas became influential within the study of popular music, as they provided a clear and easily applicable *framework of analysis that concentrates on cooperating players and institutions in the maintenance of particular stylistic fields*. Frith (1996b), for example, combines Becker’s ideas with Franco Fabbri’s genre rules (1981) in his discussion of the institutions by which the conventions of music making and appreciation in particular musical worlds are collectively shaped:

“sound conventions (what you hear), performing conventions (what you see), packaging conventions (how a type of music is sold), and embodied values (the music’s ideology)” (Frith 1996b: 95)

While Frith focuses primarily on the collective production of the distinctive aesthetic and ethical rules that define specific musical worlds, ethnographies of specific local and generic scenes make use of Becker’s framework (e.g. Finnegan 1989; Cohen 1998; Stewart 2007) concentrating primarily on cooperation, the division of tasks, and the collective management of resources in music making. It is not surprising that ethnographers of music scenes found the concept of the art worlds appealing, if we

consider the way in which Becker conceived these collectivities as *overlapping and interacting networks, rather than clearly bounded groups*:

“Art worlds have no boundaries around them, so that we can say that these people belong to a particular art world while those people do not. I am not concerned with drawing a line separating an art world from other parts of society. Instead, we look for groups of people who cooperate to produce things they, at least, call art [...]” (Becker 1982: 35)

The ethnographers who studied local scenes through Becker paid little if any attention to audiences, critics, and other scenic institutions, or the processes through which they participated in shaping shared tastes and conventions. Furthermore, although Frith’s work suggest that “art world” offers a framework to address these issues, concentrating on cooperative networks and institutions in the analysis of musical worlds alone runs the risk of providing cultural descriptions that pay little attention to musical texts and tastes. It is perhaps this relative neglect of musical texts and appreciative practices that Hesmondhalgh aimed to overcome by proposing genre as an alternative. However, rather than dismissing the “art world” oriented approach to researching music scenes entirely, I will argue in that the insights it offers could be expanded by combining it with aesthetically more engaged theories.

## **MUSICAL MEDIATIONS**

The Beckerian approach in itself seems insufficient in accounting for the centrality of music itself to the practices of appreciation through which participants engage and identify with the crate digging scene. Antoine Hennion’s (2003) pragmatic sociology of musical taste provides an illuminating point of departure towards *a musically more engaged sociology of music scenes*. His discussion stresses *the importance of musical works and appropriative compositional practices in understanding the constitution of shared aesthetic sensibilities* (ibid.: 87-88).

Hennion describes the development of appreciation of Western classical music and jazz as emerging and transforming through a series musical appropriations – borrowings, emulations, variations, and innovative reformulations – of already existing musical ideas. By exploring historical lineages of musical influence, concentrating on the

importance of particular works, composers and performers, Hennion offers a research perspective that has traditionally been associated with aesthetic theory, art history, and literary studies, and has been carefully avoided by sociologies of taste and art in order to carve out and maintain disciplinary boundaries. Although Hennion outlines his argument regarding the importance of music itself in shaping tastes partly in opposition to Becker's work, as I will explore in the following subsections, the aesthetically engaged sociology he argues for could be combined with approaches that concentrate on networks of cooperation. As I will argue, such an approach provides a way to illuminate *the intimate links between musical appreciation and the experience and enactment of collective identities*.

#### **FROM INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY TO COMMUNITY OF APPRECIATION**

Literary theorist Stanley Fish's (1980) notion of the *interpretive community* provides a concept that enables us to explore the ways in which engagement with particular musical canons and corresponding forms of aesthetic appreciation are both produced by and productive of attachments to particular musical collectivities.

Fish describes the ways in which these aesthetic conventions are learnt and shaped in loosely connected collective institutional contexts – particular classes, faculties and literary journals – that are productive of – and shaped by – specific interpretive communities within the field of literary criticism. *As participants in these communities might not necessarily know each other, and might differ in tastes and opinions, what holds them together – apart from their embeddedness in particular spatially dispersed institutional networks – is a range of shared aesthetic dispositions, knowledges and techniques: argumentative strategies, categories and hierarchies of aesthetic value, genres, periods, and corresponding canons.*

Although Fish's ideas had little or any influence within popular music studies, it is not difficult to recognize a strong correspondence between his ideas regarding “interpretive communities” and Becker's “art worlds”: both describe an institutional, collective framework in which creative works emerge and acquire specific meanings and values as “literary texts” or “art”. Fish's insights provide a way to open up Becker's production oriented model towards *the reception and appropriation of creative works*.

One of Fish's most valuable contributions is his recognition of the ways in which *embeddedness of the development of aesthetic sensibilities in social and institutional networks bring about particular alliances and loyalties, and lend authority to shared values and rules*. It is in this sense *the notion of the interpretive community enables us to think about practices of aesthetic appreciation as forms of participation in collective worlds that are organized around the cultivation of particular literary canons and corresponding aesthetic sensibilities*. Fish's work is also illuminating regarding the ways in which *shared values and strategies of appreciation become profoundly internalised through the process of learning*: it is through these dispositions we become particular kinds of readers.

Although Fish discusses the notion of interpretive community in the highly institutionalised context of academic education, it is not difficult to see similarities between literary criticism, and practices of "popular criticism" (Frith 1996b: 48) among music fans, critics, musicians, and collectors that Frith describes. There are, however, a number of important differences between the two cultural areas.

Keeping in mind that music is a "quintessentially nonrepresentational medium" (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000: 1), the focus of aesthetic practices surrounding the circulation and appropriation of musical texts in popular music scenes is not so much interpretation as appreciation<sup>7</sup>. For this reason, it is more precise to describe them as "*communities of appreciation*". Furthermore, *the collective production and dissemination of "popular scholarship"* regarding the historical origins, aesthetic conventions, and ideologies of musical scenes – much like the practical education of musicians in these collectivities (Finnegan 1989) – *take place in less formal and institutionalised settings*. However, the aesthetic practices surrounding popular music are just as much embedded in particular networks of influence and information – music magazines, peer groups, record stores, liner notes, online discussion boards, and so forth – as those within literary criticism.

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<sup>7</sup> However, as Joshua Gunn rightly asserts, many of the discussions among music enthusiasts involve interpretive moments: "Regardless of what music does to and for us, the fact remains that we talk about what music does to and for us. This talk in turn, informs the ways in which listeners approach and understand music. Hence, we often characterize music as a representational phenomenon ripe with meaning, and despite music's unruly refusal to conform our linguistic model of representation, we struggle to make it fit." (1999:33)

## **A SHARED HISTORY THAT MAKES AESTHETICS MATTER: CULTURE AS A SELECTIVE TRADITION**

Neither Becker nor Fish pays much attention to the ways in which the historicity that often informs collectively cultivated aesthetic conventions, values, and appreciative strategies is related to collective identities. Stuart Hall's remarks regarding the uses of historicity in the production and experience of identities provide an insightful point of departure for exploring this line of thought:

“identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming [...] They relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself. [...] B]elongingness, the ‘suturing into the story’ through which identities arise is, partly, in the imaginary (as well as the symbolic) [...]” (Hall 1996: 4)

The importance of historicizing efforts in creating “imagined communities” (Anderson 1983) that Hall reflects upon has been thoroughly theorised in the context of the making of national identities by Eric Hobsbawm (Hobsbawm 1983/2000). However, according to Anderson (1983), apart from the construction and celebration of a such a shared political and military history, *the search for cultural origins* – in areas of folklore, language, music and literature – also *provided an important means through which national communities came to be imagined* in the era of romantic nationalism.

This observation resonates with Frith's (1996b: 89) remarks regarding the centrality of the writing of genre histories in the construction and shaping of identities of collectivities that surround particular musical forms.

Raymond Williams offers similar insights regarding *the importance of collective engagement with a shared cultural past not only at the level of the national community, but also in smaller, more specific cultural areas*. His discussion of culture as a “selective tradition” is attentive to *the necessarily retrospective nature of the shaping of cultural traditions* (1971: 68): the significance of past cultural works is not their inherent property, but emerges through choices and appreciations that have more to do

with contemporary considerations, interests and values than the lived culture of the time of their making<sup>8</sup>.

How could we incorporate the insights provided by these discussions of the notion of tradition to the sociological description of musical scenes and other creative worlds? Perhaps the most practical approach is *to think about aesthetic conventions, values, and appreciative strategies as particular elements of a larger cultural tradition that participants in these cooperative networks collectively produce and shape, and explore the ways in which forms of appreciation are interwoven with subtle or more explicit seams of a shared history, and a historically imagined collective identity.*

It is worth noting that such – often imagined – collective histories may not necessarily become a significant or consciously pursued aspect of individual or shared tastes and appreciations. However, *in collectivities that actively explore and celebrate their cultural origins, the responsibility to preserve and pass on the shared tradition lends weight to its principles that have been laid and refined by a lineage of revered forefathers.* According to Straw (2001a) this worshipful traditionalism – at times conservatism – became typical of the collective appreciation of particular popular music forms in the end of the twentieth century. It is in this sense, Straw describes popular music scenes functioning increasingly “as spaces organised against change” (Straw 2001b:255) within which particular canons of significant musical texts and genealogies of key artists are crystallised and shaped through collective ritual practices – such as record collecting – organised around the consumption of popular music.

In this section, I have discussed the insights offered by a Beckerian approach to the description of cultural scenes in general, and the crate digging scene in particular. I have suggested that by appending Becker’s (1982) theory of “art worlds” with insights adopted from pragmatic sociology, literary theory, history and cultural theory, we could develop an aesthetically more engaged sociology of cultural scenes that would enable us to account for the ways in which the collective cultivation aesthetic sensibilities is also productive of a sense of belonging and identity. I have argued that participants become involved with particular networks of cooperation through the collective *aesthetic practices* that are organised around the preservation and shaping of a specific cultural

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<sup>8</sup> This insight will be crucial to understanding the ways in which crate diggers lift musical text from the out of the generic context in which they were originally produced and consumed, and appreciate them according to the principles that have been laid by a particular ancestry of DJs and producers.

tradition. I have suggested that a focus on cooperative networks enables us to think about *belonging as a sense of attachment that arises through participation* in the cultivation of shared aesthetic sensibilities, and to approach the *collective identity* of a particular cultural *scene as defined and distinguished primarily by its historically situated form of appreciation*.

However, as it will gradually unfold in my ethnographic chapters, the shared historical imagination that pervades musical appreciation – as much as it is continually remade through listening to, discussing and appropriating music – also tightly interweaves both the collecting customs and the more profound moral ideals of the scene. In this sense, the collective cultivation of tradition provides an important means to account for how scenic practices – organised around the reverence, preservation, passing on, and drawing on a shared past – provide an intimate sense of intimate connectedness among participants.

## 2.4 FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the relevant literature in accounting for the practices through which a sense of identity and belonging is produced in loosely-connected translocal collectivities. After an exploration of a number of different theoretical perspectives which illuminate the centrality of practices to processes of identification, I have explored the recent debates regarding the theorization of musical collectivities. I have then proposed a reworked version of Will Straw's (1991) notion of the scene as an appropriate framework to describe the practices that are productive of a sense of identity and belonging in hazily bounded translocal scenes. This refined rendition of scene as a framework of analysis outlines three particular areas of inquiry organized more specifically around three different kinds of practices – aesthetic, distinctive, and spatial. Rather than fully outlining the theoretical apparatus that each of these notions bring into play in describing the production of identity and belonging in scenes, I decided to concentrate merely on the ways in which aesthetic practices enable us to think about the scene as a community of appreciation that is organized around the collective cultivation of a shared tradition.

The decision to refrain from a more detailed exploration of the specific theories that could be combined with the notion of the scene to account for distinctive and spatial practices was, in part, motivated by my aim to explore the insights they offer through my analysis of the empirical material. However, the discussion of aesthetic practices here not only served to illuminate the centrality of tradition to my understanding of scenic practices throughout the thesis, but also set the stage for my exploration of the relationship between scenic history, musical appreciation and belonging with which I will begin my description of scenic practices in Chapter 4.

Before proceeding to the exploration of the scene, it is worth reflecting upon the ways in which the scale and scope of my research has developed at the intersection of personal interests, theoretical inspirations and fieldwork, describe the methods of data gathering, and account for the consequences of my subjective position – as a scenic participant and a researcher – for the perspectivity of the ethnographic description I will present in this thesis. The following chapter is dedicated to exploring these issues in detail.

### 3. RESEARCHING THE SCENE

In the introductory chapter I have already briefly reflected upon my position – a researcher *and* scenic participant – the particular methods I used in researching the scene, and noted some of the difficulties and responsibilities that are inevitably part of the production of scholarly descriptions of specific cultural worlds. In the previous chapter, I have further elaborated on some of the troubling aspects of ethnographic representation, more specifically, the necessarily reductionist character of academic knowledge production, and the uneven distribution of power between the researcher and the “research subjects” in setting the terms of analysis. In this chapter, I will provide a more thorough discussion of these issues in the specific context of my ethnographic project. My aim is, however, not to lament the impossibility of ethnographic representation, but rather to make the reader aware of the potential distortions, inadequacies, and limitations that might stem from my methods of data collecting, my subjective position and perspective, and the fact that my account has to conform to specific conventions and expectations as a particular type of academic text.

In the first section, I will briefly overview the development of the research project, discussing how the main themes and topics emerged from the empirical data collected and detailing the particular insights and constraints that contributed towards the delimitation of the scale and scope of the project.

In the second section, I will concentrate on the epistemological status of the claims I will present in the ethnographic chapters of this thesis concentrating primarily on the merits and perils of “insider research” and the ways in which my position – that is situated at the intersection of a number of subjective affiliations and the juxtaposition of different perspectives and experiences enabled by multi-sited fieldwork – might have shaped my understanding and interpretation of scenic practices.

In conclusion, I will explore some of the ethical issues regarding the ways in which my ethnographic text has to balance often conflicting scenic and academic expectations of representation. This last section will also account for the potential consequences of my ethnographic project for scenic participants whose accounts it draws from and the wider scene it describes.

### 3.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

Discussing the process of this inquiry that lasted well into the final drafting of particular chapters, I will concentrate on the empirical material gathered, and explain the ways in which the ethnographic data at my disposal shaped the direction of my inquiry. By reflecting upon the twists and turns of my pathway through record collecting, theory, and the process of producing a doctoral thesis, I hope to make apparent the insights, restraints, opportunities, and choices that contributed towards delimiting the scale and scope of my ethnography.

#### INITIAL INSPIRATIONS

It was the findings of my master's thesis – on the ways in which “nu jazz”<sup>9</sup> DJs in various east-central European cities used the internet in order to acquire information, share resources, and organise club events together across national boundaries (Vályi 2002) – that provided the initial impetus to learn more about translocal collectivities. Anthropologists have already begun to recognise new, participative, and bottom up models in the production and dissemination of particular cultural forms in the context of diasporic cultures (Guarnizo and Smith 1998) and political movements (Appadurai 2000) by the turn of the millennium. However, ethnographic studies of popular music scenes were still predominantly limited to locally specific groups around the time when I have conducted my research. Since then, a number of excellent multi-sited ethnographies reflected on the translocalisation – even transnationalisation – of musical collectivities (e.g. Hodkinson 2002; Bennett and Peterson 2004b; Kahn-Harris 2007). These studies made similar observations regarding the significance of the internet in the emergence and maintenance of translocal collectivities to what I had noted in the context of the nu jazz scene (Vályi 2004a).

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<sup>9</sup> The term “nu jazz” seems to have sunk into oblivion since the writing of my master's thesis. At that time, it was used to refer to the international scene that grew out of the UK based acid jazz movement by the end of the 1990s. Musically, it was an inclusive label to refer to an eclectic mix of contemporary electronic dance music styles – mainly house, techno, drum and bass, broken beat – that drew on 1960s and 1970s soul, funk, jazz, disco, Latin and Brazilian recordings. Nu jazz DJs often blended new releases with older musical influences and hip hop. *Straight No Chaser* magazine, and Gilles Peterson's “Worldwide” radio shows on *BBC Radio 1* played a key role in representing the developments in a network of loosely connected urban scenes around the world – from Kyoto to Sarajevo – each maintained and furthered by a number of local DJs, producers, musicians and – in many cases – independent record labels.

When I started my doctoral research, I was excited to understand and document the bottom-up translocalisation of cultural production and consumption more thoroughly. As a researcher, DJ, music journalist, and an enthusiast of music and culture in general, I felt that the emerging technologically enhanced forms of cultural organisation were dramatically transforming my opportunities to participate in the collective discussion and shaping of particular cultural areas. My field experiences also made apparent the usefulness of multi-sited ethnography (cf. Marcus 1995; Clifford 1997; Hannerz 1998) in tracing translocal cultural flows. During the first years of my project, I became interested in the cultural history of sampling and musical appropriation (Vályi 2004b, forthcoming 2010), as well as the material culture of music (Vályi 2006), more specifically the ways in which record collectors collectively revalorise discarded cultural artefacts (Vályi 2007). It seemed appropriate that my research should explore translocally networking record collectors; however, the analytical framework and the actual focus of the project were still relatively unclear.

#### **BEGINNING FIELDWORK**

In the spring of 2005, I got an opportunity to spend three months in Philadelphia doing library research, visiting classes on the Ph.D. programme of the Annenberg School for Communication, and conducting a pilot research project. Rather than narrowing the focus of my inquiry beforehand to answering a limited set of clearly articulated questions or testing pre-formulated hypotheses inspired by particular theoretical insights or debates, I was looking for themes and topics worthy of investigation by participating in and observing the second hand exchange of vinyl records, and conducting interviews with collectors.

For nine weeks, I visited local record shops and flea markets in Philadelphia on a regular basis in order to get a sense of the available repertoire, average price levels, the pace of turnover of stock, while I also observed the interaction between buyers and sellers. I talked to local collectors and conducted a few interviews for my project. Furthermore, I visited a smaller local record convention in Philadelphia, and – accompanied by Nat, a collector and DJ friend from New York – I also made a trip to a larger record convention in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in this period. In the end of my stay in America, I also spent about a week in New York City and two weeks in San Francisco visiting places of second hand exchange, meeting and interviewing collectors.

Initially, I approached a wide cross-section of collectors primarily through recommendations from various sources.



Record store. New York City, 2005.

The semi-structured interviews I conducted during this research trip – four in Philadelphia, nine in New York, eight in the San Francisco lasted between forty minutes and an hour – with a few exceptions – and were recorded for later reference and transcription. As our discussions did not involve sensitive issues, and my interviewees were accustomed to audio technology, the presence of the recorder did not seem to affect the interviews.

My questions were organised around five main areas of inquiry. First, I asked my interviewees to describe their individual pathways into collecting, concentrating on how their interests and motivations transformed over time, as well as the role that personal connections played in their development. They were then asked to discuss the ways in which they addressed the worth of records as collectables – with regard to musical content, edition and condition – and buying practices – in terms of price, place or method of acquisition. The third set of questions revolved around how they acquired information about music, records, and collecting prior to the internet, while the fourth concentrated on the way they understood – and related to – the effects of the emergence of online information resources and marketplaces on record collecting. Finally, I asked them to tell me stories of collecting adventures that they considered particularly memorable.

The first five or six interviews<sup>10</sup> already made apparent an almost confusing diversity of tastes and preferences. It also emerged from these accounts that collecting approaches, experiences, and points of reference converge along generational lines and musical preferences. It was perhaps because I was of a similar age, and have been involved with collecting breaks since the late 1990s that I felt I could relate best to the stories of collectors who became interested in older music because of hip hop and sampling, and were somewhere between their late twenties and late thirties. By then, I already had a reasonable knowledge of the historical origins of crate digging from academic (Rose 1994; Allen 1999; Schloss 2004) and popular accounts (Toop 2000; Fricke and Ahearn 2002). I was also aware of more contemporary developments within the scene from the articles and interviews that appeared on Soulman's *World of Beats*<sup>11</sup> website, in *Wax Poetics* magazine, and blogs such as Oliver Wang's *Soul Sides*<sup>12</sup>. I was thus more aware of the significance of their passing references, subtle distinctions, inside jokes, and less explicated comments. I could also ask questions that seemed relevant to them, share their appreciation of certain stories, make insightful comments, and pick up on the issues they mentioned. As such a competence is often seen as a marker of prestige and affiliation within particular musical collectivities (Thornton 1996; Hodkinson 2005), my awareness of particular albums, samples, record labels, people, and debates probably helped me in establishing rapport with my interviewees, which was crucial given the very limited time I could spend in most research locations. Even more importantly, these interviews often transcended the formal "question-and-answer" exchange, and developed into joint discussions around and beyond the issues of my inquiry.

In the light of my conversations with crate diggers, other interviews often felt to be beside the point. Although the accounts of collectors with different persuasions often featured fascinating stories in their own right, and provided insights regarding particular approaches to collecting and the transformation of the secondary market of vinyl records in the US, they were not directly connected to the topics that, by then, began to emerge from the accounts of crate diggers. This recognition motivated me to narrow the focus of my inquiry and concentrate more specifically on the crate digging scene both in terms of whom I would approach for interviews and the questions regarding individual

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<sup>10</sup> Short descriptions of my interviewees and the details of the interviews are listed in Appendix 2.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.mhat.com/worldofbeats/>, accessed 11 March 2010.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.soul-sides.com/>, accessed 11 March 2010.

collecting histories, influences, and connections. From this point on, I attempted to select interviewees in a way to cover most of the roles that participants could play in the scene. I talked to record dealers, bloggers and music journalists, producers of sample based hip hop beats, mixtapes, radio shows, and compilation albums, but also people who – while they were not crate diggers themselves – possessed reasonable insights regarding the scene working at specialist record stores and record labels that specialised in reissuing sought after records.



Greg Caz, a collector with a primary interest in Brazilian music who worked at Academy Records in New York City, when I interviewed him in 2005. Photo by Eilon Paz, 2009.

Simultaneously with arranging and recording these interviews, I also began to follow – and occasionally participate in – the discussions in specifically crate digging oriented forums such as *Soulstrut* and *The Breaks*<sup>13</sup>, and occasionally other record collecting related discussion boards such as *Vinyl Vulture* – a more UK centric forum on record collecting that was subsequently renamed *Very Good Plus* – and *Waxydermy*<sup>14</sup> that sometimes had break collecting related posts, and were frequented by some crate diggers. Further, I also began to read posts and comments in a gradually extending number of crate digging related blogs on a regular basis. These sources offered

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.soulstrut.com>, <http://the-breaks.com/>, accessed 11 March 2010.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.verygoodplus.co.uk/>, <http://waxidermy.com/>, accessed 11 March 2010.

important insights regarding the scene that enhanced, and often complemented my interviews, I continued following them even after having returned home from my field trip in the US.

### **A GRADUALLY EMERGING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

For the two and a half years that followed my American research trip, I tried to get to grips with my interviews and observations as well as my continually developing archive of relevant documentaries (Westwood 1987; Pray 2001; Beatdawg 2004, 2007; Stuart 2007), *Wax Poetics* articles, blog posts, forum threads, DJ mixes, and online videos. It would have been possible to describe the significance of online communication and commerce within the crate digging scene based on this material. However, I felt that by concentrating my discussion on the infrastructure that merely facilitates interaction within a spatially dispersed network of collectors, I would shy away from accounting for the *sense of shared enthusiasm and affective involvement* that emerged from these accounts as a key feature of – and motivation for – scenic participation. While such a feeling of companionship, appreciation of a collective history, and commitment to shared values would demand less of an explanation in local scenes or tightly-knit regional networks that are held together by relatively frequent personal meetings, common projects, or regular mediated communication among participants, the crate digging scene appeared more fragmented socially, more dispersed spatially, and diverse in terms of individual trajectories, tastes and approaches.

Reviewing the relevant literature, I found that neither the sociology of arts and cultural consumption, nor the wider literature on popular music offered much help in *accounting for the centrality of issues of musical appreciation, history, and a certain engagement with the spatiality of record exchange in crate diggers' accounts of their attachments to the scene*. Further, I felt that available literature on collecting practices often did not resonate much with what I encountered in the scene. This emerging recognition of the inadequacies and weaknesses of existing theories within more established strands of cultural sociology and popular music studies lead me to explore the pragmatic sociology of taste as well as disciplinarily distant areas of inquiry – such as literary theory, the philosophy of spatiality, cultural geography, and anthropology for relevant ideas.

Although the material that I collected online offered useful insights regarding the translocalisation of crate digging, I was keen on carrying out further fieldwork outside of the US to better understand local differences and similarities.

Conducting research in the UK seemed to provide an interesting perspective, not only because the local history of hip hop DJing and crate digging dates back to the early 1980s, but also because apart from adopting American influences, it grew out of – and drew on – a number of locally specific music scenes. Between September and December 2007, I – often accompanying fellow diggers – visited record flea markets, record fairs, record shops and stalls at arts and crafts markets in London. I also spent a weekend in Manchester buying records, hanging out at stores, visiting a local record dealer who specialised in funk 7” singles, DJing at a club night organised by local diggers, and made trip to Utrecht in order to visit the largest record fair in Europe. During this period, I paid more attention to the online discussions at *Very Good Plus*, and attended a few of their London based club nights where collectors of varied musical interests played their latest finds to each other.



DJ Vadim, one of my British interviewees, in his basement studio. London, 2007.

While I still wrestled with the theoretical framing of the project and the shaping of the thesis, I recorded five interviews in London and one in Manchester in December 2007. Most of my interviewees were in their mid to late thirties at the time of the interviews

and had become involved with hip hop DJing and sample based music production between the mid 1980s and early 1990s. One of them also ran a record label that specialised in reissuing obscure psychedelic recordings and soundtracks from the 1960s and 1970s that resonated with the breakbeat aesthetics, another worked at numerous record stores in London and became a record dealer specialising in breaks and old school hip hop. I also interviewed a record label A&R agent who – although he was not directly affiliated with the scene – had taken part in the production of several, breakbeat related compilation albums and offered important insights regarding the wider audience for these anthologies as well as the development of hip hop related record collecting in the UK.

These interviews followed the structure of the ones I had conducted in the US and were of a similar length, partly in order to enable comparison, but also because my initial set of questions had already proven appropriate in illuminating particular aspects of scenic identification and affiliation without directly addressing them. As I did not want my emerging presumptions to influence my interviewees, I kept discussing more general issues – such as the personal biographies and sources through which they had learned about records and crate digging – rather than asking specific questions about how musical tastes, collecting preferences, and places of exchange contributed towards a sense of belonging. My follow up questions and comments, however, concentrated more specifically on themes that by then seemed central to my inquiry, like scenic history, sources of information and inspiration, and issues of spatiality. As the larger topics of these interviews, my further questions and responses to the interviewees' stories necessarily oriented our discussions to focus on certain aspects of scenic involvement ignoring others.

### **TOWARDS A MORE SPECIFICALLY FOCUSED ETHNOGRAPHY**

In early 2008 I returned to Budapest and began to transcribe the interviews that I had conducted so far. By transcribing these recordings I became aware of subtle, but significant details in the interview data that had escaped me upon previous listenings, like meaningfully hesitant pauses and laughs that signalled ambivalence, irony or suggested in-jokes. Furthermore, having the interviews in writing meant that I could begin to select potential quotes, and organise them along with my sporadic field notes

and further ethnographic data according to the particular larger topics – musical taste, collecting preferences, learning, places of record exchange – that I by then considered central to addressing scenic identity and belonging.

I also began drafting my first empirical chapters organised around these topics. While working on the draft chapters, I also kept gathering more data from the field – mostly online – in order to clarify certain issues, explain passing references, provide more accurate facts, and validate particular claims. I also kept on digging in Budapest, and arranged meetings with some of my British interviewees and visited local stores whenever I visited London for supervision. I also returned to Manchester for a long weekend in order to work with one of my interviewees on subtitling a Hungarian movie he intended to release on his reissue label.

During the summer of 2008, I also recorded interviews with crate diggers in Hungary in order to be able to provide insights regarding the views of crate diggers in a country with a less established digging scene. In Pécs – a town in the south of Hungary – I interviewed two hip hop DJs who became interested in collecting and playing breaks in recent years, as well as a crate digger from California who was studying at a local university. In Budapest, I spoke to a young hip hop producer, a radio DJ who maintained a website and a regular programme dedicated to the original recordings that were sampled in subsequent productions, a hip hop enthusiast who collected sampled originals mainly in digital formats online, as well as a DJ who – like me – played a wide cross-section of styles from contemporary house music to 1960s garage beat, and also collected breakbeat related records and classic hip hop, and maintained personal connections with British, American, and Slovenian crate diggers through his involvement with promoting club events.

Whereas my interviews with American and British crate diggers were relatively consistent in terms of scenic values, customs, and influences, Hungarian enthusiasts – while they appreciated the same music – widely differed in terms of their experiences, preferences, interests, and awareness of the scenic *collecting tradition*. These differences are not surprising in the light of most Hungarian participants' limited personal connections to more established local scenes abroad, and – in certain cases – the language barrier. The fact that hip hop had only a very limited presence within the Hungarian music scene before the beginning of the 1990s meant that the first generation of local beat collectors was still relatively young – in their mid twenties to early thirties – at the time of the interviews. Due to the lack of older mentors, and the omnipresence

of internet based information and music in digital formats they had very different experiences and perspectives compared to those of my American and British interviewees. Furthermore, because of the lack of imported or licensed “Western” recordings in Hungary prior to the end of state socialism in 1989, most of the American funk, soul, jazz, and disco records that make up the canonical core of breakbeat collecting are unavailable or rather expensive locally.



Takeshi, one of my Hungarian interviewees, digging at a record fair. Budapest, 2008.

This difference regarding the locally available repertoire of second hand records could also be held accountable for the *divergence in collecting preferences*. Such differences between the views and trajectories of Hungarian collectors and other interviewees not only made apparent the difficulty of accounting for breakbeat and sample enthusiasm in its entirety, but also the importance of defining the scale and scope of analysis more precisely.

The history of beat collecting could be traced back to the early 1970s. Since then, successive generations of DJs, producers and other enthusiasts followed in the footsteps of the Bronx originators around the world. As the experiences and understandings of these diggers were shaped by historically and locally specific circumstances, their views and preferences often differ to a considerable extent.

While – as I have argued in the previous chapter – the notion of the scene could be used in a radically inclusive sense to describe often significantly different smaller clusters that are organised around a number of overlapping and interacting practices in a shared

cultural space, it is also clear that by extending the scope of inquiry, it becomes increasingly difficult to capture the distinctive characteristics of particular subgroups in analysis. Concentrating exclusively on aesthetic practices – organised around forms of musical appreciation – offered a possible strategy that would have enabled me to account for a much wider scene of breakbeat and sample oriented music enthusiasm. However, such a framing of my research would have not allowed accounting for the distinctive collecting practices and spatial practices that played important roles in the production and experience of belonging and identity among my American and British interviewees, while they were less significant for many of the Hungarian enthusiasts I encountered.

The term “crate digging” itself suggests the importance of engagement with the material culture of music as well as the places and space of second hand record exchange. Those of my Hungarian interviewees who collected music online, rarely – if ever – described this activity as “digging” to me. However, it is not the purpose of this thesis to draw clear boundaries – as they are clearly blurred – around crate digging culture, nor to describe it in its entirety, but to illuminate particular practices through which attachments and commonalities are enacted and experienced in its space.

*My choice to concentrate on the practices and experiences of a particular generation of crate diggers – mainly in their mid thirties and early forties at the time of writing – from the US and the UK was not merely a necessary compromise to keep my discussion within reasonable boundaries, but also a strategy that provided a way to engage with a more complex set of practices that were clearly central means of providing a sense of identity and belonging within this more narrowly delineated fraction of beat collectors, without excluding the possibility of other forms of identification and affiliation in other areas of the wider scene.*

The scenic participants whose accounts I will primarily draw on became involved with beat collecting between the late 1980s and the early 1990s inspired by the sample based hip hop of the time, and they still collect records today even though their musical preferences and the intensity of their involvement with this pursuit may have changed over time. Further, it is worth noting that *my discussion will draw primarily on the accounts of scenic participants for whom the vinyl format, record buying practices, the ownership of sizeable collections, and connoisseurly competences regarding older records held a special significance.* I have thus not accounted for the views and practices of people who are in some ways affiliated with the scene – like certain hip hop

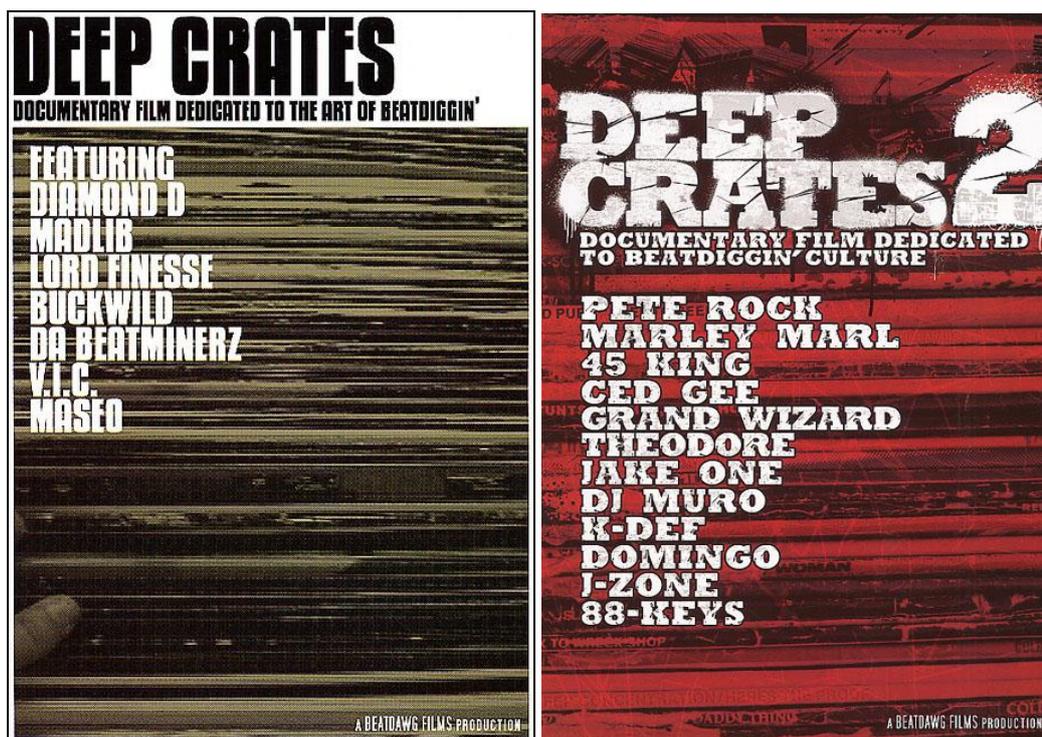
producers who occasionally buy older records to sample, but have no interest in amassing larger collections, music enthusiasts who download music from crate digging related blogs, and so forth – but assign little importance to record collecting practices.

As my discussion of the diversity of understandings and approaches even within this geographically and generationally more specific fraction of the scene will demonstrate, my aim was not to limit my inquiry to a relatively consistent and closely knit – subcultural – group in which clearly drawn common traits would enable me easily identify the sources of identity. On the contrary, my empirical chapters seek to demonstrate the usefulness of the notion of the scene to account for how a sense of identity and belonging emerges in a loosely connected and internally heterogeneous group.

As I have noted earlier, I selected my interviewees in a way that would represent a range of different roles within the scene. While they often differed in terms of the kinds of activities through which they participated in the scene – producing hip hop beats, working as record dealers, running small reissue labels, writing blogs, hosting radio shows, and so forth – all of them worked as DJs occasionally or on a more regular basis, and *dedicated considerable amount of their spare time and money for over a decade to extending their collections and knowledge of older music*. Because of *the endurance and intensity of their involvement*, they offered highly reflexive, clearly articulated and relatively similar views on scenic practices. Although such accounts are appealing for cultural analysis because of their clarity, detail, and relative coherence, it is worth keeping in mind that they tell us little about the more divergent perceptions and opinions of less established or committed enthusiasts within the scene.

My informal conversations and recorded interviews are, however, far from being representative of even such geographically and generationally specific group within the scene. Nevertheless, as I have described above, I extensively studied magazine articles, blog posts, and online discussions that offered further insights regarding the views of a wider cross-section of participants. Furthermore, I could also draw on over 150 additional interviews with – predominantly American and British – crate diggers that were conducted between 1994 and 2010 by scenic participants and published on various

blogs and websites<sup>15</sup>, in *Wax Poetics* magazine, and appeared in *Deep Crates*, a two-part documentary on beat collecting (*Beatdawg* 2004, 2007).



*Deep Crates* DVD covers<sup>16</sup>

These accounts differed from my interviews in terms of their length and focus. However, they often revolved around similar topics and issues. This wealth of empirical material not only provided more insight regarding the particular group of crate diggers that I concentrated on, but also offered access to the views of a wider spectrum of beat collectors – from the earliest hip hop DJs who pioneered the art of beat finding to contemporary producers, record merchants and collectors – for comparison.

In this section, I have provided a rather detailed account of the process through which this thesis took shape. My discussion revolved primarily around four thoroughly interconnected areas: (1) the personal interests, theoretical inspirations, and field experiences that contributed towards the emergence of the key themes and topics of this

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<sup>15</sup> Most notably Soulman's *World of Beats* (<http://www.mhat.com/worldofbeats/>, over 20 interviews conducted between May 1994 and January 2002), Mr Mass' *Masscorporation* (<http://masscorporation.blogspot.com/>, 5 interviews between November 2007 and June 2008), DJ Sorcel's "Can you dig it?" series in *Heavy In The Streets* (<http://heavyninthestreets.blogspot.com/>, 33 interviews Nov 2007 between Aug 2009), and Eilon Paz' *Dust and Grooves* (<http://www.dustandgrooves.com/>, 10 interviews between October 2008 and February 2010). All websites accessed 11 March 2010.

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.undergroundhiphop.com/store/covers\\_large/BD001VID.jpg](http://www.undergroundhiphop.com/store/covers_large/BD001VID.jpg), [http://www.undergroundhiphop.com/store/covers\\_large/BD002DVD.jpg](http://www.undergroundhiphop.com/store/covers_large/BD002DVD.jpg), accessed 4 August 2010.

thesis, (2) the methods of data collection and organisation, (3) the empirical material that I gathered, (4) the ways in which I delimited the final scale and scope of my inquiry to a specific group of scenic participants in order to produce an ethnographic account that conforms to the standards against which doctoral theses are judged.

In the next section I will explain the importance of making explicit such personal interests, ambiguities and compromises involved in the production of knowledge, and discuss the consequences of the partiality and situatedness of my research perspective in more detail.

### 3.2 NOTES ON A NECESSARILY SITUATED AND PARTIAL PERSPECTIVE

Although self-reflexivity introduces ambiguity and open-endedness to cultural analysis, it is not a relativist strategy aimed at closing off accountability by reducing ethnographic claims to subjective opinions which are beyond the domain of external judgment. On the contrary; by revealing uncertainties and potential blind spots, the ethnographers' attempts to reflect on their particular research perspectives enable the reader to gain a better understanding of the validity of the observations and interpretations presented in their ethnographic texts. In this section, I will not merely account for the epistemological status of my claims by situating them, but also a way to take responsibility for what Donna Haraway poetically described as the "promising and destructive monsters" arising from my necessarily partial perspective (1991: 190).

#### **"INSIDER RESEARCH": A PERSPECTIVE OF SPECIAL PROXIMITY**

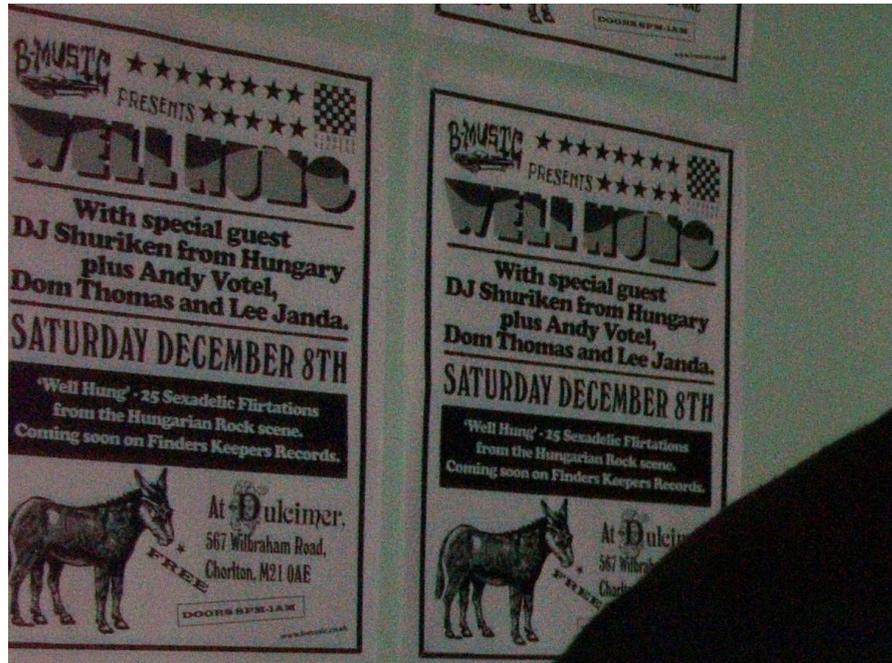
Although I have already mentioned some of the insights and difficulties arising from my affiliation with the crate digging scene in earlier sections, so far I have not provided a detailed account of the interrelation between my scenic participation and participant observation and the perspective that such a position both enabled and constrained.



I am digging at my favourite jazz record store. Budapest, 2010. Photo by Andrew Dubber.

I had been quite intensively involved with DJing as well as collecting from the second half of the 1990s on, and had an appreciation of the funk, soul, jazz, Latin and disco records that were used by hip hop DJs and producers years before the crate digging scene became the focus of this research. As I have noted in the previous section, my initial engagement with beat collecting contributed significantly towards the fact that my research project on record collecting became more specifically focused on crate diggers. Not only was I more aware of the issues emerging from their accounts, but probably more interested in meeting and interviewing people with similar dispositions and appreciations. Apart from the obvious comfort that the sense of shared enthusiasm provided, concentrating on crate diggers – rather than collectors with different interests – offered significantly better opportunities for the kind of informal mingling that are crucial in ethnographic research.

My scenic participation – taking visiting crate diggers around in record stores in Budapest, visiting distant shops, flea markets, and record dealers accompanied by local participants, hanging out, discussing and swapping records, going to club nights where they were DJing, following and occasionally contributing to the discussions of other participants online – became an inspiring, and often entertaining form of participant observation.



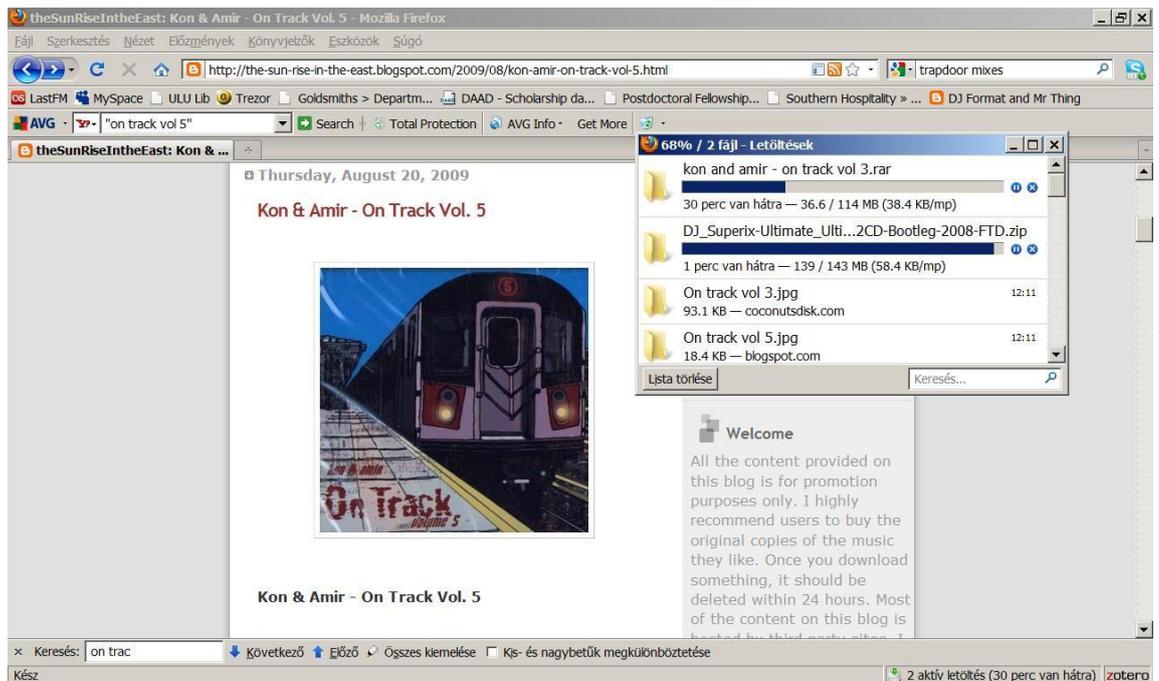
Being involved. Posters of my DJ gig with Andy Votel, Dom Thomas and Lee Janda in Manchester, 2007

Whereas it is clear that my initial insights and connections stemming from scenic affiliation had shaped my interests, choices and perceptions as an ethnographer, it should be noted that fieldwork also intensified my scenic involvement and influenced my understanding of – and attachment to – the scene<sup>17</sup>.

*Researching the scene was an unusual form of scenic participation* that – in many ways – made me an unusual scenic participant, and offered a perspective on scenic issues that might not have emerged through usual scenic practice. Being able to dedicate a significant portion of my time and resources to fieldwork, I visited a wider range of locations than many scenic participants, interviewed a number of prominent crate diggers whom I would probably never have met, listened to more mixtapes, and read more crate digging related blog posts, books and articles than I would have otherwise.

Furthermore, my enduring engagement with social theory and research methods, as well as the ways that my participation served clearly defined academic purposes rather than merely hanging out, talking to collectors and buying records made me what Paul Hodkinson termed a “critical insider” that meant that my participation also involved

“continually taking mental steps back so as to observe, compare, contrast and question as well as to experience.” (Hodkinson 2002: 6)



Screenshot, documenting an afternoon I spent hunting down and downloading DJ mixes from music blogs for this project<sup>18</sup>

Whereas enduring participation in the cultural milieu one was to observe and describe was always considered a cornerstone of ethnographic fieldwork, traditionally both anthropologists and urban sociologists were expected to maintain a certain epistemological distance from the groups they studied in order to conform to the Weberian ideal of detached, value-free inquiry (Rosaldo 1989: 169-170). The accounts of insider commentators were not considered of scientific merit, because their authors were assumed to be “so much in the thick of things that they [... could not] help but distort reality” (ibid.: 188). It was only with the acknowledgement of the relevance of partial and situated truths, that “insider research” gained legitimacy as an important and valid means of knowledge production, even though – judging by the defensive tone in which its proponents often describe its merits and perils (Edwards 1999; Haller 2001; Harris 2001; Hodkinson 2005) – it is still surrounded by an air of suspicion (cf. Hammersley 1992).

The heterogeneity of the crate digging scene, as well as the gradual transformation of my involvement with and perception of it that I have described so far makes apparent

<sup>17</sup> Hodkinson (2002: 5) notes his similar experiences regarding the ways in which insider research contributes to the enhancement of certain aspects of a researcher’s insider status.

<sup>18</sup> <http://the-sun-rise-in-the-east.blogspot.com/2009/08/kon-amir-on-track-vol5.html>, accessed 8 September 2009.

the *contested and relative* – rather than a primordial and absolute – character of “insider” position (Haller 2001). However, Hodkinson is right to assert that the fact that the notion of the “insider” is a simplification does not mean that it has no use in illuminating some of the insights and limitations stemming from the researchers involvement:

“[T]he notion of ‘insider research’ reduces complexities to generalities; but, through doing so, it establishes that researchers may sometimes find themselves positioned especially close to those they study and enables the tentative development of valuable common lessons about the probable implications of researching from such a position.” (Hodkinson 2005: 134)

“Insider” perspectives are not unusual in the study of popular music scenes (Thornton 1996; Kahn-Harris 2000; Hodkinson 2002; Bannister 2006) and convincingly demonstrated the insights this position offers in terms of (1) awareness of the history, beliefs, customs, values and agendas of the group prior to beginning research; (2) formulating the terms of analysis in a way that resonates with the experiences and concerns of the group; (3) the ease of establishing rapport and gaining access to information; (4) the ability to pick up on obscure references and passing mentions, understand inside jokes, and recognise subtle distinctions in interview situations. As I have already described the ways in which these benefits contributed to my fieldwork, I now only amend this list with one more advantage stemming from my scenic affiliation, before turning to its potential drawbacks.

My familiarity with the culture of the scene enhanced my chances to recognise when my interviewees – mostly unwittingly – exaggerated or downplayed certain things in order to conform to scenic ideals, or to lend more coherence to their often divergent and contradictory practices, as in the following excerpt from my interview with Matthew Africa:

*I’ve never... I’ve probably got about 20.000 records, but I’ve never seen myself as a record collector. I’ve always seen myself more as a DJ. Uhm, and...*

What’s the difference?

*I think there are a lot of record collectors who are interested in accumulating trophies... for me... I think the collector has records, the DJ plays records. And uhm, collectors tend to care a whole lot about having an original pressing, or a record no one else has, or something special. [...]*

And when it comes to making a decision between a beaten up original copy and a shiny new reissue?

*Well, OK. [Laughs.] Most of the time... sometimes I buy the shiny new reissue... especially if it's a one track record<sup>19</sup>, or... uhm... something like that. But historically I've either had a beaten up original, or known that if I waited around for a while I could get one [in a better condition] for the same price [as a reissue]. (Matthew Africa 2005)<sup>20</sup>*

An interviewer who had been unaware of the scenic distinctions regarding different editions or the rarity of the framed records that were decorating the walls of Matthew's home might not have pushed him to the point where recognises the irony of the discrepancy between his account and his collecting practices, and provides a more detailed explanation of his transforming approach to record buying. As in this example, my scenic involvement often helped me to avoid the uncritical acceptance of participants' initial replies, and enabled me to steer conversations in directions which provided more profound insights regarding the complexity and ambiguity of their attitudes and opinions.

Another problematic aspect of the "insider" perspective is that the "familiarity of the material can produce data blindness or myopia" (Edwards 1999: 5). There might have been important aspects of scenic practices that appeared so commonplace, mundane or normal to me that I failed to pay more attention to them, if they had not escaped my recognition entirely. Indeed, the questions and comments of my supervisors and a number of other scholars who read my draft chapters made me aware of some issues that were unclear or puzzling from the perspective of "outsiders". Their insights motivated me to explore and explain these questions in more detail in later versions, and

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<sup>19</sup> A record with only one significant track. In this context, it probably refers to one track that one can play out in DJ sets.

<sup>20</sup> Interview data and field notes are set in italics throughout the thesis. Brief background information on interviewees is given in Appendix 2.

made me more cautious about what I took for granted or considered a matter of common knowledge. However, it is almost certain that “being especially close” to what I was to observe obscured certain details that could have enriched my account.



Being too close to the object of study. Eurostrut 2007, after event for the Utrecht record fair organised by people on the *Soulstrut* forum. Boom Chicago, Amsterdam, 2007.

As we have seen, the simplified notion of “insiderness” was indeed useful in illuminating some of the advantages and potential shortcomings of “the perspective of special closeness” that my scenic involvement provided. In the next section, I will extend my discussion in a direction that is more attentive to the ways in which individual identity positions and perspectives emerge at the intersection of “fragmented and fractured” subjective affiliations that “are multiply construed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices, and positions.” (Hall 1996: 4)

#### **SITUATING SUBJECTIVE POSITION AT THE INTERSECTION OF MULTIPLE AFFILIATIONS AND ENCOUNTERS**

The body of literature on the fluid, fragmented, and processual character of cultural identities in late-modern or postmodern times (cf. Hall 1996; Holstein and Gubrium

2000) makes apparent the relativity of the “insider” perspective in at least two senses. First, it calls attention to the fact that researchers

“often belong to multiple, overlapping communities [...] by birth, ethnicity, socialization, education, political participation, residence, research, and readership.” (Rosaldo 1989: 194)

Second, it illuminates the ways in which identity positions and perspectives are constantly transforming across a range of different situations and interactions (cf. Ong 1999).

In this sense, my being male, white, Hungarian, middle class, a thirtysomething, an academic researcher, and so forth, have just as much shaped my involvement with – and understanding of – the crate digging scene as my encounters with other participants and experiences of sites of second hand record exchange. As Dieter Haller (2001) rightly notes, it is impossible to recognise all such identity positions and fully account for their potential consequences. My discussion here will therefore merely illuminate some of the ways in which my research perspective may have been affected by my affiliations and interactions.

As much as I would have liked to include the views of female crate diggers, they were virtually non-existent in the scene – my personal experiences resonated with their absence from scenic accounts – my interviewees were exclusively men. While being male almost certainly contributed towards easing my access to a social world that – similarly to other connoisseurly scenes of musical enthusiasm and record collecting (Straw 1997b; Bannister 2006) – is almost exclusively masculine, it also meant that I had little if any awareness of issues that might have appeared intriguing or problematic from the perspective of a female researcher or participant (cf. Macdonald 2001).



The predominantly masculine social world of a record fair. Budapest, 2008.

This subjective bias in terms of how I perceived and approached record collecting only became apparent to me incidentally, when the younger sister of one of my interviewees unexpectedly joined our recorded conversation. Her comments about the ways in which she was not allowed to listen to her “own music” while her brother was at home illuminated the ways in which conflicts and conventions regarding the accumulation, display and use of vinyl records in the shared space of homes were both productive and revealing of gendered power relations<sup>21</sup>. The fact that I have not pursued this insight further, is not to deny the possibility or validity of such an interpretation of record collecting practices.

Even though I interviewed crate diggers from both working class and middle class backgrounds, social standing never seemed relevant to me regarding scenic practice apart from the obvious fact that the costs involved with intensive record buying posed a barrier of entry to the scene. While some participants funded their collecting habit from having regular day jobs or juggling occasional projects, others – record dealers,

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<sup>21</sup> Keir Keightly’s (1996) account of the gendered uses of hi-fi audio devices in domestic spaces provides a similar perspective.

professional DJs, bootleggers, producers, and so forth – turned collecting into a substantial means of making a living. Coming from a middle class background with a primarily hobbyist approach to crate digging, I might have been unaware of – and inattentive to – particular issues that were of crucial importance to scenic participants for whom crate digging was not merely a precious pastime, but also a means of subsistence.

Since the commercialisation and globalisation of hip hop, neither its appreciation, nor one's involvement with its particular art forms – such as crate digging – is confined to racially imagined collectivities (cf. Watkins 2005; Hess 2007). However, its past and present is strongly intertwined with the articulation of the experiences of the black (Rose 1994, 2008) and Hispanic (Flores 2004) communities in the US from which it emerged. Furthermore, the ways in which it remains an important means of cultural expression and identification along ethnic or racial lines for youth – British blacks and Asians (Hesmondhalgh 2001), young Maori in New Zealand (Mitchell 2004), the children of Turkish migrants in Germany (Bennett 1999a), Hungarian Roma (Simeziane 2010) and so forth – around the world is also well documented. Even though hip hop is presented by certain cultural commentators as a polycultural movement that unites people across racial boundaries (e.g. Chang 2005), and racial categorisation is often consciously refused by significant figures in hip hop (e.g. Snapper 2004), it is beyond doubt that issues of race or ethnicity are pervasive in many of the cultural arenas and communities within hip hop, and obtain importance in a range of situations.

Having interviewed – and having read and watched others' interviews with – crate diggers of black, Hispanic, Asian, and white ancestry, racial or ethnic categories, however, never occurred to me as in any way significant to scenic practice. Still, my perception could be specific to my perspective as a white, Hungarian crate digger. Such a racial bias in participants' understanding of the cultural scene in which they are involved is not rare as Harris M. Berger's ethnographic account of jazz musicians suggests:

“While the African American players emphasized that there have been important European American musicians, they all took pains to represent jazz as an African American music; while the European American players were aware of jazz's African American roots, they

presented a much more desegregated view of jazz history.” (Berger 1999: 93)

It seems to me that both black and white players perceived jazz history in a way that enabled them to feel a part of it. While African Americans leaned towards a historical narrative that resonated with their blackness, European Americans conceived this past in a way that was not suggestive of a certain racial authenticity that conflicted with their whiteness. It is likely that my understanding of hip hop – and crate digging – as a racially unbound, internally diverse, and transnational cultural tradition is subject to a similar unaware self-justification. Whereas my interpretation resonates with my experiences, it is neither exclusive nor absolute. It is clear that – by concentrating on different regional, racial, or generational fractions of the scene, adopting alternative interpretive strategies, and by focusing on other lines of similarity and continuity – the scene could be presented in relation to quite different cultural contexts.

Being white and Hungarian did not only mean that I was attentive to certain scenic issues, while unaware or disinterested in pursuing others, but also that I chose to rely on secondary sources regarding record spots that were situated in deprived areas of racially segregated American cities. I was often discouraged from visiting these neighbourhoods unless I knew people from around there. I had little local knowledge that would have allowed me to judge the extent to which these warnings were founded on ungrounded stereotypes and fear. Still, the accounts of crate diggers who had more experience regarding such areas convinced me to stay away from them:

*I'll run through the ghettos. You know, I'm a white kid, yo. I'm part... I'm half Mexican, half white, but [to] cats in the hood, I'm white. I'm as white as kids can get, yo. [If] I had blonde hair, I'm done. A lot of cats... a lot of people are scared to run through the hood, you know. [...] Chicago has this, well, famous record store called the Out of the Past. And it's ghetto. You're in the ghetto. I've known kids who tried to go there and got jacked right in front of the store. Bad place. But amazing records. (Justin Torres 2005)*

Due to the lack of enduring stay in many of the places where I carried out fieldwork, my understanding of specific aspects of their local cultural contexts was based on media reports, novels, academic and cinematic accounts that I had absorbed over the years. My cultural distance from the locally specific cultural histories – as well as British and

American culture more generally – coupled with the influence of these secondary accounts might have led me to exoticise the everyday to some extent, as well as to uncritically reproduce some of the popular myths I unwittingly drew on. However, uncertainties regarding issues as mundane as the safety of walking around certain urban areas in Philadelphia, New York or San Francisco – and what to make of the American ghetto – made me more aware of the limitations and potential distortions of my understanding. It is partly due to this recognition that I chose to avoid giving more detailed accounts of particular local digging scenes and to concentrate on issues which seemed relevant across particular sites instead. I spent too little time at any of my research sites – with the exception of Budapest – to be able to account for the specific histories and particularities of their crate digging scenes, or the wider traditions of local music enthusiasm in which they were situated.

Indeed, the most common criticism of multi-sited inquiry is that it cannot provide as widely focused and well-grounded descriptions of particular localities as traditional, single-sited ethnographies, because the researchers' attention, available research time and funding is divided among multiple fields. However, as Ulf Hannerz (1998: 248-249) rightly asserts, *translocal research does not necessarily involve the investigation of large-scale local units, as it is usually focused on relatively small groups and not the whole local population. Furthermore, whereas multi-sited research might lack "depth" or "breadth" with regard to certain locally specific issues, it – especially complemented with online correspondence and data gathering – enables the researcher to experience and juxtapose multiple perspectives regarding translocal processes that escape the descriptive space of single-sited ethnographies* (Marcus 1986, 1995). George E. Marcus even argues that the relevance and richness of the gathered empirical material, and the capacity of fieldwork to inspire interpretation and enable the analysis of complex and ambiguous cultural phenomena should be the measure of ethnographic "thickness" rather than the researchers enduring stay in – and interaction with – a specific location (Marcus 1998). As crate diggers – due to their limited numbers in most locations, and the scarcity of occasions when they publicly gather – do not have an easily observable urban presence that is typical in many other music scenes, enduring local observations would have had to concentrate mostly on the activities of a few loosely connected friendly circles. It is not difficult to see that such a research perspective would have only provided limited insights regarding the sources of identity and belonging in this spatially dispersed, loosely connected scene.

Whereas so far I have concentrated on the ways in which my perspective was shaped by being situated at the intersection of a number of subjective identity positions, it is also worth reflecting on the ways in which it was also constantly transforming according to specific situations, encounters and experiences. Throughout this section, I have often described my position and the potential insights and distortions stemming thereof by making references to particular field experiences that illuminated the partiality of my perspective. Indeed, what I value most about ethnographic practice is that the *multiplicity and complexity of different views, practices and situations the researcher encounters in the field open a space of critical reflection about the ways in which one's perception and understanding is limited, and introduce an element of productive uncertainty and humility to cultural analysis*. Marcus suggests that *this heightened state of reflexivity is even more characteristic of multi-sited fieldwork* as it involves attentive engagement with a wider range of different circumstances, trajectories and perceptions (Marcus 1995).

Although it would be possible to discuss my subjective position in more detail, I hope that what I have outlined so far offers sufficient insights regarding the ways in which it contributed towards shaping my ethnographic account. I will close this subsection with an example illustrating the ways in which Marcus's above observations resonate with my experiences of the capacity of multi-sited research to enable a more reflexive stance. It was in the first weeks of my American field trip that I posted some of the records I had found while visiting Iowa City for a conference on the *Soulstrut* forum. I intended to do this as a way to briefly introduce myself and my research project to the community that actively participated in the crate digging related online discussions there. Whereas showcasing finds and discussing record spots was standard practice on this board, some of the replies I got made me aware of how out of place I might have appeared to some participants.

The records I posted were unavailable in Hungary and relatively expensive in Europe. However, they were cheap and easy to find in the US, and were probably considered "basic stuff" that local participants picked up in earlier phases of their collecting careers. Not only was I mistaken for a beginner, but it seemed that my perception of the store as a relatively good spot differed significantly from diggers who already owned such records and were on to more obscure and rare stuff. This encounter, like many more that followed, not only made me more aware of the particularity of my perspective

and more attentive to other points of view, but also more anxious to present the scene in a way that does not sacrifice the complexity and inconsistency of scenic views and practices for a definitive interpretation.

<p><b>mylatency</b> Legendary Up in Here</p>  <p>Reged: Oct 31 2003 Posts: 13987 Loc: email me: mylatency2@gmail.com</p>	<p><b>Re: Diggin in Iowa City</b> [Re: <a href="#">meatyogre</a>]</p> <p>#299308 - Mon Mar 28 2005 01:25 AM</p> <p>Quote:</p> <p>dude, don't waste yer time.. that place sucks... went thru damn near everything in there and found NOTHING</p> <p>He found some decent stuff for someone new to digging (check his report). Shruiken is new to this but definitely seems true to this, dude is writing a dissertation on digging. 🤪</p> <p>Post Extras: 🗑️ 🗑️ 🗑️</p>
<p><b>daren</b> Microwave Popcorn</p> <p>Reged: Feb 12 2004 Posts: 124 Loc: Iowa</p>	<p><b>Re: Diggin in Iowa City</b> [Re: <a href="#">shuriken</a>]</p> <p>#299330 - Mon Mar 28 2005 04:02 AM</p> <p>Haha..I actually live in Iowa City. I really dislike that antique store since the guy prices everything soooo high upstars (like 5 copies of original press of 13th Floor Elevators from \$50-\$100). I did buy T. Rex "Electric Warrior" there.</p>

The *Soulstrut* thread<sup>22</sup>

### 3.3 REPRESENTING THE SCENE

In this chapter, I have described my methods of data gathering concentrating on the ways in which the main themes and topics of my account emerged from this material at the intersection of theoretical insights, field experiences, and drafting chapters, and detailed the potential limitations and insights stemming from my position and perspective. In conclusion, rather than reiterating my remarks regarding the development of this project and the epistemological status of my ethnographic observations, I will briefly turn to an issue that I have so far left largely unexplored: the problem of representation.

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<sup>22</sup><http://soulstrut.com/ubbthreads/showflat.php?Cat=&Board=crates&Number=299154&fpart=&PHPSESID=>, accessed 31 March 2005.

In the first section, I have already mentioned the ways in which the academic expectations against which doctoral theses are measured played an important role in delimiting the scale and scope of my ethnography. However, I have paid little attention so far to the ways in which I had to balance scenic responsibilities and academic expectations in how I presented and represented the crate digging scene and its participants in my account. The scholarly audience whom my account primarily addresses, as well as the generic conventions and functions it has to conform to as a particular type of text had a decisive influence regarding the terms, arguments, structure, narrative strategies, and language that characterise my discussion. However, my understanding of – and loyalty to – certain scenic values also motivated me to shape the textual representation of the scene according to different standards that had to be negotiated with academic requirements.

The moral urgency of having to “represent” is ubiquitous in all of hip hop’s cultural arenas, even though the object and appropriate manner of “repping” is not clearly circumscribed. While its rules are unwritten and hazy, there is a pervading sense in hip hop culture that by participating in the competitive creative practices that are central to its artforms one does not merely claim a name for oneself, but also “represents” one’s crew, neighbourhood, city, or – ultimately – “real hip hop”. Furthermore the practices through which one strives to claim respect and acknowledgement for one’s immediate circle or wider community are often measured against the principle of “keeping it real”<sup>23</sup>. This norm – both in the sense of remaining true to one’s experiences and preserving tradition by practice that respects its values and conventions (McLeod 1999; Rose 2008) — seems compatible with the scholarly norms of accurate and respectful representation. However, “keeping it real” as a scenic ethnographer meant that my discussion of scenic practices, participants, and history had to stay within often quite differently understood limits of what an “accurate and respectful” representation meant in these two worlds.

Acknowledging one’s achievements – “giving credit when credit is due” – is central to the competitive ethos of hip hop, while it also plays a key role in the collective cultivation of the particular traditions of its various art forms and communities. For this reason, I chose to identify my interviewees and the sources of the accounts I collected

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<sup>23</sup> I will provide a more detailed account of the principles of the ethos underlying scenic practices in Chapter 5.

from secondary sources by name. In the case of the participants who used different aliases as journalists, bloggers, and DJs rather than their real names, I refer to them by the names by which they were best known within the crate digging scene.

Whereas clearly identified sources are the measure of credibility in journalistic practice, in ethnographic accounts informants are often referred to by pseudonyms. As Mitchell Duneier (1999: 348) rightly asserts, naming the people and places one writes about is productive of ethnographic accounts that measure up to higher standards of accountability.

Anonymisation might have been necessary if, due to the sensitivity of some of the issues involved, the disclosure of the identity of my informants would negatively affect their personal relationships, livelihood, reputation, safety or would in other ways seriously intervene into their lives. However, the most sensitive kinds of information I encountered during fieldwork was the whereabouts of little known record spots – in order to prevent competition from other diggers – and the identity of recently discovered breaks – among hip hop producers that are highly competitive about who samples a particular record first. While I have taken care not to disclose such details, I had no reason to deny these participants the right to be represented by name as the sources of the stories and opinions they shared with me. Although I have not had my interviewees sign written letters of consent, I have explained the aims of my project and the purpose of interviews before they agreed to contribute to my research. Due to the lack of sensitive issues involved and the public availability of the accounts I collected from magazines, books, blogs, documentaries, and online forums, it seemed unnecessary to obtain permission in order to quote them in a similar manner.

It is probably worth mentioning that I chose to standardise the terms that appeared in multiple forms in the original accounts – like hip hop that was often written as hip-hop, hiphop or Hip Hop – in quotes in order to maintain textual coherence. Furthermore, as most of the forum posts and e-mails were hastily drafted, they often included abbreviations, as well as small mistakes in spelling and punctuation. I corrected these, partly to make quotes easier to read. As they could not be aware of the later fate of their texts, and wrote with the expectations and conventions of online conversations in mind, pointing out their mistakes felt unfair and unnecessary. These changes, however, did not significantly alter the original accounts.

Whereas “giving credit” for particular accounts was relatively unproblematic, I felt that scenic and academic perspectives on what constituted “accurate and respectful” representation matched less clearly regarding how to account for scenic history and the diversity of scenic practices and views. I often found my attempts to represent the divergent, hazy and ambiguous character of scenic practices and opinions difficult to negotiate with the potential expectations of producing clean cut categories and relatively straightforward arguments in analysis. As much as I tried to balance academic and scenic responsibilities, my account might annoy those who prefer a more sparing and instrumental use of empirical material in analysis.

Whereas in most cases it was possible to reach acceptable compromises, in the case of the following chapter I had to sacrifice generic conventions of preferable length as a result of my responsibility to “represent” the history that is central to the identity of the scene. In the light of scenic expectations to give due credit to the achievements of key figures, the omission of certain works and people might not only be a sign of ignorance, but, possibly, also of disrespect. Although my discussion of key records, DJs and producers is still far from a definitive account of the canon it explores, it might appear as unnecessarily long and detailed – or to quote a sociologist who read a draft version: “boring” – to those academic readers who consider empirical data as mere supporting evidence for theoretical claims.

Such an attention to detail, however, seemed just as inevitable considering the responsibilities arising from my engagement with a musical tradition as an ethnographer. The significance of the roles that researchers play in recording, preserving and mediating particular musical traditions (e.g. Kippen 2008; Shelemay 2008) is a matter of critical reflection within ethnomusicology, while the unexpected consequences that such projects may have beyond academia have also been recognised by practitioners of that discipline (e.g. Feld 1996). However, *the ways in which research may not only document and preserve, but also contribute towards the shaping and transmission of the tradition it observes remains largely unexplored within popular music studies*. Whereas failing to “represent” the historical development of crate digging with a reasonable thoroughness might not have mattered much in a blog post dedicated to the subject matter, the perceived authority associated with academic accounts in the absence of detailed scholarly discussions of scenic history raised the stakes enormously.

## 4. THE BREAK AESTHETICS. HISTORY, APPRECIATION, AND COMMUNITY



*Ultimate Breaks & Beats. The Complete Collection, De La Soul 3 Feet High And Rising, Quincy Jones You've Got It Bad Girl, Mustafa Özkent Gençlik İle Elele, record sleeves*<sup>24</sup>

“Every new musical style is inspired by previously established musical styles. Lenny [Roberts] started the *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* series on the Street Beat record label in the Bronx, New York City to supply record diggers with compilations of rare records, as well as to introduce songs to hip hop heads who were unaware of the incredible music the past had to offer. Through his knowledge of '60s and '70s music, and his own observations of the records DJs were searching

<sup>24</sup> All sleeve images throughout the thesis are my photographs of records in my private collection, unless otherwise noted. The source of the Quincy Jones LP cover is <http://www.discogs.com/viewimages?release=842428>, accessed 10 February 2010.

for, Roberts started a series of compilations that contained the perfect beats for Hip Hop heads to work with.

The music on these records has continued to be prominent in the Hip Hop world. Just as Marley Marl sampled [The Emotions'] 'Blind Alley' for Big Daddy Kane's 'Ain't No Half Steppin'', and 'Hard to Handle' [by Otis Redding] for 'The Symphony', Nas used [The Incredible Bongo Band's] 'Apache' for 'Made You Look' and Rick Rubin sampled 'Big Beat' [by Billy Squier] for the Jay-Z hit '99 Problems'. Run DMC used [The Monkees'] 'Mary Mary' for their track called 'Mary Mary'. Pete Rock sampled the drums on 'Long Red' [by Mountain] for several songs he produced. Pages upon pages could be filled listing every track that had an *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* sample or two contained in it. [...] People would, and still do, work with these records until they are non-playable, due to cue burn<sup>25</sup>. [...] Rest in peace Lenny Roberts. He played a major role in the golden age of Hip hop. His influence will always be present in the world of music." (Liner notes for *Ultimate Breaks & Beats. The Complete Edition*.)

"After this record, shit was never the same again. Up to this point it [i.e. sampling] was all about [looking for source material on] James Brown's *30 Golden Hits* and [the] *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* [compilation series]. Suddenly we're hearing Steely Dan and Johnny Cash on rap records! This is probably the most important record ever from a beatman's point of view because it kicked the doors of creativity wide open." (Phil "Soulman" Strohmman (cf.1995c) on De La Soul's *Three Feet High & Rising* album in his "Top 20 Hip hop Albums Of All Time, From A Beat-Fanatic's Perspective" list.)

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<sup>25</sup> Cue burn refers to the wear resulting from excessive use of vinyl records in DJing techniques such as backspinning the record in order to cue up a track during mixing or cutting doubles (extending specific segment of a track by using two copies of the same recording), and scratching (creating percussive sound effects by rhythmically moving the groove back and forth against the needle).

“*You've Got it Bad Girl* has the cut ‘Summer in the City’ which the Pharcyde used for ‘Passin’ Me By’. ‘Superstition’ has a pretty funky intro and there's some samplable moments on there. Not to mention the theme from [the NBC sitcom] *Sanford and Son*. Now you can put on a show for your family in that dump you call a room.” (DJ Day n.d., on Quincy Jones’s *You’ve Got it Bad Girl* album in an introductory article on crate digging.)

“Is this record for real? Either these guys had time-machines or DJ Kool Herc had secret Eastern connections. If a box of original copies of this seldom-sighted album had made its way to the South Bronx in the late seventies then Mustafa Özkent would be sharing throne space with other ultimate breaks and beats such as [‘Apache’ by] Michael Viner’s Incredible Bongo Band, [James Brown’s] ‘Funky Drummer’ and [Thin Lizzy’s] ‘Johnny The Fox’ bringing modern record collectors’ new found Turkish obsession forward by some 20 years.” (Andy Votel’s liner notes for Mustafa Özkent’s *Genlik Ile Elele* album reissue.)

The above reviews and liner notes introduce us to a form of appreciation in which the aesthetic significance of musical works emerges in relation to a history of appropriative music making practices – DJing and sampling – in hip hop. I will call this specific engagement with musical texts the *break aesthetics*, and describe it in more detail throughout this chapter as one of the central elements that defines and distinguishes the crate digging scene. I chose to start my discussion with these reviews and liner notes, because they – like many of the conversations I had with crate diggers over the years about records – highlight particular moments and figures, amplify subtle connections in a complex web of musical intertextuality that are hidden from the uninitiated ear. What I find intriguing about these aesthetic arguments is the passionate, at times worshipful mode in which they engage with a particular, collectively shared version of history that they rely on as much as they produce it.

Such a historic referentiality of aesthetic appreciation is not exclusive to the crate digging scene: Western art history, literary criticism and musicology always made use of similar historical narratives of stylistic innovations – describing genres and categories

of excellence primarily through periods, schools, genealogies of key artists, and canonical lists of formative works. The historical imaginary that is typical of high aesthetics (Bourdieu 1979/2002: 2-3) is also clearly present in certain areas of popular culture, most prominently in the aesthetic arguments of experts, aficionados or connoisseurs (Spooner 1986; Belk 1995). Similarly to Bourdieu, academic commentators of record collecting (Straw 1997b; Jamieson 1999; Bannister 2006; Dougan 2006) usually concentrate on the elitism of connoisseurly aesthetics. They describe competence in a particular music history and a corresponding system of aesthetic evaluation as the key means through which collectors internally stratify and maintain boundaries around their social worlds. Although such elitism is undeniably a part of the break aesthetics, I will take a different route in exploring the significance of such historically conceived *aesthetics* by approaching it *as a means of belonging*, rather than of exclusion.

Ethnographers often define the popular music scenes they study by describing the emergence and formation of the particular genre of music appreciated within the particular social world they explore (e.g. Hodkinson 2002; Kahn-Harris 2007; Tófalvy 2009). Such introductory sections usually narrate complex processes of stylistic development by pointing out key bands and influential records. Such accounts certainly bear marks of the above mentioned narrative conventions of high aesthetics. However, it could be just as convincingly argued that they more or less faithfully reproduce the ways in which references to a shared musical history work towards evoking – at times defining – an imagined community (Anderson 1983) in the accounts of musicians, music journalists, collectors and fans. *The role of historical imagination in weaving together shared aesthetic sensibilities and collective identities* in popular music worlds have so far received little scholarly attention. I find this lack of reflexive engagement with *historical narratives* odd, almost disturbing in the case of academic works which themselves implicitly draw on or propose such *constructions*. Simon Frith's remarks on the significance of musical historiography are illuminating regarding both the responsibility of the historiographer and the centrality of a vision of a shared past in the ways communities around particular musical forms imagine themselves.

“[t]he writing of genre histories [...] matter, both because what happens to genres over time is crucial to their meaning and because

genre self-consciousness derives in the first place from an account (usually mythical) of its own past” (Frith 1996b: 89)

The liner notes and reviews which I quoted at the beginning of this chapter do not just speak to a certain audience – “hip hop heads”, “beatmen” or “modern record collectors” – of shared aesthetic sensibilities, but – as Frith suggests – *evoke a sense of historical continuity* linking “record diggers” of the past – Bronx based DJs of the 1970s, hip hop producers of the turn of the 1980s and 1990s – to contemporary enthusiasts who – by working with the *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* compilations “until they are non-playable”, reading and writing liner notes, reviews and top lists of significant records – *take part in the maintenance and furthering of a collective tradition*<sup>26</sup>.

Despite the fact that crate digging has been around in various forms for more than three decades, the shared approach to musical appreciation that defines and holds together this hip hop related vinyl record collecting scene remains relatively unexplored in scholarly accounts<sup>27</sup>. Most theoretical accounts discuss appropriative practices in hip hop DJing and sampling from the perspective of high aesthetics, often in the historical context of musical practices within the Afrodiasporic community.

In the first section of this chapter, I will explore this literature for insights that are relevant to my following discussion of scenic tastes, and argue that the break aesthetics’ referentiality to hip hop history – rather than a wider, racially imagined ancestry – makes possible a post-Afrodiasporic – a racially or ethnically less confined – understanding of this tradition. In the three sections that follow it, – drawing on the work of Becker (1982), Fish (1980), and Williams (1971) – I will discuss three main periods of the development of the break aesthetics – the distinctive form of musical appreciation within the crate digging scene – by providing an overview of the emergence and development of the community in which it is cultivated as a shared aesthetic tradition.

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<sup>26</sup> It is exactly this affective dimension of tradition that Eric Hobsbawm described in the context of the conscious efforts of nation building projects to evoke and strengthen a sense of community through the “invention” of a shared past partly through national historiography, and the enactment of this history in public rituals (Hobsbawm 1983/2000).

<sup>27</sup> I will discuss the two most notable exceptions – Joe Allen’s seminal article on the development of the crate digging scene (1999), and Joseph G. Schloss’s ethnography of sample based hip hop producers (2004) – in the second section of this chapter in more detail.

In conclusion, I will summarise my argument regarding how a collective engagement with a particular form of musical appreciation and a musical history is productive of a sense of identity and belonging within the crate digging scene.

#### 4.1 A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH TOWARD SONIC ORGANISATION

With a few notable, however less than comprehensive, exceptions (Leland and Steinski 1988; Rose 1994; Allen 1999; Schloss 2004; Marshall 2006; Schloss 2006), little is written about the appreciative strategies of collectors who collect music from a wide stylistic spectrum – primarily, but not exclusively, soul, jazz, funk, rock, disco and latin – within the context of hip hop DJing and sampling. Most of the academic body of work on the aesthetic significance of appropriative practices of music making in hip hop is focused on the political significance of musical borrowing. The theoretical debates surrounding sampling approach this compositional practice from the perspective of “high aesthetic” theory, and focus on issues such as intertextuality, or changing notions of authorship and authenticity (Goodwin 1988), often in the context of the clashes between copyright legislation and technologically enhanced musical appropriation (Porcello 1991; Sanjek 1992; Bartlett 2004; Schumacher 2004). Most of the literature in this vein aims to morally legitimise sampling, defending this practice as an act of creative musical expression in its own right. The main line of argument is that sampling is rooted in the folk/Black tradition of free musical borrowing that predates the emergence of copyright. Tricia Rose (1994: 62-98) summarises most of these arguments in her remarkably thorough discussion of the origins and aesthetics of sample use in hip hop, and also takes the analysis of the aesthetic significance of breaks further by paying close attention to the actual ties that link sample based hip hop to a diasporic tradition of black musical forms and music making practices:

“Rhythm and poly-rhythmic layering is to African- and African-derived musics what harmony and the harmonic triad is to Western classical music. Dense configuration of independent, but closely related, rhythms, harmonic and nonharmonic percussive sounds, especially drum sounds

are critical priorities in many African and Afrodiasporic musical practices.” (Rose 1994: 66)

As Tricia Rose rightly observes, much of the original music that was later appropriated by hip hop DJs and producers is more geared towards repetition and the layering of complex rhythms than towards melodic progression. The Bronx based black and Hispanic disc jockeys that are today considered the founding fathers of hip hop grew up listening to the tight grooving of James Brown’s various bands or Parliament, and the extended conga and bongo solos on Afro-Latin boogaloo records. These rhythmic tracks provided both the inspiration and the raw material for their DJ sets, and later, sample based compositions. The other key black diasporic influence Rose mentions is versioning – an Afro-Caribbean music making practice that is focused on creating new variants, and mixes of already popular rhythms (see Hebdige 1987; Back 1988; Manuel and Marshall 2006) – that was brought to the Bronx by immigrants like Jamaican born DJ Kool Herc, a pioneer of hip hop DJing, who became familiar and fascinated with reggae sound system culture during his childhood years in Kingston (Marshall 2007).

Apart from such subtle links between hip hop and other Afrodiasporic musical forms, Rose – drawing on her interviews with a number of important producers – also describes the ways in which sampling is often intentionally used to accentuate a certain continuity between hip hop and earlier genres of black popular music in America. Her account suggests that through the careful selection and referential use of source material, producers reflexively engage with the cultural memory of the African-American community.

“For the most part, sampling [...] is about paying homage, an invocation of another’s voice to help you say what you want to say. It is also an archival project, a process of musical and cultural archaeology” (Rose 1994: 79).

Rose's remarks echo Greg Tate's statement on the significance of sampling as an act of discovering, resurrecting and preserving the past<sup>28</sup>, but also, as a kind of identification with a particular line of forebears:

“[S]ampling isn't a copycat act but a form of reanimation. Sampling in hip hop is the digitised version of hip hop DJing, an archival project and an artform unto itself. Hip hop is ancestor worship.” (1988: 73)

Whereas in Rose's and Tate's accounts sample based hip hop appears to be grounded in and furthering a particular lineage of black music making, Paul Gilroy warns against such a utopian and singular understanding of Afrodiasporic musical tradition. Reflecting on the central role that music plays in the identity formation of black communities, Gilroy (1991a) draws attention to the raptures and breaks in the circulation of musical ideas. Drawing on Leroi Jones's concept, he approaches black expressive culture as a “*changing same*” – rather than fixed and unchanging – and suggests that *the significance of “lovingly borrowed, respectfully stolen, or brazenly hi-jacked” (Gilroy 1991a: 117) musical forms and fragments is often transformed in processes of transmission and adaptation as they travel among different times, places and communities within the Afrodiasporic space.*

Joanna Demers's (2003) account of referential sampling affirms Gilroy's suggestions regarding the transformative capacity of musical borrowing. Demers describes cases when 1990s gangsta rap recordings sample 1970s blaxploitation soundtracks for songs that glorify the life of crime and violence that the movies themselves condemned. Rather than resurrecting the black filmmakers' voices, the appropriated musical fragments function here merely to provide a musical backdrop that evokes cinematic

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<sup>28</sup> The suggestion that digging for records to sample can be seen as an archival project, a grass-roots practice of rescuing and resurrecting the musical past is an observation that actually resonates with crate diggers' understanding of their collecting practice. In this perspective, records are material artefacts from bygone eras through which amateur investigators learn about musical and cultural history, much in line with the pleasures Walter Benjamin associates with old book and toy collecting (Benjamin 1999a, 1999b, 1999c). Such a sensibility is clearly at work in other vinyl record collecting scenes (see Juno and Vale 1993; Juno and Vale 1994; Milano 2003; Pettit 2008), as well as in other forms of contemporary popular collecting (Belk 1995). Issues concerning engagement with the past through records came up in almost all of my interviews with diggers; furthermore, I've also come across explicit references to crate digging as “vinyl archaeology” and diggers as “archaeologists” in digging related articles. See for example Cosmo Bakers reflection on his “Digging in the Crates” column (<http://blog.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.ListAll&friendID=21523861>) and Soulman's “World of Beats” articles (<http://www.mhat.com/worldofbeats/>, both accessed 24 July 2008 ). Soulman, one of the most respected figures of the scene has titled his seminal breaks themed mixtape series – lasting 84 volumes – *Archaeologists Classics*.

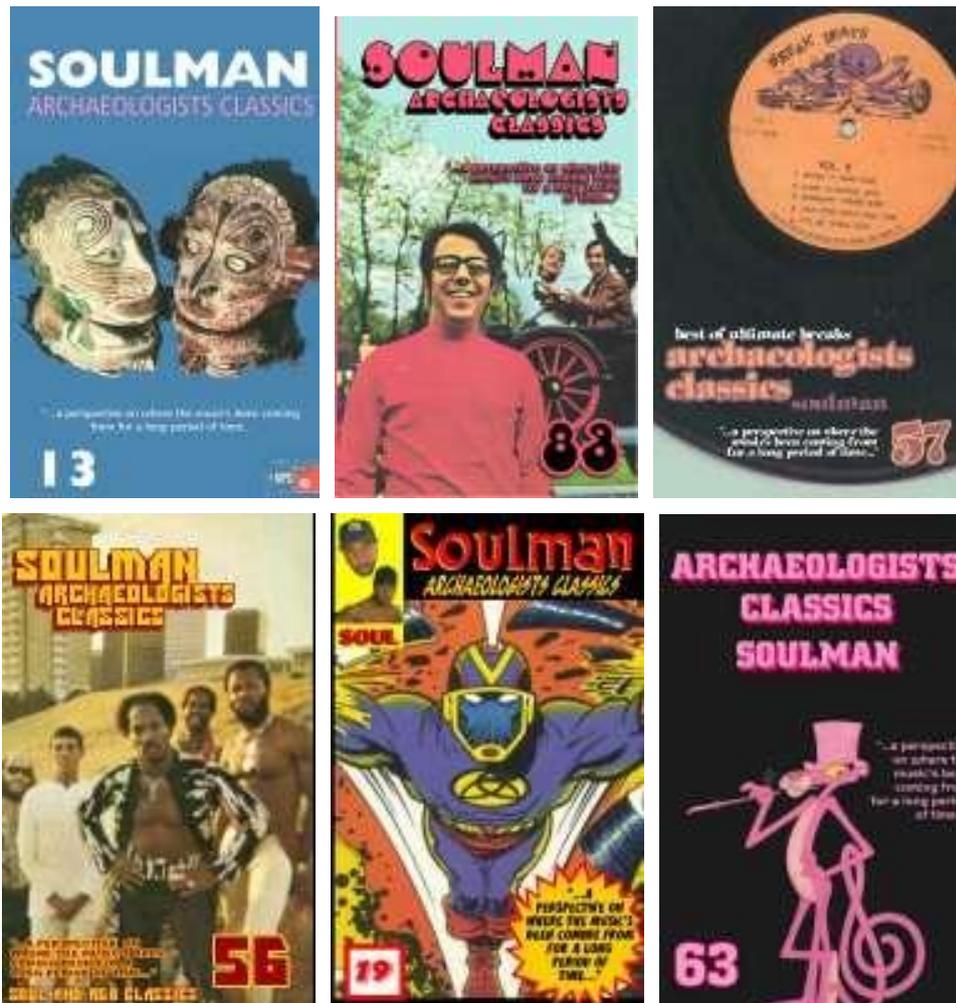
images of ghetto criminality from a bygone era. Although Demers provides an analysis that sheds light on the complexity of referentiality that Rose and Tate fail to address, her argument is similar to theirs in that it describes sampling as form of engagement with black collective cultural memory. Kodwo Eshun's poetic elaboration on appropriative music making in hip hop and electronic music (1999) challenges such claims regarding the ways in which sampling is limited to the cultivation of a racially confined tradition:

“The Breakbeat is a motion-capture device, a detachable Rhythmgine, a movable rhythmotor that generates cultural velocity. The break is any short captured sound whatsoever. Indifferent to tradition, this functionalism ignores history, allows hip hop to datamine unknown veins of funk, to groove-rob not ancestor-worship. [...] As DJ Shadow suggests, hip hop is therefore not a genre so much as an omni-genre, a conceptual approach toward sonic organisation rather than a particular sound in itself.” (Eshun 1999: 14)

Eshun argues that sampling is a radical compositional approach that shatters, rather than respectfully worships particular musical traditions. His “sonic fiction” delineates adventurous trajectories through which the “sampledelia of breakbeat” creates a different form of continuity, that of “Afro-futurism” (cf. Dery 1993), a particular approach to exploring rhythm and sound that connects a range of otherworldly sonic experiments – from the repetitive grooves of Parliament and the wired funk of Herbie Hancock to the the hyper-manipulated drum and bass sampling of 4Hero and DJ Shadow's rock and folk influenced instrumental hip hop – in a rhizomatic network. Although Afrodiasporic musical sensibilities – the primacy of sound and repetition over melody and linear progression – and the body of work of visionary black artists are central to Eshun's Afro-futurism, the cultural origins of the musical ideas it absorbs are just as unimportant as the racial identity of its key innovators.

Indeed, commentators of the development of sample based hip hop (Poschardt 1998; Allen 1999; Toop 2000) emphasise the significance of the early hip hop DJ sets that included breakbeat-heavy tracks from rock records by white bands like Babe Ruth, The Monkees, The Rolling Stones, and Thin Lizzy, as pioneering an open-minded approach in selecting source material that became also characteristic to the work of hip hop producers. Eshun rightly observes that there is a certain functionalism in this disregard

of traditional, racialised genre boundaries<sup>29</sup>: an indifference to where the music is coming from, as long as it has the right sound and rhythm.



Mixtape covers from Soulman's *Archeologists Classics* series<sup>30</sup> drawing on different sources of funkiness. Although the veins of “funkiness” that hip hop DJs and producers seek could be traced back to African and Afrodiasporic rhythmic traditions, it would be a mistake to conceive of it as an entirely black form. The history of the development of American popular music is clearly a history of cross-fertilisations among different ethnic forms (Sanjek and Sanjek 1996; Leland 2004; Holt 2007). Apart from the well known fact that stylistic elements, instruments and ideas have been borrowed across racial boundaries, the contributions of white session musicians to the definition of genres that were dominated by black performers and were marketed to the Afro-American audience have

<sup>29</sup> See Holt (2007) regarding the racialisation of musical genres.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.samplehead.com/worldofbeats/soulart.html>, accessed 8 February 2010.

also received more recognition in recent years (Back 2002; Ankeny 2007). Paul Gilroy is well aware of such complexities:

“the most important lesson music still has to teach us is that its inner secrets and its ethnic rules can be taught and learned. [...] Black music cannot be reduced to a fixed dialogue between a thinking racial self and a stable racial community. Apart from anything else, the globalization of vernacular forms means that our understanding of antiphony will have to be changed. The calls and responses no longer converge in the tidy patterns of secret, ethnically encoded dialogue.” (Gilroy 1991a: 134)

Similarly to the ways in which Gilroy’s essay blurs racial boundaries in thinking through Afrodiasporic expressive culture, Eshun’s Afro-futuristic network weaves together Kraftwerk, Depeche Mode, Brian Eno and DJ Shadow in a sonic continuum with Miles Davis, Sun Ra, Afrika Bambaata and Cybotron:

“Kraftwerk are to Techno what Muddy Waters is to the Rolling Stones: the original, the authentic, the real.

Techno reverses the traditional 1960s narrative in which the Rolling Stones stole the soul and vulgarized the blues of [Muddy] Waters *et al.* [...] Happy to be the interloper, the latecomer, [Afrika] Bambaataa steals the synthetic soul from Dusseldorf, bastardizes it into ‘Planet Rock’<sup>31</sup>. Kraftwerk happily called their sound Industriell Volk Musik, Folk Music for the Industrial Age. For Techno, Dusseldorf is the Missisipi Delta.” (Eshun 1999: 100)

The observations of Gilroy and Eshun enable us to think about hip hop as based on the sonic sensibilities of an Afrodiasporic tradition of music making, bearing in mind that neither its ancestrage, nor its production and appreciation is racially confined. Although hip hop has emerged from, and even today, provides an important platform for articulating the experiences and agendas of black and Hispanic communities in America, its commercialisation has propelled it beyond racially imagined collectivities (Watkins 2005; Hess 2007). The account of DJ Premier, a legendary hip hop disc jockey

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<sup>31</sup> Afrika Bambaataa & The Soul Sonic Force interpolated Kraftwerk’s “Trans Europe Express” and used the same drum pattern as the Düsseldorf band’s “Numbers”.

and producer, appropriately captures the racially mixed character of the contemporary hip hop scene:

“In 1990 [...] that’s when it was most predominantly just black people coming to our instores<sup>32</sup>, you know, before hip hop spread that wide where, it’s now a vast mixture of race and everything, on every level. You know what I’m saying?” (DJ Premier 2010)

Jeff Chang (2005), for example, describes hip hop as a unifying cultural force that overcomes racial boundaries and provides the means of expression and identity for a *generational* movement of political awareness and activism for post-babyboomers in the United States of America. As I have noted in the previous chapter, the ways in which hip hop is adapted and adopted to express local issues and sensibilities, and forge translocal alliances across the globe is also well documented (Bennett 1999a; Mitchell 2002; Basu and Lemelle 2006; Condry 2006).

As we will see in the following section, the appreciation of musical texts within a racially mixed scene of crate diggers could be understood as both a form of ancestor worship, as well as an ear for a particular approach toward sonic organisation. Although the history of the development of appropriative practices that lends significance to the break aesthetics is strongly rooted in the tradition of Afrodiasporic music making, for many, it provides a racially unbound – post-Afrodiasporic – form of belonging *to a hip hop related tradition of record collecting and listening*:

“To me, what hip hop stood for, was unity through music. On a physical basis it manifests itself in people like Bambaataa. He was called the peacemaker, because he encouraged all the gangs from New York to stop fighting over turf, and start rallying around music instead [...] On the other side of that he was demonstrating that through what he played. He played James Brown next to a Rolling Stone record [...], next to Kraftwerk. And that was his vision. No boundaries, no genre barriers. [...] The powers that be politically and otherwise would like to see us, and that all, separated. But I’m not having that, and I will play... And you will understand that music is for everyone. That’s to me what hip hop is about. That to me, along with vinyl

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<sup>32</sup> Promotional live appearances and record signings in record stores.

culture and breakbeat culture, is all that I represent.” (DJ Shadow in Bleed n.d.)

## 4.2 THE MAKING OF A SHARED TRADITION: ANCESTOR WORSHIP REVISITED

“One of the least covered aspects of hip hop is an intriguing subculture in which obscure old records are dug up, dusted off, and put to use to create the backdrop for one of the most powerful forms of musical and social expression of the 20th century. Known as beat-finding or ‘diggin’ in the crates’ (a term popularized by producers Showbiz, Diamond D and their crews), this is an important part of hip hop that even some of the most diehard rap fans don’t know about. [...] A brief overview: hunting down hard-to-find records with funky breaks began back in the earliest days of hip hop, with pioneers like Kool Herc and Afrika Bambaataa coming up with unknown records that would rock crowds in the parks and keep the competition befuddled. [...] With the advent of sampling in the late ’80s, the art of beat-finding encountered a big resurgence. [...] A new generation of kids began to get their fingers dusty, sifting through Mom and Pop’s collection of assorted 45[ RPM single]s, looking for the perfect beat. And even with an increasing number of rap producers using live music tracks for their artists, the crate digging era is far from over. (There’s a sense of history involved here, so don’t be so quick to throw away your sampler and hop on this live band trend that’s going on now – you can build on the house, but don’t discard the foundation or the whole thing might collapse!)” (Soulman 1994a)

In his seminal article, aptly entitled *The Beginning*, Phil “Soulman” Strohman introduced *World of Beats*, the first regular column dedicated to the world of hip hop

related record collecting to reach a wider audience in the United States and beyond<sup>33</sup> by providing the above historical account. As I have suggested in the introduction of this chapter, his story weaves together the emergence of a particular form of appreciation with the history of a “subculture”, an imagined community (Anderson 1983) of crate diggers stretching from the early DJ pioneers to the kids who have just started looking for records inspired by contemporary sample based hip hop productions. Soulman’s account that is focused largely on record collecting corresponds with the ways in which the development of hip hop music has been described since the earliest journalistic and theoretical reflections (Leland and Steinski 1988; Rose 1994; Toop 2000).

Rather than merely describing the history of a particular form of record collecting, Soulman’s account – particularly his closing remark – is also indicative of a certain enthusiasm, even activism: an urge to participate in keeping alive the history upon which tradition is founded. The fact that Soulman’s column later became an important source for both academic works that discuss crate digging in more detail (Allen 1999; Schloss 2004), as well as for many of the collectors I have interviewed for this thesis, suggests that *such popular historiographic efforts* (cf. Popular Memory Group 1998) *can indeed play an important part in the production of both scenic and scholarly understandings of this particular tradition of appreciation.*

Although the now generally accepted narrative that Soulman presents above is rarely if ever challenged, Wayne Marshall describes the ways in which ?uestlove – DJ and drummer of The Roots, a rap group that uses traditional instruments extensively – provides an alternative history of hip hop music making. Tracing the use of live instrumentation rather than sampling, and including generally overlooked details<sup>34</sup> ?uestlove’s account problematises the continuous and linear fashion in which the history of sample based hip hop is usually presented (Marshall 2006). The drummer’s story offers an insight to both the partiality of the conventionally accepted narrative that I will follow throughout this chapter and the politics of authenticity that is inherent in such genre histories. My aim, however, is not to provide a critical assessment of the

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<sup>33</sup> Cosmo Baker’s “Digging In The Crates” column in *On the Go* magazine slightly predated Soulman’s articles, however the Philadelphia based publication had only a very limited circulation compared to *Rap Sheet*. (Personal communication with both Soulman (17 May 2005) and Cosmo Baker (27 April 2005))

<sup>34</sup> ?uestlove credits the first sampled funk groove to British progressive rock group Yes: “So, the first ‘authentic’ ‘break’ sampled on was from . . . a rock band. Yes took five seconds of Funk Inc.’s classic cover of Kool and the Gang’s classic ‘Kool is Back’ for ‘Owner of a Lonely Heart.’” (Quoted in Marshall 2006: 876)

canonical narrative, but to *focus on the ways in which the engagement with this particular understanding of a shared musical history is productive of aesthetic sensibilities as well as of a sense of involvement with the maintenance of scenic tradition*. Furthermore, it is also important to note that my account does not merely reflect on scenic history from an isolated external domain, but – as I have already suggested in the previous chapter – to whatever degree it has an effect, it may contribute towards shaping the tradition it observes<sup>35</sup>.

In describing the ways in which a particular form of musical appreciation could be seen as a form of belonging within the crate digging scene, I will draw on Raymond Williams’s notion of the “selective tradition” (1971), Howard Becker’s ideas regarding the “art world” (1974), and Stanley Fish’s “interpretive community” (1980) and *explore the scene as a community of appreciation*. As I have already described these concepts in detail in Chapter 2, I will only quickly reiterate here my argument regarding how they fit together and complement each other. Whereas Williams enables us to think about the centrality of retrospective historicising efforts in the production and reproduction of cultural traditions and the appreciation of past cultural texts, Becker pays closer attention to the networks of co-operation and the institutions within which such aesthetic conventions and ideologies are formed, while Fish concentrates primarily on how one’s situatedness in such institutions results in particular forms of appreciation. Although they describe three sides of the same cultural process, none of them would enable us to think through the complex relationship between appreciation and belonging without the insights of the other two.

My following account of the emergence of the break aesthetics will alternate among three main narrative strands, in order to highlight the interwovenness of the processes that each of the above approaches respectively illuminate: a) the selective and retrospective development of a tradition of record collecting that is framed primarily as series of innovations within a particular ancestry of hip hop related music making practices; b) the emergence of the institutions through which scenic history, aesthetic conventions and identity are collectively crystallised, discussed and mediated; as well as c) the formation of a particular kind of musical appreciation among DJs, producers,

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<sup>35</sup> The fact that an early edition of David Toop’s groundbreaking hip hop book (1984) became the primary source of education on the history of hip hop for DJ Shadow, one of the most respected crate diggers on the contemporary scene (Wilder 2005: 38) suggests that scholarly and journalistic reflections do not exist in an entirely separate domain from the formation of scenic narratives.

journalists, and other record enthusiasts who participate in these networks of co-operation. Even though a full exploration of each of these converging threads is beyond the scale and scope of this chapter, an account of the break aesthetics – a form of appreciation, as much as of belonging – would be incomplete without paying attention key elements of this shared musical tradition, and the institutionalising, growing and translocalising record collecting scene in which it is cultivated.

### 4.3 B-BOY BREAKS

“Who would you credit as the father of diggin’?”

[Mr. Supreme:] It has to be without no doubt Clive Campbell aka. DJ Kool Herc and [Afrika] Bambaataa. They were doing this eons before others were. As far as currently DJ Shadow is serious with his and a very good dude. Dante Carfagna is as well and his knowledge is out of this world. Soulman, Muro, Gerald Short, Keb Darge, and the list goes on. There are a lot of cats with the illest shit that don’t get shine or people just don’t know about them like Chris Veltri from Groove Merchant. Lots of Japanese cats and so on.” (Mr Mass 2008c)

The historic emergence of the various elements – DJing and music production practices, MCing, b-boying, graffiti, fashion – that make up hip hop culture have been the subject of many popular and scholarly accounts since the 1980s (Toop 1984; Rose 1994; Poschardt 1998; Toop 2000; Macdonald 2001; Shabazz and Pannicioli 2001; Rahn 2002; Kool Moe Dee 2003; Garcia 2003; Wang 2003; Cooper 2004; Forman and Neal 2004; Schloss 2004; Chang 2005; Coleman 2005; Shabazz and Ahearn 2005; Price 2006; Coleman 2007; Cooper 2007; Kugelberg 2007; Cooper and Chalfant 2009; Schloss 2009; Stewart 2009), however, surprisingly little has been written about the ways in which this constant reflexive engagement with history is an important part of scenic practices in many of hip hop’s cultural arenas (Allen 1999; Rahn 2002; Schloss 2004, 2006, 2009). The abundance of commemorations of founding fathers, prominent members of the “old” and later “schools” of its specific art forms at public events, in interviews, on records and tribute mixes, in documentaries (Ahearn 1982/2007;

Westwood 1987; Fitzgerald 2000; Pray 2001; Israel 2002; Chalfant and Silver 2003; Beatdawg 2004, 2007; Corbera and Underhill 2007; Stuart 2007); and various print publications (Fricke and Ahearn 2002) with regard to their particular stylistic innovations or contributions resonates with Greg Tate's understanding of hip hop as form of ancestor worship (1988). However, it is important to note that this worshipful activity is rarely attentive to the wider context of Afrodiasporic musical past, and revolves primarily around a specific genealogy that is limited to the context of hip hop as cultural tradition in its own right.

“[W]hen you start to examine WHY DJ's focused on breakbeats in particular in the first place, then you have to understand what a breakbeat was. In the mid-to-late '60s, the music that the streets were dancin' to was r&b, soul and a fresh new twist on both called funk. Funk incorporated a hard driving sound, grittier than the popular black music of the day... it centered around the drums and the bassline groove, with the beat usually falling 'on the one'.

Naturally, when the NY DJ's were spinning these records, some of the more popular songs were the ones that contained a breakdown. Many of these DJ's referred to the breakdown as 'the get down part'. [...]

Certain DJ's, like [Kool] Herc and [Grandmaster] Flash, started consciously focusing on songs that had that 'get down part', then extending it and eventually spinning just the breakdowns. As that consciousness evolved, the DJ's began looking outside of the traditional funk/soul/r&b records for songs that also had a breakdown that would fit into this new style.”<sup>36</sup>

This forum post from the *Old School Hip Hop Board* resonates with the theoretical observations from the previous section regarding the ways in which the break aesthetics was influenced by previous Afro-diasporic forms. However, “traditional funk/soul/r&b” is only referred to in passing. Rather than describing specific authors or recordings making use of conventional genre histories, much in line with Williams's (1971) insights, this account reflects a more contemporary aesthetic sensibility at work. The

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<sup>36</sup> Post by EyeGetzRaw on the *Old School Hip Hop* message board, posted 23 January 2007. ([http://oldschoolhiphop.forumco.com/topic.asp?TOPIC\\_ID=16078&whichpage=2](http://oldschoolhiphop.forumco.com/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=16078&whichpage=2), accessed 2 September 2009.)

significance of appropriated recordings is limited to their rhythmic qualities, or more precisely, to the ways in which their breakdowns fit into the “new style” pioneered by the first hip hop DJs, the protagonists of this story.

Similarly to such popular accounts, well researched historiographies of hip hop’s stylistic development (Rose 1994; Toop 2000; Fricke and Ahearn 2002; Chang 2005; Marshall 2007; Persley 2007) credit DJ Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaata, and Grandmaster Flash as the musical founding fathers of hip hop that invented and perfected a new DJ performance style playing only short, percussive parts of longer tracks, extending the duration of these fragments by going back and forth between two copies of the same recording<sup>37</sup>. Many of these original breaks – played at block parties, community centres, and small venues around the Bronx from the mid 1970s – consisted indeed of repetitive drum, or drum and bass grooves; however, they were often dominated by other percussive instruments like timbales, congas or bongos, and incorporated minimalistic horn “stabs” or guitar “riffs” that accentuated some of their rhythmic qualities. As I have noted earlier, this initial circle of breakbeat DJs were soon looking for breaks on a wide range of records – mainly from the 1960s and 1970s – disregarding traditional genre categories: even children’s records, or beat, pop and rock recordings (Rose 1994; Allen 1999; Toop 2000; Chang 2005). The main selection criteria was that they had to include a stripped down percussive segment, where the rhythm section played either syncopated funky backbeat patterns<sup>38</sup> that were pioneered and popularized by drummers like Idris Muhammad, Bernard Purdie, and James Brown’s drummers, Clyde Stubblefield (Aldave 2003a) and John “Jab’o” Starks (Aldave 2003b) by the end of the 1960s, or the pulsating, “straight” 4/4 beats of 1970s disco<sup>39</sup>.

The identity of these tracks was strictly guarded by the inner circle of DJs who discovered and popularized them, mostly because maintaining the exclusive ownership of these tracks were generally seen as the key means of staying ahead of competing DJs both business-wise (Fricke and Ahearn 2002) and in status terms (Allen 1999). Still, in

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<sup>37</sup> Disco historian Tim Lawrence notes that around the same time when DJ Kool Herc pioneered this technique in the Bronx, two disco DJs – Walter Gibbons in Downtown Manhattan and John Luongo in Boston – came up with a very similar concept in “parallel yet unconnected universes” (Lawrence 2004).

<sup>38</sup> On the historical origins, development and rhythmic structure of funk music see Stewart (2000).

<sup>39</sup> I have included a number of DJ mixes that are representative of this particular style of DJing in the „B-Boy breaks mixes” folder on the DVD Appendix Volume 1 that accompanies this thesis. Afrika Bambaataa and Jazzy Jay’s *Death Mix Live!* that counts as an early document of breakbeat DJing is included in the “Significant recordings” folder of the DVD Appendix Volume 2.

spite of this secrecy, their performances inspired a smaller local scene of aspiring DJs, savvy self-made record merchants (Leland and Steinski 1988; Smith 2006), as well as music loving kids to find these records and dig up yet undiscovered breaks from the very early days:

“Being that Bambaata was from my project, there was a time when searching for beats and digging in the crates was a part of the culture of the whole projects. It was something that we all did. [...] When we were going to jams we just stood there just trying to know, see if we can name every beat that Bambaataa or whoever was DJing put on. [...] And if we heard a new beat we set out for a journey as children thirteen fourteen years old to go find that beat.” (Jesse West in Beatdawg 2007)

*Although the scene was relatively uninstitutionalised at this point, we can understand it as a co-operative network in a Beckerian (1982) sense: a space of collective production where competing parties take part in re-discovering and popularising a repertoire of older recordings according to a novel aesthetic sensibility. Participants in this locally confined scene of beat collectors invented, refined and disseminated the concept of the break as they assembled a collectively appreciated repertoire of songs, a canon of breaks that was crystallised and made apparent primarily in live DJ sets.*

Apart from sporadic mentions in music related publications (Ford 1978/2004, 1979/2004), breakbeat DJing was largely unknown beyond this initial Bronx based scene, and only received wider recognition among DJs and music enthusiasts from the early 1980s on through a number of bootleg releases and compilation albums, such as *Super Disco Brakes*, and most prominently Lenny Robertson’s *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* series.<sup>40</sup> These bootleg compilations upset many of the secretive DJs, but they also extended the network in which the break aesthetics was formed by making previously closely guarded information accessible beyond the web of personal relationships (Allen 1999). *By making a certain repertoire easily available on subsequent represses, these*

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<sup>40</sup> I have included a detailed discography as well as the musical content of the 25 volumes of the series on the DVD Appendix Volume 2, attached to this thesis. Andrew Mason suggests that Lenny was behind the anonymous breaks compilation series – often referred to as “Octopus records” because of the graphic design of their labels – that have been around from the very early 1980s, and directly preceded *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*. The fact that the first ten volumes in the UBB series came out in 1986, and their tracklistings closely followed that of the *Octopus* records supports his theory (Mason 2002a).

*anthologies contributed towards solidifying the central position of compiled tracks among successive generations of DJs, collectors, and later, hip hop producers.*

“I came up learning about hip hop as a result of *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* and the *Octopus* joints [in Poughkeepsie, a small town in upstate New York, in the early 1980s]. Those records laid the foundation for hip hop music in the mid-late '80s and played a major role in revitalizing the sound during a time when shit was starting to sound stale. From those records I'd go searching for the originals and take it from there.” (Paul Nice in Soulman 2000b)

DJ Paul Nice's account regarding the importance of the *UBB* compilations in learning about breaks is not unlike many stories I have heard from crate diggers who became involved with hip hop during that decade. The following interview excerpt with Danny Breaks, a British DJ and producer from Rayleigh, indicates that these anthologies were also available in Europe by the mid 1980s, and provided important points of entry into break collecting.

And how did you start buying breaks, original stuff?

*From seeing... I don't know when I got the Ultimate... The first thing I got was Ultimate Breaks & Beats that was when... I think probably I had got into them in '86... '85-86. [...] So, yeah, through finding that and realising what that was then I started yeah, getting the Ultimate Breaks & Beats, kept stocking most of them when I could. And then you're like "Ah, that [often sampled break]'s [from] that [original recording], and that's that!" And I probably stayed on that level [for a while ...] To get an original record was quite a bit after, I reckon. I think... I think... I think... maybe '87-'88. Yeah, there started to be things appearing, or people cutting up things which weren't on Ultimate Breaks & Beats. And it was like, "Oh, what's that?" I think the first one I got was Isaac Hayes's "Ike's Mood". There was a UK documentary called Bad Meaning Good<sup>41</sup> and it was DJ... DJ Fingers was cutting up two copies of that. And it was like "Oh shit, what's*

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<sup>41</sup> Tim Westwood's documentary on the UK hip hop scene for BBC2's Open Space programme (Westwood 1987).

that?” Cause it... that’s been used in Biz Markie[’s] “Make the Music”<sup>42</sup>, so it’s like “Wow, oh, that’s the thing.” I didn’t know it was meant to be on a 45, ’cause it’s flipped on 45<sup>43</sup>, the actual break.  
(Danny Breaks 2007)

Danny Breaks’ mention of recognising the samples from the hip hop tracks of the time on the *UBB* compilations also suggest that the appropriative reuse in early sample based hip hop beats lend further significance to the recordings that are featured on the series. The twenty-five volumes of the *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* – released between 1986 and 1991 – were available in hip hop oriented specialist stores (Leland and Steinski 1988) paralleling the arrival of affordable audio-sampling technology and sample-based hip hop production practices. In the first years of hip hop sampling, the breakbeat tracks on the *UBB* series, along with James Brown’s body of work, provided the raw material for most of the new hip hop beats (Torres 2002). As Paul Nice suggests, these compilations played a key part in revitalising the sound of hip hop after its first years of recording history when MCs rapped over the music of live session players that interpolated the breaks that had been popularised by DJs, and later, the programmed beats of drum machines.

From the mid 1980s onwards, the significance of breakbeats from the *UBB* series was also accentuated by a new breed of complex “edit tracks” – *instrumental* break megamixes – most prominently Double Dee & Steinski’s “Lesson” series, and Mantronix’s “King of the Beats”. These cut-and paste style collages drew on numerous classic breaks, and could be conceived of as the producers’ tribute to the origins of hip hop DJing, a form of ancestors worship<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Biz Markie’s “Make the Music With Your Mouth, Biz”.

<sup>43</sup> The single version of this Isaac Hayes’ song was different from the one released on the album, and Biz Markie’s record was made using the “flipped”, alternate break from the 7” single.

<sup>44</sup> Double Dee & Steinski explicitly entitled their third break collage “Lesson 3: The History of Hip Hop Mix”. The influence of their series among diggers is apparent in the ways in which both Cut Chemist and DJ Shadow produced edit tracks entitled “Lesson 4” independently of each other in the US in the early 1990 (Pray 2001). By the end of the decade, DJ Format has also released an “English Lesson” using a number of British breaks. The legacy of the original “Lessons” series is thoroughly documented in the three volumes of *The Ultimate Lessons* compilation series. Although they are less organised to work as compositions in their own right, continuous break megamixes could also be found on “battle” or “scratch” records, like DJ Qbert’s four volume *Breaktionary* series – “the meanest ’70s funk breaks made for the b-boy scratch DJs” according to their cover – or 45 King’s *Break Beats for Dummies*. These records are intended as DJ tools and sold primarily to turntablists or more technically advanced hip hop disc jockeys to cut doubles of, or scratch with. I have included some of these recordings in the “Significant recordings” folder on the DVD Appendix Volume 2.

The recurring references to the *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* compilations in my interviews and conversations with crate diggers, as well as the abundance of similar mentions in liner notes, reviews, articles, blog entries, and forum posts suggest that the series is generally seen to have played a formative role in laying the foundations for the aesthetic sensibilities at work within this hip hop related record collecting scene. The lengthy article on the *UBB* series along with its complete discography in the debut issue of *Wax Poetics* – a music magazine that was focused primarily on crate digging culture in its first years – is indicative of *the centrality of these compilations in outlining and demarcating breaks as a particular stylistic field, but also, their importance as historical documents that connect listeners to a particular ancestry:*

“*Ultimate Breaks & Beats* is essentially a catalogue of rhythm. [...T]he breaks featured on [the] Street Beat [label]’s *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* series form the basis for modern popular rhythm. [...] It is a chronology that leads from community center parties in the Bronx to the rise of sampling in the mid ’80s and onward to the creation of the dance music innovators who were inspired by the rhythm patterns of rap music.”

(Mason 2002a: 45-46)

Today, the *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* compilations stand as an uncontested body of classics or standards within the crate digging scene. The recordings included on the series are often referred to as “old school breaks”, or – particularly with regard to the faster paced titles – “b-boy breaks”. The term “b-boy breaks” is a reference to the practice of b-boying, the competitive dance style that evolved in close relation with breakbeat DJing in the early hip hop scene of the Bronx. According to Schloss ethnography of b-boying, many of the tracks that appeared on the *UBB* volumes still maintain prominence within b-boy culture, and form a canon that is central to how this particular tradition of dancing is passed on, and experienced among dancers (Schloss 2006, 2009).

Although crate diggers today – unlike dancers – are interested in a significantly broader spectrum of musical recordings than what is included on these compilations, the centrality of the *UBB* series in defining and maintaining a scenic tradition of collecting resonates with Schloss’s observations. Whereas Schloss describes dancing to canonic songs as a form of ritual activity that has the capacity to evoke a sense of involvement in a collective history among b-boys and b-girls, it could be argued that *listening to,*

discussing, sampling, recognising, mixing or seeking out the original pressings of the songs on the UBB compilations may serve as similarly powerful means for crate diggers to participate in the preservation and shaping of a shared tradition of collecting and for experiencing a sense of attachment to the scene.



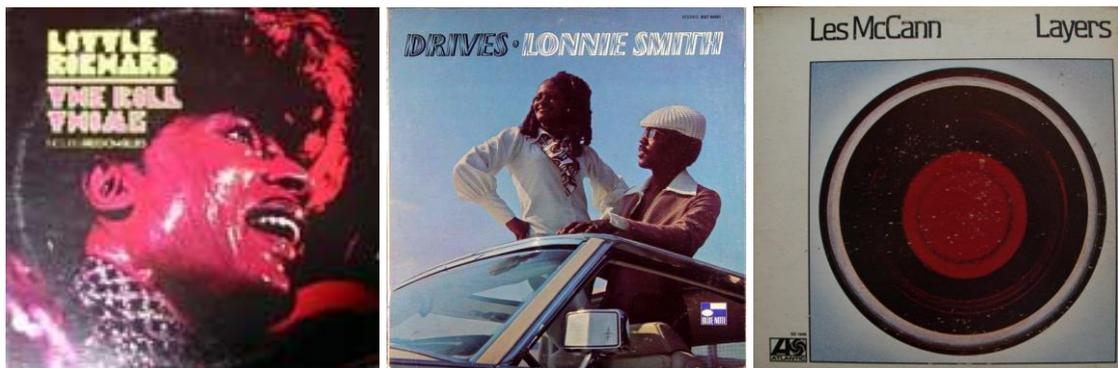
*Ultimate Breaks & Beats* volumes 1 to 25, album covers<sup>45</sup>

As written accounts like Soulman’s and Mason’s above were absent until the late 1980s, the co-operative network within which the aesthetic conventions of beat collecting were forged was limited to live or mediated DJ performances, breakbeat compilations, sporadic video footage (Ahearn 1982/2007; Westwood 1987), and early sample based hip hop productions. Although Paul Nice’s and Danny Breaks’ accounts already illustrate Fish’s ideas regarding the ways in which one’s engagement with a particular

<sup>45</sup> Images taken from the *Ultimate Breaks & Beats. The Complete Edition* 2 CD + DVD set.

web of influences is productive of very specific approaches of aesthetic appreciation, the lack of written histories, commentaries and criticism in this period limited the articulation, solidification and mediation of the break aesthetics. In the following subsection, I will describe the ways in which the collective efforts of a range of emerging scenic institutions contributed towards the further definition and demarcation of breaks appreciation in the wake of sample based hip hop's popularity.

#### 4.4 SAMPLES AND BEATS



Little Richard *The Rill Thing*, Lonnie Smith *Drives*, Les McCann *Layers*, album covers<sup>46</sup>

“[The second wave of hip hop production epitomized by Diamond & Psychotic Neurotics’ *Stunts, Blunts and Hip Hop LP* released in 1992] is the direct result of what Diamond labels ‘the second level’ of breaks. ‘It’s like two levels of beats,’ he asserts. ‘It’s like the old school level of beats that niggas collect, and then it’s the new joints that niggas back in the days wasn’t up on. For example there’s the Little Richard drums [‘The Rill Thing’] – that was recorded, like, in ‘72, but none of them niggas had doubles of that record. Flash, Bam, Herc, none of them. They didn’t know about it, so, like beats to them would be the Blackbyrds, the Incredible Bongo Band, Babe Ruth, groups like that. Niggas wasn’t outside the park cutting up Lonnie Liston Smith’s *Drive[s]*, or didn’t have copies of Les McCann [*Layers*].’ For Diamond, and many others,

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<sup>46</sup> <http://www.discogs.com/Little-Richard-The-Rill-Thing/release/712849>, <http://www.discogs.com/Lonnie-Smith-Drives/master/67385>, <http://ecx.images-amazon.com/images/I/4184P5ZSV1L.SL500.AA240.jpg>, accessed, 16 of September 2009.

the second level of breaks, and digging for them, begun in earnest upon hearing the seminal works of [hip hop producers] Prince Paul and Hank Shocklee.’ (Hohlt 2004: 77)

As Danny Breaks’ above quoted account, Diamond D’s story is telling of another tendency that was taking shape from the end of the 1980s: hip hop producers started digging for new raw material, rather than taking what was readily available to their competitors on the UBB compilations (Allen 1999; Torres 2002). The changing production ethic echoed the principles of the first generation of hip hop DJs: a highly competitive scene of producers that sought out obscure, yet unknown records with breaks, and creatively put them to musical use in order to stay ahead of rivals (Schloss 2004). This similarity is not a coincidence, as many in the first generation of sample-based hip hop producers were DJs before they got into production and grew up in the Bronx during the block party era under the mentoring of the old school DJs:

*“[...] guys like Diamond D and 45 King were directly involved in the Bronx party scene, 45 King carried DJ Breakout’s crates.”<sup>47</sup>*

Even though most accounts of the history of crate digging imply a certain continuity between the two DJ generations, it is worth noting that the producers of sample based hip hop tracks were a unique scene onto themselves in terms of both the kinds of musical recordings they pursued and the ends they put them to.

Whereas the actual connections, and the similarities in the rules and motivations in collecting breaks are apparent in the two eras, the fact that the expression “crate digging” was not widely used before the early 1990s is indicative of the ways in which the collective identity of this collecting scene began to take a more defined shape in the early 1990s, at about the time when Diamond D’s Digging in the Crates (D.I.T.C.) crew became a significant name within the hip hop scene:

“Although he cannot recall who exactly dreamt up the seminal namesake, Diamond credits his man Latief from Brooklyn with being the first person he heard use the term ‘digging’ – saying ‘let’s go digging’ when they went shopping for breaks. The genealogy of the crew’s adopted

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<sup>47</sup> E-mail exchange with New York based DJ, producer, and music journalist Andrew Mason aka Monk One. See also Mason (2003b) and Hohlt (2004).

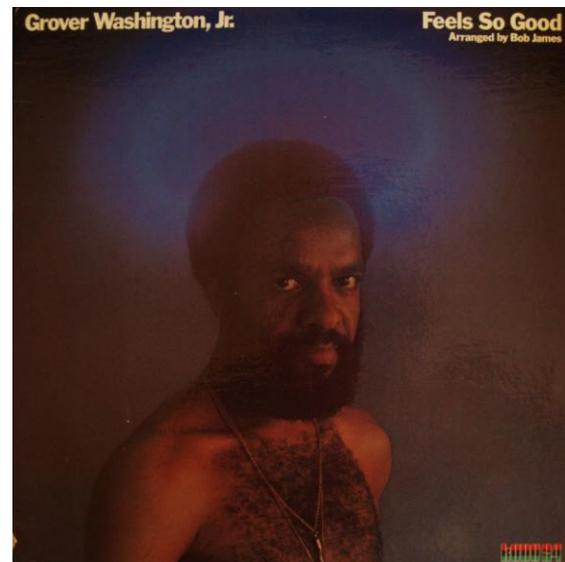
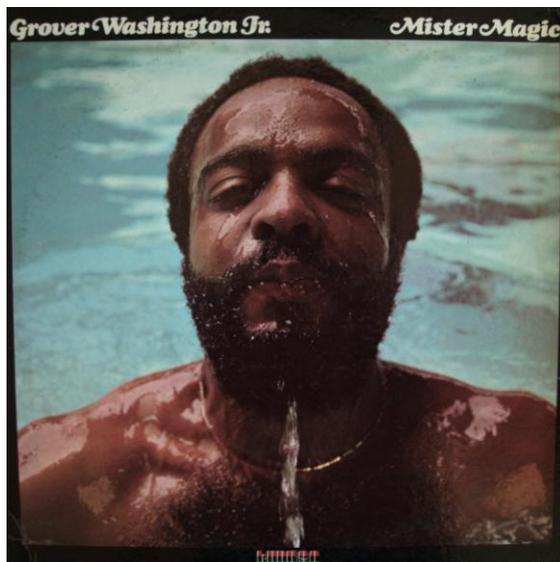
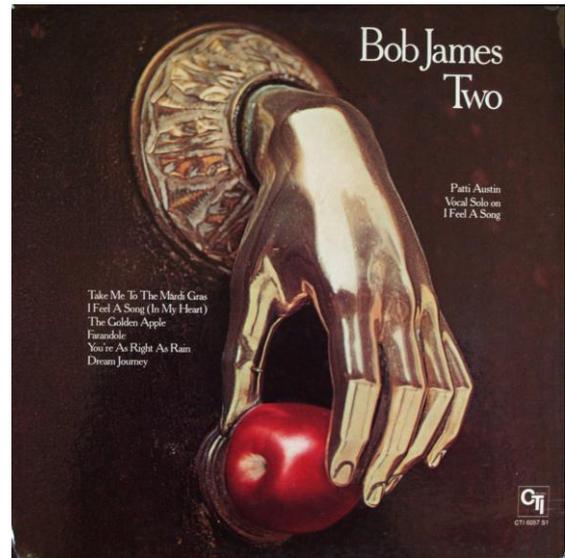
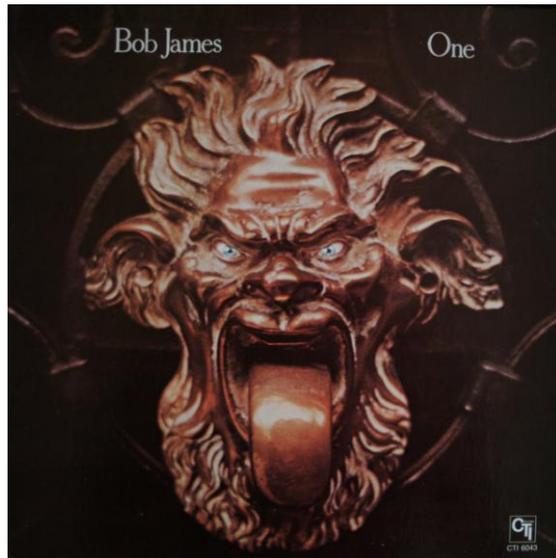
name notwithstanding, the title stuck, and has obviously evolved into common parlance in the vernacular of digging culture” (Hohlt 2004: 78)

As Soulman’s account – that I quoted earlier in this chapter regarding the origins of beat collecting – suggests, crate digging has remained a largely uncovered aspect of hip hop music making up until the mid 1990s. Most of the journalistic and scholarly reflections regarding the genealogy and history of digging that I have presented so far appeared in the wake of sample based hip hop’s popularity, after producers like Marly Marl, Eric B, Hank Shocklee & the Bomb Squad, Dr. Dre, Prince Paul, Pete Rock, Large Professor, Buckwild, Diamond D and DJ Premier established themselves as important figures in shaping hip hop music. It was due to the appreciation of their beats, and a gradually developing more profound interest surrounding their production methods and sample sources, that a wider scene of hip hop enthusiasts became involved with collecting older records, and in turn with exploring the origins and aesthetics of crate digging:

*’Cause I was so, like, you know hip hop, you know. ’Cause everything was like, in the early days, you know, it was like Kurtis Blow, and then, you know, I got into Rakim, and Kool G Rap and all that stuff. And rap was such a big part of my life. And it went until like the late ’80s, early ’90s when I started to... really started digging for records [...] We used to do this club out here, and John, Shortkut, would play all these samples, mixed up...you know...he’d play the rap record and throw in the original. And me and Derek were like, “Whoah!”, we only know how to DJ like [hip hop] records... throw in a Michael Jackson here and there, and John was just killing it. And we were like, “What are you doing? What is that?” And that’s when we started looking for Bob James and Grover Washington, Jr., and your typical diggin’ 101. [...] That’s how I got into it. (Justin Torres 2005)*

Justin Torres describes slower paced 1970s jazz fusion records as part of the “digging 101”, a new canon of beat collecting that was defined primarily by what was being sampled in significant hip hop recordings of the era. From the late 1980s on, the breaks repertoire expanded considerably: producers began to dig up new kinds of records that were often less dance-floor oriented than the old school breaks: 1960s soul, jazz, and blues, 1970s jazz funk, and easy listening among other things. The multi-layered production methods allowed for the use of non-percussive samples, often “chopped up”

to smaller segments and rearranged in a new sequence on top of a steady rhythmic backbone consisting of a drum loop or a programmed beat.



Bob James *One* and *Two*, Grover Washington, Jr. *Mister Magic* and *Feels So Good*, album covers

According to Schloss, this development of sample based production methods has redefined the notion of the break:

“Today the term ‘break’ refers to any segment of music (usually four measures or less) that could be sampled and repeated. For example, the song ‘They Reminisce Over You (T.R.O.Y.)’ by Pete Rock and C.L. Smooth is based on a break from a late-sixties jazz artist. The break in this case, however, is not a moment of intense drumming activity but a two-measure excerpt from a saxophone solo. Presumably one who was not already familiar with the hip hop song would not hear those particular measures as being significant in the context of the original music. In

contemporary terms, then, break is any expanse of music that is *thought of as a break* by a producer. [...] Record collecting is approached as if potential breaks have been unlooped and hidden randomly throughout the world's music. It is a producer's job to find them." (Schloss 2004: 36-37, emphasis in the original)

Schloss presents here a producer's perspective, however, as Torres's account suggests, hip hop DJs and fans often trace the trails of producers in order to find breaks that have been sampled for classic tracks. Regardless whether crate diggers look for yet unsampled material or the original recordings behind hip hop tracks, Schloss's account is indicative of the ways in which *this particular form of collecting pays less attention to the aesthetic contexts in which these recordings were initially produced and appreciated. As it emerges from Schloss definition, scenic musical appreciation is primarily focused on the segments that fit with the "conceptual approach towards sonic organisation" (Eshun 1999) that is laid down by sampled hip hop beats.* Schloss's observations resonate with Williams's (1971) remarks regarding the ways in which past texts are always selected and appreciated according to contemporary sensibilities. As the following account suggests, an awareness of sampled recordings provides an insight to the process of beat making, and thus, is often seen as essential to fully appreciating the creative skills of hip hop producers.

"Of course, if we're debating who's the king of flippin' beats, the title has to go to [...] DJ Premier. Yes, without a doubt those chopped up, minimalist tracks of his are the illest [i.e. most impressive]. But there's no way you can totally appreciate what the man does unless you know what records he's deconstructing and then reassembling like a hip hop Dr. Frankenstein. For example, the shit he used for 'Royalty' from the last Gang Starr album. My man Ryan at [the] Jump Jump Music [record store] played the original joint for me over the phone, and I'm like, 'Huh???' 'Trust me, that's what it is', he assured me. Okay. So I finally get the record he used, and I try to recreate what Primo did. I'm listening and listening and LISTENING to this shit – I hear the sounds in there, but I can't figure out how the hell he put this shit together, or how he could've even conceived this shit! [...]. But anyway I finally get it (pretty close, anyway) after hours of

work on the [Akai] MPC [sampler], and I put the results on my Soulman *World Of Beats Vol. 3* [mixtape] along with the original sample, so heads could see how it was flipped<sup>48</sup>.” (Soulman 1999b)

In this context, digging for sampled tracks often has more to do with revering hip hop producers than worshipping the musicians who recorded it. It is worth noting however, that the pleasures of the break aesthetics are not entirely confined to appreciating hip hop beats: more often than not, they emerge from recognizing and understanding the subtle intertextual connections between old and new music:

*Like I knew Lou Reed[’s] ‘Walk on the Wild Side’, so when [A] Tribe Called Quest Came out with ‘Can I Kick it?’ [that sampled the song], it was heavy as fuck. Because I was already into... like Velvet Underground in school before hip hop and stuff. So that freaked me out [...] because I knew the original record...*

*Not just they were samples, this was like a key to... music, you know. The... whatever... the Bible code, you know. [Laughs. ...] ‘Cause you loved the hip hop track, so you wanted to hear the ingredients, you wanted to know what it’s made from. And you wanted to... and we’d get into the... break thing. You wanted to hear what happened before the break... the break start... and what happened after it. The.. the obsession with that has started. And that is a big thing for me. [...] That moves... that power has just moved me a lot, you know. (Pro Celebrity Golf 2005)*

Pro Celebrity Golf’s account is telling of the complexity of the break aesthetics: the ways in which the recognition of sampled music contributes towards the appreciation of sample based beats, while older recordings are listened to with ears trained by hip hop tracks. His description is particularly illuminative regarding the “heaviness”, the affective depth of the musical experience that is often felt when one recognises well known elements in sampled or sample based tracks, or upon hearing an obscure non hip hop recording with a break appeal. Whereas I struggle to appropriately describe the power of this experience to move – the ways in which hearing some breaks sends

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<sup>48</sup> This mix is included in the “Original sample mixes” on the DVD Appendix Volume 1. Soulman’s reconstruction of Premier’s beat starts at 1’ 54” of the “Dig It!” side.

shivers down my spine, makes me nod my head to the rhythm – Golf’s account makes it clear that the break aesthetics extends beyond mere intellectual contemplation, and provides an important motivational force to become more involved with crate digging.

As I have argued earlier drawing on the work of Fish (1980) and Becker (1982), particular forms of subjective appreciations are not merely natural responses to music, but – to an important degree – are learnt in collective settings, often shaped by a range of different institutions that take part in the collective production of a shared history, generally agreed aesthetic conventions, as well as a canon of significant works and artists. Whereas beat collecting was a relatively uninstitutionalised musical world until the end of the 1980s, it underwent a profound transformation in the early to mid 1990s. In contrast to the earlier primacy of the *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* series and early sample based hip hop records in the formation and dissemination of the break aesthetics, a range of new players – self-made journalists, mixtape DJs, bootleggers, legitimate record companies, record shops – entered and extended the collective field where scenic tradition and appreciation was forged.

As I have mentioned earlier, Phill “Soulman” Stroman’s *World of Beats* was the first crate digging oriented regular column to appear in a nationwide publication within the United States. Soulman’s monthly section featured lists of records with breaks, interviews with respected hip hop producers, but also insightful talks with lesser known figures such as record dealers, and collectors who put together breaks compilations, and mixtapes. Soulman’s rants, reviews, interviews, and reports provided an insider’s view on the collecting culture that surrounded hip hop at a time when producers would not talk about their sample sources and production methods. This secretive attitude was partly a legacy of the old school DJs, however, it was also a means to minimise the risk of legal prosecution for uncleared samples after the first copyright infringement trials at the beginning of the 1990s (Franzen and McLeod 2009). Although Soulman’s column upset those who saw it as a breach of an unwritten rule (Soulman 1994b), it soon became instrumental in representing the scene, articulating its agenda, discussing its norms and controversies, as well as its history and aesthetics. Soulman’s column drew on a collectively formed understanding of the origins of and aesthetics of digging, as much as it contributed towards their articulation and mediation. It was in the context of such mediated retrospective historicising accounts that DJs like Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaata, and Grandmaster Flash emerged, not only as the founding fathers of hip hop,

but also the ancestors who have laid the foundations of beat collecting. In a similar fashion, while *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* was already a much used DJ tool and an important source of learning about breaks, accounts like Mason's previously quoted article (Mason 2002a) heightened their significance as authentic historical documents of an earlier era of digging, as well as the foundation upon which sample based producers built when they explored new territories in the appropriation of past music. The diversity of written sources that I quoted throughout this chapter appropriately indicate the expansion of mediated communication that contributed towards the solidification of crate digging as a distinct cultural tradition – with its own name, ancestors, genealogy, canon, vernacular, values, and contemporary figures.

*When I started the “World of Beats” column in Rap Sheet, there really was nothing like that, other than Cosmo [Baker] did his thing a little bit before me [in On The Go magazine]. It hadn't been done [on a national level]. I thought there was a void for it, obviously there was, from what everybody says to me now. But now, you get on the internet, you've got a lot of sites that deal with it, you know. You've got Soulstrut[.com], which you're familiar with, and it deals with that. There is plenty of forums on the internet. And you've got magazines like Wax Poetics, you used to have Grand Slam, Big Daddy, and all those... Scratch magazine... You've got a lot of magazines that deal with this stuff. I don't feel like there is a real need for “World of Beats” anymore [...] Pretty much I have helped set the table for all that and now other people have pretty much picked it up and ran with it. And that's cool with me. I'm happy. I'm happy to see it. I think people are taking it to another level. And that's cool. (Soulman 2005)*

Soulman's account is not just indicative of the pioneering role of his articles, but also a sense of purpose: what he did was important for the scene, because it fulfilled a certain collective need in the absence of other crate digging related publications. Furthermore, his reflections on the websites and magazines that have emerged in the wake of his column enable us to think about the scene not only as a network of co-operation, but as a shared social space in which participants influence and inspire each other.

The way in which scenic participants discuss sample and break oriented mixtapes<sup>49</sup> below resonates with Soulman's account, and offers further insight regarding how the circulation of scenic products is productive of a sense of involvement. Although the mixtape was an important medium for the dissemination of hip hop since the very beginning (Chang 2005), the first tapes that focused on older recordings that had been sampled in recent productions as well as obscure tracks with a similar appeal appeared at about the same time as Soulman's column. These tapes were influenced by the organisation of the hip hop beat: they seldom featured whole tracks, rather, they were patchwork-like assemblages, sometimes skillfully extended by using double copies, sometimes mixed in quick succession – one after the other – in many cases particular segments running for less than a minute. The tapes were made mostly by lesser known, underground producers and DJs like DJ Sheep, Ken Sport, DJ Muro, Soulman, the Conmen, Kon & Amir, and became an important medium of communication and inspiration within the inner circle of crate diggers: a way to display one's collection and knowledge, but also a means to hear new breaks, and get an idea of the presence and standing of others within the scene. Many of these tapemakers had a knowledge of breaks that matched, even surpassed that of celebrated hip hop producers, and their tapes often inspired collectors and beatmakers alike.

“I remember that *King of Diggin'* tape [by DJ Muro]' recalls [well known American hip hop producer] Lord Finesse 'because we was all twisted knowing that he was from Japan but he had all this knowledge of this music. Knowledge of some stuff we ain't even had at the time!’” (O'Connor 2005: 16)

“As far as inspiration for the [Conman] tapes, of course the Soulman tapes and Muro tapes kind of gave me the idea to do it. I had also heard some wack [i.e. unimpressive] tapes with a bunch of well known joints on there, and I thought we could come with something better. I think if you put out a tape of this nature that you should have some shit that I or my peoples don't know. Something to make me speculate on what it could be. There was one Muro tape that had a lot

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<sup>49</sup> I have included a selection of these mixes in the “Original sample mixes” folder on the DVD Appendix Volume 1.

of things I didn't know that got me amped.” (Jake One in Soulman 1999c)



Break mixtapes by the Conmen, Muro, and Kon & Amir

These accounts also reveal what Becker's (1982) and Fish's (1980) approaches pay little or any attention to: the way in which *the engagement with the collective shaping of shared aesthetic conventions is productive of a sense of participation and belonging in a specific cultural scene.*

In the absence of neatly organised sample-source guide books or break discographies, it took a laborious process of exploration to identify a break after first hearing it in a hip hop beat or on a mixtape. Whereas the break or sample tapes almost never included track lists, the second wave of break compilation records that gathered momentum in around the same period followed a less secretive approach, and provided useful starting points for beginners that looked for the originals behind popular hip hop recordings.

Focusing either on the sources of current hip hop hits, or the music that was used by a particular rap group or producer, these compilations usually revealed the identity of the sampled recordings, and also named the hip hop tracks in which they were used. Similarly to the *UBB* series, these compilations contributed towards the circulation of information about what was being sampled, as well as the crystallisation of a new canon of what Diamond D called “the second level of breaks” above. These compilations were

explicitly framed in the context of sampling – as opposed to the conventional music anthologies that are organised around a particular period, genre or artist. The fact that many of these sample-source anthologies were available in specialist stores of Budapest – a relatively remote and small market for hip hop where printed information on breaks was difficult, if not impossible to obtain at the time – in the mid-1990s is indicative of the role these records played in the transnational dissemination of the break aesthetics.



Strictly Breaks Volume 5, Tribes Vibes, covers

Similarly to break mixtapes, some compilation series like *Vinyl Dogs* and *Dusty Fingers* went beyond what was already sampled and led the way in exploring musical territories that producers so far had left untouched:

*The Dusty Fingers series [...] got a lot of people really excited, because that's for a while became sort of the new UBB. I mean, I'm pretty certain that a lot of the songs that ended up... uhm.. there's a lot of hip hop songs that got made that sampled off those comps rather*

*than the originals. You know, because they were... whoever put together the Dusty Fingers was really ahead of the curve on library records, like they were using that, soundtracks, European jazz [...].*  
(Oliver Wang 2005)

Oliver Wang's suggestion regarding the seminal role that the *Dusty Fingers* series played in extending the musical spectrum of crate digging among enthusiasts as much as producers resonates with my previous observations regarding the significance of break mixtapes. Both cases are indicative of the complex interplay between different kinds of scenic actors – producers, the DJs behind mixtapes and compilations – in shaping the break aesthetics.

The “golden age of sample based hip hop” stretched from the second part of the 1980s, well into the mid-1990s (Schloss 2004), until the production trends in the increasingly commercial hip hop mainstream (McLeod 1999; Chang 2005) changed in favour of synthesizers, drum machines and live instrumentations<sup>50</sup>. However, the body of work produced in the golden era inspired a new generation of producers who kept alive the cut and paste production methods. From the mid 1990s onwards a third wave of producers – DJ Shadow, Cut Chemist, DJ Krush, DJ Vadim, Madlib, RJD2, and others – elevated sample based hip hop production beyond being the mere musical background to rapping, by creating crackling instrumental soundscapes often coupled by album cover art or sleeve notes that explicitly reflected “on a lifetime of vinyl culture”<sup>51</sup> and the art of digging. Some of these instrumental works – like DJ Shadow's *Endtroducing.....* album – crossed over to a more diverse audience, and was well received by crate diggers, but failed to excite followers of the increasingly commercial hip hop acts.

This emerging generation of producers was also involved in making beats for hip hop MCs within the underground rap scene that is often referred to as independent hip hop. The boundaries separating the hip hop “underground” from rap acts that came to

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<sup>50</sup> These musical trends were largely influenced by the radically increasing costs involved with sample based production from the beginning from the 1990s onwards, after the first successful legal attempts by artists and labels to claim compensation for the use of their music in sample based hip hop productions. From then on, rights owners of the sampled recordings often demanded prohibitively high licensing fees (McLeod 2002; Franzen and McLeod 2009).

<sup>51</sup> “This album reflects on a lifetime of vinyl culture” was DJ Shadow's introduction to the list of originators - DJs and sample based hip hop producers – to whom he dedicated his *Endtroducing* album (1996).

dominate the global pop charts from the second half of the 1990s, began to emerge in the middle of the decade (Chang 2005). Although production methods played a certain



**This album reflects a lifetime of vinyl culture.**

For further research on the evolution of sample-based music, check the innovators:

**(Pioneers)**

Kool Herc, Bam, Grand Wiz Theodore, Jazzy Jay, Red Alert, Tony Tone, D.ST, Flash, Charly Chase, etc.

**(Groundwork)**

Hurby Love Bug, Steinski, Rick Rubin, Dave Ogryn, Patrick Gammon (and all of the old-school engineers), Marley Marl, Art of Noise, Trevor Horn, Arthur Baker, Joe "The Butcher", Sam Sever, Paul C. King of Chill, Ced Gee, Eric B., Daddy-O, Dr. Dre, Simon Harris, Coldcut etc.

**(More masters)**

Prince Paul, Solid Productions, Diamond D, T-Ray, Large Professor, Tony D., DJ Premier, Grand Puba Maxwell, Ali Shaheed Muhammed, Dust Brothers, Pete Rock, Yann Tomita, Afrika Baby-Bam, Beatnuts, Biz Markie, Major Force Posse, Shocklee, Sadler & the Bomb Squad, DJ Pooh, Geoff Barrow, DJ Mark the 45 King.

**All Respect Due to the original 'edits' crew. (Chopping beats Hip-Hop style):**

Mantronik, Chep Nunez, Carlos Berrios, Omar Santana, Latin Rascals and last but not least, Gigolo Tony for putting out "He Is DJ Crash", the ultimate edit track.

**All Respect Due to the DJs that inspired me through the years:**

Magic Mike, DJ Premier, DJ Man (Shy D), Dr Dre (for "Surgery"), The KDAY Mixmasters 1985-1987, Dave Moss (KMEL), Michael Erickson (KSOL), Mr. Mix & the Ghetto Style DJs, Rockmaster Scott, and all the early soloists, Hijack Djs (U.K), Mixmaster Ice, Unknown DJ (for "Breakdown"), Jam Master Jay, Grandmaster Flash, Cash Money, Jazzy Jeff, Code Money, Q-Bert & the Rocksteady DJs.

**All Respect Due to James Brown and his countless disciples for inventing modern music.**



The gatefold cover and sleeve notes of DJ Shadow's *Endtroducing.....* LP.

role in stylistically differentiating the two musical worlds, “independent” artists, labels, and their audiences often explicitly took an alternative or oppositional stance in the face of hip hop’s commercialisation. The music that came out in the independent scene in the second half of the 1990s has never achieved the popularity of hits that had been produced in the golden era. Mainstream hip hop acts like Jay-Z, Kanye West, Nas, and Ghostface Killah occasionally still rap over sampled beats, and their samples are still pursued within the scene to some extent; however, by the end of the 1990s, many of the crate diggers who started collecting breaks between the late 1980s and the mid 1990s – the particular generation whose experiences and views I pursue in the following chapters – had lost interest in closely following new releases in hip hop or collecting the music that was sampled in recent productions.



Pete Rock & C.L. Smooth *They Reminiscence Over You (T.R.O.Y.)*, 12” Single sleeve, People Under the Stairs “O.S.T.” LP cover

*[S]ampling [after the mid 1990s] was just seen as really dead in mainstream hip hop production. And the only kids [that] were still doing it were these independent groups whose music at that point I really ceased to really find much to like about. [...] You know, a lot of bands I could sort of name... to me they were just furthering the aesthetic that Pete Rock, and Large Professor, and Buckwild started in the early to mid '90s... And I didn't really see much progression there. So I wasn't really interested in documenting what they were using sample-wise. 'Cause Pete Rock using the Tom Scott break for “They Reminiscence Over You”, I mean that's a sample that becomes classic. I don't know of anything that People Under the Stairs' ever*

*sampled that has the same kind of stature. And it's not their fault, it's because hip hop has changed.*<sup>52</sup>

While contemporary sample based hip hop productions – with the exceptions of the beats of a new generation of producers like J Dilla, MF Doom, Kanye West, and Jake One – lost centrality in shaping the break aesthetics in the late 1990s, the interest in identifying, collecting, and playing the obscure sources of seminal golden era productions prevail even at the time of writing this thesis, as the abundance of contemporary sample source compilations, break mixes, magazine articles, and online discussions indicate.

As the above account indicates, the significance of these sampled originals for crate diggers is intimately tied to the standing of the sampling song in a canon of seminal hip hop tracks, and is often discussed referring to a lineage of producers. Similarly to what I have suggested with regard to the *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* series, *the practices – digging for, listening to, discussing, and sharing breaks – through which crate diggers engage with sample sources could be seen as means of participation in the collective cultivation of a shared history, a tradition of collecting in which “the golden era” played a formative role.*

*The (Rap) Sample FAQ* – an extensive, collaboratively expanded, searchable online rap sample database that grew out of a mailing list where enthusiasts shared their knowledge of breaks in the mid 1990s, and was later renamed *The Breaks* – made manifest the canon of the “second level of breaks” for the first time, serving as an early blueprint to subsequent sample guides like *Who Sampled*<sup>53</sup>, and Model Art Tokyo’s *Sampling Dictionaries* (2008b, 2008a).

By making available an unprecedented wealth of information regarding sample sources in an easily accessible form world wide, *The (Rap) Sample FAQ* evaporated the mystery that surrounded the sources of many samples that had been used in the golden era, nevertheless, it also marked the beginning of a new era, when participation in the public shaping of the breaks aesthetics was no longer limited to a small inner circle of producers, journalists, DJs and bootleggers.

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<sup>52</sup> As my interviewee mentioned that a publication of such critical views might put him in an uncomfortable situation, I’ve decided to keep his identity secret.

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.the-breaks.com/>, <http://www.whosampled.com/>, accessed 11 March 2010.



*The Sampling Dictionary 2008* and *The Re:Sampling Dictionary 2008*, book covers<sup>54</sup>

Whereas so far I have concentrated on scenic actors that took part in the network of co-operation in which the break aesthetics was forged, it is important to note that this process was not entirely confined to institutions internal to the scene. Recording industry giants like EMI have experimented with re-releasing music from their back catalogue on breakbeat and sample-source themed compilation albums from the early 1990s onwards. Other major recording industry companies also endorsed this repackaging strategy after the end of the decade<sup>55</sup> paralleling the success of sampling related scenic bootleg compilations, and a growing number of legitimate reissues and anthologies by smaller labels like Strut, Harmless, and BGP. The compilations released by extra-scenic parties partly drew on an already significant recognition of and interest in breaks and samples among hip hop enthusiasts, as well as fans of sample based pop and electronic music, and targeted a much wider, more general audience than merely DJs and producers or rap fans<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Image sources: <http://www.dustygroove.com/prip/0/0/474200i.htm>, <http://www.dustygroove.com/prip/7/5/475657i.htm>, accessed 21 February 2010.

<sup>55</sup> EMI certainly led the way among major companies with its Blue Note and Stateside related anthologies, as well as the four part *Sampled* series (released under the Virgin imprint). However, Universal's *James Brown Breakbeat* compilation (published under the Polydor label) and *Sampled!* (a Verve Jazz Club release), and Warner's *Right On! Break Beats And Grooves From The Atlantic & Warner Vaults* 4 CD boxed set indicate this trend.

<sup>56</sup> Personal communication with Quinton Scott who worked on compilation projects like *Pulp Fusion* – a jazz funk series that explicitly mentioned sampled tracks in its liner notes – *DJ Pogo Presents the Breaks* and *DJ Pogo Presents Block Party Breaks* in this period.

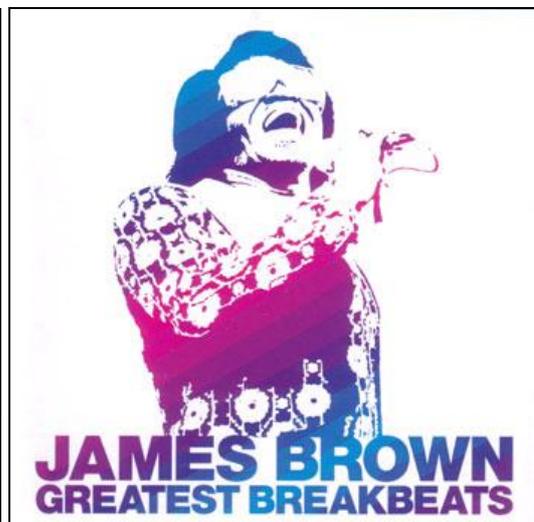


The sampler, while far from making the DJ obsolete, changed the music of hip-hop. The hip-hop producer emerged as a derivative of the DJ. The raw elements of a hip-hop track in purest form are the bits and pieces of a record. Today, this is most clearly and purely embodied in the works of a prominent DJ/producer, DJ Premier. Samplers used as instruments manipulate samples (sounds and loops) into a new musical format, Hip-Hop. A sample can be as long as eight bars or more, or as short as one note, and as with the pioneering DJ's the skill of a producer lies technically in his ability to manipulate a sample or samples into a track. The most reputable hip-hop producers are also renowned for their expansive record collections. Hence the name of famed production crew "Diggin' In the Crates." The selection of a sample has become an obsession for the truest of producers, and although certain forms of music are more popular than others for sampling, now more than ever, all forms are fair game for chopping, looping and reshaping. Labels of other eras; Cadet, Flying Dutchman, People, Black Jazz, Polydor, Strata-East, Prestige, Inner City, as well as those still functioning, are common stock in the arsenals of top producers, who forever rummage through endless pre-recorded songs and sound-bits in search of the elusive break.

Among the record labels whose vintage sides are frequently sampled is Blue Note. And of the many records on Blue Note used for their breaks some of those most often used are from the output of Bobbi Humphrey. The

Compilations from EMI's *Blue Breakbeats* series, excerpt from Aton Adair's liner notes for Bobbi Humphrey *Blue Breakbeats*.

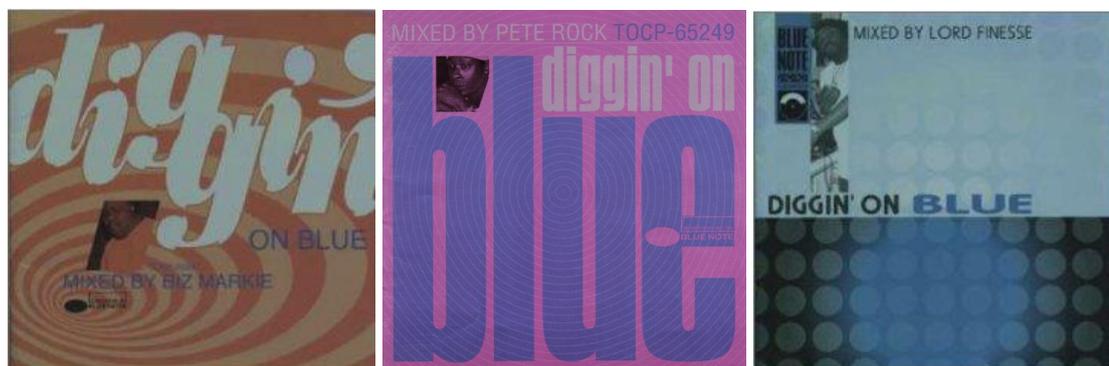
The intentions to make the breaks aesthetic more accessible are apparent in the explanatory tone in which the liner notes of these anthologies often reflected on crate digging.



Major label compilations, covers<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.discogs.com/viewimages?release=364709>,  
<http://www.discogs.com/viewimages?release=465704>, accessed 11 March 2010.

EMI, the company that held the catalogue of Blue Note, a jazz label that had been much sampled in the early to mid 1990s, even drew on the concept of break mixtapes, and released a series of mix CDs entitled *Diggin' On Blue* in Japan by the end of the decade, mixed by prominent American hip hop producers, as well as similar mix by Japan's mixtape king, DJ Muro<sup>58</sup>.



Diggin On Blue mixes by Biz Markie, Pete Rock, and Lord Finesse, covers<sup>59</sup>

The fact that record industry majors felt safe about marketing soul, jazz and funk in a hip hop context, often explicitly using terms such as “breakbeats”, “breaks” or “sampled” instead of conventional genre labels suggests a sizeable audience who recognised the break aesthetics to some degree. The solidification of “breaks” into genre category – a label that implies a particular audience, a genre history, and a form of appreciation – is also apparent in the ways in which some specialist record merchants categorise their inventory today.

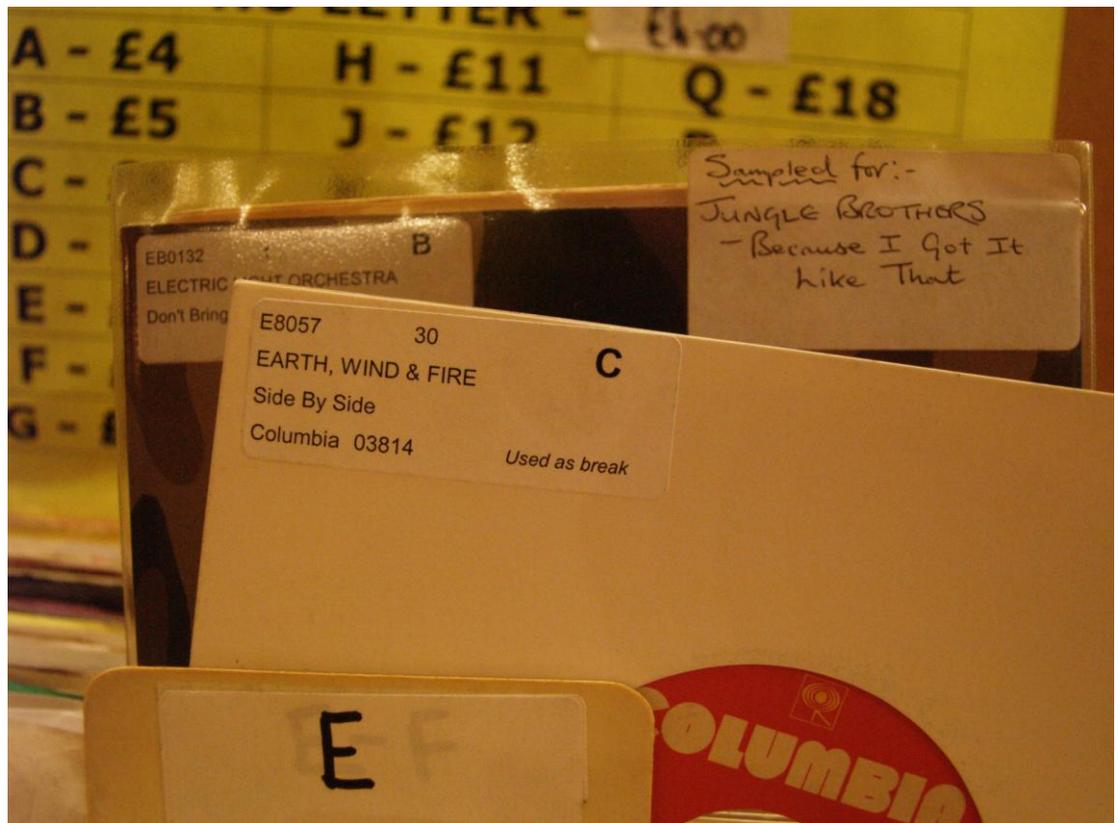
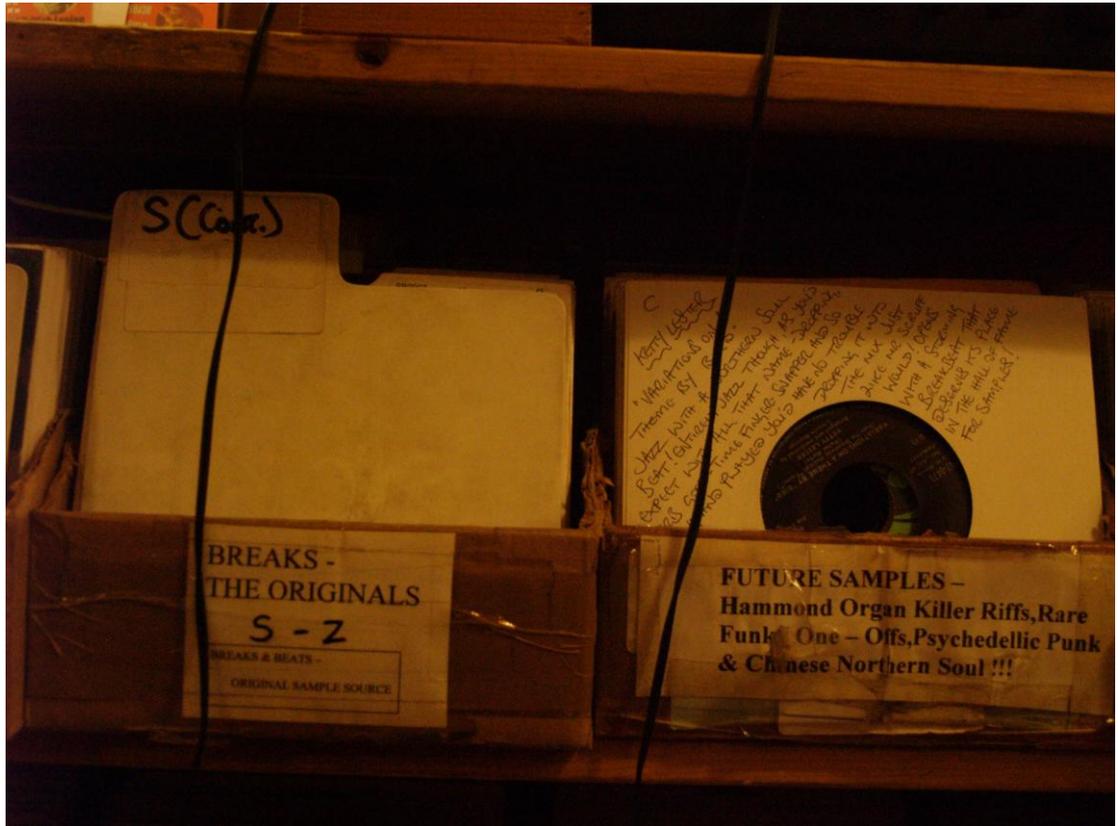
Simon Frith (1996b: 77) notes that record stores are usually among the first institutions to recognize the emergence of new genres, as they are in direct contact with the customers and learn about their aesthetic sensibilities, and interests earlier than the music industry. Indeed, “breaks”, “breaks and beats”, “breaks, loops and samples”, “drum breaks”, “b-boy breaks” are a few of the generic labels I came across at record fairs, shops, market stalls of record dealers and online auctions from the late 1990s onwards.

I will explore the significance of the handful of specialist stores that are run by crate diggers in the crystallisation and mediation of the break aesthetics in more detail in

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<sup>58</sup> I have included these mixes in the “Original sample mixes” folder on the DVD Appendix Volume 1.

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.discogs.com/image/R-1479752-1222802226.jpeg>, <http://www.discogs.com/image/R-1189717-1199987342.jpeg>, <http://www.discogs.com/image/R-1479757-1222802547.jpeg>, accessed 15 February 2010.



The breaks section. Beating Rhythm, Manchester, 2008

Chapter 7. Now I only concentrate on the fact that even merchants with a less hip hop specific interest began to categorise their inventory in a way that took crate diggers into account as an important segment of their clientele.

The case of Beating Rhythm illustrates my point: this Manchester based soul and funk 7” singles specialist store had both “Breaks – The Originals. Breaks & Beats – Original Source” and “Future Samples” among the categories by which they organized their stock when I visited in 2007. As the break aesthetics cross-cuts traditional genres, they had empty sleeves in the funk and soul racks notifying their costumers that they would find these singles in the breaks section.



An empty 7” single sleeve in the funk section. Beating Rhythm, Manchester, 2008

Another sign of the development of breaks into a genre in its own right is the ways in which classic b-boy breaks and hip hop samples became the source of inspiration for a number of funk bands that pay homage to hip hop history by covering classic instrumental grooves in their live sets or on their records from the mid 1990s onwards.

The tracks on Breakestra’s *Live Mix* series – featuring live renditions of classic hip hop samples blending into each other in quick succession – replicated the aesthetics of breaks mixtapes. El Michels Affair released an album playing cover versions of RZA’s sample based beats on Wu-Tang Clan’s *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)* album,

while a group called Ultimate Breaks & Beats released instrumental covers of songs from the *UBB* compilations.

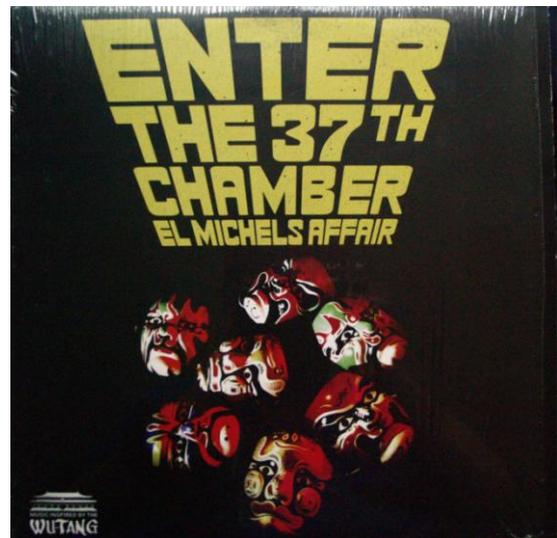
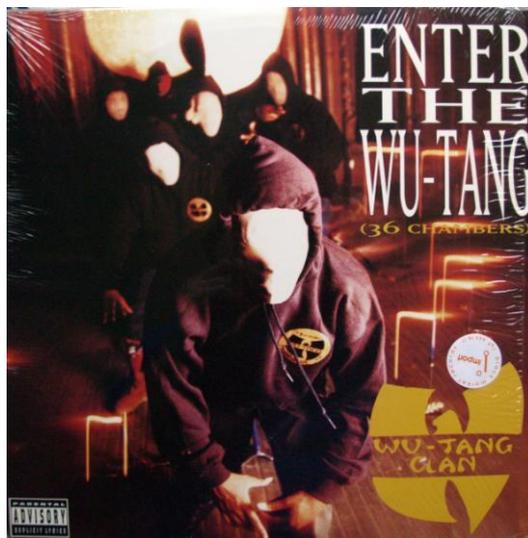


Breakestra *The Live Mix Part 2* cover art, Part 2 cover

Because I believe in The Breakestra - in their vision, in their mission. These are able musicians, not just playing funk for funk's sake, but playing funk because they've studied the music and realize that a certain power and emotion somehow got lost in the shuffle from one commercial form to the next. These are musicians who know the hip hop aesthetic. They understand the progression of the music from a DJ backcueing "Apache" to Doug Wimbush and the Sugar Hill House Band replaying "Cavern" to forward-thinking producers digging deeper and deeper into funk's past to create contemporary backdrops for their rapping counterparts. These are musicians that wish to educate through entertainment. And they succeed admirably.

The Breakestra play funk for the lowest common denominator. They play classics by Sly Stone and Kool And The Gang without mocking the greatness of these innovators. Agreed, they may rock an inventive cover of some deep-dish 45, but they won't hesitate to bust into Charles Wright or Weather Report. They're no breakbeat snobs. They aren't wet-mouths that got into funk 'cause they heard a Keb Darge comp and want to match the crate depth of some hell-bent collector that has been buying 7"s since 1979. Their live set incorporates funk to hip hop riffs popularized in rap songs, funk classics, unknown gems considered classic within the hip hop canon and original compositions. They play with frightful intensity, and are a sight to see.

Breakestra *The Live Mix Part 2* sleeve notes.



Wu-Tang Clan *Enter The Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)*, El Michels Affair *Enter the 37<sup>th</sup> Chamber*, record sleeves.

These examples are, again, telling about the ways in which an awareness and appreciation of the break aesthetics was no longer confined to record enthusiasts – DJs,

producers and collectors. The history of appropriative music making within hip hop became an important means through which younger musicians – and their audiences – engaged with music of the past, influencing contemporary performed and recorded repertoires, as well as compositional practices.



Cover art and label design for Ultimate Breaks & Beats *Instrumentals* LPs, label design from the original UBB series

Whereas the origins and aesthetics of beat collecting were little known beyond a small circle of hip hop DJs and producers at the beginning of the 1990s, as we have seen, it solidified into a more defined and accessible tradition as a result of the contributions of both scenic and extra-scenic institutions by the end of the decade. *The circulation of journalistic coverage, mixtapes, and break compilations crystallised particular appreciative conventions* – defined to a significant degree through a canon of key works and artists – but, just as importantly, it *also made manifest an intimate network of producers, DJs and collectors that took part in the public shaping of the crate digging*

*tradition*. Implicitly, the presence of break collecting oriented matter in niche magazines and record shops also made apparent a steadily growing *scene of enthusiast with similar tastes beyond the inner circle of public figures*. I'm hesitant to use the term "audience" here with regard to this wider social world, because of the connotations of atomization and passivity that this notion often evokes.

I have already noted the spirit of activism and participation among crate diggers that publicly contributed to the shaping of scenic culture. Nevertheless, Justin Torres's account of his introduction to digging and Soulman's reference to his friend's phone call regarding the record DJ Premier had sampled urges us to think about *the whole scene* as a *connected, collective space in which crate diggers participate primarily through the exchange of information, influences and inspirations in a web of both personal and mediated connections*<sup>60</sup>. As I have suggested earlier, the advent of the internet contributed towards the emergence of a more participative – or democratic in Jack M. Balkin's terms – culture within the scene, in which

"individuals have a fair opportunity to participate in the forms of meaning making that constitute them as individuals. Democratic culture is about individual liberty as well as collective self-governance; it is about each individual's ability to participate in the production and distribution of culture." (Balkin 2004: 3)

Although Balkin's essay is focused mainly on regulatory issues, his insight regarding the empowering potential of networked digital media resonates with the increasing prominence of internet based communication – online forums, mailing lists, music blogs, web-radios, and video sharing channels among other platforms – in the collective production of a shared scenic history, appreciation and identity since the end of the 1990s. As the ways in which the solidification and mediation of the break aesthetics was situated in an expanding participative network is probably clear by now, in the next section I will explore the stylistic expansion and fragmentation of scenic tastes that happened simultaneously with the canonization of b-boy breaks and samples, as well as the diversification and decentralization of scenic infrastructure after the Millennium.

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<sup>60</sup> I will explore the significance of these influences in Chapter 6.

## 4.5 BEYOND BREAKS

*Everything is picked over now [in record shops and flea markets]. How long have people really been digging for records in the vein of hip hop and what not? How long has that been going on? Ten years? Fifteen years, maybe? OK, all the funk's gone. All the soul's gone. Couple of years ago Brainfreeze<sup>61</sup> came out, right, so all the 45[RPM, 7" single]s are gone. So people kind of have a tendency to [say] "Well, let's, find something else." So now...*

*...Brazilian...*

*Yeah, now it's all the Brazilian. Now it's all the...*

*...and disco...*

*Now it's all the disco. Now it's all the folk, the folk-funk, or the psych, whatever. Crazy, right? Next thing you know it will be... even is, now it's nineties hip hop, indie hip hop, from the eighties and nineties. It's always something new. [...] It's a funny thing, shows both the ingenuity of the digger and the desperation of the situation, because the things are just drying up. [...] There is nineties hip hop 12" [singl]es, things that I had, going for 600-700 dollars. For a fucking 12"! (Cosmo Baker 2005)*

While contemporary hip hop has lost its appeal to many diggers within the scene from the late 1990s, the focus of digging has also shifted from mainly American jazz, funk, soul and rock recordings to musical territories previously left untouched by diggers, like soundtracks, rare funk 7" singles (Soulman 2000a; Wang 2002), East-European (Hopkins 2008), Central and South American (Alapatt and Cut Chemist 2003; Gyemant 2005, 2006; Thayer 2006; Ríos 2007), Cuban (Yglesias 2008), African (Cleret and

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<sup>61</sup> DJ Shadow and Cut Chemist released a mix-CD entitled *Brainfreeze* with the pioneering concept of playing exclusively funk, soul, pop and rock 7" singles containing breaks in a very technical, turntablist style. The CD that was to document their practice for a gig became so popular that they organised a tour to play the contents of the CD live. The film that included footage of the last gig of the tour and the rehearsals (DJ Shadow & Cut Chemist 2001), as well as several bootleg compilation albums that contained the music played on the Brainfreeze set turned the attention of the crate digging scene to the previously largely ignored domain of 7" singles (cf. Soulman 2000a; Wang 2002).

Holland 2005), Turkish (Paul 2008), and Indian records, ultra rare, esoteric releases on small, local independent labels or private pressings (Carfanga 2002, 2003, 2004b, 2004a), psychedelic rock, children's records, 12" disco singles (Mason 2003a), albums released by music schools (Alapatt 2003), sound library records for media production companies (Hollander 2009), early hip hop 12" singles on small independent labels, and so on.

Cosmo Baker credits the trends of shifting musical interests among crate diggers to the effects of a collective revalorisation of previously neglected records on the second hand vinyl market. His account resonates with the observations of many of my interviewees regarding the ways in which a range of previously relatively cheap and easily available records became in demand due to sampling. The growing demand led to shrinking supplies, and in turn, steadily increasing prices from the mid 1990s onwards. What used to be a chaotic mass of cheap bin material – records generally dismissed by collectors of more conventional tastes – was gradually sifted through, and reorganised according to the break aesthetics<sup>62</sup>.

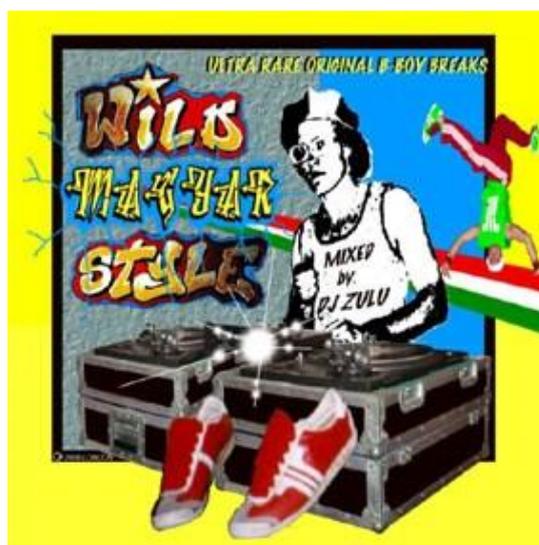
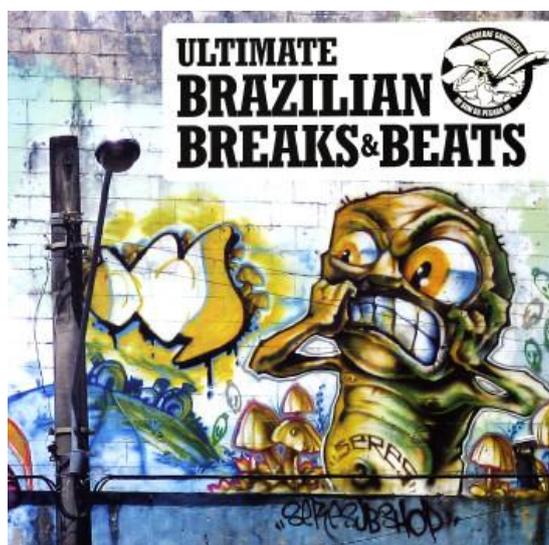
*Whereas the collective exploration of breaks – as I have described in the previous subsection – resulted in the solidification of a distinctive core of canonical recordings that is central to the definition and demarcation of scenic tastes and identities, the crystallisation of this shared canon paradoxically also contributed towards the stylistic expansion of the break aesthetics. By the end of the 1990s it became increasingly difficult for crate diggers to stumble upon a desired record at a low price, or find yet undiscovered breaks by taking chances on relatively cheap jazz, soul, and funk records. The ready availability of the breaks related information did not only diminish the thrill of the hunt and raise the costs involved with collecting, but also contradicted with the ethos of creativity and work that is central to crate digging<sup>63</sup>. The effects of canonisation on the second hand market could thus be seen as an important force that motivated many scenic participants to move on to yet unexplored musical terrains, and “find something else”.*

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<sup>62</sup> Will Straw describes this correspondence between collective re-valorisation of particular musical forms and the gradual disappearance of canonised music from record stores as a specific logic at work in the second hand market of vinyl (Straw 2000). I will provide a more thorough discussion of the transforming landscape of second hand record trade in Chapter 8.

<sup>63</sup> I will describe these principles of the crate digging ethos in more detail in the following chapter.

The shifting interests in scenic musical exploration, however, were not driven solely by transforming material scarcities and prices. As I have noted earlier, staying “ahead of the curve” on records and maintaining the exclusivity of one’s selection was a marker of status among the competitive DJs – and later, producers – from the earliest days of hip hop. Just as importantly perhaps, by the end of the 1990s, a generation of crate diggers has assembled sizeable collections – and exhaustive knowledge – of American jazz, funk, soul, and disco records and were also looking for new sources of excitement. Furthermore, with the translocalisation of the scene, diggers from outside the US – mainly from Europe, Japan, Australia, Canada, and Brazil – also began to explore their own local heritages of recorded music for breaks, and influenced collectors world wide by sharing their discoveries on compilations and mixes<sup>64</sup>, but also by trading records and exchanging information online. Records that typically only had a geographically limited circulation would hardly have become the focus of lasting transnational attention were they not available via *eBay*, *GEMM*<sup>65</sup>, and other online places of second hand vinyl exchange, as well as a range of reissues and anthologies.



A Brazilian compilation, and DJ Zulu’s *Wild Magyar Style* – a mix CD of Hungarian breaks, covers<sup>66</sup>

The successive waves of stylistic expansion of the breaks aesthetics were intensified by the availability of detailed journalistic coverage of various kinds of obscure records in magazines like *Wax Poetics*, but also in online forums – like *Soul Strut*, *The Breaks*,

<sup>64</sup> I have included a selection of these mixes in the “Digging beyond breaks” folder on the DVD Appendix Volume 2.

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.ebay.com/>, <http://www.gemm.com/>, accessed 11 March 2010.

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.discogs.com/viewimages?release=889112>, [http://hiphop.ne.hu/index.php?pg=news\\_3\\_751](http://hiphop.ne.hu/index.php?pg=news_3_751), accessed 2 March 2010.

*Old School Hip Hop* – and music blogs written by scenic participants – Oliver Wang’s *Soul Sides*, Soulman’s *That Real Schitt*, Matthew Africa’s *I Wish You Would*, and countless others, like *Masscorporation*, *Heavy in the Streets*, *Crate Kings*, or *Dust and Grooves*<sup>67</sup>. Whereas it took more than a decade for the canon of b-boy breaks to crystallise in the absence of an infrastructure that would have enabled a large number of participants to effectively share information over great distances, new directions are now often carved out and exhausted for breaks in a matter of a few years.

Although well recognisable trends of popularity are apparent in, as much as shaped by, scenic media coverage, reissue strategies, mixes, online discussions, and the transforming prices of particular kinds of records, it is also worth noting that *the scene also seems to have diversified and fragmented, with smaller groups of collectors specialising in the exploration of particular musical styles*, as the following account by British record dealer, DJ and producer Huw72 suggests.

*For the breaks lot, it’s always just two crowds, the b-boy breaks crew, who only want the fast stuff, and they don’t want clean breaks, slow, clean breaks which I love [...] and yeah, it’s like little pockets, you’re right: there’s Brazilian crew, Latin crew, rock crew, psych rock crew, and of course tastes have changed, so right now it’s really hard to play disco out, so psych’s kinda more bigger, anything rocky is more bigger now, so... the digging taste changes, you know. And also you get bored, you don’t want always American records, so it’s much more exciting to find a killer [record] from Europe.... er.... Oh, and yeah, from Turkey. That’s why last we had like the Turkish breaks stuff going off. That’s now kinda died down now... [...] it always changes. (Huw72 2007)*

Apart from the stylistic diversification and fragmentation of scenic musical interests that Cosmo Baker’s and Huw72’s accounts indicate, the third important tendency in the contemporary transformation of scenic tastes is the way in which for many, *the appreciation of older music became less explicitly focused on breaks and samples, and*

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<sup>67</sup> <http://www.soulstrut.com/ubbthreads/ubbthreads.php>, <http://the-breaks.com/forums/>, <http://www.oldschoolhiphop.com/board.htm>, <http://www.soul-sides.com/>, <http://www.thatrealschitt.com/>, <http://www.matthewafrica.com/>, <http://masscorporation.blogspot.com/>, <http://heavyinthestreets.blogspot.com/>, <http://www.cratekings.com/>, <http://www.dustandgrooves.com/>, accessed 11 March 2010.

*more informed by conventional genre based aesthetics, especially among more established crate diggers.*

*On my audio blog I actually I sort of go out of my way not to mention that... if I throw up a song that “Oh, by the way it’s been sampled”. Because... I mean, it might just sound ironic, but I just feel like I sort of like... it seems a silly for me to do that. Because it... because it reduces the song or the artist to just a sample. And I think if I’ve learnt anything through digging is that to appreciate that it’s much more than just a loop or a drum break that makes a song interesting. (Oliver Wang 2005, his emphasis)*

Oliver Wang, a crate digger, music journalist, and author of *Soul Sides*<sup>68</sup> – an influential music blog focused mainly on soul, funk, jazz and Latin music of the 1960s and ’70s – thought that I might find his account ironic, being aware of the years he had spent exploring the original sources beyond hip hop beats. His transforming approach to music illustrates Antoine Hennion’s insight that musical appreciation is a constantly forming sensibility, rather than a given, static property (2001). Although some of my interviewees described different pathways – leading from an appreciation of soul, funk, jazz, or 1990s sample based electronic music towards hip hop and breaks – Oliver Wang’s case is illustrative of a trajectory that is more common among scenic participants. Most of the crate diggers I have talked to in the US and the UK began exploring older recordings inspired primarily by sample based hip hop, focusing first on samples, and then gradually gravitating towards more conventional forms of appreciation.

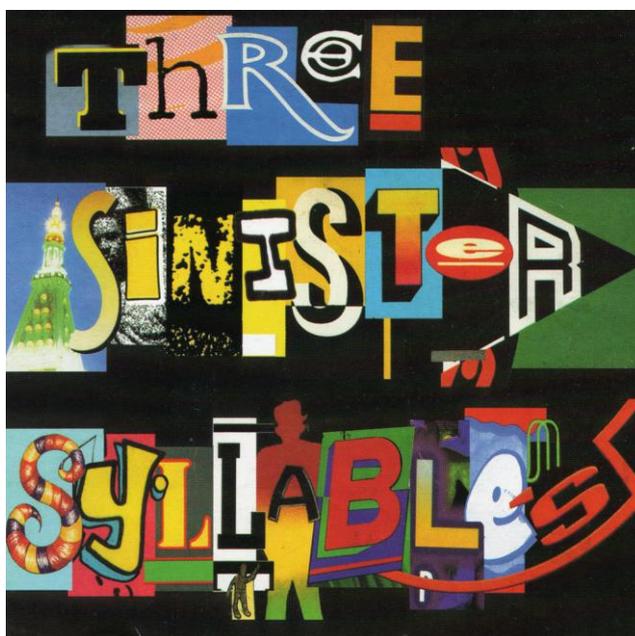
While many has turned away from hip hop and sampling entirely, others began to exploring the originals behind the beats of the generation of hip hop producers that made themselves a name between the mid to late 1990s – DJ Shadow, MF Doom, and J Dilla among others – and creating sample mixes that paid tribute to the work of particular beat makers. In rare cases, like Pro Celebrity Golf and Jay Glaze’s 2004

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<sup>68</sup> <http://soul-sides.com/>, accessed 8 March 2010.

mixtape, *Three Sinister Syllables*<sup>69</sup>, they have not only followed old blueprints, but elevated the ways in which breaks were put to use in new, appropriative works:

“[Pro Celebrity] Golf had realised a gap in the mixtape culture, which was essentially an homage to the sample sources from the kind of independent hip hop tracks popular on the underground scene during the mid to late ’90s. He also envisioned a mixtape that was so dense in content that it went beyond the traditional mixtape concept and seemed more like an ‘actual’ album. [...] Some of the scenes dopest artists, journalists and mini moguls began proclaiming *Three Sinister Syllables* as being one of the greatest mixes to date. [...] It is still considered 5 years later as being miles ahead of the game and the likes of Steinski and Coldcut have lauded it as a significant progression of the scarcely visited medium.” (Anon. 2009)



Three Sinister Syllables, CD cover<sup>70</sup>

The above description of the mixtape – taken from the issuer Chopped Herring label’s website – is not empty boasting: the mix radically expanded the collage aesthetics of earlier edit-tracks. The mix – that took two years of daily work to accomplish – features

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<sup>69</sup> I have included a copy of this mix in the “Original sample mixes” folder of the DVD Appendix Volume 1.

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.flickr.com/photos/76345608@N00/2062844732>, accessed 18 September 2010

over two hundred and fifty breaks and dozens of sampled movie dialogue excerpts seamlessly woven together into eleven tracks of unprecedented density (Anon. 2006b).

*Although crate digging has never been a clearly bounded and isolated scene, stylistic diversification, specialisation and the adaptation of more conventional tastes among diggers extended and intensified its overlaps and interactions with other collecting scenes, most prominently with the stylistically eclectic scene that is often referred to as “rare groove” collecting<sup>71</sup>.*

As old school breaks and sampled “originals” are usually taken from records within the eclectic mix of styles – soul, funk, jazz to afrobeat, salsa, Brazilian, disco or even reggae from mostly the 1960s and 1970s – that rare groove collectors are interested in, collectors easily slip from one scene to the other in both directions, and they are often at home in more than one musical world at once. The hazy boundaries among various collecting scenes bring to mind Ruth Finnegan’s (1989: 180-190) ethnographic observations regarding the ways in which various local music worlds drew on and fed into each other in a British town. Inspired by Becker’s insights regarding the intersections and mutual dependencies among “art worlds” (1982: 34), Finnegan describes the situations, and institutions that bring together participants from different scenes, and argues that musicians often belong to more stylistic scenes at once, or move back and forth between them.

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<sup>71</sup> Norman Jay – an influential British DJ – is widely credited with coining this term. The Original Rare Groove Show, his programme – consisting of previously overlooked or forgotten funk, jazz funk and disco music from the 1970s – on the then pirate Kiss 94 FM has certainly contributed to the popularisation of this idiom in the 1980s (see <http://www.normanjay.com/>, accessed 4 March 2010).

Regardless of whether they actually used the “rare groove” label then, DJs have played a similar selection of older records in other points of the world, like Paris, Berlin, San Francisco and Los Angeles around the same period. Franky Jackson’s Soul Kitchen parties in New York City are mentioned as particularly influential and open minded events where DJs played an eclectic mix of 1960s and ’70s groovy jazz, soul and funk alongside reggae and hip hop in the early 1990s (Armstrong 2008; Wang 2008). Andrew Jervis – now vice president of Ubiquity, a record label specialising in releasing new electronic dance music that draws on these influences – told me about the time when he worked for Groove Merchant, a San Francisco based specialist record store, after having moved from London to San Francisco in the beginning of the 1990s. According to Jervis’ account, the store catered to rare groove collectors as much as hip hop producers in that period. In his opinion, the small, local scenes for soulful eclectic music in the US remain largely undocumented, because unlike the British scene, they have never developed into a more visible, popular movement, and had less of an influence (*Andrew Jervis 2005*). Whereas “jazz funk and fusion”, 1980s “rare groove”, “jazz dance”, “world music”, and 1990s “acid jazz” marked stylistically and historically specific – although often overlapping and interacting – DJ/collecting scenes in the history of the British dance music collectivities organised around the appreciation of various forms of black diasporic music (cf. Cotgrove 2009), “rare groove” is often used today as a more inclusive term – particularly outside of the UK – to refer to all sorts of soulful music from 1960s reggae to 1970s Brazilian disco.

The case of *Wax Poetics* exemplifies the ways in which both scenic and extra-scenic participants congregate around certain institutions that connect and mediate between different kinds of music enthusiasts and collectors. Although this New York based, but globally distributed magazine is proud to present older musical forms through a hip hop sensibility, it has always been keen on presenting sampled music in its wider aesthetic and historical context. After its first issues, the magazine became less narrowly focused on breaks, samples and crate digging, and addressed a wider audience of soul, funk, jazz, reggae, and disco enthusiasts and collectors besides hip hop fans:

“[*Wax Poetics*] kind of bridges the gap between an older generation and a newer generation. You get people like... who may be in their fifties or sixties that were avid jazz collectors or soul collectors, music lovers that were buying records since the fifties or sixties... and they can get into it as well, as like the young hip hop... er... kid, who is like eighteen-nineteen, who is curious about grooves and breaks, or hip hop in general.” (DJ Spinna in Carluccio 2008)

Even before the internet gained prominence, record shops, radio shows, compilations and music magazines with a more general following lay at the intersection of different scenes contributed towards the cross-pollination among various aesthetic sensibilities. Online media further enhanced lines of communication and inspiration across genre boundaries. By searching for particular records online, one is just as likely to end up finding more conventional, genre specific pages, as hip hop and crate digging related websites<sup>72</sup>. The link and comment sections of crate digging related music blogs make apparent that both their authors and readers follow a range of more conventional, genre oriented sources<sup>73</sup> as much as scene specific blogs. Furthermore, crate diggers actively engage in discussions with other kinds of collectors and music enthusiasts on more general, record collecting oriented forums such as *Waxydermy*, or *Very Good Plus*<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> By looking up Mustafa Özkent’s *Gençlik İle Elele* LP in online search engines, for example, one finds mainly online shops and blogs specialising either in psychedelic and progressive rock, or hip hop and digging.

<sup>73</sup> *Soul Sides*’ link section illustrates this tendency. At the time of writing the thesis, the “blog roll” was broken down in sections such as “Soulful Struttin’ & Jazz Jukin”, “All Mixed Up”, “The Hip Hop Heads”. <http://soul-sides.com/2007/01/our-blog-roll.html>, accessed 14 March 2010.

<sup>74</sup> <http://waxydermy.com/>, <http://www.verygoodplus.co.uk/>, accessed 11 March 2010.

Such overlaps between crate digging and various other collecting scenes might explain why Mr. Supreme – one of the most respected crate diggers in the US – listed Keb Darge – who came from a Northern soul background, and became a defining DJ of the “rare funk” scene – and “Jazzman” Gerald Short – a knowledgeable British collector, record dealer and label owner specialising in rare Latin, r&b, soul and jazz recordings – as key figures of the contemporary digging scene in his account that I quoted earlier in this chapter. Despite the lack of involvement of these collectors with hip hop, Supreme probably mentioned them, because they belong to a small elite circle of enthusiasts looking for a similar set of extremely obscure and rare records, dig with the same intensity, and, most probably, discuss, and trade records with each other.

*In this subsection I have described the transformation of the break aesthetics, the stylistic fragmentation of the crate digging scene, and the ways in which its boundaries became increasingly blurred with other record collecting scenes from the end of the 1990s onwards. Fish’s (1980) insights regarding the embeddedness of individual appreciative strategies in particular collective, institutional settings illuminate the ways in which the transfiguration – expansion, decentralisation, and increasingly trans-scenic nature – of the network in which the break aesthetics is cultivated contributed towards the diversification of scenic tastes.* Although the scale and scope of this chapter obviously limited my discussion of the heterogeneity of musical interests, appreciations, and individual pathways of stylistic exploration within the crate digging scene, I hope that the most central elements that define and demarcate crate digging as a particular tradition of record collecting are reasonably clear now. However, as we have seen in this subsection, clear boundaries are increasingly difficult to draw, while the apparent diversity of musical preferences and perceptions in transnational scenes that stretch across several generations also make simplistic assumptions about the relationship between “a shared taste” and collective identity dubious. In conclusion, I will reiterate the key strands of the argument I have proposed throughout this chapter, and argue that approaching the crate digging scene as a “community of appreciation” enables us to begin to unfold the ways in which participation in the collective cultivation of musical traditions is productive of a sense of belonging even in spatially dispersed, loosely bound, internally diverse scenes.

## 4.6 A COMMUNITY OF APPRECIATION

“[P]sych rock [...] is my current favorite genre of music to listen to. I probably don’t really know a damn thing about psych – every time I look up info on a psych album online, the reviews rarely sing the praises of the songs on the album that I like the most [...]. Obviously I’m not hearing it from a true psych enthusiasts’ perspective. Which I guess makes sense, since I’m a black first generation hip hop dude... I didn’t grow up on [Led] Zep[elin] or [Black] Sabbath or the Beach Boys or Zappa or even Hendrix. I grew up on James Brown and Earth Wind & Fire and Stevie Wonder and the Furious 5. Yet and still, *I know what I like*. [...] I’m dropping another new Soulman mix [...]. Just playing a bunch of soft, mellow psych songs that I really love. Familiar folky stuff that the Vashti Bunyan and Linda Perhacs fans out there may already know and love, but also some other very nice tunes that only the most hardcore psych dudes are gonna be hip to.



Soulman *Beautiful*, online mix front and back cover<sup>75</sup>

### Comments:

[...]

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<sup>75</sup> <http://www.thatrealschitt.com/2009/11/soulman-beautiful.html>, accessed 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2010. I have included a copy of this mix in the “Digging beyond breaks” folder of the DVD Appendix Volume 2.

**Anonymous said...**

Nice one Soulman! [...] I didn't even know that I even liked this schitt....that's how I like my psych rock, through a 1st generation hip hop dude's ears....man, what I love about hip hop is it has introduced me (and hip hoppers in general) to so many other kinds of muzak....I know my wife's parents will love this...

[...]

**Matthew [Africa] said...**

[...]I really like the way you emphasize songs on these mixes rather than beatbreaks. I'm looking forward to volumes 2 & 3!"

[...]

**sean said...**

OMG.. we're on the exact same wavelength these days. I'm huge into psych but never like the stuff traditional psych enthusiasts like, with the exception of Linda Perhacs, who I'm obsessed with. Some incredible stuff on here. Keep it coming!" (Soulman 2009, his emphasis)

Soulman's introduction to his downloadable mix of "soft psychedelic sounds" illustrates many of the points I made throughout the previous subsection regarding the ways in which scenic appreciation has transformed since the end of the 1990s. The apparent stylistic diversification of individual tastes and increasing presence of more conventional, genre based appreciations among crate diggers – along with the intensifying lines of influence and interaction across the blurring boundaries of overlapping and intersecting musical worlds – could be easily misinterpreted as signs of the ultimate dissolution of the scene in a larger heterogeneous postmodern culture of musical enthusiasm that is characterised by "unstable and shifting cultural affiliations" (Bennett 1999b: 605). However, a more attentive reading of Soulman's post and his readers's reactions reveal prevailing lines of distinction that separate people whose appreciation of various styles of music was profoundly influenced by hip hop from traditional psych enthusiasts and an older generation of one's wife's parents.

Although the boundaries of the world of crate digging are increasingly “invisible and elastic” (Straw 2001b: 248), my aim throughout this chapter was to concentrate on elements of musical appreciation that remain central to the processes through which scenic tastes and identities are defined and distinguished. I have argued that the aesthetic significance of musical texts for crate diggers emerges in relation to a history of appropriative music making practices within hip hop. Drawing on the work of Williams (1971), I have described the ways in which a canon of seminal works, and a genealogy of DJs and producers is collectively cultivated within the scene, as the foundations of a shared tradition of collecting that is central to both the appreciation of music, and the imagination of scenic identities. Drawing on Becker (1974) I have concentrated on how the emergence and expansion of both scenic and extra-scenic institutions contributed towards the definition, development, and dissemination of the break aesthetics while I made use of Fish’s ideas (1980) in order to highlight the ways in which individual aesthetic sensibilities are acquired as a result of one’s engagement with these networks.

Drawing on these interconnected theoretical inspirations, I have described the crate digging scene as *a community of appreciation: a social world that is held together by collectively cultivated aesthetic tradition – as much a form of musical appreciation as a means through which collective identities are enacted and experienced – produced and shaped by participants’ engagement with a particular network of institutions*. I have argued that the emergence of scenic institutions – by crystallising the aesthetic conventions of breaks as a particular musical genre, and making this information more easily available – contributed towards the growth and translocalisation of the scene. Furthermore, I have explored the ways in which the increasing circulation of various scenic media also made apparent a social world in which collectors mutually influenced and inspired each other, and thus, contributed towards a *sense of participation and belonging*. Finally, I have suggested that the emergence of various forms of internet based communication has significantly enhanced crate diggers’ possibilities in taking part in the collective production of a shared scenic history, appreciation and identity since the end of the 1990s.

Whereas the expansion, decentralisation, and increasingly trans-scenic nature of the networks in which crate diggers explore and discuss music certainly contributed towards the diversification of scenic tastes, it has not brought along the emergence of

alternative histories of digging, the development of scenic counter canons, or the fading of the defining elements of this collecting tradition altogether. On the contrary: the following interview excerpt with Soulman – like many of recent printed and online sources I have quoted throughout this chapter – indicates the prevailing presence of collective efforts to document, discuss, and explore scenic history, as a distinctive foundation of scenic identity:

“Who Is The Father Of Diggin’? [...]

[Soulman: I]t would have to be Afrika Bambaataa in my eyes. The GRANDfather of diggin’. Diggin’ goes back to the ’70s, it didn’t start with us dudes in the ’90s era. And that’s just on the hip hop level – I’m sure you had people before that, especially in the UK and other places where they may have had a retro scene and played rare old records at clubs. I’ve heard a little about that but I don’t really know about it... I’m a hip hop guy.” (Mr Mass 2008a)

What separates crate diggers like Soulman from “psych enthusiasts” or UK rare groove collectors is not necessarily what records they listen to, but *how they listen to them*. Even in cases when “hip hop guys” like Soulman or Matthew Africa focus on acoustic guitar driven folk songs with minimal rhythmic backing rather than breakbeats, their appreciation is informed by a particular set of hip hop recordings, a canon of classic breaks and samples, as well as the web of influences and inspirations within which they acquired and contributed to the break aesthetics. This is probably what Soulman means, when he says that he doesn’t hear psychedelic music “from a true psych enthusiasts’ perspective”. As I have argued earlier drawing on Frith’s (1996b) insights, such “perspectives” are not only productive of different forms of musical appreciation, but as Soulman’s views regarding the originators of digging suggest, being situated in distinct traditions and collectivities, ways of listening are also intimately tied to particular identities.

*By stating that a certain kind of musical appreciation – delineated by a historical narrative that weaves together a genealogy of key figures and a canon of significant musical texts; collectively shaped in a particular network of institutions – provides the distinctive core that distinguishes crate diggers from other kinds of music enthusiasts and collectors, I would not like to deny or ignore the diversity of individual tastes and affiliations within the scene that, I hope, is apparent from the ethnographic material I*

presented so far. I find Fish's (1980) notion of the "interpretive community" particularly helpful in thinking through the role that appreciation plays in the definition and delineation of musical worlds, as he approaches literary collectivities as heterogenous, loosely bound, and overlapping spaces, and focuses on the institutionally embedded interpretive strategies that make aesthetic arguments and debates possible among readers of different backgrounds, agendas, interests, competences, and opinions. Similarly to Fish's students, professors, and literary critics, crate diggers do not necessarily agree on the significance of a particular record, might not be familiar with scenic history to the same extent, and might read different blogs, but they recognise shared aesthetic conventions and are aware of scenic historical and institutional reference points to a certain degree that enables them to participate in the collective appreciation and discussion of music.

In this chapter, I have focused mainly on outlining the distinctive core that defines and demarcates musical tastes within the crate digging scene. So far, I concentrated primarily on the collective production of a shared history, musical appreciation and scenic identity, and paid little attention to the ways in which this tradition is infused with particular ideals of moral excellence. I will now turn to exploring the intricate ethical rules and norms that regulate the distinctive collecting practices within the scene, and describe the ways in which the principles of *the digging ethos* – the shared moral worldview in which these practical standards are established in – are seen by participants to have been laid by the same ancestry that is credited with defining the break aesthetics.

## 5. THE DIGGING ETHOS. DISTINCTIVE COLLECTING PRACTICES

*We hang out at a market stall in a big industrial space that I think must have been a storage space or factory hall of the Truman Brewery just off Brick Lane in East London. It is Sunday, and as usual, the streets and buildings of the gentrifying neighbourhood are converted into a crafts, arts and junk market buzzing with hip urbanites looking for clothes, fashion accessories, furniture and interior decoration by young artists and designers, as well as music, and a range of second hand collectibles. Danny, his friend from Rayleigh, and I take turns looking through the boxes of a record dealer's 7" singles in a relatively remote and abandoned corner. The records are marked with tiny, dot-like stickers, a colour code referring to different price levels. Early 1990s pop and rock for 50 p or a pound each, funk singles in a separate section ranging between 3 to 15 pounds, depending on the music just as much as on rarity, condition or whether they are original, American records, English pressings from the same period or more recent reissues. There are a few larger crates of very moderately priced LPs as well, but clearly, they are of little importance to the seller or the hardcore vinyl connoisseurs: very basic funk, jazz and easy listening records, a few good compilations. They seem to be there to provide something to look at for the average music enthusiast market-goers as well. As I've learnt from Danny, the seller, a guy in his forties, is called Richard, and he is "one of the Rs of M|A|R|R|S", a former member of the pioneering electronic dance music production team from the early 1990s. He's now into funk and soul singles and seems to know his stuff. The selection is good, the prices appropriate. Danny ends up buying two 45s. One of them has the beautiful minimalist typography typical of 1960s American singles, with the logo of Date, a label I've never heard of. It is Soul Pad by the Coasters, a single that starts with an amazing drum and vibraphone break. All of us nod our heads as it plays on Richard's little portable turntable. There is a little sticker attached to its blank paper sleeve noting that it was used as a sample in a rap track by Big Daddy Kane. The other record is an original first pressing of The Champ, a record cut by The Mohawks, a band consisting of the cream of British session players, released on the PAMA label. The second single costs 15 pounds. I have a brief conversation with Danny about the record on the way to the food stall. We first talk about the price, agreeing that although it was not cheap, it was by no means overpriced either. We both consider it one of the best tracks on the Ultimate Breaks & Beats series, and one of the relatively few old school break records by a British band. Although the Mohawks LP pops up every now and then, at least in dealers crates at better record fairs, throughout the years we have spent digging, none of us has ever seen the track on a single. While*

*Danny is happy with his find, he also seems to be concerned with the ambivalence of the purchase. He says that the track is “too cheesy to play out” in a club setting, probably, because it is so widely available on compilations and has been played to death even by less knowledgeable DJs. Furthermore, as one of the top UK DJs specialising in a mix of classic hip hop tracks and obscure breaks, his interest has moved well beyond such obvious recordings. He then notes that the record is a cool thing to have anyway, as it might impress an occasional visitor who might say “Oooh, you’ve got it on a 45[RPM 7” single] !” if he accidentally found it thumbing through his collection some day. “Yeah, it’s a status thing”, his friend concludes half matter-of-factly, half-reassuringly. We grab some food. I’m still somewhat puzzled by Danny’s remark, thinking of how many knowledgeable diggers will actually make the forty minutes long train journey to Danny’s home from East London’s Liverpool Street station in the coming years, and how slim their chances are of stumbling across this single among the thousands of records he keeps in his collection.*



Danny Breaks in front of a part of his collection. Rayleigh, 2007.

Describing the crate digging scene as a particular *audience* or *community of appreciation* alone would very much limit our understanding of the ways in which a

sense of identity and belonging emerges in the crate digging scene to the practices through which *musical texts are appreciated as meaningful aesthetic experiences*. Although being aware of this shared musical taste certainly provides some understanding of what goes on in the above flea market scenario, it tells us little about *how vinyl records are brought into play as tokens of identity and belonging in distinctive collecting practices*. This chapter, thus, shifts the focus of the discussion from appreciation to distinction (Bourdieu 1979/2002), but also from “musical texts” to music in the form of material artefacts.

Crate digging, as its name suggests, is an activity that revolves around the materiality of music: it is about looking through, evaluating, selecting, acquiring, using and talking about vinyl records. Whereas

“[t]he marking off of some artists as ‘good’ and others as ‘bad’ seems to be a necessary part of popular music pleasure and use; it is a way in which we establish our place in various music worlds and use music as a source of identity” (Frith 1996b: 72)

among music enthusiasts in general, record collectors make similar distinctions regarding the authenticity of the material artefacts that carry the music, but also concerning the ways in which they are acquired and used in order to position themselves within collecting worlds.

Similarly to the study of collectivities surrounding popular music in general (cf. Thornton 1996; Kahn-Harris 2000; Hodkinson 2002), Bourdieu’s theory of distinction is widely appropriated by academic commentators discussing the social worlds of record collecting groups (Straw 1997b; Jamieson 1999; Dougan 2006). Many of these writings concentrate mainly on how commodities and connoisseurly competences are accumulated as a source of group specific cultural capital, and displayed in distinctive collecting practice as membership and status-claims. Such a simplified and sociologically uninformed appropriation of Bourdieu’s theory runs the risk of presenting collecting worlds as rigid and static fields where rational actors compete for symbolic power adhering to already given rules denied of any form of agency. Such a clear-cut model was in stark contrast with my experience of the highly diverse distinctive approaches to collecting within the crate digging scene. Furthermore, while these authors describe ideal-typical rules and norms regarding the authenticity of objects – a regime of value (Appadurai 1986) – and collecting practices – a shared code of conduct

– as the distinctive core of collecting worlds, they have not made attempts at connecting this practical level of distinctiveness to more profound, group specific ideals of moral authenticity. One of my biggest concerns regarding the theoretical model these academic accounts offer is that they implicitly presuppose a transparent field of action where prestige and membership is publicly claimed and acknowledged through distinctive practices; a social world in which one's possessions, knowledge and deeds are widely known and rewarded or sanctioned in terms of social standing. Whereas this is often the case within the prestige economies of geographically bounded, tightly-knit groups (e.g. Berta 2006, 2009), as the episode that opened this chapter suggests, in spatially dispersed and loosely connected scenes like crate digging, distinctive practices often lack such a wide-scale public visibility and recognition. Just like Danny Breaks' purchase of the Mohawks single, the ownership of certain records often does not become known outside a small circle of immediate friends. Furthermore, many of the distinctive choices crate diggers make when they dig on their own remain their private concerns.

In this chapter, I will attempt to rethink the ways in which distinctive collecting practices situate collectors in social worlds, not by abandoning Bourdieu, but by paying more attention to the fine detail of his theory. I will argue that *by focusing on the notion of habitus* – a key concept in the Bourdeuian framework that is ignored by most commentators on collecting – *we could benefit from an approach that describes distinctive collecting practices in the context of belonging and prestige* – a subjective sense of self-worth and identity that is to a significant extent individually enacted and experienced<sup>76</sup> – rather than membership and status – understood as a collectively awarded, well defined, objective position within a transparent and clearly drawn social hierarchy.

I will begin my discussion with a theoretical introduction to how we might understand distinctiveness in relational and positional rather than absolute terms. I will then examine *the rules and norms regarding the authenticity of records and collecting*

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<sup>76</sup> This is not to suggest that scenic distinctiveness completely lacks a public dimension: record collections are shown to visiting friends, records are displayed in radio-shows, club dj sets, mixtapes, top 10s, connoisseurly competence is further demonstrated in conversations, interviews, record reviews, blog posts and articles. In most cases, these distinctive practices contain elements of taking pride in owning and knowing records, but also of competing with or challenging others. I will describe immediate and mediated social context within which distinctive practices are enacted in more detail in Chapter 6.

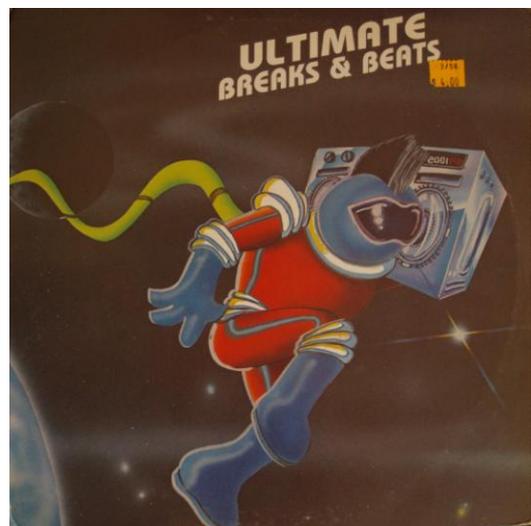
*practices* as historical constructs, as *constitutive elements of crate digging as a particular tradition* of record collecting that is embedded in the wider context of hip hop culture. After a discussion of the ideal-typical criteria of authenticity that form the core of the *practical level of scenic distinctiveness*, I will explore the highly diverse *individual strategies* of their actual application in the context of personal positions, possibilities and aspirations. I will then go on to describe the ways in which these rather flexibly applied practical rules and norms are *made meaningful in the collective context* of more generally shared and profound moral ideals of scenic excellence which I will refer to as *the crate digging ethos*. In conclusion, I will discuss how such a relational approach to distinctiveness enables us to understand the ways in which scenic belonging becomes an affective matter.

## 5.1 RELATIONAL DISTINCTIVENESS

“If you’re a DJ, then you know that the most important pieces of vinyl that you own are your *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* LPs. Not every DJ was fortunate enough to be buying vinyl in the early ’80s, nor are they all wealthy enough to afford original pressings of the vinyl breaks that your favorite producer made infamous. That’s why the *UBB* series has always been considered an ‘acceptable’ form of cheating when it comes to break collections (don’t crucify me break purists). I won’t front, I don’t own an original copy of the Incredible Bongo Band’s classic ‘Apache’ break. However, I do own 4 copies of *Ultimate Beats & Breaks Vol. 3* (which has the Apache break).” (Pipomixes 2009)

What is striking about Pipomixes’ references to the distinctiveness that surrounds the ownership of vinyl records in the crate digging scene is the way in which its inconsistencies and contradictions appear almost natural, rather than strange or extraordinary. The way he presents different positions and possibilities – DJs, purists, people from different generations and with different budgets – and corresponding choices and attitudes towards collecting reflect our everyday experiences of the ways in which cultural worlds are internally diverse and contested rather than homogenous domains where all participants have the same awareness, understanding and acceptance

of collectively maintained norms and values at all times (Taylor 1999). Pipomixes' account, however, seems to suggest that, regardless of the multitude of different interpretations and applications, there actually does exist such a core of group specific norms and values associated with records and collecting practices within the scene. However, *these norms and values are shared not by adherence, but by reference*. The way in which he justifies his view of the importance of the Ultimate Breaks & Beats records is outlined *in relation* to a particular hierarchy of value in which compilations are seen as inferior to original pressings, and owning these might be considered "cheating", that is to say, breaching the unwritten moral code of collecting. These ideal-typical norms of scenic authenticity are presented as open to flexible applications and interpretations: whereas break purists are presented as their most orthodox defenders, Pipomixes suggests that the majority of DJs will often opt to make an exception to this particular rule in the case of the UBB series.



Incredible Bongo Band *Bongo Rock* and *Ultimate Breaks & Beats Volume 3* album covers

Pipomixes' account depicts *scenic distinctiveness as relational and positional rather than absolute*, where belonging and prestige is less a matter of *conformity* to shared standards of excellence, *but rather an awareness and application of these rules* in a way that suits individual positions, aspirations and possibilities. Such an approach to distinctiveness challenges simplistic understandings of group specific conceptions of the authenticity of objects and collecting practices as rigid, externally imposed rules, and is more sensitive to how the habitus generates individual practices, strategies and perceptions depending on the actor's actual position and situation (Bourdieu 1977:72; 1990b:53).

But how exactly does a relational approach to distinctiveness transform our understanding of the significance of a regime of value and code of conduct as distinctive characteristics of collecting groups? Brian Spooner offers a potential strategy when he describes these collectively maintained norms and rules of *authenticity* in oriental carpet trading and collecting as shared *through interpretations and debate, rather than a general consensus*:

“[t]he existence [...] of this taxonomic scheme [of oriental carpets] is recognized in different degrees by a variety of consumers, from those just trading up from wall-to-wall at one end of the social scale to the most discerning collectors at the other end. *Becoming an aficionado means entering the debate* about the recognition and application of the criteria – criteria of authenticity.” (Spooner 1986: 197, my emphasis).

Spooner’s account partly echoes Bourdieu’s thoughts about the ways in which particular perceptions of “the rules of play” and corresponding strategies are tied to both individual positions within a particular field and the dispositions one has developed over time. What I find particularly illuminating here is the way he presents taking part in the *debate* about authenticity as lying at the heart of what it means to be an aficionado. Such an understanding of connoisseurship presents the distinctiveness of expertly collectors more reflexive and conscious than every-day carpet consumers, or to be precise, more oriented towards the very categories and hierarchies of symbolic value. This partly resonates with the academic accounts on record collecting that I have mentioned in the introduction of this chapter: collectors become prestigious members of connoisseurly groups by developing competences regarding shared evaluative principles. However, Spooner seems to go further than this: his account implies that discerning collectors not only apply shared criteria of authenticity in an appropriate manner, but, just like Pipomixes above, also demonstrate their competence in part through consciously and confidently challenging ideal-typical norms, and providing expertly justifications for individual deviations.

As this chapter aims to think through prestige and belonging in terms of how they are individually enacted and subjectively perceived through distinctive practices, I will focus on how scenic participants take and explain such personal positions. Gregson et al. offers a similar perspective in their discussion of distinctiveness in the retro / second hand fashion scene:

“consumers mobilize ‘the authentic’ [...] as means of demonstrating individuality, knowingness, knowledgeable and discernment, as an expression of their cultural capital, and as a way of constructing their difference from others” (Gregson et al. 2001: 16)

I find this approach illuminating, because it shifts the focus of inquiry from the question usually asked through the notion of distinction – how taste and cultural capital contribute to the production and reproduction of social structures – to how socially maintained criteria of authenticity are mobilised in the making of individual identities. In a group context, such a perspective pays more attention to individual agency regarding the construction of prestige and belonging: *rather than conceiving of cultural capital as the publicly acknowledged source, or marker, of membership and status, it asks how it is brought into play in distinctive collecting practices as an enactment of individual aspirations of belonging and prestige.*

Judith Butler’s work on performativity (1990, 1993) suits this perspective, as she talks about the importance of repeated, embodied practices through which we produce ourselves as particular subjects. Her emphasis on repetition, and later citationality (Butler 1993) points to the importance of the embeddedness or rootedness of such “performances” in specific social contexts that “cite” their norms, attitudes and conventions, and so provide the stability and feeling of identity. This processual understanding of identity formation strongly resonates with Bourdieu’s ideas of the regularly recurring rituals through which the habitus is produced and reproduced. Similarly to Bourdieu, Butler conceives neither individual, nor collective identities as “already given” or static, but rather as being in the state of constant remaking, actualizing only in and through repeated practices<sup>77</sup>. This complements Bourdieu’s ideas regarding the *generative* character of the habitus, the ways in which it opens up the possibility to understand culture as a dynamic system that in part mediates individual action, but at the same time is also generated and transformed through the individual practices in which it is rooted (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 132-137).

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<sup>77</sup> Butler only became aware of how her ideas regarding the ritual dimension of performativity resonated with Bourdieu’s thinking on habitus after formulating her own theory. She explored the connections and parallel trajectories between the two lines of thought in later writings (Butler 1997, 1999). Alison Jayne Rooke provides a thoughtful and thorough analysis of the similarities and differences of Butler’s and Bourdieu’s ideas (Rooke 2004).

Although Butler developed her ideas in her description of how the gendered self is produced in the context of heteronormative sexuality, Anne-Marie Fortier's work on how Italian émigré identities are produced through religious gatherings in London provides a powerful example of how Butler's ideas can be appropriated to describe the enactment of identity in the context of smaller cultural groups (Fortier 1999).

In the following, I will argue that distinctive *collecting practices* can be understood as regularly repeated *performances of belonging and prestige that cite and recognise shared standards of excellence*, and just like Fortier's religious gatherings have the capacity to manufacture "cultural and historical belongings which mark out terrains of commonality that delineate the politics and social dynamics of 'fitting in'" (ibid.: 42). In the following section, I will describe *the rules and norms regarding the authenticity of records and collecting practices* as historical constructs of this kind, as *constitutive elements of crate digging as a particular tradition* of record collecting that is embedded in the wider context of hip hop culture.

## 5.2 FROM A SHARED TRADITION TO INDIVIDUAL APPLICATIONS

"DIGGIN' IN THE CRATES. (see also, 'Beat Digging,' 'Beat Mining,' 'Diggin')

Diggin' in the crates is taking a chance with a record and finding a fresh new, unknown beat. Diggin' in the crates is the obsession to always find new wax. The epitomy of diggin' in the crates is finding that one drum beat everyone said you would never be able to find. Diggin' in the crates is a love of soul that is found in previous generations' wax, whether jazz, Latin, funk, 'soul'... or whatever type of music. Diggin' in the crates is developing an 'ear' for certain styles of music. Diggin' in the crates is paying dues. Diggin' in the crates is tradition. Diggin' in the crates is having doubles of your favorite breaks. Diggin' in the crates is buying only original pressings. Diggin'

in the crates is getting up crazy early on your only day off to try and beat the crowd at the record fairs.

Diggin' in the crates is NOT buying 'breakbeat' compilations. Digging in the crates is NOT buying reissues. Diggin' in the crates is NOT borrowing your boy's copy of a record. Diggin' in the crates is NOT looking for open drums on your favorite hip hop record." (Jay Skills quoted in Stef 1999)

I quoted Jay Skills' definition of crate digging at length partly to reinforce what I have already suggested, that it would be a mistake to think about crate digging as mere status competition: the excitement of new discoveries, the appreciation of musical heritage, the expansion of one's knowledge and the development of one's taste in new directions, and the buzz of record fairs can all play a part in why people dig for records in this scene. What I find particularly valuable about his account for my discussion is that it presents crate digging as a tradition: a particular set of customs, beliefs and practices handed down from generation to generation.

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the cultivation of a particular genealogy as central to both the appreciation of music and the production belonging within the scene. Now I want to take a further step, and explore the ways in which this ancestry is seen not merely as defining a particular approach to listening, but also to have drawn up the rules and norms that orient collecting practices. Some authors have already noted the profound traditionalism, sometimes even conservatism of hip hop related cultural scenes with regard to how the *authenticity* of practices – particular graffiti (Rahn 2002) and dressing styles (Garcia 2003), dance music repertoires (Schloss 2006, 2009) or production methods (Schloss 2004) – is *conceived and regulated*. In these hip hop related expressive cultures one's reputation is built and maintained *by demonstrating an*

*awareness of how their foundations are seen to have been laid, and showing a commitment to tradition, by remaining “true to the game” or “keeping it real”*<sup>78</sup>.

The shared standards of scenic authenticity that Jay Skills describes are related to both hip hop DJing – owning double copies of records that contain breaks – and sample based music production – not sampling drums off hip hop records. I have briefly discussed how sampling grew out of and built on earlier DJ practices in the late 1980s, and also the ways in which it fed back into break related DJing and collecting practices beyond the inner circle of American hip hop producers from the early 1990s. It is impossible to pinpoint when and where the above standards have emerged in the complex history of the scene; however, the centrality of the “golden era” of sample based hip hop in the development, definition and popularization of crate digging practice suggests that many of today’s rules and norms could be traced back to the small, initial circle of American hip hop producers and DJs of that era. Joseph Schloss’s detailed account of the “professional ethics” of sample based hip hop music production shows many connections to the ways the authenticity of records and collecting practices is conceived even among crate diggers who do not produce music themselves. Rules like not sampling CDs, compilations and breaks that others have already used are obviously related to the ways in which discovering new breaks and buying original pressings are valued within the crate digging scene, while creativity and hard work, as we will see later in this chapter, are core values in both contexts. Schloss argues that while some elements of the hip hop production ethics could be traced back to the earliest days of hip hop, it has only developed into an overarching ethical system in the late 1980s or early 1990s (Schloss 2004: 103). Authenticity among producers, but also

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<sup>78</sup> Although the term’s genealogy is largely unexplored, it is often used in the sense of “being true to oneself” or “representing oneself” and not pretending to be something else. In the context of gangster rap it is often meant to be “about both representing a particular black ghetto street life and being truthful about one’s relationship to that life”, a stance often associated with the gratification of violence (Rose 2008: 136). However, it is also used in the traditionalist corners of hip hop meaning staying true to shared norms of authenticity, as in the following account: “With over 250 pages, the *Sampling Dictionary* features listings formatted by Artist’s Name / Track Title / Sampled Artist / Sampled Track, while the *Re: Sampling Dictionary* provides the exact same info, but in reverse index. Sure, we’re gonna hear all types of balks and arguments from who don’t think this is “keeping it real”, but do you really care when you’re saving years of lost time, money, and sleep trying to figure solve the problem of that [...] elusive sample ID?” (Semantik 2008). Apart from these two, Kembrew McLeod describes four further senses in which “real” or “true” has been used as a marker of authenticity within hip hop music communities. He argues that “keeping it real” became pervasive in the mid 1990s as a discursive construct that functioned to maintain hip hop’s identity and boundaries in the face of commercialization and its dramatic ascendancy to the mainstream of US popular culture (McLeod 1999).

crate diggers in general, is conceived as truthfulness to the rules and values of this tradition.

“Keeping it real” within the crate digging scene partly means an awareness and application of the hierarchy of formats that was established among producers by the end of the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. Although bootleg pressings and compilations like the *Octopus Breaks*, *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* and *Super Disco Brakes* have been around since the 1980s (Leland and Steinski 1988; Smith 2006), it was only around the beginning of the next decade when compilations became illegitimate among hip hop producers. Whereas “old school” breakbeat compilations have by then obtained the status of “classics”, “acceptable and important DJ tools” that also provide a good introduction to the foundations of the crate digging canon for beginners, the new generation of compilations, bootlegs and reissues containing the original recordings that have been sampled in recent hip hop tracks have been generally regarded as inferior – and the ownership of these sometimes even considered “cheating” – ever since within the scene.

*In the beginning I hated it [compilations]. I thought it was such cheaters way out. I'd be like “That's a bullshit way to go out, man! I will never buy a compilation! Fuck that, man! I'm true to my game! I don't need that reissue stuff! 180 milligrams?<sup>79</sup> [...] Who cares, man? Gimme the vinyl, let me find the original! OK, maybe a second press<sup>80</sup> is OK, but I need the originals, man!” All my friends were buying these compilations with twelve tracks with samples or “funky New Orleans tidbits”, and I'm like “Whatever, man. Fly to New Orleans and find the music!” And I was so “fist in the air”, like “this is the way how you buy records, any other way and you're bullshit!” (Justin Torres 2005)*

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<sup>79</sup> High fidelity reissues are often made out of “virgin” – not recycled – vinyl using more raw material in order to allow deeper cut grooves to enhance sound quality. These reissues often have stickers on their covers stating the weight of the record to signify this. The original pressings in most cases were produced a lot lighter than the 180 grams that is now the standard among audiophiles and is often brought up in debates suggesting the superiority of reissues over originals.

<sup>80</sup> Second pressings often came out just after the first pressings ran out, so in many cases they look almost identical.

The way in which Justin Torres remembers his initial reactions to these compilations is telling about how the authenticity of records and buying practices is strongly connected to ideas of personal worth in such distinctions, and also the moral urgency such distinctions can carry within the scene. Still, there is a crucial difference between Jay Skill's neutralized definition of digging and Justin Torres's account. Whereas the former reads like a list of clear and objective norms that regulate crate digging, the latter suggests more flexibility in their individual application, a range of individual choices and strategies, as well as a range of positions one could feel comfortable with, apart from that of a purist:

*I like old, original copies of things. It's not an absolute thing for me. I'm not a purist, when it comes to record collecting. Especially when shit gets to be expensive, original copies, you know. And to not own something... or not get it 'cause it costs fuckin'.. astronomical [sic.] amounts... Or, anyway, you're gonna rule it out because it was made recently? What's wrong with that, man? If it's not like some bullshit pressing... that's great. (JT 2005)*

We would lose this richness of scenic distinctiveness if we attempted to describe it through an ideal-typical regime of value and code of conduct. Such an approach would not just run the risk of presenting these rules and norms as absolute and binding laws, but would be also incapable of accounting for the ways in which the understanding and application of the criteria of authenticity always happens in subjective contexts where they often appear more flexible, uncertain, even contradictory.

“What on paper is a set of dictated exchanges under certainty is lived on the ground in suspense and uncertainty. [...] A rule doesn't apply itself; it has to be applied, and this may involve difficult, finely tuned judgments.” (Taylor 1999:41)

It is exactly this richness of situated and embodied perceptions and strategies that Bourdieu attempts to grasp through the notion of habitus, by focusing on a subjective “practical *sense*”, or a *feel* for the game rather than looking for clearly set legislative principles:

“the modes of behaviour created by the habitus do not have the fine regularity of modes of behavior deduced from a legislative principle: the habitus goes hand in glove with vagueness and indeterminacy. As

a generative spontaneity which asserts itself with an improvised confrontation with ever renewed situations, it obeys a practical, inexact, fuzzy sort of logic, which defines one's normal relation to the world." (Bourdieu 1990a: 77-78)

There are three important insights in Bourdieu's distinction between legislative principles and the habitus, that I will now explore in the context of scenic distinctiveness.

First, the principles of authenticity are not explicitly and definitively stated, systematically thought through or provided with a clear and coherent rationale. Although they often present themselves in the distinctive collecting practices of crate diggers, such "citations" are often enacted, rather than verbalised. Even in the distinctive talk regarding records, they are often only alluded to, or mentioned in passing rather than discussed at length. They are thus full of uncertainties – "maybe a second press is OK" – and ambiguities. Most of the time, they seem to be operating at the level of the unconscious, appearing as the natural order of things that need no further explanation: "this is the way you buy records".

Second, they are always applied in individual contexts. It partly means that people in different positions have different perception of the content and importance of these rules, as well as different aspirations and possibilities to following them. Some people, like Justin Torres, try to "keep it original"; others, like JT, care less about the format, especially if originals are beyond their price range. Which also informs us about the ways in which positions pose limitations in terms of available strategies: Torres, a record dealer who dedicates most of his time to tracking down records, has higher chances of acquiring impossibly rare records at affordable prices in remote shops or private collections or through trading within a network of renowned collectors, than JT who made design furniture as a carpenter during as his daytime job at the time of conducting the interview.

Third, and closely related to the first two, unlike legislative principles, the rules and norms of scenic authenticity are not absolute and externally binding, or followed out of rational calculation. People choose to follow particular ideals of excellence because they have made them their own, because they feel right, because they have become the standards against which they measure their self-worth, even in the absence of immediate collective expectations, rewards or sanctions. The way in which Justin

Torres presents his choice of not buying reissues and compilations as staying true to *his* game tells about the ways in which it is his standards that matter, and not what others do or think.

Before I proceed to the description of individual applications, it is worth noting that although the ideal-typical norms and rules of authenticity are not sharply defined, and lack the binding strength, systematicity and coherence of legislative principles, they are not entirely unarticulated and unconscious. On the contrary: the ways in which DJ Jay Skills and Justin Torres are quite articulate about the particular distinctiveness that orients collecting practices within the scene suggests a more conscious, reflexive engagement with such shared rules and norms, which echoes Spooner's remarks regarding the centrality of the debate about authenticity to connoisseurly collecting (1986). Although scenic practice rarely involves situations where participants have to provide detailed, verbalised explanations of their understandings and applications of these shared criteria of excellence, such reflexive discussions of scenic authenticity are not entirely unusual among collectors. Its main issues are also discussed occasionally in articles and interviews in crate digging related media. These discussions can take the form of highly reflexive public debates at times when the emergence of new types of records – such as the second generation break compilations in the beginning of the 1990s – or record buying practices – such as *eBay* and other internet based record exchange sites in the mid 1990s – appear to threaten the “traditional ways” digging is done, until the status of these novel objects and practices is settled<sup>81</sup>.

Still, it is important to stress that there is a gap between how scenic understandings of excellence actually orient participants' actions at the level of the habitus, and the more conscious and rationalizing reflections on scenic distinctiveness in their replies to my questions. In the light of their enduring, reflexive, connoisseurly engagement with issues of authenticity, their justifications and explanations offer a reasonably reliable picture of the personal motives and collective issues that are brought into play in the distinctive collecting practices within the crate digging scene.

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<sup>81</sup> In a sense, these debates are very similar to the contemporary discussions within DJ circles regarding the acceptability of new technologies that allow the playback and manipulation of digital soundfiles from a laptop through a turntable based interface that Rebekah Farrugia and Thomas Swiss (2005) describe.

### 5.3 INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES: PERCEPTIONS, POSSIBILITIES, AND ASPIRATIONS

*I won't download funk and soul things, even if I know I won't ever be able to get them on vinyl. Or anyway, chances [of getting these here] are very slim. But I simply don't have the heart to play funk even from WAV [files]<sup>82</sup>. I don't have this aversion to [playing] house and new music [in digital formats], but hip hop is strange like that. It ought to be played from wax.*



DJ Suhaid, digging at a record fair with his portable turntable. Budapest, 2008

And where is this coming from?

*This format-fetishism? I don't know. I simply won't play funk from a CD. The old music, you know... it has been pressed... If it is a vinyl reissue, it is a thing that one has to swallow, coming from East-*

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<sup>82</sup> Uncompressed sound files that are generally seen as being of better quality than mp3s, and are more accepted among DJs who play music from CDs or laptops.

*Europe... without a chance to find the originals of all the records you would like to have. That... that is within my tolerance limit. For many people, it's off limits. For [DJ] Format for example... or you. But maybe less so for you. (Suhaid 2009)*

The way in which Suhaid talks about the “format fetishism” of hip hop related collecting and DJing in the context of his own practice conforms to what Bourdieu suggests about the habitual nature of distinctiveness in at least three senses. First, the hierarchy of formats are perceived as a given, almost a natural order, the norms that orientate his practice appear in Suhaid’s narrative to be “simply” the way things are. Second, these norms are not necessarily always thought through, or followed out of rational, conscious calculation, it is the way things “ought to” be done, he cannot bring himself to doing it any other way. Third, there is a sense in which the Hungarian DJ’s position – living in a place with very limited access to original pressings of American funk, jazz and soul records that are sought after and played by crate diggers – creates a particular perception of the importance and applicability of these norms<sup>83</sup>. It is this positionality of individual perceptions and strategies that this section will turn to explore.

Suhaid’s comments on distinctiveness, just like other accounts throughout this chapter, suggest an awareness of an ideal-typical hierarchy of formats in which original pressings appear superior, as well as of more uncompromising collecting approaches within the scene. Whereas he leaves the commonly accepted hierarchy of particular editions and recording media unchallenged, he explains his particular strategy of its application in his collecting practices as having to do with his geographical position within the scene. He justifies his acceptance of reissues by pointing to the lack of access to original pressings of the mostly American records that are sought after within the

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<sup>83</sup> The justifications and explanations for individual deviations from ideal-typical norms that orient collecting practices within the scene resemble some of the argumentative strategies that Sykes and Matza (1957) describe as “techniques of neutralization”: justifications by which members of deviant groups seek to present their violations of the “normative system of society” as in some ways acceptable, or appropriate. However, the key difference between scenic explanations of individual distinctive attitudes, and such techniques of neutralization lies in the difference between the vague and uncertain norms of scenic distinctiveness, and the clearly defined, binding legislative principles that are the context of Sykes and Matza’s discussion. In the context of scenic justifications, the overwhelming sense of guilt or shame that “techniques of neutralization” seek to resolve is absent; partly because there is no clear and present scenic majority that would absolutely adhere to and enforce violated rules; but also partly because these ideal-typical rules are not necessarily internalized by participants as absolute and binding principles of a generally shared moral order.

scene. The way in which he maintains a certain distinctiveness of formats – not playing “old music” in a hip hop context from digital media – suggests that even if those standards are set individually, they play a key role in how collecting practices become enactments of self-worth and belonging in the context of a shared tradition.

In other cases, personal perspectives on the acceptability of various formats are expressed with reference to very practical considerations that are tied to the actual use one has for the records in particular positions, like that of a DJ:

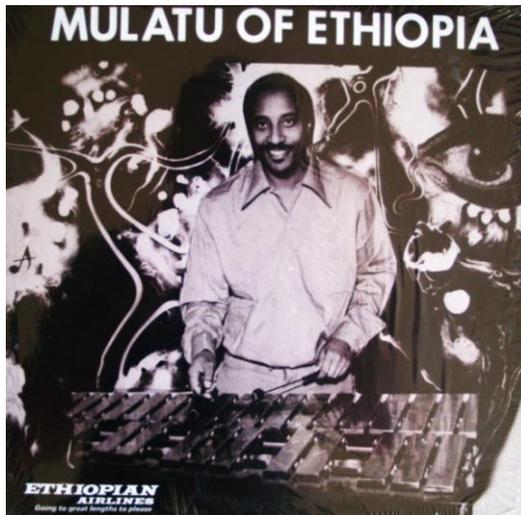
*You know, I had no problems with playing a compilation, because hey, I don't have to... I can leave... I can leave the original joints at the crib or whatever. (Beni B 2005)*

*.. as a DJ, those come in handy when you're in a situation where you have to DJ for a long time, so you have a little section in your crate of compilations to stretch your set out. (DJ B.Cause 2005)*

These accounts refer to compilations as useful, practical DJ tools. Beni B uses them to save his rare originals from the wear and tear that are a part of playing them as a DJ. Vinyl records can “burn out” – become noisy and lose dynamics – from scratching and backspinning. Furthermore, they are always exposed to the risk of accidental damage – dancers bumping into the DJ booth or somebody accidentally spilling drinks over the turntables or into a DJ bag – during DJ gigs. DJ B.Cause refers to similarly mundane considerations: as the number of records one can comfortably carry is limited, compilations come in handy in case of long nights. Whereas albums or singles only have one or two songs one can play in a set, comps most often offer at least a dozen such tracks. Again, while both arguments make a case for the acceptability of compilations, they do so by making references to the superiority of original pressings: Beni B describes these later editions as *disposable substitutes* for the rare originals he keeps safely at home, DJ B.Cause suggests that they can only play a limited, *supplementary* role in DJ sets. However, as it might already be apparent, neither this relatively open attitude towards compilations, nor this particular practical justification for their approval necessarily coincides with being a DJ. The following conversation between Mr Thing and DJ Format brings forward quite different individual perceptions and strategies:

*Mr Thing: I thought [the] Vinyl Dogs [compilation series] was really good when they came out, because, again, that put me on to a whole*

other world of stuff, I never have... I never would have thought of. Like seriously, they put like the Mulatu record<sup>84</sup> [on]... that's where I've first heard it.



Mulatu of Ethiopia, album cover



Vinyl Dogs Volume 4, label<sup>85</sup>

DJ Format: To be honest, I never really cared much for the comp... for the other compilations [after Ultimate Breaks & Beats], not because...

M: Right.

F: Not because they weren't good... no good... but I just thought, no there is no fire... no, just straight away I thought 'No, I wanna discover my own breaks.' 'Cause I don't really...

M: Uhm.. I mean I haven't bought a comp for a long, long, long time... but the time, you know, I was buying the odd thing like that... like [the compilation] that had the [Love and] Happiness [by] Monty Alexander on it, the one that had Mulatu on it, things like that. So, you know, I just wanted to have things I couldn't find, that Monty Alexander record.

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<sup>84</sup> Ethiopian vibraphonist Mulatu Astatke's track, *Kasalekut Hulu* that was originally released on the *Mulatu of Ethiopia* LP by the independent *Worthy* label in 1972. The record was pressed in a very limited number of copies and never had much distribution beyond New York City. Until its appearance on a number of compilations in the mid 1990s and the subsequent album reissue, it was an incredibly obscure recording (Cleret and Holland 2005).

<sup>85</sup> eBay auction picture: [http://cgi.ebay.es/VINYL-DOGS-RARE-BREAKS-AND-BEATS-SEALED-FUNK-LP\\_W0QQitemZ310145211898QQihZ021QQcategoryZ43701QQcmdZViewItem](http://cgi.ebay.es/VINYL-DOGS-RARE-BREAKS-AND-BEATS-SEALED-FUNK-LP_W0QQitemZ310145211898QQihZ021QQcategoryZ43701QQcmdZViewItem), accessed 6 September 2009.

*F: Uhm.*

*M: So, you know...quite happily... and I think ... I think really... the only comps really doing it at the minute is Dusty Fingers...*

*F: But then again, I really... they got some great stuff on there, but, you know, for me... I don't... if anything, it makes me, you know, angry when I hear them, 'cause like 'Shit, they know about that break!' [Laughs.] (DJ Format and Mr Thing 2007)*



Mr Thing and DJ Format playing and discussing records at Format's place. London, 2007

Rather than speaking about the practical demands and circumstances of a DJ gig, Mr Thing talks about the usefulness of compilations in learning about obscure music, and acquiring recordings he really wants, but are impossible to get. While DJ Format acknowledges the validity of such a view, even the potential value of the compilations, he explains his own uninterestedness in these records in terms of an individual preference for discovering “one’s own” breaks, rather than relying on what’s already discovered and compiled by others. What appears as an individual strategy here is probably more understandable in the collective context of the particular use Format has for records as a hip hop producer. As I have already noted, the unwritten ethical rules of

sample based hip hop production disapprove sampling breaks that have already been used in previous productions or using music off compilations (Schloss 2004). The publication of breaks Format has discovered on his own doesn't just spoil the pleasure he associates with the exclusivity of this knowledge, but also gets in the way of incorporating the laboriously unearthed record in his own music.

This conversation informs us about the ways in which the particular aspirations and strategies of producers might differ from those scenic participants who only DJ; however, it also underlines the fact that such strategies peacefully coexist. There is no competition between DJ Format and Mr Thing here, neither of them challenges or tries to convince the other regarding the appropriateness of a particular approach: the way in which they laugh together about Format's reaction to compilations suggests that Format is aware of the particularity of his position, but also that Mr Thing has an awareness, even understanding of the rationale behind Format's stance.

Still, as Justin Torres's account of his initial reaction towards compilations suggest, such an empathic approach is not always the case: there are militant, "fist in the air" perceptions of the ideal-typical norms as absolute and all encompassing. However, the way in which he described his current attitude reveals that such understandings are not necessarily permanent, but can change over time:

*And I was so "fist in the air", like "this is the way how you buy records, any other way and you're bullshit!" (pauses) It's impossible to find some of these records. [Laughs. ...] If you want Salt on [the] Choctaw<sup>86</sup>, dude, you've gotta buy a compilation. You're not gonna spend three grands on a 45. If you find it [at an acceptable price], you're not going to find Detroit Sex Machines<sup>87</sup> [...] You're not gonna find these things. How are you gonna get them? You gonna get them on a compilation. As hard as I tried to keep it OG, keep it original, I still don't buy comps, but I'm helping to put them together. (Justin Torres 2005)*

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<sup>86</sup> *Salt – Hung Up / I Believe*, an extremely rare funk 45 on the *Choctaw* label.

<sup>87</sup> *Detroit Sex Machines – The Funky Crawl / Rap It Together* is another rare funk single originally released on the *Soul Track* label.

His account almost reads like a justification of buying compilations that resonates with Suhaid's and JT's position. What Torres used to see as "cheating" or a "bullshit way to go out" appear now as a completely valid way of buying records. However – just like DJ Format – he continues to set different standards for himself.



The Salt and Detroit Sex Machines singles<sup>88</sup>

In some cases, however, even such individually set standards are subject to change:

*Most of the time... sometimes I buy the shiny new reissue... especially if it's a one track record, or... uhm... something like that. But historically I've either had a beaten up original, or known that if I waited around for a while I could get one for the same price [as the reissue]. Uhm... now, there are exceptions, but I think... we're having this conversation at sort of a watershed moment for me, because... I'm not going to spend stupid money on records anymore. I'm kind of getting away from... uhm... vinyl as a medium. (Matthew Africa 2005)*

Matthew Africa describes his approach to collecting in the historical context of his collecting career, and ties his actual position to a particular moment. At the time of the interview, he was considering to switch to digital DJing technologies, playing sound files rather than records.

His transition from a preference for originals to an increasing disregard for the actual medium, just like Justin Torres's growing understanding for less purist approaches to collecting, seems to fit with what Paul Hodkinson and Ross Haenfler observe in the context of subcultural fashion and code of conduct: newcomers tend to follow ideal-

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<sup>88</sup> eBay auction pictures archived at <http://www.popsike.com/pix/20070530/130119765308.jpg> and <http://www.popsike.com/pix/20090201/350160735796.jpg> respectively, accessed 22 July 2009.

typical aesthetic (Hodkinson 2002: 40) and ethical norms more closely, often with a militant “fist in the air” attitude (Haenfler 2004: 424), while more established and respected members feel more at ease with individual deviations. Partly, because they have learnt the acceptable forms of transgression, partly because they no longer feel that they have to prove themselves to others.

As we have seen in this section, scenic distinctiveness is a heterogeneous space: although participants often make use of an ideal-typical set of shared norms when talking about their collecting practices, these are evoked as shared reference points rather than absolute and binding rules. Scenic participants perceive and apply these often in a very individual manner, in ways that correspond to the possibilities and aspirations that are tied to their particular positions.

In this section, I have concentrated mainly on explanations and justifications of particular distinctive approaches that mobilise ideal-typical norms and rules regarding the authenticity of records and collecting practices in a way that suit individual positions and aspirations. However, in many cases when people explain particular strategies or these practical rules and norms of collecting practices in general, they make more or less explicit references to various principles of what I shall call the *scenic ethos*. I will now discuss the ways in which this set of more profound ideals of moral excellence is evoked as a shared context in which scenic distinctiveness becomes meaningful.

#### 5.4 HIGHER COMMON PRINCIPLES: APPLYING THE CRATE DIGGING ETHOS

When I described individual strategies, it was not to suggest that scenic belonging is only a matter of awareness and flexible application of ideal-typical norms of authenticity regarding records and collecting practices in distinctive performances. While focusing on individual applications and understandings of subcultural styles, David Muggleton clearly warns against such an entirely carnivalesque appropriation of Butler’s ideas, an approach to performativity that assumes that subcultural identities are picked up and thrown away at will:

“subcultural identity is constructed by possession of the required attitudes and values, not merely adopted by performing the requisite actions and dressing in the appropriate fashion [...] In this sense, a claim to feel punk ‘inside’ does not denote an essentialist self, but an internalization of values acquired through socialization.” (Muggleton 2000: 92)

What he suggests here is that belonging is more a matter of internalised ideals than a superficial application of the practical norms and rules of subcultural style. In this section, I will describe the crate digging ethos as a set of such more abstract and internalised moral ideals, that are more generally shared within the scene than the ideal-typical principles that orient collecting practices at the practical level. Furthermore, I will present the ways in which participants mobilise the schemes of this ethos as a shared interpretive context within which the practical level of scenic distinctiveness is made meaningful.

In a way, the following account by Ken Sport, a Japanese DJ who lived in New York City and became a significant figure within the scene through a series of break-mixtapes in the 1990s, reflects the kind of deeper identification with scenic participation that Muggleton argues for. When asked in an interview about how long he *has been in the crate digging game* – using fairly standard hip hop slang for participation – he became rather upset:

“I never been in no game.. It’s my LIFE, I hate peoples playing games, so I don’t call it a game. [...] Kids nowadays talking about game: game this, game that! Play your PlayStation or Nintendo in your crib if you wanna play games! [...] When it comes to diggin’ life, I take it more seriously. It’s a Journey of Discovery & Enjoying Good Music. My everyday life was just diggin’, diggin’, diggin’ in the ’90s period!” (Ken Sport in Mr Mass 2008b)

Ken Sport describes digging as a way of life, rather than a playful or unserious hobby. Digging for records and making mixtapes is what occupied his days for most of the 1990s, and has remained important for him ever since. Although Muggleton makes a reference to Bourdieu when he describes “subcultural allegiance as inscribed on and conveyed through the body in ways other than dress” (2000: 90), he never fully explores how these internalised distinctive attitudes and values relate to subcultural styles. While

the centrality of scenic practice in Ken Sport's life is only one extreme on a wide scale of possibilities, his account suggests that boundaries of scenic practice and everyday life are blurred<sup>89</sup>. Such an understanding of scenic identities as inseparable from everyday life offers us a chance to reconsider Bourdieu's thoughts about the relationship between the embeddedness of popular distinctiveness in the ethos of particular groups:

“Popular taste applies the schemes of the ethos, which pertain in the ordinary circumstances of life, to legitimate works of art, and so performs a systematic reduction of things of art to the things of life.” (Bourdieu 1979/2002: 5)

Bourdieu argues that class specific ideals of morality present themselves in the aesthetic categories by which people from specific classes evaluate and interpret high art, but also more mundane things like cooking or clothing. Although he never provides an exhaustive definition of what he means by ethos, the way in which he considered it to work at the level of the unconscious, and to be the outcome of an enduring learning process through the objective regularities of practice (Bourdieu 1977: 77) suggest that we might not be mistaken much when interpreting it as closely connected to the notion of habitus<sup>90</sup>. Bourdieu presents the ethos as a set of collectively shared, foundational, unformulated and practical moral principles that precede a written ethics (Bourdieu 1990a: 100), and also corresponds to class-specific economic and social conditions (Bourdieu 1979/2002). If we consider the everydayness of scenic participation with its regular, repeated enactments of collecting practice and the group context in which these distinctive rituals are performed and perceived, we can easily conceive it as a particular life experience that has the capacity to inscribe the principles of such a particular moral worldview, a group specific ethos that is applied in value-judgements regarding records and collecting practices. Although, as we will see, such group-specific ideals play an important part in the ways participants make sense of the more practical rules of scenic distinctiveness, the principles of the scenic ethos also coexist and overlap with the dispositions they have acquired prior to scenic participation, and in other social contexts

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<sup>89</sup> Keith Kahn-Harris' (2007) suggestions regarding the authenticity assigned to mundanity within the extreme metal scene, and Paul Hodkinson's (2002) recognition of the ways in which everyday subcultural participation is the measure of commitment among Goths indicate that such a blurring of boundaries between group specific and everyday lives is not uncommon in other cultural arenas.

<sup>90</sup> Bourdieu explicitly refers to Hegel's notion of the ethos, a concept of similar function to habitus (Bourdieu 1990a: 12).

too. Much in line with Ross Haenflers observations regarding youth cultures, “[p]articipants construct both individualized and collective meanings for their participation” (Haenfler 2004: 428-429).

Paul Hodgkinson describes the distinctive space of the goth subculture with reference to the relative consistence of tastes – regarding fashion and music – and ideals – a set of moral assumptions associated with the given subcultural lifestyle – from one place to the next, and one participant to the next (Hodgkinson 2002: 30, 40-41, 61-61, 76). However, just like Muggleton (2000), he doesn’t attempt to explain the relationship of tastes and ideals apart from explicitly rejecting the “structural homology” approach (cf. Hebdige 1987) that interprets subcultural styles as “expressions” of an “underlying” meaning in the context of group specific experiences and values (Hodgkinson: 61). Nevertheless, his account offers a potential starting point to reconsider the relationship between the concrete level of distinctiveness and a more profound, shared moral worldview. Drawing on Sarah Thornton’s (1996) work, he describes shared, commonsensical “ideals and meanings” as a subcultural ideology, a shared interpretive framework within which the value and significance of the practices is assessed by participants. What I find illuminating in his analysis is the way in which he describes *an active application of shared ideals in the explanation and evaluation of practices on behalf of the subculturalists themselves*. Building on this insight, we can approach the practical rules and norms of *collecting not as inherently meaningful, but rather as made meaningful* through the application of the “schemes of the ethos”, like the following account suggests

*[Playing originals] used to mean a lot [...], like [In an excited tone of voice:] ‘Oh wow, is he playing that? And it’s original as well!! Oh man!’ That was something that was kinda cool, an extra thing you could have. And also showed you’ve put the work in. You’re killing it, you’ve just played a set of like an hour worth of absolute killers, all on original, you know, it’s like, ‘Man, this guy’s put some work in... or he paid a lot.’ But, if this guy’s just got three or four compilations, at that time, you know, like [in less than appreciative a tone of voice] ‘Maaan, that’s...’ (Huw72 2007)*

The way in which Huw72 talks about what playing originals meant for him in the early 1990s suggests that “keeping it original” signalled more than just mere awareness and

truthfulness to a shared ideal-typical hierarchy of formats. It also signalled a certain commitment: one had to either put the work in to find those rare records cheap, or pay high prices for them at a specialist store or record dealer. He brought up the issue of work twice in this account, and indeed, it seems to be a generally more valued form of commitment within the scene than the willingness to spend significant amounts of money for records.

### **PAYING DUES**

The way in which Mr. Supreme feels the need to justify buying expensive records suggests a general aversion to paying high prices for records:

“Well, any true digger knows that if you put in the work you will find some real gems for the fraction of their market value. However, some records were just not available in certain parts of the world and you will probably never find them. If you do, it will take you a lifetime! So sometimes you just have to shell out that paper. It’s not satisfying for me to shell out an absurd amount of money for a record. Don’t think that I don’t or haven’t done that. (Mr. Supreme in Stroman 2002: 60)

Mr Supreme, again, makes reference to the importance of “putting the work in” when he reflects on his take on paying high prices. Even if it’s not a “satisfying” way of getting a record, it is acceptable in the case of records that are nearly impossible to find, no matter how much work one puts in.

Whereas bargains, records that are found cheap routinely come up when crate diggers talk about records or digging experiences, and bragging about such finds is omnipresent in crate digging related message boards, there seems to be a certain quietness, in certain cases almost an air of shame about expensive purchases:

*The more money [you spend on a record] it’s looked unfavourably. [...] The less money you put into it, it’s more about the elbow-grease you put into it, you know what I’m sayin’, like: “Look at the hard work I’m putting into getting this. (Cosmo Baker 2005)*

*I think a part of it is connected to that... it’s that, you’re not paying your dues if you... if you buy your way into a really good collection. You have to get your fingers dirty, and getting your fingers dirty means going into*

*basements, going into people's attics, but paying like bottom dollar for like real shit. Because anyone with ten thousand dollars can walk into Sound Library [a specialist record store] in New York and can gather like a killer collection. (Oliver Wang 2005)*

In the above accounts, distinctive approaches to collecting – such as a preference of originals, not paying high prices for records, valuing record buying in more remote and unorganised places of exchange as opposed to specialist shops – are explained by applying a particular scheme of the scenic ethos. Although I did come across other explanations for these preferences – like buying records cheap as a way to oppose the established hierarchy of music – “paying dues” emerged frequently enough in a number of different contexts as the “natural” explanation for particular rules and norms of collecting practices within the scene.

It is however important to mention that “*paying dues*”, the moral ideal that scenic positions have to be earned through enduring effort, is not just the glorification of work for its own sake. Joseph G. Schloss suggests that among hip hop producers, digging for source material is itself seen as a way to pay dues among hip hop producers. He describes paying dues as a complex process through which one accumulates the kinds of knowledge and records that are associated with prestige, but also a becoming, a *rite of passage*:

“One is simultaneously learning through experience, gathering musical material for later use, and undergoing a rite of passage.”  
(Schloss 2004: 93)

Beni B's following account of his dismissive attitude to *eBay* based buying practices is illuminating because it enables us to think about paying dues as taking part in a process of musical education:

*[I] just don't fuck with eBay, dude. [...] Because if I need something, I know where I'm gonna get it. [dismissively:] eBay, whatever... You know, that's for all the... Again, huh, music is a continuum, sometimes you've gotta listen to the bad records in order... or have a bad record in order to get to a good record, you know. But OK, eBay takes all-a-that out-a-that. Now it's like “OK I can go and then get all the good records.” (Beni B 2005)*

The way in which one has to go through hundreds of bad records in order to find a good one is *a particular type of effort* through which one develops the “digging skills” and a particular appreciation for music and records that make a crate digger: a way to experience the “continuum of music”, to develop an “ear” for certain styles, to find out enough about the geography of “record spots” to know where to find particular records, and to soak up every little detail about music in order to be able to intuitively find records with breaks.

Different types of work ethics are present in other music scenes as well, however they often differ in terms of the kinds of work that is valued (i.e. Kahn-Harris 2007; Tófalvy 2009)<sup>91</sup>, paying attention to the particular effort that is associated with prestige in the crate digging scene suggest that its ethos is situated within the wider context of hip hop culture. *Just like in other areas of hip hop, the expected work within the crate digging scene is practice, an enduring and repeated process of learning aimed at developing skills that are later demonstrated in some kind of creative output:* DJ sets, break mixtapes or sample based hip hop productions. It is in this sense that compilations or buying records on *eBay* appear as cheating: not just because they enable people to acquire music without making an effort, but also because they provide access to recordings that may be used to signal well developed digging skills, records that would otherwise take years of digging to recognise and appreciate.

“The downfall [of *eBay*] is you have a lot of jealous toys on there buying shit they know nothing about and don’t deserve it for not doing their homework.” (Mr Supreme in Stroman 2002: 60-61)

Mr Supreme’s choice of words here suggests that he understands the importance of “having to pay dues” in the wider context of hip hop culture: “toy” is the slang for young, inexperienced graffiti writers who lack skills, and have little understanding of the shared aesthetic and ethical norms of writing:

“I remember so vividly being like a toy [novice] and not knowing anything about the rules and just pretty much keeping my mouth shut and listening and wanting to learn, you know, having some education

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<sup>91</sup> Hodkinson’s (2002) description of “commitment”, as one of the substantive elements of subcultural forms strongly resonates with the importance of work to scenic affiliation.

before I just jumped into the thing blindly.” (Futura 2000 quoted in Macdonald 2001: 184)

As veteran graffiti artist Futura 2000’s account suggests, toys are expected to keep quiet and do their homework first. Nancy Macdonald describes a particular strategy among writers to move from the simplest types of graffiti, slowly and gradually to more complex forms only when they feel they have acquired the necessary skills, in order to avoid ridicule. Paying dues among graffiti writers is a matter of going through this process of learning the “rules” and gradually developing and demonstrating skills through enduring practice. (Macdonald 2001: 74-83, 132-134). Mr Supreme’s reflection on a new generation of diggers follows a similar logic: when novice diggers brag about their *eBay* finds on online forums or display them in mixes, they claim acknowledgement they have not yet earned.

There is however a more profound significance of having to pay dues. As Schloss insightfully notes regarding the importance of the principle of “getting your foundation” within the b-boying community: the significance of enduring, gradual learning points beyond merely mastering the basic techniques, skills, and strategies upon which individual styles can be built; it is also an important means to learn about the development, rules and philosophy of the art form, an education in scenic history that ensures that individual innovation is solidly grounded in a shared tradition (Schloss 2009: 50-51).

### **FLIPPING RECORDS**

“People always want to know, Well how many records you have? It doesn’t matter. The real question is, how do you play and work with what you have.” (Beni B in Klawter 2005: 21)

“Since its birth, hip hop has always been about flipping records whether rocking the party or making a beat, it all comes down to the records you have and how creative you can be.” (DJ Day n.d.)

Apart from work, creativity is the other value that is often evoked as a merit of moral excellence within the scene. Just like “paying dues”, the importance of creativity also resonates with a more general hip hop ethos. Nancy Macdonald describes a similar importance of creativity in the context of graffiti writing (Macdonald 2001: 82-83), but

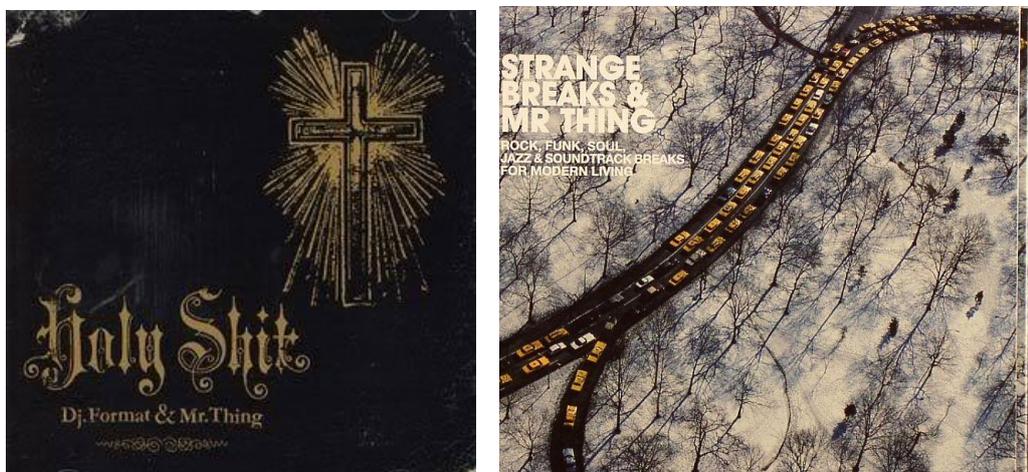
the abundance of such a centrality of creative reuse and stylistic innovation in how authenticity is conceived in hip hop dressing styles (Garcia 2003), DJing (Pray 2001), b-boying (Israel 2002; Schloss 2009) and rapping (Fitzgerald 2000) is also apparent. Joseph Schloss presents creativity as one of the foundational moral values underlying the “professional ethics” of sample based hip hop production (Schloss 2004: 101). Through the description of a number of practical rules, he explores how this creativity is conceived and valued as originality in terms of the sampled material, innovation and transformative use – flipping – of already available elements among producers.

Similarly to “paying dues” the ideal that associates moral excellence with creativity is often evoked to reflect on the practical rules and norms of collecting and to justify individual distinctive approaches:

*If you track back the digging aesthetic... which starts in hip hop... which starts with the pioneering old school DJs... is their little thing was “Let me find some ill song that nobody know about, but that you’re gonna go bonkers when you hear.” And the idea was that the obscurity of the song’s over... is all for that they are overlooked, and therefore it’s not something that you would’ve paid a thousand dollars for, because anything worth a thousand dollars people already know about. It’s really the record like the Incredible Bongo Band’s cover of “Apache” that most people have thought was big junk that suddenly got turned into something. So it’s the whole idea... the whole hip hop aesthetic of turning nothing to something. So, I think for that reason the whole idea of spending a lot of money on these things kind of goes against that because it... it... if you’re spending a lot of money then that means that you’re buying something that is sort of a known item, rather than finding that thing that no one knows about, or that thing that people... that people throw away as junk is what you turn into something of value. (Oliver Wang 2005)*

In this alternative explanation of why buying expensive records is looked at unfavourably, Oliver Wang refers to the ideal of creativity that also provides a potential rationale for why discovering one’s breaks is associated with moral worth. Wang describes crate digging as a double creative process: as the recognition and actualisation of yet unrecognised musical value. Apart from the actual discovery, the process through

which a record is turned from “nothing to something” also has to do with how it is “flipped”. The following account shows how the scheme of creativity can be, and is indeed, applied regarding the evaluation of both the act and medium of transformative use:



Mix CDs by DJ Format and Mr Thing<sup>92</sup>

*I just think, it's [producing compilations] a good way of putting out good music and making it accessible for everyone, but personally I would rather do a mix CD where you actually put some of your own creativity into presenting something in a different way. Like anyone can just find some breaks and put them on a compilation for anyone else to sample, but I think... I don't know.. it's more interesting if you can like take those breaks, cut 'em up, you know, do a mix CD, make it interesting. You know, like you've done [to Mr Thing], or like I did. (DJ Format 2007)*

It is also important to note that due to its abstract and undefined nature, creativity is just as open to individual interpretations and applications, as the previously discussed concept of work. Previously I have already quoted Mr Thing's opinion about *Dusty Fingers* as the only compilation series that were “doing it” at the time of conducting our interview. Like other diggers I have spoken to, he acknowledged the compilation series for being “ahead of the curve” in terms of exploring musical territories – library records, soundtracks, European jazz – that were then still beyond the knowledge of most crate

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<sup>92</sup> <http://i27.photobucket.com/albums/c168/dubstrong/format.jpg>, <http://images.juno.co.uk/full/CS294475-02A-BIG.jpg>, accessed 5 September 2009. I have included *Holy Shit!*, the mix by DJ Format and Mr Thing in the “Digging beyond breaks” folder on the DVD Appendix Volume 2.

diggers. In an interview, Dusty Kid, the anonymous compiler of the series has put himself before producers of other compilations on the grounds that those people only put out the originals of records that have already been discovered and sampled by others, but also challenged hip hop producers for not being creative enough in terms of looking for materials to sample:

“*Dusty Fingers* is like, a project that no one’s really done before in compilations. [...] The reason why I’m puttin’ out all this crazy shit [on compilations] is because I’m pissed off at all these simple minded producers using disco and bullshit records. There’s another world out there that you can sample from. There’s TONS of records. Why sample a stupid fuckin’ record that was a hit in the ’80s when you can be sampling shit like this and also make it a hit?” (Dusty Kid in Soulman 1999d)



*Dusty Fingers* compilation covers

## FOUNDATIONAL VALUES

As a number of earlier quotes in this section suggest, similarly to the practical norms and rules of scenic distinctiveness, these schemes of the scenic ethos are, implicitly or explicitly, often grounded in the history of crate digging, or the wider context of hip hop culture. As in the case of practical rules of collecting, the logic of “keeping it real” does not prescribe a uniform application of moral ideals. The abstractness of these principles opens up the space for highly flexible, often conflicting interpretations and applications. In the beginning of this section, I have reviewed a number of accounts that apply the scheme of “paying dues” in order to explain ideal-typical norms such as the hierarchy of formats. The following example suggests that the same principle can be mobilised to

effectively challenge the very same hierarchy, and a whole range of practical norms that most scenic participants tend to acknowledge at least to some degree:

*It should be about your [DJ] set, you know. And if you find music on the internet, that's fine. To me, it's the modern day version of digging, you know. Because you still have to know who those artists are. And if you're on [p2p file sharing service] Soulseek or some shit like that, you see a thousand things out there, you don't know what it is, and you still will have to figure out what it is, research it. And that's dope. The internet makes sure that it's a lot more garbage out there. It's infinite amount of garbage, so it means a lot more work. (King Honey 2005)*

When King Honey makes a case for the acceptability of downloading and playing digital soundfiles, as “the modern day version of digging”, he supports his argument by evoking both schemes of the ethos in his argument, rather than making references to practical considerations, limitations and aspirations that are related to personal positions. Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot describe how debating parties resolve conflicts of evaluation by resorting to “higher common principles” (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999, 2000, 2006) – that is, more profound and consensually shared values – in justifications as the shared platform upon which agreement is possible. The value associated with creativity and work plays a similar function in King Honey’s argument. The way in which these schemes of the ethos serve as potential common ground for agreement on an otherwise controversial claim within the scene suggests that these moral ideals carry more weight as more generally shared, central or foundational values of the scene than practical rules and norms. Indeed, I have never heard anyone to question or challenge these ideals within the scene.

## 5.5 IT’S A BELONGING THING

In this chapter, I described both the practical rules of collecting and the abstract ideals of the scenic ethos as historical constructs of authenticity: shared norms of excellence that are related to the development of crate digging, a particular tradition of collecting

that is embedded in the wider context of hip hop culture. I have argued that the logic of “keeping it real” that operates in both domains does not prescribe a singular and absolute distinctive approach to collecting within the scene, but allows for flexible, relational applications.

As we have seen in the previous sections, *at the practical level of scenic distinctiveness*, a relatively clear set of ideal-typical rules and norms are perceived and applied in personal strategies in ways that correspond to personal positions, possibilities and aspirations. *What allows flexibility here is that the standards of practice are not collectively set or policed, but emerge out of individual strategies of identity making.*

*In the case of the scenic ethos*, whereas its internalised ideals appear more generally shared, and rarely if ever challenged, *it is the abstractness of its core values – work and creativity – that allows a high degree of flexibility* in how participants interpret and apply these values when they explain the practical level of scenic distinctiveness, and justify their particular positions.

I have argued that Bourdieu’s notion of the habitus is useful in understanding the positionality of individual approaches to distinctiveness – the ways in which particular positions offer different perceptions and strategies regarding the application of the practical norms and rules of collecting. Furthermore, I have suggested that the habitus enables us to better understand how this practical level of scenic distinctiveness is made meaningful by scenic participants through the application of the schemes of the scenic ethos.

I have already made passing references to how the habitus enables us to conceive of the ways in which the distinctive attitudes of scenic participants have less to do with rational calculation – conscious attempts to put on particular identities or accumulate symbolic capital in a status-competition – than the internalization of distinctive attitudes and values. When Ken Sport talked about his “diggin’ life”, Justin Torres about the importance of “keeping it original”, Suhaid about “not having the heart” to play funk in a digital format, or Mr Supreme about how toys do not “deserve” particular records, their accounts were charged with emotions: in some cases passion and affection, in others, resentment or outrage. While individual applications of the practical rules and norms varied, as well as the degree to which such the validity of such standards were seen as all encompassing, or rather, a matter of individual choice, what was common in

these accounts is that they *did matter* at a deeply personal level which suggests that belonging to the scene is an *affective affair*.

Whereas Bourdieu talks about the importance of repeated, ritual practices in the making of the habitus, Butler talks about the same thing in the context of identity-making (Butler 1997, 1999). In this context, the principle of “paying dues” appears almost as it is set up to make sure the internalization of scenic values and attitudes through enduring, regular practice. It is *not just* a process of learning through which one *acquires* digging skills and a particular appreciation for music and records, but also an enduring engagement with scenic practices that facilitates the development of an affective relationship with the distinctive attitudes and values of this tradition.

Much in line with what Butler and Bourdieu write about the role of individual enactments in the reproduction of both individual identities *and* collectively shared rules and ideals, distinctive collecting practices are not only performances through which scenic participants continuously position themselves within the crate digging scene by making references to its shared attitudes and values, but also the very means of keeping this tradition alive:

So why do you stick to vinyl?

*I'm old school. I'm a purist. [...] It's... it's... you know... it's tradition. And some level, it's not for any logical or practical reason. I mean the audiophile argument that vinyl sounds better than CD... I can't tell the difference. And you play the two of 'em next to each other, you know, I'm not gonna know which one is better. It really is because what I've learned from, like, the people who came before me, and, on whatever level, I have an interest in maintaining that tradition. (Oliver Wang 2005)*

Although such conscious and explicitly articulated explanations of the importance of “keeping it real” are rare, the ways in which purists tend to stress the importance of keeping their standards “close to the foundations” suggests (Schloss 2004: 104) an *implicit concern with, and a sense of personal responsibility in preserving and passing on the norms and customs of the crate digging tradition*.

What does all of this tell us about Danny Breaks’ purchase of the Mohawks single? Probably, that it would be a mistake to take it for a mere “status thing”: a membership

or status-claim that that expects some sort of public approval or acknowledgement. Such an interpretation would tell us little about the significance of this purchase as an act of participation within the scene: the ways in which we could understand it as the maintenance of scenic values and attitudes in general, but also the actualization of a particular standard of moral excellence that Danny set himself in this shared context. It is not the acquisition or ownership of that particular record that makes a difference or entitles him a particular position within the scene, but the ways in which this purchase becomes part of a longer chain of events, a history of enduring, regular collecting practice, a process through which his scenic allegiance is continuously remade.

As a last remark, it is important to distinguish this individualistic understanding of scenic distinctiveness and belonging from what David Chaney describes as *life-style projects*. Chaney defines contemporary life-style groups as heterogeneous communities of strangers who share a set of aesthetic preferences and corresponding ethical ideals, and find a sense of belonging and self-worth within these worlds through the consumer choices they make (Chaney 1996). As Oliver Wang's above account suggests, scenic participation doesn't play out in such an atomised context. Although in this chapter I have argued that scenic identities are to an important degree the products of individual aspirations and enactments, it is important to pay attention to the fact that the acquisition of scenic taste, collecting attitudes and ideals and digging takes place in a web of personal and mediated connections. As I will argue in the next chapter, it is through this learning process – a series of enduring, repeated interaction with scenic participants and media – that participants develop personal attachments to the social world of the scene, and internalise its ideals and values.

## 6. CREATING ATTACHMENTS. SOCIAL LEARNING WITHIN THE SCENE

*When I first came to Providence, Nat was one of the first people I met. And we kinda like really, really hit it off. And he... we were both DJing. So it was fortunate I actually found somebody, 'cause you know like DJ is a folk art. So, you couldn't go to classes back then [in the early 1990s], there wasn't like a weekend seminar to learn to DJ, like you're taught by another person who knew how to DJ. So, him and I was kinda like at the same skill level, you know, and we were learning from each other, and we were into different stuff. So we'd go collecting all the time. We'd go to flea markets, and stuff like that. And we met Ben Woodward, now known as Mr. Ten Fingers, and he was more of the art school party DJ, and he played like disco and funk with punk rock. And then we met Nick who was like pure Queens hip hop, he was like New York to the fullest. So, it was kinda like a competition to find records. It was amazing. Each of us would go to different places. [...] We each had our own different methods, so ... uhm ... Nat was really good at going on to Usenet groups<sup>93</sup> and signing up for things, and researching this. My technique was to get unusual records, records that looked weird, and then one out of twenty would be good, and then check the liner notes see who that was, and make sure I had a list. And we were also really avid about listening to radio shows, like that was really, really important. And 'specially for contemporary music, because that was so hard to get hold of, that stuff. It was word of mouth, or the radio stations. [...] We were all working together, we would trade information. Individually we would've never covered any ground, but as a group we were able to each learn our own ways what was going on. (King Honey 2005)*

I quoted King Honey's account at such length, because it touches upon many of the issues that I will explore in this chapter regarding the ways in which the acquisition of scenic tastes, distinctive attitudes and values, and digging skills creates attachments to the scene, because the learning process is embedded in a web of personal and mediated

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<sup>93</sup> Internet based discussion groups that preceded the development of the world wide web.

relationships. When I asked him, how he *got into* collecting records, he answered my question by focusing on how such social connections contributed to the development of his DJ skills and expanded his knowledge about music in the early 1990s. Whereas it would be possible to limit my discussion to a mere description of the particular networks through which scenic information circulates, such an approach would be insensitive of how these sources themselves contribute to the development of the participants' engagement with the scene. Rather than approaching these connections as neutral channels of cultural transmission, I will show that they play important roles in the internalisation of scenic tastes, distinctive attitudes and values, as well as the development of personal affiliations to the social world of the scene. By paying attention to how they contribute to the development of attachments (Hennion 2001), what might be understood as a mere acquisition and trading of information through a strictly functionalist perspective, appears as the absorption and exchange of influences and inspirations that gain their significance and affective depth partly from being profoundly embedded in a web of relationships which they – at the same time – also intensify and expand.

In this chapter, drawing on the work of Will Straw, I will approach the scene through these networks of sociability that facilitate the informal transfer of scenic skills and competences. In the first section, I will briefly overview the literature regarding the role of social learning within cultural scenes. In the two sections that follows, I will explore the roles that personal relationships and mediated connections played in the dissemination and internalisation of scenic tastes and ideals, and the formation and solidification of personal attachments to the social world of the scene between the mid 1980s and early 1990s, when the particular generation of crate diggers that my research is focused on became involved with crate digging. Although most of this chapter describes the circumstances of social learning in a period characterised by a relative scarcity of available information regarding breaks, samples, and other crate digging related issues, in the concluding section I will briefly explore the ways in which the emergence of a multitude of internet based sources has affected scenic learning since the mid 1990s on.

## 6.1 NETWORKS OF SOCIABILITY

By approaching the social world of crate digging primarily through the networks of sociability that facilitate the informal transfer of scenic skills and knowledge, I follow Will Straw's (2001b) suggestion regarding the potential insight we could gain from one of the earliest uses of the notion of scene in social sciences, more precisely the sociology of work and organisations. Straw refers to Arthur Stinchcombe's (1959) study of the organisation of work within the construction industry that described the ways in which the allocation of tasks and the distribution of expertise was arranged primarily through informal communications within the social scene of construction crews, rather than managed through more institutionalised, bureaucratic forms of administration that are typical in the co-ordination of mass production. Although Stinchcombe was primarily interested in how differences in the tasks and problems that are specific to particular industries demanded different methods of organisation, Straw suggests that such *an attentiveness to the importance of social relationships* – kinship and friendship ties – *as well as informal, sociable interaction* – such as after-work drinking – *in the dissemination of competences and opportunities might enable us to gain a better understanding of how loosely connected creative worlds are organised*. Straw only calls attention to this approach as a potentially illuminative application of the notion of scene, and does not attempt to present a fully developed research agenda based on this perspective, or list the kinds of questions we could ask by adopting it.

Within the study of music scenes, we rarely find inquiries that pay any attention to processes of learning. Ruth Finnegan's ethnography of amateur music making in Milton Keynes is one of the few notable exceptions. She describes how *particular generic scenes differ in terms of the expected forms of musical education*: whereas within the world of classical music, taking part in formal, institutionalised training under the supervision of professional teachers is the norm, within popular music scenes, such as folk and rock, a self-taught, creative "*mode of learning*" is valued. In this latter form, apart from developing musical skills through individual practice that attempts to copy recorded performances, as well as informal, uninstitutionalised situations – rehearsals, jam sessions and gigs – are the primary sites of developing one's musical skills (Finnegan 1989: 133-142). Alex Stewart's detailed and insightful account of the contemporary big band jazz scene in New York City pays attention to the importance of

rehearsals and gigs not just as informal training grounds, but also the sites where scenic information is exchanged, social relationships are developed, reputations are made, odd jobs and steady positions in bands are allocated (Stewart 2007: 40-60). The implications of Stewart's work resonates with Straw's insights: this "behind the scenes" interaction is central to the transfer of musical skills and the organisation of professional activity within this musical world. Although Stewart never quite explicates, his study suggests that such occasions are also crucial for the making and re-making of the very networks of sociability that are important not just for the organisation of collective, creative work, but also for creating individual attachments to such shared worlds. It is exactly this relatively unexplored sociable dimension of learning that this chapter will explore.

*Focusing on the social embeddedness of scenic learning* enables us to account for the ways in which *being into* crate digging emerges as more than just *being in the know* in King Honey's account. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that *scenic sensibilities* – the kind of affective relationship to the music as well as the distinctive scenic values and attitudes – are inscribed through enduring and repeated engagement with people and mediated sources of information, a learning process which at the same time is both productive and acts towards enhancing participants' attachment to the social world of the scene. Furthermore, I will argue that it is exactly the situatedness of information flows within these affective relationships that lend weight to shared values and attitudes through the process of their internalisation: the importance associated with the opinion of peers, and the perceived authority of the guidance and judgment of respected mentors, and socially distant role-models are what make scenic tastes and ideals matter in a profoundly personal way.

The way in which King Honey spoke about DJing as a "folk art", a craft that was passed down through informal channels, rather than something that was learnt in more institutionalised settings, resonates with the way in which Stinchcombe likens the socially embedded dissemination of duties and expertise at the workplace to the circulation of folklore (Stinchcombe 1959), but also with Finnegan's observation regarding the tendency that practices of popular music making are primarily learnt in informal settings (Finnegan 1989). However, there is an important difference between the social scenes of work that Stinchcombe describes, and Finnegan's popular music scenes: whereas the former is based on face-to-face relationships, in the latter mediated sources of information and inspiration – records, sheet music, music magazines – also

play an important part in the development of one's skills apart from personal connections. Indeed, King Honey's remarks regarding radio shows and Usenet groups suggest that we should understand his description of DJing as a folk tradition in a metaphorical sense, rather than referring to a cultural form that is passed on strictly orally. Although in the 1970s, most information regarding break collecting was indeed transmitted almost exclusively within a network of personal connections among Bronx breakbeat DJs (Allen 1999; Fricke and Ahearn 2002), King Honey's account describes a later stage in the development of the scene when sporadic mediated sources – radio shows, compilation records – already made some of this information available beyond the initial social circles where breakbeat DJing and sampling was developed. Still, prior to the wide-spread use of the internet, such mediations were scarce, locally bound, ephemeral, and difficult to find, *which meant that learning about breaks was an enduring, laborious process that to a large extent relied on individual explorations – finding records by taking chances at record stores, and actively seeking out mediated information – as well as repeated, regular personal communication with mentors or peers.*

Most of my interviewees started their digging careers in this particular period – between the late 1980s and the early 1990s – prior to the widespread use of the internet, and the development of easily accessible online sources with rich, well structured information on breaks, records and crate digging. Their accounts – that I will present in the following two sections – regarding the ways in which personal and mediated sources of information have influenced them thus provide a partial perspective on the significance of these connections, which was in many ways tied to the information scarcity that was specific of that time.

## 6.2 PERSONAL INFLUENCES

*Georges [Sulmers] was one of my earliest influences. Him and Jeff Mao, "Chairman" Mao. They're like best friends. And I've gone out to [visit them in] the East Coast. [...] I went out there in '94, and they've been digging already for like ten years. And we went down to*

*Maryland to a record show<sup>94</sup>, and I've never been to a record show. I was still a newbie, I was still, like, you know, basic. And we went to the record show, and I had like a thousand dollars, you know, to spend. And Georges and Jeff walked me by all the tables, and they literally just pulled records. To some of them, they said "No, no, no. His not ready for that yet.." [...T]hey made me learn that you have to get your basics. You can't just jump into 24 Carat Black<sup>95</sup> without starting with James Brown. You know, you can't jump in to Frank Motley<sup>96</sup> without first knowing the Ohio Players, and, you know, Sly Stone. So they made me learn, from the beginning... and what funk and soul was. And that made me [...] start understanding jazz, helped me to understand blaxploitation... and, I would say, in the earliest days it was those three people, Shortkut, Georges Sulmers and "Chairman" Mao that really made me go [in an excited tone of voice]: "Wow! I love this! I wanna dig!" Those were the people. (Justin Torres 2005)*

The way in which Justin Torres recalls his earliest influences resonates with what Howard Becker suggest regarding the importance of *social learning* in the context of the developments of a deviant career:

“Before engaging in the deviant activity on a more or less regular basis, the person has no notion of the pleasures to be derived from it; he learns these in the course of interaction with more experienced deviants.” (Becker 1963/1991: 30).

Becker argues that “deviant motivations” are the results of “deviant behaviour”, rather than the other way around: they emerge through the process of learning the techniques of deviant practice as well as the categories through which it appears pleasurable, a specific aesthetics that is embedded in a particular “self-justifying-rationale (or

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<sup>94</sup> A record show or fair is a pre-advertised, often regularly organised convention where multiple record sellers offer their merchandise. I will describe these events in more detail in the Chapter 7.

<sup>95</sup> Released under the name of *24 Carat Black*, *Ghetto: Misfortune's Wealth* is a much sampled and very rare concept album written and produced by Dale O. Warren in 1973.

<sup>96</sup> A trumpet player and singer – initially from North Carolina – who put out a number of obscure funk 45 RPM singles on Toronto's Paragon label, leading bands like The Hitch-Hikers and The Bridge Crossings in the late 1960s. His music was reissued by Gerald “Jazzman” Short's Jazzman Records in 1998 on a compilation entitled *The Best of Frank Motley & King Herbert – Canada's Message to the Meters*.

ideology)”. Becker’s recognition of the processual and socially embedded development of group specific tastes serves as the point of departure for this section.

Much in line with what Becker says, the two experienced diggers did not only point out records that contained breaks to Justin Torres, they also educated the newcomer about a particular systematic order among musical texts that, as I have described in Chapter 4, is an important aspect of the aesthetic appreciation of music within the scene. The normative mode in which Justin Torres described what he had learnt about the appropriate way of absorbing musical knowledge from his mentors – “you have to get your basics” – also affirms Becker’s suggestions about the ways in which learning what’s pleasurable is interwoven with certain group specific moral ideals that provide a wider rationale for one’s actions. Still, it seems to me, that if we were to interpret Torres’s account through Becker’s model, we would lose sight of something significant in his story: the ways in which his enthusiasm and excitement to become more involved with digging, and also, his attachment to shared values emerges in part from the context of his affective relationship with Georges Sulmers and “Chairman” Mao.

Whereas Becker never explores the importance of one’s attachment to the social scene in which the acquisition of tastes is embedded, Antoine Hennion’s approach is more geared towards such an exploration of belonging:

“With taste and pleasure, the effects are not exogenous variables, or automatic attributes of objects. They are the results of a corporeal practice, collective and instrumented, settled by methods that are discussed endlessly, oriented around the appropriate seizing upon of uncertain effects. It is for this reason that we prefer to speak of attachments.” (Hennion 2007: 108-109)

Although Hennion’s account could be mistaken for simply repeating Becker’s above cited ideas, his formulation is more attentive to the ways in which *repeated, collective practice creates attachment*:

“as much as to oneself in the life of one’s body and training, as well as to others, and to a collective history, with its fashions, techniques, changing objects and controversies.” (ibid.: 100)

Hennion resonates with both Bourdieu’s (Bourdieu 1990b) and Butler’s (Butler 1990, 1993, 1999) ideas about the role of regular, ritual performances in the internalisation of

shared sensibilities, values and attitudes, and the making of both individual and collective identities. In this view, group affiliation is *not the result* of taste development, a final stage in a sequential career as Becker seem to suggest at certain points, *but is a continuous process of attaching oneself* to a shared world through cultural practices that are ultimately collective. In this pragmatic perspective, belonging is both the product of, and is productive of a complex web of affective relationships to objects, but, more importantly for my discussion, *to particular customs and traditions as well as sources of information and inspiration*. These insights bring us closer to the subject matter of this section: the question of how *the embeddedness of learning in particular personal and mediated relationships makes tastes and shared values matter at a deeply personal level*, and how it can create and reinforce a sense of attachment to the social world of the scene.

#### **LONG LASTING, IMMEDIATE RELATIONSHIPS: MENTORS AND PEERS**

For Justin Torres, a hip hop enthusiast, but also a “newbie” to crate digging at the time, the guidance of Georges Sulmers and “Chairman” Mao is likely to have carried a certain weight because of the enduring engagement of these people with collecting, but also as a result of their particular positions within the scene. In that period, apart from producing beats, Sulmers was the head of Raw Shack, an important independent hip hop record label<sup>97</sup>, while “Chairman” Mao was already an established DJ who wrote for and edited *ego trip*, a small but influential hip hop magazine<sup>98</sup>. Furthermore, it is also important to note that if they hadn’t been good company to hang out with, Torres probably would have been less excited about becoming more involved with digging.

The following interview excerpt provides more insight regarding the ways in which one’s relationships with more experienced and knowledgeable music enthusiasts in stylistically more diverse local music scenes can similarly contribute to the broadening of one’s knowledge:

*... and I became involved with the Manchester music scene. And then, obviously, you meet people who’ve been into music for years... ’cause you know, I was isolated first, then I came into it, then I met a lot of*

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<sup>97</sup> See (Soulman 2000c).

<sup>98</sup> See (Wang 2008).

*people who had been collecting records, who had been into music for a while. And we shared... we shared knowledge and stuff. And you get brought up like that basically. Your knowledge increases quicker, because you are surrounded with people who've been into it for a while. [...] And also, when you're young and you got that certain excitement about it, you've got the energy about it, you know... The older heads, you know, they like that. You know, so they like to share the knowledge. Because if you're reacting, and you're getting buzzed up off something they put you on to, then it's a nice relationship. (Pro Celebrity Golf 2005)*

Pro Celebrity Golf's account is also illuminating regarding the dynamics of the relationship between experienced mentors and excited newcomers, and provides some insight regarding what motivates more knowledgeable collectors to dedicate time and effort to educating people who are just getting into music.

As King Honey's account that began this chapter suggests, networking with close friends who are of the "same skill level" can be just as important a way of acquiring information about records and digging as the guidance of mentors. The way in which Cosmo Baker describes his introduction to the principles of crate digging suggest that such more equal peer relationships can become just as influential in the transmission of scenic attitudes and values, as friendship ties with more established scenic participants:

*I had a bunch of friends... my friend Espo, who.. uhm... like he initially turned me on to Gil Scott-Heron. Like when he first played me "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised"<sup>99</sup>, it was like a nuclear bomb went off in my head. [...] I had a couple [...] of Parliament records, that I bought when I first started DJing, you know, and uhm.. and he said you need to go way deep, and he turned me on to Funkadelic, and uhm... like he always said... like he started me off to a degree... or instilled certain val... certain values. Like he instilled the values of like the digger mentality in me.*

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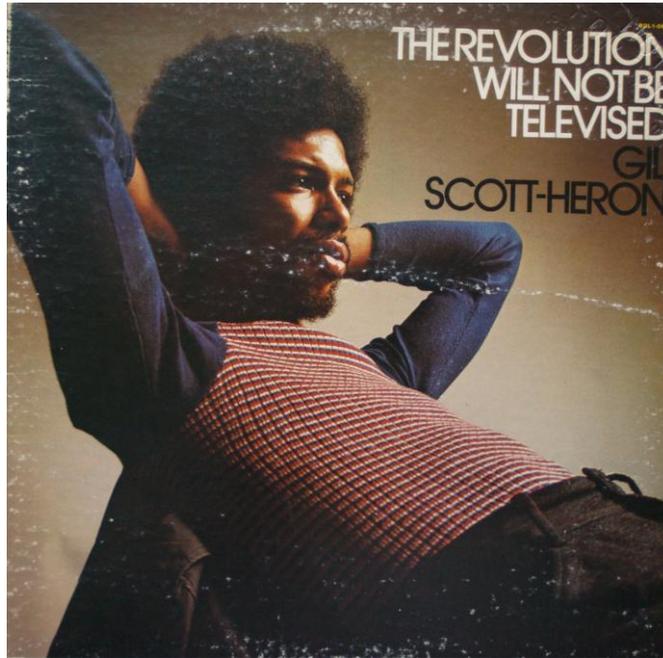
<sup>99</sup> American poet, spoken word artist and soul singer. "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" that was released on his *Pieces of a Man* album in 1971 is one of his best known works. The Flying Dutchman label has also released a Gil-Scott Heron compilation album under this title in 1974. It is not clear whether Cosmo speaks about the song or the album here.



Cosmo Baker in his record room. Brooklyn, 2010. Photo by Eilon Paz

What's the digger mentality?

*Digger mentality? Is more.. more... Cheaper. [Laughs. ...] The digger mentality is, let me find out more about this, and find out as much as I can about this, and let me get the dirt on it. You know what I'm saying. [...] You look in the back of a record, and that record is like really funky, and you see Idris Muhammad played the drums on this, and then you uhm... start looking for anything he is on. Or you found a [record] label that's really good, like [...] CTI, like the really easy ones, you know. You know, like those ones. And then, uhm... and then you just start focusing on everything, everything, everything. Like that. And that's.. that's the digger mentality to me. Like, not necessarily being a completionist, but, like, having a certain thoroughness, you know. And those are like [the] tools of trade [...] looking through the sessioners, looking through the labels, those are the tools. (Cosmo Baker 2005)*



Gil Scott-Heron's *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, album cover

Cosmo described the “digger mentality” as a mix of practical skills for discovering music, but also certain scenic values: an understanding of the importance of finding stuff cheap, “with the dirt on” by going to out of the way places, and “having a certain thoroughness” in gradually exploring more and more obscure stuff. The way in which Cosmo presents it as a mindset that is “instilled” resonates with Bourdieu’s thoughts about *how shared values are internalised* through the process of inculcation, *through enduring, regular collective practices* (Bourdieu 1990b): *digging together, but also, playing music to each other, discussing and debating issues of collecting and DJing.*

#### **OCCASIONAL ACQUAINTANCES: DISTANT ROLE-MODELS**

Although these socially embedded learning experiences often play out in the context of stable, long-term, local relationships, in many cases, occasional acquaintances - diggers met through recommendations of mutual friends while travelling, DJs flying in for gigs – may also contribute to one’s development.

The following story provides a detailed account of such an influential meeting:

“I was 19 years old and I played a show with Peanut Butter Wolf<sup>100</sup>. I played the show, went home and crashed, and got a call at ten in the

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<sup>100</sup> A prominent digger and producer from the West Coast of the USA.

morning from him. He was like, ‘Are we going digging or what?’ I borrowed my girlfriend’s car and went to pick him up. I’m 19 and I’m about to go digging with Peanut Butter Wolf. I couldn’t believe it. When we started digging I said, ‘You’ve been doing this since I was in short pants. Any record that you find that you think is ill [meaning good], even if you think it’s dumb obvious, give it to me.’

I must have bought \$300 worth of records that day. I followed him around and he handed me cool shit. I handed him some things I thought he might know and managed to surprise him with a few things. [...]

That experience totally blew my mind. It was a total head rush because I was so young. He also blew off a meeting with Madlib<sup>101</sup> and Melvin Van Peebles<sup>102</sup> in New York because he didn’t want to stop digging. Melvin Van Peebles was mad because someone from Stone’s Throw<sup>103</sup> had sampled something from *Sweet Sweetback’s Badasssss Song* and he was talking about filing a lawsuit. We were just digging and PB Wolf was like, ‘You know what? Fuck that’ and kept on digging.” (DJ Apt One in DJ Source-1 2008b)

Again, there is more to this story than learning about records. It is also an account of a powerful introduction to a certain enthusiasm, dedication, even fanaticism that is part of the digger mentality. It is through experiences as an influential role-model’s insistence on going digging early after a long night out, or his cancellation of a highly important meeting that such a priority assigned to digging begins to appear normal or even appealing, rather than strange or excessive.

I remember being equally surprised and fascinated in the beginning of my collecting career by how visiting DJs I admired insisted on waking up early – despite getting only a few hours of sleep – in order to get to the record shops in due time. After a while,

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<sup>101</sup> One of the most respected American hip hop producers in the crate digging scene since the late 1990s.

<sup>102</sup> Melvin Van Peebles is an American actor, screenwriter, novelist, director and composer. He is best known for writing and directing *Sweet Sweetback’s Badasssss Song* in 1971. The movie is often credited with laying the blueprint for the blaxploitation genre. Van Peebles also composed the soundtrack for the film, that – like many other blaxploitation soundtracks – was later sampled in hip hop tracks (Demers 2003).

<sup>103</sup> Madlib and Peanut Butter Wolf’s record label.

waking up early, or even, staying up until dawn in order to be the first to browse through the records at flea markets became a regular habit within the circle of my collecting friends in Budapest and remained so for quite some time. Similarly to what Bourdieu suggests, through repeated experiences, such a centrality of digging in organising one's life can become naturalised. Years later, when picking up two diggers at the Budapest airport, I did not find it the least bit strange or offensive that, before even saying "Hello" or "How are you?", they first asked me whether we would still find record stores open. We only recognised having skipped the polite greeting ritual after I had answered their question.

There are two further insights we could gain from DJ Apt One's encounter with Peanut Butter Wolf. First, the fact that even a newbie could manage to surprise a very experienced digger with records reinforces what I have suggested earlier: *learning about breaks is a project that is always in the making, something that is never fully accomplished or finished*, as the amount of available music that potentially conforms to the break aesthetics is well beyond that which anyone could ever hope to fully explore in a whole lifetime. *The sheer amount of records awaiting discovery provides a temporal dimension to the learning process*: it demands an enduring engagement with scenic practices.

#### **REINFORCING RELATIONSHIPS: MUTUAL FAVOURS AND CO-OPERATION**

Second, that scenic learning is often a two-way exchange, rather than just a unidirectional transfer of skills and knowledge. The subject of mutual sharing takes us back to King Honey's opening account. Throughout the interview, he described numerous cases of how they regularly tipped each other off regarding recently discovered music and "record spots", and also that when stumbling upon multiple copies of the same records, they gave them away as gifts, rather than selling them:

*For us, the purest thing was, like, getting the records, and hooking up our friends. Not to make money, you know. Money was irrelevant.*  
(King Honey 2005, my emphasis)

King Honey's account would be misinterpreted if we described it as a case of rational co-operation through which he maximised his scenic capitals – records, digging skills

and knowledge about music – by networking with others. Such a description that would concentrate on self-interest as the primary motivation that ultimately underlies these acts of kindness would be ignorant of something profoundly human and sociable about these exchanges<sup>104</sup>: the ways in which they draw on, express and enhance personal relationships. The following story is more explicitly indicative of the social significance of the sharing of information, as well as the gifting and trading of records among scenic participants.

“I met Count [Bass D] in a local record store, The Great Escape, in the fall of 1996. He noticed some records I was carrying – some fusion and soul jazz, some funk records – and surmised correctly that I was digging for beats. He walked up to me and handed me an Alice Cooper record – the one with ‘Public Animal #9’ on it – and instructed me to listen. I did, realized he knew what he was talking about, and wheeled around to talk. [...] We began talking more, and of course we kept bumping into each other at the store. I’ll never forget the time that I walked into the store and Count handed me a stone mint copy of Bob James *Two*<sup>105</sup> at his wife’s insistence! At the time, I was finishing my training at WRVU, Vanderbilt [University]’s [radio] station. I knew that I couldn’t do a show by myself, so I asked Count if he would consider taking up the show together.” (Egon in Soulman 1999a)

Egon described the development of his friendship with Count Bass D from a chance meeting in a record shop to doing a radio show together through a series of shared digging experiences and talks, but also *repeated favours*. *Although most of this chapter examined how personal connections facilitate the acquisition of scenic skills and knowledge*, Egon’s account is important, because it highlights the ways in which *the exchange of scenic information and records simultaneously contribute towards forging and enhancing such relationships. In addition to the making and reinforcing local*

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<sup>104</sup> See David Graeber’s criticism of the primacy of self-interested competitive strategies in the Bourdieuan framework of cultural description (Graeber 2001: 29).

<sup>105</sup> Jazz keyboard player Bob James’ 1975 album for CTI records, sought after by crate diggers mainly for the track Take Me to The Mardi Gras that opens with a classic break. The break has a highly distinctive sound due to Ralph Macdonald’s melodic cowbell arrangement, and has been sampled in far too many classic hip hop tracks to mention here.

*connections, the kind of exchange that I have described through the account of DJ Apt One suggests that the interactions between travelling and local diggers contribute towards the development of translocal relationships*<sup>106</sup>.

So far, I have described the importance of personal relationships – with mentors, peers, occasional encounters with role-models – in the development of participants’ attachment to the scene. I have argued that apart from facilitating the informal transfer of skills and knowledge, these connections play an important role in the internalisation of scenic tastes and ideals, partly because of the importance and authority associated with these sources of influence, partly because of the duration and regularity of the repeated encounters through which such attitudes, values and knowledge are acquired and passed on. Furthermore, I have suggested, that such enduring social interactions can also contribute to the development of these personal connections, the immediate context of one’s scenic affiliation. However, as I have already noted in the introduction of this section, personal connections are not the only sources of information and inspiration. In the next subsection, I will explore the ways in which networks of mediated communication can fulfil similar functions in disseminating scenic skills and knowledge, and also in developing an attachment to the social world of the scene.

## 6.2 NETWORKS OF MEDIATION

Howard Becker is articulate about the role of mediated channels of communication in acquiring deviant tastes and motivations:

“[d]eviant motivations have a social character even when most deviant activity is carried on in a private, secret, and solitary fashion. In such cases, various media of communication may take the place of face-to-face-interaction in inducting the individual into the culture.” (Becker 1963/1991: 31)

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<sup>106</sup> I will discuss the significance of record buying practices in creating and strengthening translocal connections in the next chapter in more detail.

He describes the importance of these channels in the context of the secretive nature of deviance, the ways in which deviants have to maintain their activities in a covert, secluded manner in order to avoid harassment or punishment because of the disdained or forbidden character of that form of behaviour. In the case of more accepted cultural tastes and practices, however, the significance of mediated communication lies not as much in the enabling of the maintenance of isolated, private practices, as connecting individuals to a geographically or socially distant social world. As I have already suggested in Chapter 2, there is a growing recognition (Thornton 1996) and emphasis on the empirical exploration (Hodkinson 2002; Kahn-Harris 2007) within subcultural studies of the ways in which various forms of media contribute to the crystallisation and dissemination of group specific tastes and ideals, as well as of the internal circulation of news, discussion of controversies and agenda-setting within geographically dispersed cultural scenes. These discussions suggest that niche media – music magazines, radio shows targeted at a wider audience – provide points of entry to these worlds for new recruits, while subcultural media – fanzines, flyers and online resources created for and by participants – facilitate the formation and maintenance of such collectivities. *However, the ways in which various media outlets contribute to the internalisation of shared tastes and ideals as well as the development of attachments to the social worlds of these scenes remains largely unexplored.* At best, the significance of mediated information in evoking a sense of identity and belonging is discussed in the context of Benedict Anderson's (1983) ideas:

“[T]he best-known fanzines functioned to reinforce the translocal sense of shared identity within the goth scene. Their exclusiveness to the subculture and their construction of a common agenda meant that, abstractly, they connected their geographically dispersed goth readers with one another *through their common consumption* of the publication. Consistent with Benedict Anderson's well-rehearsed argument that early print media functioned to construct ‘imagined’ national identities in the past, it is clear that, on a smaller scale, [...] fanzines [...] helped construct and reinforce the translocal sense of community which characterized their subculture.” (Hodkinson 2002: 169, my emphasis)

Whereas the role of personal influences in creating affective engagement with the scene – which I have described in the previous subsection – is not counter-intuitive, I feel that the ways in which media consumption may contribute towards the development of a sense of attachment to social worlds are less “clear” – and more complex – than Hodkinson suggests. While he is certainly right regarding the centrality of subcultural media to the translocal dissemination of news regarding relevant products and events, as well as the articulation of shared tastes and values, the mere availability of this information does not explain how its consumption may evoke a sense of affiliation and commitment to group specific tastes and ideals. Subcultural studies would probably benefit from paying attention to the body of work in media studies that explored the ways in which mass communications provides a sense of belonging to an imagined “national family” *through regular, ritualised, often active or participatory media consumption practices through which mediated images of distant people, events and debates become interwoven with the intimate and immediate experiences and relationships in the viewers’ and listeners’ everyday domestic routines* (Morley 2000: 105-113). Although David Oswell outlines a similar argument regarding the ways in which youth oriented TV programmes contribute towards the production of an imagined community of adolescents (Oswell 1998), his suggestion remains unexplored in the literature on music oriented youth cultures.

In what follows, I will pursue this insight and focus on the moment of consumption rather than exploring how various forms of media facilitate the circulation of crate digging related information. In other words, *I will pay attention to the ways in which participants engage with mediated information* as part of the enduring learning process through which they acquire scenic tastes, skills and values.

#### **ENTRY POINTS: INFLUENCES FROM MASS MEDIA**

In the previous section, I have suggested that personal connections often play a significant role in scenic learning. However, more isolated pathways were not uncommon among the crate diggers I interviewed, especially in the early years of their collecting careers:

*It’s a weird thing compared to a lot of people, I just worked it out for myself. I just pieced it all together without really having a mentor... or anyone to tell me what to do. Like no one showed me how to cut up*

*breakbeats. I just, you know, worked it all out for myself. And the same with... with digging. I had no idea what I was doing, I'd just buy anything that looked cool. Just did it from scratch, really. (George Mahood 2007)*

George Mahood grew up in Norwich, “a small and out of way place, but still a city, with enough music heads for having things happening” in the 1980s. Compared to larger cities with more vibrant music lives like Manchester, London, San Francisco or New York, the Norwich music scene was significantly smaller, less diverse, and more limited in terms of available records. Although personal connections played only a minor role in the development of his taste and musical knowledge until his late teenage years, he described how he had read music magazines “from cover to cover”, often sitting in the record stores that had display copies, because he could not afford buying them. He also referred to John Peel’s radio shows on BBC Radio 1 as a “massive influence”:

*In fact, John Peel is one of the biggest influences on hip...rap in the, in the UK I would say, because he had a national audience on Radio 1 and he'd play everything, well, everything he thought was good, and that included playing Ultramagnetic[ MC]s and Juice [Crew]<sup>107</sup> 12[" single]s as in new release like in 1987-88. So, by listening to John Peel, you'd consult... it's like a massive influence right there. I was hearing way out sounds. Normally, when a celebrity dies I don't... I don't really feel like..., it wouldn't normally feel like crying, or you know, I wouldn't really feel personally upset, but when John Peel died, I did cry, I maybe cried. Because it was just like a best friend died. Because, you know, you'd hear the guy like every night for many-many years, you'd hear a [unintelligible] of great records the week when they came out from John Peel. And that's how you'd find out about things in an out of way place. We didn't have like a local hip hop radio show or anything. It was just national... if you could get national. So a lot of my influences about how I'd find out about music was John Peel. (George Mahood 2007)*

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<sup>107</sup> *Ultramagnetic MCs was an influential American rap band from the mid to late 1980s, while Juice Crew was a collective of rap artists on the Cold Chillin' label in the same period.*

George Mahood's grief over the loss of John Peel is certainly telling of a rather exceptional attachment to an extraordinary music enthusiast and radio personality<sup>108</sup>, the way in which he recounts the Radio 1 DJs influence suggests that *the mediated nature of such relationships does not necessarily mean they lack affective depth. Indeed, such distant figures can often take on the position of just as trusted, admired and influential sources of information and inspiration as knowledgeable mentors.* The way in which George describes John Peel's influence in the context of the regularity of his own listening pattern as well as the substantial length of the period throughout which he followed the programme resonates with Morley's suggestions regarding the ways in which audiences often develop intimate relationships with particular media programmes that become profoundly integrated with their everyday domestic routines. Much the same way the enduring regularity of news programmes and shipping forecasts socialise the domestic sphere by connecting listeners to places, significant events, figures and issues of the nation, and also evoke a shared sense of homogenous national time, John Peel's radio show both familiarised its listeners to particular emerging musical forms, artists, and new recordings, and created a sense of temporal synchronicity that symbolically connected listeners in remote locations like Norwich to the distant communities in which these musicians lived, recorded and regularly performed; places where these releases were readily available in shops and local stations as soon as they came out. Although the ways in which Anderson's ideas have been applied and furthered in the exploration of how the consumption of mass media can provide a sense of national identity seem applicable to more specialised media and identities that are related to particular forms of music, there is a number of crucial differences worth considering here. Whereas in the heyday of broadcasting, relatively few channels of mass media saturated the everyday lives of the vast majority of national societies, the exploding number of media outlets, their significant thematic diversification, as well as the rise of niche marketing strategies have brought along a fragmentation of national audiences from the end of the 1970s (Castells 1996; Hesmondhalgh 2002). Within the context of the increased number of alternatives, even in places like Norwich where airwaves were not filled with pirate radios, listening to John Peel's show on BBC's

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<sup>108</sup> Regarding Peel's career and influence, see his autobiography, especially the parts written by his wife, Sheila Ravenscroft. Her account of correspondence received from Peel's admiring audience after his death, the graffiti painted to commemorate him, and the way in which his funeral became a public event suggests that George Mahood's reaction was not uncommon among Peel's listeners (Peel and Ravenscroft 2005: 391-392).

premier nationwide station from 10 PM regularly was not necessarily an evident choice for the vast majority of British residents<sup>109</sup>. *By focusing on the element of choice and dedication that went into following Peel's programme, we could understand the sense of attachment to particular imagined musical communities as emerging less from the ubiquitous presence of this show, than from an active and regular engagement of its listeners with it: staying up, taping the programme, identifying with certain bits of music and not with others, and ultimately imagining themselves as being particular kinds of listeners partly in the context of belonging to distant social worlds. This resonates with Frith's observation regarding the ways in which*

“[m]usical identity is both fantastic – idealizing not just oneself, but also the social world one inhabits – and real: enacted in practice.”

(Frith 1996b: 274, 275-276)

Following Frith's suggestion I will now approach *the selective and dedicated consumption of more specialised forms of media not only as enactments of particular identities, but also, the very real practices through which music enthusiasts participate in the scene: a distant “imagined” community, as well as a web of more immediate personal relationships.*

There is another important observation we could draw from George's above account. Although I have not provided a detailed description of extra-scenic influences in the previous section, my interviewees often described how the guidance received from older collectors of specific genres, relatives, and record shop owners contributed to the development of their knowledge and appreciation of music and record collecting.

#### **DIGGING DEEPER: ACTIVELY SEEKING FOR MUSIC RELATED EVENTS, COMPILATION ALBUMS, SPORADIC ARTICLES, HIP HOP RELATED RADIO SHOWS**

In the context of mediated information, as Thornton (1996), Hodkinson (2002), and Kahn-Harris (2007) suggest, various forms of niche media – music related radio shows and magazines that address wider audiences – often served as an introduction to a hip hop and breaks among scenic participants. Such extra-scenic influences, as George's case suggests, can provide enough impetus for one to become fascinated with hip hop

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<sup>109</sup> The fact that his listenership figures doubled after John Peel's program had been moved forward to from a late night slot to 8.30 PM in October 1988 (BBC 2005) is clearly indicative of the ways in which this show was followed by a narrower audience than programs such as the evening news.

and sampling, and start looking for more information and taking part in music related events. George told me that he had chosen a particular college program that included a semester in Albany, in upstate New York, because of his interest in hip hop and record collecting. He recounted this as an influential period, because of the records and hip hop magazines – *ego trip* and *On the Go* – he had gained access to by living in the proximity of New York City.



Ben Velez' "Diggin In The Crates" column in *On The Go*<sup>110</sup>

Both *ego trip* and *On The Go* featured information on sample based music production techniques, like interviews with prominent producers of the time, as well as the wider context of the history of hip hop culture. Such well informed articles on crate digging written by scenic participants were, however, rare in hip hop related magazines, and have first become a central element of the content of a regular print publication when George Mahood launched his own Nottingham based, but trans-continentially distributed *Big Daddy* magazine in 1999, partly inspired by *ego trip* and *On The Go*.

<sup>110</sup> This page is from an unspecified 1996 issue published in Cosmo Baker's blog. Diggin in the Crates was initially written by Cosmo Baker, but his friend, Ben Velez eventually took over the column. <http://blogs.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendId=21523861&blogId=335804517>, accessed 6 September 2009.



George Mahood looking through funk singles. Manchester, 2007

Apart from the importance of these mediated influences, he mentioned attending a particular hip hop event in New York City as a formative experience:

*The most mindblowing thing was going to a Zulu Nation<sup>111</sup> anniversary event. I was in Fat Beats, I think, [or] one of those [record]shops in Manhattan, and I saw like a paper flyer, and it was the Zulu anniversary. And it turned out to be that day. So I just hopped on the train, went up to Harlem. It was in, like, a basketball court on the third floor. Had Afrika Islam<sup>112</sup> on the door. It was pretty mind blowing. The world's best b-boys on the floor, Bambaataa and Cold Crush [Brothers]<sup>113</sup> doing the music on a really shitty PA<sup>114</sup>. Actually,*

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<sup>111</sup> The Universal Zulu Nation is a now international hip hop awareness movement that grew out of Afrikaa Bambaataa's efforts to reduce gang related crime and violence among youth by providing a positive alternative through hip hop's various forms of creative expression in the 1970s (Chang 2005).

<sup>112</sup> A former b-boy and MC from Afrikaa Bambaataa's circles, initially member of the Rocksteady Crew, later on he went on to have a career as a DJ and producer.

<sup>113</sup> A legendary old school hip hop group that was founded in the late 1970s in New York City.

*they had a set of sealed Ultimate Breaks & Beats, and they were cracking them open, and passing them to [Grandmaster] Caz<sup>115</sup>, and he was cutting them up, and lecturing people on the microphone.*  
(George Mahood 2007)

Whereas receiving such a lecture directly from the founding fathers of crate digging is quite uncommon within the scene, George's account resonates with what King Honey described in the beginning of this section: *scenic learning usually takes place at the intersection of the real and the mediated.*

This particular experience probably played a part in the fact that George bought the whole set of Ultimate Breaks & Beats compilations, and took it back with him to the UK. After returning home, he spent months mastering the art of cutting up doubles. Like many diggers in Chapter 4, he also pointed out the ways in which those compilations provided the foundations for him to understand breaks, and the impetus to start looking for more. All the diggers I have interviewed, who became involved with digging primarily because of mediated influences described how pursuing breaks in turn lead to the development of personal connections with like-minded collectors, DJs and producers through taking part in hip hop events, hanging out at record stores, and so forth.

*Like there is no place to get it... like... maybe now you can buy a book, like The Hip Hop Source Books of Jazz Samples, or some shit like that, you know. But before that, there wasn't anywhere to find that. [...] You really had to communicate with people to be able to find out, because you would never expand your music without that.*  
(King Honey 2005)

*It would be a mistake, however, to account for the lack of personal influences in the early years of George's collecting career only in terms of his geographical distance from New York.* Monk One, a native New Yorker who became aware of breaks at about the same period, told a similar story in terms of the primacy of mediated sources as his early influences:

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<sup>114</sup> An abbreviation of power amplifier, as in this case, it is often usually used to refer to the whole sound system.

<sup>115</sup> Important old school DJ and MC, member of the Cold Crush Brothers.

*Cause I used to listen to the radio [...] and you would hear guys cut up records and stuff like that. And I didn't have any idea what they were doing. [Laughs.] Like I would hear it and be like "What? What is this? How is this happening? What's going on? What are these weird records?" And they would like... they would use like comedy records... and all these things that... and it just sounded so cool, but I didn't know what the records were. And gradually, bit by bit, I would recognize things that I had [in my collection already]. [...] One of the great DJs in New York was Kid Capri in the '90s, I mean, he [was] just like king, definitely. Mixtapes, radio, whatever. And uhm, I really admired him. [...] Like I didn't know anybody else who was doing what I was doing. I thought like I was the only one or something. You know, like "Me and Kid Capri." That was it. You know like I didn't know that there were other people out there doing it. (Monk One 2005, his emphasis)*



Monk One in his record basement. Brooklyn, 2010. Photo by Eilon Paz

Despite the absence of peers or mentors at this early stage, such socially distant, but adored DJ figures have profoundly influenced Monk One's development. In an online discussion of the practice of covering up the information on the labels of vinyl records

in order to keep that information secret from competing DJs – that was the general modus operandi among old school breakbeat DJs (e.g. Leland and Steinski 1988; Allen 1999; Fricke and Ahearn 2002) – he wrote:

“Coming up idolizing ’80s-era NYC DJs, I was indoctrinated into the cover-up. This is standard for hip hop oriented folks.”<sup>116</sup>

*The way he described the influence of socially distant, but idolised DJs - like Kid Capri – as an “indoctrination”, the inculcation of certain attitudes and values – a “doctrine” one is expected to uncritically accept – strongly resonates with Cosmo Baker’s and Justin Torres’s accounts regarding the capacity of personal guidance to contribute towards the internalisation of scenic tastes and ideals.*

As I have suggested in Chapter 4, from the mid 1980s onward, compilations like the *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, and sporadic coverage in music related media provided points of entry to crate digging for people who lacked immediate, personal connections to the scene. Similarly to the guidance received from mentors or peers, these sporadic mediations provided enough information for music enthusiasts to become aware of the significance of breakbeats in hip hop, and to develop an interest in pursuing breaks. George Mahood was quick to recount such early sources of information regarding breakbeats that predated his American trip: the mixtapes of DJ Masterscratch from Nottingham that included sections with original breaks, Dean Rudland’s articles in *Hip Hop Connection* magazine that discussed sample sources of recent rap releases, and Afrika Bambaataa’s list of breaks published in *Blues & Soul* magazine<sup>117</sup>. Most of my interviewees who became involved with digging between the mid 1980s and early 1990s had similarly vivid memories of the particular sources of mediated information regarding breaks. As Monk One and George Mahood, almost all of them made references to the actual DJs and music journalists who produced these mediated accounts, rather than just referencing a radio station or magazine where the information appeared, which, again, suggests that – similarly to mentors – *the personal credibility*

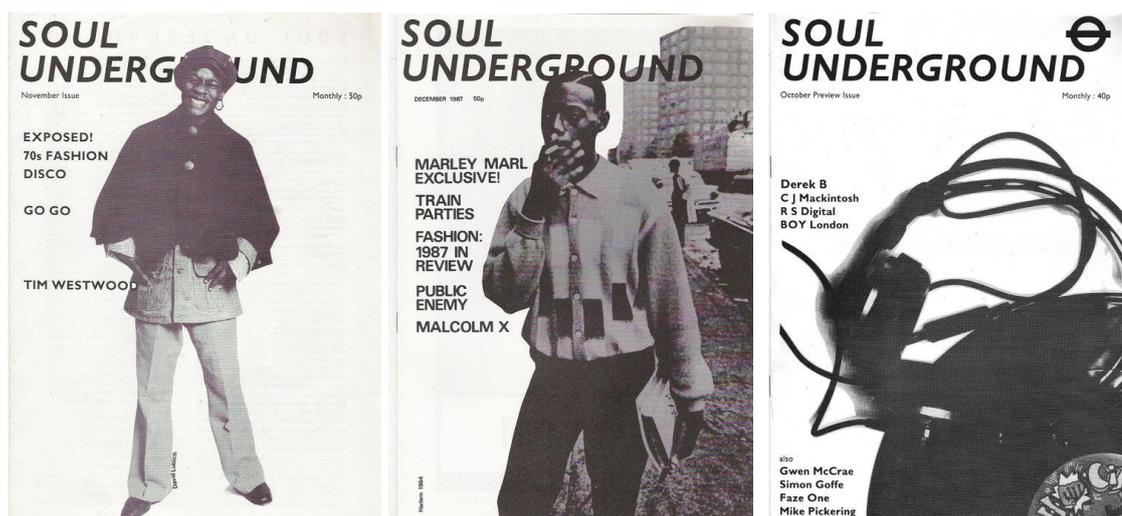
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<sup>116</sup> Monk One’s e-mail sent to the *Blackcrack* mailing list as a reply to the thread entitled “cover ups / serato”, 3 October 2006.

<sup>117</sup> The list was published in the August 1988 issue of *Blues & Soul*. According to *ego trip’s Book of Rap Lists* where it was later republished, this “was the first published record of breakbeat information to ever hit Europe, thus it set off a continent-wide beat-hunting craze for nations of aspiring hip hop DJs that lasted for years.” (Jenkins et al. 1999: 20) The fact that other British diggers also mentioned this list suggests that it was indeed a widely influential resource.

and authority of these disc jockeys and commentators was an important factor that made their judgements and suggestions matter<sup>118</sup>:

*In the eighties there was... for the rare groove scene... we had a magazine called Soul Underground, which was great, just black and white, it was really... just more like a fanzine, it's like a pound, you could buy in all the record shops which supported it. Yeah, that was great, because it would give out articles on breaks and stuff. [...] I've got... I've still got them all.*



*Soul Underground magazine covers*<sup>119</sup>

*They were awesome. There'd be... you could find [Gilles] Peterson saying something, or Richie Rich saying something, or Norman Jay<sup>120</sup> saying something. They'd all have like a little column... [...] Yeah, Soul Underground, it was awesome. [...] Because sometimes they would have breaks lists in there. So we were like, [in a highly excited tone of voice:] "Aaaaah". And there was also one key issue in Face [...] that blew all our minds, because Face was a fashion magazine, culture magazine, but it had a feature on Downstairs records and breaks. [...] Incredible. So that, that is a very, very important article for us, because everybody was like, "Aaaaaah". (Huw72 2007)*

<sup>118</sup> This also resonates with Hodkinson's suggestion that fanzines are influential in shaping subcultural tastes and values because of the subcultural credibility of the people who produce them.

<sup>119</sup> <http://staufenberger.typepad.com/repository/2008/05/further-soul-un.html>, accessed 5 September 2009.

<sup>120</sup> Important DJs who have made their name in the UK rare groove scene in the 1980s.

The *Face* magazine article, which appeared in 1986, was penned partly by Steinski, the co-producer of the Lesson series, the trilogy of now legendary cut-and-paste style break megamixes<sup>121</sup>, provided an insiders view on digging culture including first hand accounts by its originators, as well as respected hip hop producers of the time. The lengthy piece (Leland and Steinski 1988) described the daily interactions in Music Factory – a key record store for breakbeat collectors at the time – in vivid detail, and offered a comprehensive account of the origins, main figures and places – like Downstairs records – of the New York digging scene. It also described the significance of compilations like Ultimate Breaks & Beats, as well as the centrality of discovering yet unknown new breaks to digging.

#### **CREATING AND REINFORCING ATTACHMENTS TO THE SCENE THROUGH MEDIA CONSUMPTION PRACTICES**

Until the mid 1990s, such in depth reports were few and far between, which could be one of the reasons for the significance of that particular article for Huw72 and other diggers who had to piece the whole picture together from erratic references, such as record dealer's mail order lists:

*If a [record dealer's] list came through the door, I ran home from school early, you know what I mean? It's just like, you know... I just speaked to me dad on the phone. 'Cause you know, me and me dad used to live separately, but me mail went to me dad. And he'd ring me... if a list came through, it was almost better than the records themselves. Especially [Jazzman] Gerald's list. (Andy Votel 2007)*

Andy Votel's excitement resonates with the fascination Huw72 described regarding the *Face* article or the *Soul Underground* magazines. *The scarcity of available information on beat collecting was one of the reasons that made such lists, articles and mixtapes treasured resources that people studied thoroughly, kept, and repeatedly consulted over a longer period of time.*

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<sup>121</sup> A digital copy of the Lesson series is included in the "Significant recordings" folder of the DVD Appendix Volume 2.



Andy Votel playing Hungarian singles at the B-Music night at Dulcimer. Manchester, 2007

Although this repeated, enduring engagement with mediated information was in many cases carried out individually; collective media consumption practices were not uncommon among participants who, like King Honey and Huw72, had peers who also collected records. Indeed, as Huw72's account suggests, the discussion of radio shows, mixtapes, and articles was an important focal point of the interaction within his immediate circle of friends in the mid to late 1980s:

*We all heard the Jazzy Jay tapes and [Afrika] Bambaataa tapes and Death Mix<sup>122</sup> and stuff like that, on [Tim] Westwood's show, or various pirate shows. [...] And some of the old Zulu tapes. To find some of the breaks from those...it's just like, [finding the] Holy Grail. To find out what [The] Commodores' Assembly Line was, that for a good couple of years for all of us was like [in an excited tone of voice:] "What the he... What is this break? This is... Aaaaah." 'Cause*

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<sup>122</sup> The *Death Mix* was an unofficial release on *Paul Winley's* record label of a tape recording of a *Zulu Nation* party in James Monroe High School in the Bronx in 1980 with Jazzy Jay and Bambaata behind the turntables. Despite its terrible sound quality, it remains one of the most important documents of the early days of hip hop. (Shapiro 2005: 385) A digital copy of *Death Mix* is included in the "Significant recordings" folder of the DVD Appendix 2 that accompanies this thesis.

*we weren't... The only people playing that was heads in New York.  
That knowledge hadn't been passed over yet. (Huw72 2007)*



*Death Mix, cover and label*<sup>123</sup>

The home taping and collective discussion of significant radioshows and mixtapes in Huw72's account resonates with the ways in which Henry Jenkins describes the centrality of the recording, shared viewing and trading of videotaped programmes to the ways in which social worlds of media fandom are brought and held together. According to Jenkins, these practices through which fans "read" and "re-read" media texts are crucial to participating in media fan scenes not just because they are important means that facilitate the transmission of the "basic interpretive strategies and institutionalized meanings common to the group" (Jenkins 1992: 74), but also because they lead to the development and strengthening of social ties with likeminded peers. In a sense, *such collective engagements with media texts fulfil similar roles to those I have described regarding digging and discussing records together.*

Huw72's account is also illuminative regarding *how* the scarcity of available mediated information regarding breaks contributed towards creating attachments to the break aesthetics, particular records, mixtapes, and other sources of mediated information, as well as personal and mediated relationships to the wider social world of the scene in the late 1980s. The way in which he describes the task of identifying breaks as difficult as finding the "Holy Grail" suggests that the lack of readily available information *had important consequences for the speed – or rather slowness – of the learning process*

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<sup>123</sup> Label scan source <http://www.discogs.com/viewimages?release=183348>, accessed 6 September 2009.

itself: it often took years of active and intensive involvement – seeking out relevant mediated information, networking with knowledgeable people, and going through a vast amount of unknown records intuitively – to find a particular break after first hearing it on a mixtape or in a hip hop beat.

The fact that Huw<sup>72</sup> kept his collection of *Soul Underground* magazines for over almost two decades is indicative of the ways in which fanzines, mixtapes, flyers and other forms of *scene related media not only serve as information resources, but are often accumulated as material belongings that evoke a sense of prestige and scenic affiliation, similarly to record collections*. They are kept as documents of scenic history, but also of one's involvement with the scene. Gaps in such private collections of magazines and mixtapes are often retrospectively filled through swapping or trading with other participants<sup>124</sup>, or buying – mainly from internet based sellers:

“Those of you that have been reading [the] *Crate Kings* [blog] for a while know that I have a tiny obsessive streak when it comes to records, production, and, of course, *Wax Poetics* Magazine. I stumbled across *Wax Poetics* a few years ago during the release of issue number 8 and have been struggling to bury a growing internal need to obtain every back issue. It seems as though a number of others have the same *Wax Poetics* problem, since back issues of the mag have been fetching significant amounts of dough on *eBay*. A couple of weeks ago I could no longer bear the sleepless nights or contain the urge to find out what endless jewels were contained in issues 1 through 7.

Let me just say that the articles contained in the first few issues are amazing! *Wax Poetics* has become more geared towards classic soul and funk, but it really started off as a mag focused towards hip hop, beat making, and record diggers. I've heard rumors about an anthology of early articles being released this spring. Hopefully this is

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<sup>124</sup> Such requests regarding scene specific magazines, radio shows and mixtapes are not uncommon in the “trades & wants” sections of music related online discussion boards that focus on particular forms of music. They are indicative of the importance of the fact that the collecting and sharing of archive media matter is not specific to the crate digging scene. Such material is also shared on music blogs, but also more organized grass-roots archival projects like <http://themixingbowl.org/>, an online community centered around the digital archiving and sharing of contemporary radio shows of dance music DJs, or <http://www.mastermix.org/>, a website dedicated to assembling an archive of 1980s pirate radio shows by allowing people to post digitized soundfiles from their private tape collections (Both accessed 28 December 2005).

true and more people will be able to read some the classics gems that have been dropped. Until then you'll have to settle for these proud pictures of a truly rare sight ... a complete collection of *Wax Poetics* magazine (including the issue 17 dual cover with [Jay] Dilla and Public Enemy). Enjoy!" (Semantik 2007)



Semantik's collection of *Wax Poetics* magazines as posted on his blog

The fact that Semantik has only stumbled upon the magazine in 2004, two years after the publication of its first issue, is indicative of another important aspect of the ways in which the consumption of these magazines contributes towards a sense of scenic attachment. *Wax Poetics* is still not a major magazine that could be bought at most local newsagents, its availability – as that of mixtapes – is limited to outlets like specialist record stores on and offline, as well as the website of the magazine. In order to keep up with the magazine, or retrospectively collect out of print past issues, one has to invest considerable effort: they have to be actively pursued. As I have described in the context of listening to John Peel's radio shows in the 1980s, such a selective and enduring engagement with seeking out and following scenic media can be understood as an enactment of individual musical identity in a collective context, but also as a form of participation in the imagined and immediate social world of the scene.

In this section, I have explored a number of ways in which the mediated information may contribute towards the acquisition and internalisation of scenic tastes and ideals, and evoke a sense of belonging. I have suggested that we could understand individual and collective media consumption as enduring, ritual practices through which scenic participants place themselves in a web of affective relationships with socially, or

geographically distant people, as well as immediate personal connections. I have first shown that, similarly to the guidance received from mentors or peers, the mediated accounts of distant figures can be equally important and credible sources of information and inspiration that motivate further scenic participation, and make shared sensibilities matter at a profoundly personal level. I have also suggested that whereas mediated information in many cases serves as a first point of contact to scenic words, it often provides the impetus to take part in music related events and engage in a web of personal relationships. Furthermore, I have described the collective consumption and discussion of mediated information as an important form of interaction among scenic participants, a practice that contributes to the strengthening of immediate connections over time. Finally, I have suggested that by paying attention to how various forms of scenic media – magazines, flyers, mixtapes – are often collected, we could think about these as material belongings that evoke a sense of prestige and affiliation in a similar way as record collections.

As I have indicated in the beginning of this chapter, most of the above quoted accounts describe the significance of personal and mediated connections in the context of the scarcity of readily available information regarding breakbeat collecting that was specific to the period stretching between the late 1980s to the mid 1990s. Throughout this section, I have made passing references to the consequences of these particular circumstances regarding the significance of mediated sources for participants, and also, for the speed of the learning process. In the concluding section, I will briefly address the ways in which the relative abundance of easily available information – mainly through internet based outlets – has affected scenic learning.

### 6.3 THE TRANSFORMATION OF SCENIC LEARNING

*I really feel like the internet is harming that, [...] that sense of the community that you get out of the whole culture of pursuing records. There is a new community online, but it's, it's, it's something I can't quite put my finger on, I really dislike, even though I'm part of it, I really dislike. I think it's very unhealthy. [...] I mean message boards,*

*primarily, but also the ways of finding records now. I find it unhealthy. It makes it too easy. It's like you can buy a culture off the shelf, almost, almost literally. You can be a rich sixteen year old kid and you can, you can buy everything and know everything in a matter of months. And I don't think that's healthy for anyone.*

You mean for personal development?

*Yeah, and it stifles the whole creative aspect. Because I believe that buying records is like an art form in a lot of ways. In certain ways you're defining yourself as a person by what you choose to buy, and what you keep, and what you do with it. And by taking it like box fresh, ready-made off the shelf, as a lot of people are [doing] nowadays, by easy message boards and eBay [...] It just defeats... to me... a lot of what the whole point is... of the exercise. [...] An essential part of gaining knowledge, and discovering, and finding out, finding out more... you had to interact with other people, and you had to be in such situation, you had to be active, you had to be out, you had to be at jams, or you had to be in shops [...], or you had to be at people's houses, and waited till they went to the loo, went to take a piss so you could quickly take a look at their records. All these kind of things. It was a proactive way of doing things and now it's entirely passive. (George Mahood 2007)*

George Mahood's concerns resonate with many of the issues I have touched upon throughout this chapter regarding how the acquisition of scenic skills and knowledge contributed towards the creation of attachments. In the first section I have described the ways in which the absence of well structured, detailed, and permanently available information contributed to the importance of personal influences – the guidance of mentors, peers, and occasional acquaintances between the late 1980s and mid 1990s. In the second one, I have suggested that the scarce and ephemeral mediated information became the source of identity and belonging for participants in part because it had to be actively pursued and puzzled together through an enduring process of individual and shared consumption practices.

George Mahood rightly asserts that the relative abundance of crate digging related information over the internet has made scenic learning less dependent on one's enduring engagement in a web of immediate personal connections, while it has also made the acquisition of information regarding breaks as well as the records themselves a less laborious and quicker process. It is now possible to “*buy everything and know everything in a matter of months*”, in principle at least.

As I have already noted in Chapter 4, at the time of writing this thesis, obscure original records used on mixtapes or in hip hop tracks are often quickly revealed by participants on online discussion boards, sample sources are easily identified by searching in collectively developed online databases like *The Breaks*<sup>125</sup>. Further crate digging related information is available in *Wax Poetics*, but also through a number of weblogs that are maintained by knowledgeable diggers. Discographic information can be obtained by simple online searches that often lead to *Discogs*<sup>126</sup>, a community based discography database and record market place, to official discographies maintained by the record labels themselves, or the unofficial discographies of enthusiasts and collectors. The music itself has also become easy to acquire through reissues and compilations, often available through online music stores, while officially yet not reissued, highly obscure, and prohibitively expensive records, archive radio shows and mixtapes are digitised and shared by collectors via file-sharing applications, music blogs and video sharing services like *Youtube*<sup>127</sup>. Similarly to what Semantik's account suggests, the acquisition of rare original pressings of sought after recordings and out-of-print magazines is no longer necessarily the matter of a long and often hopeless quest at flea markets, record fairs, or second hand stores. Even impossibly rare items show up occasionally on auction sites like *eBay*, or in the searchable database of the inventory of thousands of record stores and individual sellers at *GEMM*<sup>128</sup>.

As I have suggested in Chapter 4, beat collecting has undergone a gradual transition from being the culture of a secretive, closely-knit, locally bound community – where skills and knowledge were passed down strictly by word of mouth – to becoming the shared tradition of a loosely connected translocal scene where information circulates

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<sup>125</sup> <http://the-breaks.com/>, accessed 11 March 2010.

<sup>126</sup> <http://www.discogs.com>, accessed 11 March 2010.

<sup>127</sup> <http://www.youtube.com>, accessed 11 March 2010.

<sup>128</sup> <http://www.ebay.com>, <http://www.gemm.com>, accessed 11 September 2009.

relatively freely through networks of mediation. The process of increasing mediation has always been interwoven with tensions ever since the publication of the first breakbeat compilations by the end of the 1970s. One potential explanation for the initial opposition of established participants towards anthologies, reissues, articles, or online record trade focuses on the ways in which the new means of mediating scenic information could be seen as upsetting the internal hierarchy of the scene by making scenic capitals – both knowledge and records – readily available, and thus contributing to their devaluation or trivialisation. Although there are elements in George Mahood's account that could be singled out to support such an argument which would position the discussion of this process around issues of commodification (Horkheimer and Adorno 1993) or incorporation (Clarke 1975/2002; Hebdige 1979/1988), it seems to me, that most of *his account is more indicative of his uncertainties regarding the effects that the transformation of scenic learning will have on the affective engagement of participants with scenic tastes, values as well as the social world of the scene.*

Although other diggers from George Mahood's generation might offer less pessimistic accounts of the effects of relatively easily available information, a sense that a substantive element of scenic practice has undergone an irreversible transformation was clearly present in many of the interviews I conducted:

*You know, and I think that [the digger mentality], that's kinda been lost these days, with the ease, or the way things are presented. [...] Not that it's a bad thing, but it's just happening.*

So you can find out about stuff on the internet instead of going out and learning by yourself...

*Right, right.*

... step by step.

*So, there's something that's gonna take you four years, [now] you can look on the internet you know, in four minutes. (Cosmo Baker 2007)*

The way in which Cosmo Baker describes the loss of the digger mentality resonates with the ways in which George Mahood laments how the acquisition of records and related information no longer relies on individual creativity and skills which are developed through enduring effort under the guidance of knowledgeable mentors or in interaction with peers. Indeed, these concerns provide three important insights regarding

what Ruth Finnegan (1989) would describe as the particular “mode of learning” that is the expected form of affiliation and authentic practice within the scene. First, *these conventions are strongly connected to the main schemes of the scenic ethos*: the importance of enduring, laborious practice, as well as individual creativity in discovering breaks. Second, *that the lines of distinction are drawn here not between institutionalised and informal modes of learning, but between personal and mediated forms of acquisition, as well as among different kinds of mediations*. Third, *that these conventions might transform over time as the conditions, institutions and available technologies of learning change*.

It is beyond the scale and the scope of this study to provide a detailed account of the novel forms of scenic learning that make use of internet based resources, and explore whether or not these methods contribute towards the internalisation of scenic tastes and ideals, and the development of lasting attachments. However, like King Honey’s account regarding online digging suggested it in the previous chapter: making sense of the overwhelming heap of information that is made available over the internet requires just as much invested time, creativity and effort, as finding relevant information under conditions of scarcity, even though this individual inventiveness and labour might take new and different shapes and might produce new and different kinds of attachments. The quantity and diversity of readily available music has to be selected and listened to. Blogs have to be found, filtered through and regularly followed. Obscure leads actively pursued through searches on the web, online databases and market places which calls into question George Mahood’s view that online forms of learning are “entirely passive”.

Furthermore, the internet has not put an end to participating in local and translocal personal relationships, but, as Paul Hodkinson (2002) suggests, it provides an effective infrastructure for more direct and regular interactions among scenic participants than traditional media would allow. As the content and comment sections of blogs, as well as the conversations on online discussion forums suggest, scenic participants use these channels to engage in the sort of informal interaction that is typical of the face-to-face communications among peers and personal acquaintances: they brag about their finds, make inquiries or offer opinion and advice regarding artists, records, record spots, share knowledge on sample sources, or swap magazines and records.

Although it would be possible to resort entirely to such mediated channels of communication and using exclusively “easy” online resources to finding out about and

acquiring music, as the next chapter will demonstrate, conventional record buying practices at various “physical” sites of second hand record exchange still remain central to the interaction and information exchange among participants.

## 7. DIGGING SPOTS. PLACES OF SCENIC PARTICIPATION

## “AH MEMORIES!

Those of you who were infected with hip hop back in the 1980s will no doubt recognise the shop in this photo below. [...]



Groove Records. London, late 1980s. Photo by SKIRE.<sup>129</sup>

In the latter half of the '80s, Groove Records was the place to go in London for the latest hip hop records. The shop was tiny, and often it meant queuing for an hour or so to even enter the shop on a busy Saturday. If you were lucky, Blade would be outside peddling his vinyl wares. But all in all, the journey to London's Soho area was worth it just to see what Groove had in stock. I can still recall records I own that came from the Groove racks. And the Tim Westwood Future Rap chart on the wall as you entered the door. My man DJH has kept one of the poly bags [with the shop's logo] from back then, and won't part with it despite my constant hassling. [...]

Kid Dyno

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<sup>129</sup> As posted in (KidDyno 2010)

**martinfinch said...**

[... A]s good as the internet is, it's killed the majority of independent record shops & the excitement of diggin' for records. I'd give anything to return to the days of diggin' for records in SHOPS & finding spots on nearly every corner. You can't beat getting' your fingers dusty, rather than sit at home typing on a keyboard for records..!!! [...]. And yeah, bro, apparently Jean [the owner of Groove Records] did know a lot about hip hop records!!

**p.s.Supreme Dominion said...**

Sad as it is [...] to be sitting behind a PC, diggin' for wax you need in the collection. There ain't too many other ways to find dope records these days, especially if you live where I live. Most shops 'round here have gone under over the past ten years.

Also sad that the fun has been taken out of diggin' because the amount of info online about records hence prices shooting up in 2nd hand record and Oxfam-like charity shops, and of course what the next man is willing to pay for a title at auction, plus people [are] now up on their *eBay* game even more so [...].

I also miss the atmosphere in a busy import record shop, ploughing through sections, asking about records racked up behind the counter and being put up on what's dope by the store workers, and what you'd find other heads were baggin' up at the same time, fresh beats playing on the decks pumpin' out the speakers etc. [...]

Real shame we've lost an essential tradition. There really is no personal buzz from ordering a current 12" [single] online, record buying was as much a social event as just getting any old record and taking it home, in my opinion.

**martinfinch said...**

Yeah Supreme, it's the same where I live, bro (Bournemouth). There just aren't any record shops here. Like you say, the only way to get

that dope-on-a-rope rap record now is on the internet. But just think if there was no internet, all those dope records on *eBay*, *Discogs*, etc. would all be sat in the racks, in some dusty old second hand record shops, ready to be dug up by us..!” (KidDyno 2010)

The above discussion seems to resonate with George Mahood’s and Cosmo Baker’s accounts in the concluding section of the previous chapter. Not only are these comments indicative of the irreversible *transformation of record shopping, the most central scenic practice*, due to the availability of record collecting related information online and the emergence of internet based means of record buying, they also suggest that something fundamental – “an essential tradition” – was lost in the process.

Partly, these accounts reflect the distinctiveness of scenic collecting practices that I described in Chapter 5: for many, online buying practices – purchasing at the push of a button rather than by “getting your fingers dirty” – are seen as less satisfying with regard to scenic ideals of hard work and creativity. While the annoying effects of online trade on the exchange of second hand vinyl records – increasing prices, *eBay* savvy dealers that remove “all those dope records” from the racks of “dusty old second hand shops” in order to resell them on the internet – are also noted with regret, it seems to me that the laments regarding the narrowing chances of “diggin’ for records in SHOPS” reveal *more fundamental concerns regarding the transforming culture of music consumption*.

p.s.Supreme Dominion’s account seems to fit with most academic observations that describe *record shops as institutions that facilitate the circulation and organization of information within particular scenes* (Finnegan 1989; Cohen 1991; Straw 1997a; Hodgkinson 2002). The advice of people who work behind the counter, the records they stock, the music they play, the charts they keep on display serve as just as important points of orientation as the opinions and consumption choices of other customers. Fabian Holt notes that one of the reasons behind the success of online retailers is that they – modeling their services on conventional shops – “serve the same basic functions<sup>130</sup>, in some respects, more effectively” (Holt 2007: 28). However, it is clear from p.s.Supreme Dominion’s account that online points of sale do not offer him a

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<sup>130</sup> Offering not only generic categorizations, reviews and charts, but also automated recommendation services based on past purchases, as well as possibilities for customers to share their opinions.

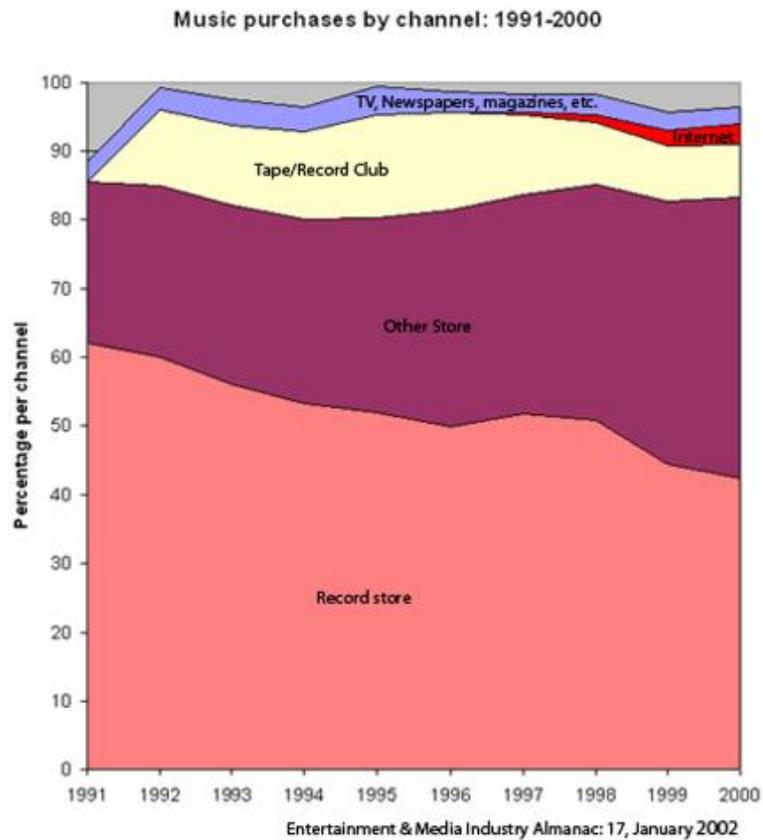
sense of taking part in a “social event” that he describes as being just as central to conventional record shopping practices as acquiring the music itself. Whereas Holt is right to note that “most shoppers go into the store to buy the recording and share it with family and friends elsewhere” (ibid.) it is clear that to the regular customers of specialist shops like Groove Records, these places *are important sites of participating in – and experiencing – a particular scene*. In this light, the growing significance of online record trade *may be seen to threaten not only conventional record buying practices, but also the particular means of identification and belonging which they provide*.



Remaining sign of a defunct record store. Philadelphia, 2005

Such sentiments, however, are not specific to the participants of the nostalgic discussion that opened this chapter. They are also apparent in the anecdotes, interviews and personal reflections of musicians, fans, record store owners, and collectors that are presented in recent monographs paying homage to the remaining small, independent record shops in the UK and the US, and documenting the particular culture of collective music enthusiasm they foster (Pettit 2008; Graham 2009; Calamar and Gallo 2010; James 2010). The statistical data they present regarding the diminishing numbers of record stores in the last two decades makes apparent the radical pace and scale of the reorganisation of the landscape of music consumption. One, however, did not need to see the numbers in order to have a sense of the extent of change. From time to time throughout my fieldwork, I came across scenic discussions online which reported and lamented the closing down of historically significant local record stores online. Older

record shop guides printed off the internet often led to dead ends: different businesses already took over many of the properties where once music was sold. Furthermore, it was not unusual that I bumped into remaining signs advertising long gone record stores when walking around different cities in Europe and the US.



Pacey Foster’s chart of the declining business of record stores<sup>131</sup>

Pacey Foster (2006) – a crate digger and management studies scholar – provided a quickly drafted explanation of this “apparent [...] trend of record shop closing” based on an analysis of music sales data, and argued that the decline of this segment of music retail had begun years before the internet became an important channel of communication and music distribution by the end of the 1990s:

“Looking at the growth of the ‘other stores’ category, it makes me think that there are actually two intersecting trends going on. One is the general trend toward buying everything at big megastores, and the other is the gradual decline of record sales generally. While much

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<sup>131</sup> <http://libraryofvinyl.blogspot.com/2006/04/record-stores-are-so-20th-century.html>, accessed 21 August 2010.

more data is required to draw any conclusions about causality, the basic trend looks pretty undeniable to me.

*Luckily, none of this will affect the hardcore diggers who seem to find piles where none should exist.”* (Foster 2006, my emphasis)

Despite the gradual disappearance of small, independent record shops – particularly from smaller towns and less frequented streets of larger cities – and the obvious difficulty of keeping many such enterprises afloat, at the time of writing, stores – specialising in new releases, used records, or a combination thereof – are still very much present in urban areas. The prevailing presence of regularly organised record fairs of different scales, and the fact that less specialised merchants still offer second hand records and CDs at car boot sales, yard sales, flea markets, charity and antiques shops, and used book stores also suggest that online exchange has not eliminated the collective rituals that are organised around conventional record shopping practices. Even if records became more expensive and pickings got slimmer, crate diggers still regularly visit remaining local record spots, and occasionally make trips to more distant outlets and record fairs, as Foster suggests.

In many other music scenes, recorded shopping constitutes only one of the possible means through which music enthusiasts participate in – and experience – the collectivity to which they belong. The significance of social events organised around live performances (Shank 1994; Cummings 2007) and the consumption of clothing and accessories that are specific to particular groups at specialist outlets (Hodkinson 2002; D’Andrea 2007) is well documented in academic accounts of both local and translocal musical collectivities. However, within the crate digging scene, club events or concerts rarely serve as occasions of large scale public gatherings, and there is no specific dressing style that would be collectively consumed. Such a relative lack of alternative occasions and sites for face-to-face interaction among participants – coupled with the fact that *record buying is the fundamental musical practice within the scene – makes apparent the centrality of places of record exchange to the collective rituals through which a sense of identity and belonging is produced among crate diggers.*

*In this chapter, I will concentrate on practices of record buying, and explore some of the ways in which the physical sites of record retail contribute to participants’ involvement with – and experience of – the crate digging scene.* In the first section, I will discuss the available academic accounts on the social significance of record stores, and argue that

that whereas they illuminate particular aspects of the complex roles such institutions play in music scenes generally, they provide less insight regarding the more specific roles that these sites play in collectivities that are focused primarily on collecting obscure recordings from the past.

In the three sections that will follow, I will offer a more detailed exploration of the significance of various kinds of second hand outlets for scenic collecting practices. First, I will explore the ways in which flea markets and second hand record stores facilitate the regular enactment of scenic identities as well as the development and maintenance of social ties locally and translocally. I will then describe record fairs as heavily temporalised places that facilitate larger, often translocal public gatherings of crate diggers and other collectors. Finally, I will explore the roles that specialist stores play in providing a sense of the scene for participants, by becoming the focal points for the circulation and organization of scenic information.

In conclusion, I will begin to address the ways in which some of these places become the objects of the kind of sentimental attachments that the above accounts of Groove Records make apparent.

## 7.1 SITES OF MICROECONOMIC ACTIVITY, SOCIABILITY, AND THE CIRCULATION OF INFORMATION

The discussion of Groove Records that opened this chapter brings to mind Will Straw's ideas regarding the ways in which music scenes could be approached as "webs of microeconomic activity which foster sociability" (2001b: 249), or the ways in which they are held together by overlaid "circuits, through which particular styles of alternative music circulate in the form of recordings or live performances" (Straw 1991: 378). Whereas these are somewhat general and abstract observations, ethnographic accounts of various music scenes provide more practical insights regarding the importance of physical places – most often the sites of various enterprises that provide some form of service – as sites of interaction and exchange among participants in local and translocal music scenes.

Rehearsal and performance venues (Finnegan 1989; Stewart 2007), pubs with thematic music nights and stores specialising in subcultural clothing (Hodkinson 2002) have all been noted for their significance in providing ground for the development and maintenance of personal connections as well as the circulation of information *within particular local music scenes*. Furthermore, the ways in which music festivals (Cummings 2007), thematic club nights (Hollows and Milestone 1998), and specialist shops function as popular destinations for non-local participants in *spatially dispersed scenes* (Hodkinson 2002) is also recognised.

Although Ruth Finnegan (1989: 273-277) mentioned the significance of record stores in her ethnography of amateur music making in Milton Keynes, her discussion was more focused on exploring the various roles music shops – that sell sheet music, musical instruments and accessories primarily – played in the musical life of this British town. Besides providing the “material resources” of local music making – selling, renting, lending and repairing equipment, and occasionally sponsoring events – the personal connections and *musical expertise of their staff* also contributed to the development of the careers of local musicians – in terms of offering *expert advice* and formal music lessons. Furthermore, she also noted that these *stores contributed to the informal circulation of information about news, events and opportunities by providing a space for local adverts, fanzines, flyers, posters, and facilitating gossip among their customers* that often dropped by just to have a chat with others.

Although only at a length of a single paragraph, Sara Cohen makes similar observations regarding the importance of record stores in her ethnography of the Liverpool rock music scene. Apart from distributing local music, managing bands, employing and attracting musicians, the most important local shop “became a centre of news and gossip on local music” (Cohen 1991: 54).

Matthew Bannister (2006) explores the significance of local *independent stores as sites of musical education, and often, talent development for musicians*. He mentions a number of second hand record store owners who played key roles as taste makers within the post-punk / alternative / indie rock scene in the UK, the US, and Australia:

“Second hand record stores and their owners performed a broadly educative function for indie musicians, broadening their awareness of musical history.” (Bannister 2006: 82)

Bannister's discussion makes apparent the ways in which such musical histories were very much particular to the owners' tastes. Such preferences were not only reflected in what they kept in stock and recommended, but also the advice they gave to musicians regarding the directions in which they should be developing musically. Many of these record store owners went on to found independent record labels in order to further pursue their aesthetic ideals and extend their musical influence (cf. Hesmondhalgh 1997, 1999; Bannister 2006).

Whereas Finnegan and Cohen only mention record stores in passing, and Bannister concentrates primarily on the influence of a particular group of store owners on musicians, Paul Hodkinson's (2002) ethnography of the goth subculture provides a more detailed account of the social significance of various kinds of music retailers and music consumption practices. As some of Hodkinson's observations will serve as the starting point of my discussion of record buying practices and sites of record exchange in the following sections, I will now provide a more detailed discussion of his most relevant ideas.

First, he *differentiates different types of music retailers*, suggesting that these make available different repertoires of goth music. *High street stores* – that mostly belong to larger chains – concentrate mostly on pop music and stock records only by the most commercially successful groups. *Independent shops* usually offer more specialised selections of music focused on particular genres. The inventories of *goth specialist stores and mail order retailers* are more specifically focused on music that is relevant to subcultural participants including a wide range of classic recordings as well as the latest releases on small, obscure goth labels. He notes the relative scarcity of specialist stores, and describes that they are only present in larger cities – like London – where a substantial population of local participants and regular translocal visitors make such enterprises economically sustainable. Furthermore, he points out *the centrality of second hand trading – at flea markets, record fairs, and festivals – in making available many significant and lesser known older recordings, as many of these titles are not reissued after the first editions are unavailable through other channels after first editions sell out.*

Second, Hodkinson provides a very detailed discussion of the roles that goth *specialist stores* play in facilitating the circulation and organisation of information within this collectivity. He convincingly argues that such shops and mail order distributors *not only*

*make a wide range of subculturally relevant music available, but also play significant roles in shaping the canon of goth recordings and policing the stylistic boundaries of the genre by what they chose to keep in stock.* Moreover, resonating with the ways in which hip hop enthusiasts described to Groove Records in the introductory section of this chapter, Hodkinson presents *specialist stores as sites of collective rituals centred around music consumption*:

“goth-record shops provided their clientele with a space to browse, listen and discuss preferred bands and CDs with subculturally knowledgeable assistants.” (Hodkinson 2002: 147)

Accounting for the fact that many non-local participants visit these stores from great distances, he suggests that – although it would be possible to buy much of the music that is available in these shops via mail order – visiting these places not only enables them to learn about music they might not be aware of, but also, to take part in the social scene that these stores facilitate. Indeed, Hodkinson’s most valuable insight for my discussion is his suggestion that *music consumption practices could be understood as important means through which enthusiasts participate in – and experience – specific musical collectivities.* The ways in which these sites facilitate the forging of translocal – and due to regularly visiting foreign participants, often transnational – connections and the circulation of information within and across local scenes is also apparent in his description.

The academic accounts I discussed in this section offer important insights regarding the roles record shops play in the circulation and organisation of musical information and scenic gossip, as well as in fostering sociability. However, apart from Hodkinson’s account, they rarely discuss sites of record exchange and the practices and interactions these institutions facilitate in more detail. Whereas Hodkinson’s discussion is particularly valuable for highlighting the social significance of specialist stores within the collectivity he observes, he pays less attention to the ways in which other kinds of music retailers may foster sociability among participants apart from the fact that they make certain types of relevant recordings available.

This neglect of the social significance of sites of record exchange is understandable, as the above accounts describe music scenes where the most significant social events are organised around concerts, the club nights of DJs, festivals, and rehearsals. However, as the following sections will demonstrate, *in the crate digging scene* – and probably other

music scenes where the collecting of music in physical form remains important – *record shops, flea markets, record fairs, and specialist stores are the primary sites of the collective rituals through which scenic social ties are forged, maintained, and a sense of identity and belonging is produced and experienced among participants.*

## 7. 2 LOCAL SPOTS: SITES OF REGULAR SCENIC INTERACTION

*I'm half an hour late for our meeting in Camden Town, so I rush from the tube station towards Camden Lock. While I was in the underground, Matt sent me a text-message that he was already in the basement of the Record and Tape Exchange. The shop is still about a hundred meters away, on the right side of this road. It is one of the largest second hand record stores in London specialising mainly in rock and electronic dance music related stuff upstairs, and offering huge sections of jazz, funk, soul, reggae, hip hop, and r&b in the basement. As I enter, I pass by a couple of indie rocker types who browse the rock and soundtrack sections, and quickly make my way to the stairs.*

*I first met Matt in Budapest when he had a DJ gig in town as DJ Format. Suhaid, a local DJ and crate digger who promoted the night brought him over to my place and we listened to Hungarian records together. I gave him a few albums and singles he happened to like, and he promised to give me some records in exchange.*

*It was his idea to meet at a record store, so that we can dig together rather than just hand over records, and talk over a coffee somewhere. When I arrive, he is already halfway through the bargain racks with another guy he introduces to me as Mark. Mark is a DJ and producer known as Mr Thing. Matt and Mark are among the top crate diggers of the UK scene, but that doesn't really show in the way they dress or act. It is a small underground scene after all. We engage in the conversational choreography of British politeness for the first few minutes. Matt asks me about how I'm doing settling in and coping with London. I ask him about his recent projects. He tells me about Holy Shit!, a mixtape he and Mr Thing have just finished the week before. He describes it as a mix of funky religious music and weird, bizarre, or beautiful spoken word records. Mark adds that the mix was fun to do, and turned out really good as well. And this is about all the chat we have for now, everybody is already back to pulling out and*

looking at records, one after the other. Every now and then, one of us holds up a record and asks the others whether they know what it is like. These questions are sometimes requests for help, sometimes they are to recommend a particular record to the others. “You don’t know this one?” “No, what’s it like?” “This one has a beat, nothing special, just an open drum break<sup>132</sup>. The rest of the record is crap.” This is the kind of conversations we have. Sometimes we gather around Matt’s Fisher Price portable turntable to listen to the more exciting discoveries. The portable is up for grabs; we take turns listening through small piles of records that for some reason look interesting. The lightweight, battery operated turntable is a great aid for digging in places that do not have listening posts. It saves us a lot of money, as we do not have to take chances on records that look exciting but fail to live up to the expectations. Having it around also means that we do not have to pass upon great records, due to being uncertain about whether they are worth the price or not. Were not Matt and Mr Thing on first name terms with clerk the behind the counter – a man in his thirties like us – we would not be able to use it, as the shop usually does not offer listening facilities or allow portables.

At some point Matt and Mark have a quick chat with the assistant about records or gigs, but I’m too busy looking at records to gather much of it. We are done in less than an hour and move on to another second hand record store up the road. It’s a run down place that offers a few hundred hip hop, jazz and soul records on the ground floor, all priced between five and seven pounds, and thousands of records in an unorganised dusty mess in its bargain basement for a pound each.

Here, Mr Thing digs out a British pressing of the Enter the Dragon soundtrack, but he already has a copy of it. Instead of buying it to trade later with a dealer or collector, he does me a favour by handing it over. Matt picks up a copy of a hip hop 12” by Lakim Shabazz and suggests that I give it a listen. He tells me that it’s a great, but much overlooked hip hop record from the mid 1990s. I give it a spin on the portable and decide to bag it. These guys know the kinds of records that are in the shop way better than I do, so I’m not really able to be of much help to them. We finish here in less than thirty minutes, I buy about five or six records, but they complain that this place is dry,

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<sup>132</sup> An “open drum break” is a syncopated drum solo of a few bars length. The expression refers to the fact that it is left “open”, that is, without other instrumental layers “covering” the sound of the drums. This “openness” is appreciated by hip hop producers because it enables them to easily “chop” rhythmic segments up into smaller segments – most often individual hits – that are then easily rearranged in order to create new rhythmic patterns.

*meaning, it doesn't offer too many records they still do not have, but would be interested in. On the way to the last shop we are about to visit today, Matt gives me a copy of his latest release on a 12" single, and the American jazz records he promised me in Budapest.*

*We are all quite exhausted by the time we get to the last spot, and it turns out to be an overpriced place aimed at well off tourists who visit the Camden market. After about fifteen minutes of half-hearted digging, we give up, exit the store, say goodbye to each other, and disperse just as quick as we met up.*

By scenic measures, there is nothing extraordinary about the afternoon I spent digging with Mark and Matt. Although digging is often a solemn activity, it is just as usual that scenic participants go to local shops, flea markets together, mostly in smaller groups of twos or threes. It is just as common that they make smaller digging trips to neighbouring towns or travel to record fairs together.



Despite its apparently large size, the narrow walkways at Laci Bácsi Lemezboltja make this shop inconvenient for larger gatherings. Budapest, 2010. Photo by Andrew Dubber.

The limited scale of these gatherings reflects the loose connectedness of the crate digging scene: it is a social world organised around small, overlapping networks of friendships, rather than larger groups. Furthermore, this could be explained by a number of practical reasons: the difficulty of scheduling, the fact that more people could easily overcrowd smaller shops, and that a larger company also means more competition for

records. Digging on one's own is in many ways more convenient than visiting record spots with others. However, going in company not only offers a more sociable experience, but also provides opportunities to learn about music, exchange news, swap records, hand out one's mixes or new releases, and so forth.

In this section, I will explore the roles that local record spots play in facilitating the collective rituals through which scenic identities are enacted and social ties are forged and reinforced. I will first discuss the centrality of places of record exchange to scenic interaction. I will then explore the ways in which participants' record buying practices in these places could be seen as distinctive performances through which participants display their musical knowledge and commitment to scenic values and share their enthusiasm for music and digging. Finally, I will discuss the ways in which these sites contribute to the forging and reinforcing of scenic relationships.

#### **ON THE CENTRALITY OF RECORD BUYING PRACTICES WITHIN THE SCENE**

Due to the mundanity of digging with friends and the fact that such occasions never involve larger crowds of scenic participants, it took me a while to start thinking about them as important "social events". Their *centrality* to the forging of relationships and the circulation of information among scenic participants, ironically, only occurred to me at a club event, the sort of occasion that in many other music scenes serves as the focal point of sociability and interaction.

DJ Format had a DJ gig in South East London, at a bar close to Goldsmiths College that was frequented mainly by students. As usual, he played a mix of classic hip hop and break-heavy funk and rock records. Huw72 – Format's friend, a DJ, beat collector, record dealer, and producer – and I were probably the only crate diggers in attendance. Although the student crowd danced cheerfully to Format's set throughout, it was only Huw and I rushing in excitement to the DJ booth upon hearing an amazing funky psychedelic rock record that turned out to be by a band from New Zealand. Apart from us, no one was curious to find out what this record was, to study its sleeve with fascination, and to hear Format's Australian digging story behind it. To the rest of the audience, it was no more interesting or complicated than "great music to dance to". Such a limited presence of fellow participants at the DJ gigs of crate diggers is more the norm than the exception. Even at club nights which focus more explicitly on breaks or

particular kinds of obscure records, the few knowledgeable collectors in the audience are most likely to be the immediate friends of the DJs on the bill.



Adam Jazzchess and his guest, Huw72 in the DJ booth of Vibe Bar. London, 2007

This lack of larger public gatherings of scenic participants is not surprising taking into account the relatively limited number of people involved with crate digging, even in larger cities. Furthermore, the loosely knit social fabric of the scene might also play a part in the fact that DJ gigs or concerts seldom become the sites of larger social events.

*I'm not [connected to the UK digging scene] so much. Probably [to] Huw[72]... probably the most. Like him, and Tom. Yeah, I mean, I know lots of people who do that sort of thing. Mr Thing. All of these guys. But I wouldn't say I'm hard core involved in the whole "What have you done today? What did you pick up?" Just because I'm not in contact with them.*

You know about guys like Cherrystones, and...

*Yeah, yeah, all those guys. Yeah, totally. I think everyone has a general... if you're involved in it, you hear... that everyone kind of knows each other through a third person. Or whatever. It's like so and so. I was friends of them, so I've met them through them. [...] It's not mega millions of people, so you end up crossing paths somewhere along the line. Especially, when it's been so many years. (Danny Breaks 2007)*

Whereas some diggers might spend more time discussing their recent finds over the phone or in online forums than Danny, his account elucidates the loose connectedness that is typical of the social organisation of the scene. Such a lack of frequent meetings and intensive interaction with other diggers could be mistakenly accredited to the fact that Danny lives in Rayleigh – an English small town. However, scenic relationships are organised in a similar manner even in larger cities that are more densely populated with scenic participants. It is important noting that Danny’s account is also indicative of a sense of intimacy that emerges almost paradoxically in spite of the lack of daily communication with – or direct connections to – other participants: due to the limited number of significantly involved participants, it is only a matter of time to “cross paths somewhere along the line.”

The ways in which Danny describes the emerging sense of the scene illuminates the importance of already established friendships in making new acquaintances or becoming aware of others through hearsay. DJ gigs certainly play a part in maintaining and expanding both local and translocal connections among participants – through the practice of inviting different guest DJs to one’s local club nights, and returning such favours in exchange. However, apart from the most successful and well known DJs in the scene, such social events occur relatively infrequently in the lives of most participants compared to those that are organised around record buying practices among participants.

#### **DIGGING FOR RECORDS, TELLING DIGGING STORIES, ENACTING IDENTITIES**

*It’s the search. It’s finding records and searching for them... ah man, it’s such a rush... driving to a spot, looking through hella records and being able to leave with something. Makes it worth. That one record that I can bring home and say: look what I’ve got! That’s what collecting is all about. It’s being able to go somewhere and find something you want. For any amount of money. Could be five thousand dollars or a dollar it doesn’t matter but being able to find something you want, and knowing that you went out to get it, that’s the rush. (Justin Torres 2005, my emphases)*

Although the intensity of participants' involvement with digging is almost constantly changing – depending on available budget and spare time as much as family duties and other commitments – it is not uncommon among crate diggers to visit shops or flea markets at least once a week, if not more often. *While, in many cases, they dig on their own, often even these occasions obtain a social character.* I regularly receive calls from my local friends inquiring whether I know about record spots in a particular town they happen to be in, or whether the record they just found in the racks somewhere is worth buying. It is also usual practice to call others immediately after leaving a store to notify them if one stumbles upon records they might be interested in, or – as Justin Torres's account suggests – brag about recent finds.

The ways in which he describes the significance of digging for scenic participants resonates with Hodkinson's suggestion that

“[i]ndividually and collectively differentiating between and selecting from a range of subcultural and potentially subcultural goods in the spaces in which they were sold were means by which shared tastes and individual differences were played out, as well as comprising a perfect way to demonstrate the depth and appropriateness of one's knowledge and tastes.” (Hodkinson 2002: 150)

While Hodkinson's account elucidates how individual allegiances and shared sensibilities are enacted and experienced by mobilising musical knowledges in the selection and discussion of records, he is less attentive to the ways in which music enthusiasts often bring into play individual knowingness and shared ideals regarding how and where records are bought. Nicky Gregson and Luis Crewe's (2003) ethnography of second hand clothing consumption provides more insights regarding the complex meanings and values associated with *buying things at specific sites of exchange*. Discussing the accounts of a range of consumers with subcultural affiliations – “aging hippies' with tales of afghan coats, through former punks, New Romantics and Goths, to ex-indie girls” (ibid.: 99) – they assert:

“While all talked at length about what they bought, as they all equally made clear, what mattered as much within these subcultures was where you bought it.” (Gregson and Crewe 2003: 99)

The subcultural participants Gregson and Crewe describe resort to second hand outlets as a way to distance themselves from the consumerism that they associate with first

cycle retail spaces. The ways in which these discerning retro clothing buyers see little value in buying new items that are readily available in high street stores resonate with what I have described in Chapter 5 regarding the distinctions scenic participants make regarding buying practices. In both cases, personal authenticity stems from the knowingness, skill, creativity and effort associated with tracking down a particular difficult to find item in a heap of other used goods, or recognising the value in something that most people tend to overlook.

*It's great to be able to find great deals on eBay, great deals on GEMM, but it's not digging. There is a culture here: those that are out there, braving the cold at five in the morning, helping unloading boxes off some flea market guy's truck in order to get to the records first. That's digging to me. Travelling down to L.A. to try to find some old musician, because hopefully he might have some records or a good story, or could push me on to the next guy who might have the record I'm looking for. That's digging. [...] I mean you can find records all day online. Go find for two bucks at some flea-market at the Southern end of Georgia! Nobody wants to hear your great deals on eBay. Fuck that, dude! Gimme some stories! It's boring. It's like [sarcastically puts on an enthusiastic tone of voice] "Got it on eBay, took me seven whole days!" (Justin Torres 2005, my emphases)*

Although it is possible to argue that finding yet undiscovered records or under-priced rarities online demands just as much dedication, competence and savviness as conventional forms of digging, the kinds of record buying Torres mentions approvingly – waking up early, travelling to distant spots, tracing down musicians and picking up records for cheap at flea markets – makes apparent *the prevailing centrality of places of second hand exchange to the practices through which "the culture" of digging is maintained and individual attachments are produced and experienced in collective rituals. Whereas digging with others is the most immediate way of displaying one's knowledge, competence and commitment, bragging about finds and telling digging stories fulfil many of the same roles.* Digging stories – which are omnipresent in the

conversations and online discussions<sup>133</sup> of scenic participants – are in many ways similar to the boasting that Gregson and Crewe describe among subcultural second hand fashion enthusiasts:

“The more outlandish and obscure the site of purchase, the more symbolic value comes to be invested in particular purchases and the greater its ‘boast value’ within friendship networks.” (Gregson and Crewe 2003: 100)

Indeed, much of Torres’s account suggests, most digging stories revolve around more adventurous buying trips, unexpected rarities found at antiques stores, flea markets, garage sales or the cheap bins of record stores, rather than expensive purchases online or at a specialist store. However, although most stories of crate digging adventures involve implicit claims about one’s commitment and competence, there is more to them than bragging and claiming prestige. *Similarly to going to dig with others, telling – and listening to – such stories is a way to share one’s enthusiasm for certain records and the rush of digging with others who find value in similar things. Although displaying one’s knowledge of records and commitment to digging is clearly one of the most important means through which crate diggers gain the respect of fellow participants, the collective rituals at sites of record exchange and the accounts of digging adventures often have as much to do with mutually providing a “confirmation of a shared universe of critical judgment” (Straw 1997b:5) as with competitive performances of knowingness, commitment and taste.*

#### **ESTABLISHING, MAINTAINING AND EXTENDING SCENIC RELATIONSHIPS**

As the description of the afternoon spent with Matt and Mark in Camden suggests, instead of meeting at home, at a bar, a club or a café to hang out and chat, swap records or hand out copies of one’s recent productions or mixes, it is a common practice to

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<sup>133</sup> The following discussion threads from Soulstrut offer a good overview of the main themes and topics of such exchanges. “Collection buying stories”: <http://www.soulstrut.com/index.php/forums/viewthread/43938/>; “Record store horror stories”: <http://www.soulstrut.com/index.php/forums/viewthread/25460/>; “International digging stories”: <http://www.soulstrut.com/index.php/forums/viewthread/18927/>; “Life risking digging stories”: <http://www.soulstrut.com/index.php/forums/viewthread/44395/>; “Best finds found for \$3 and under”: <http://www.soulstrut.com/index.php/forums/viewthread/54089/>. All accessed 5 September 2010.

arrange meetings at record stores. Whereas the ways in which record spots play important roles in facilitating scenic learning, the circulation of information and records, the mutual exchange of favours provide a chance to demonstrate one's expertise and dedication to others. However, such a list of social functions does not capture the experience of shared enthusiasm and adventure that I described in the context of King Honey's account.

*We just bought those records wherever we could. Like library sales, like flea markets. Like we would stop, no matter what, if there's a yard sale, and we saw a crate of records, bam, we're out of the car. It's like whole weekends dedicated to it, it's like every weekend dedicated to it.*  
(King Honey 2005)

As Justin Torres's account that opened the previous subsection, King Honey's description of his digging trips with Nat, his close friend, captures the intensity of the excitement of digging that they shared on a regular basis. The following interview excerpt suggests that such regularly organised digging adventures are not unusual, especially among younger participants with fewer duties to juggle in their spare time:

*We were just really into it [as teenagers.] For our age group it was like every Saturday, that was the day. Everyone goes up to town does the circuit of the record shops, and then we just go off to the [Record and Tape] Exchanges, the Recklesses<sup>134</sup>, or some small shops in the countryside after that. It was always a Saturday.* (Huw72 2007)

It is clearly more difficult to schedule digging trips among older participants with such regularity. However, visits to local record stores, flea markets and record dealers, or smaller trips to record spots in nearby towns are arranged from time to time. Such *collective digging adventures create a history of commonly executed record hunts, strengthen relationships and create alliances based on shared experiences.* Furthermore, as the story of my introduction to Mr Thing indicates, digging with others may lead to "crossing paths" with the friends of one's friends, much in the manner Danny Breaks' account described the development of scenic relationships.

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<sup>134</sup> Record and Tape Exchange is a chain of second hand record shops in London. Currently Reckless is a second hand shop in Soho at the time of writing, but at one point, the company had four stores in London (Belam 2007).

Meetings between scenic participants at places of second hand record trade are, however, not always arranged in advance. It is not uncommon to accidentally bump into friends and acquaintances from the local digging scene in flea markets or record stores. Such *chance meetings heighten the sense that these spaces are collectively used and traversed by scenic participants*<sup>135</sup>, and just as arranged meetings, offer opportunities to gossip or point out records to each other.

It is important to note, however, that the scenic encounters that sites of record exchange facilitate are not always cheerful and relaxed. The competition for a limited number of reasonably priced sought after records – particularly among the dealers and more obsessive collectors – does sometimes lead to tensions. It is not uncommon at flea markets and record fairs that certain participants elbow their way to the crates of a particular seller in order to get a first pick, or that they start looking for records in the same box that somebody else is just looking through. Such rivalries, at times, lead to heated arguments, and can – over a longer period of time – escalate into lasting animosities.

In the previous chapter, I quoted at length Egon’s account of how he met Count Bass D at a local record store. The following interview excerpts are indicative that such *chance meetings between previously unacquainted participants are not uncommon*. As in the case of Egon and Count Bass D, *such accidental encounters often lead to long lasting friendships and collaborations*.

*I’ve met one of my closest friends just down there [in a record store in Camden]. It’s like [imitating excited teenager mumbling] “Who are you? What you’re lookin’ at?” “Beats and breaks.” “Yeah, me too!” [...] That’s how it all starts. Many little friendships started like that. Just trading a few breaks like, BBC breaks, like The Life of a Bird or something like that, or Hong Kong Beat*<sup>136</sup>. (Huw72 2007)

“Baytown Records is also where I first met my man Matt Africa. He’s the breakbeat man, ahead of his time you might say. He’s been

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<sup>135</sup> The thread dedicated to the discussion of encounters with famous “hip hop diggers” while looking for records well illustrates the ways in which chance meetings provide a sense of involvement with the wider social world of the scene: <http://www.soulstrut.com/index.php/forums/viewthread/14940/>, accessed 5 September 2010.

<sup>136</sup> Richard Denton & Martin Cook: Hong Kong Beat & Other BBC TV Themes.

assisting me on the show for about a year and a half” (Beni B in Soulman 1995b)

My account of meeting with Matt and Mark also suggests that *local record spots also serve as sites of establishing and reinforcing translocal relationships within the crate digging scene*. Crate diggers, who visit a distant location for the first time lack local knowledge regarding the whereabouts of record spots and might need guidance regarding which locally specific records are worth picking up.

As in the case of DJ Apt One’s encounter with Peanutbutter Wolf in the previous chapter, the occasion for visiting a particular location is often a DJ gig, and it is customary for local DJs involved with the event in some way to accompany the visitor to local shops. At other times – as in the case of my meeting with Leo which I described in the Chapter 1 – before collectors leave for distant cities, they ask their friends whether they know any shops or have any acquaintances in that area. The following e-mail exchange between me and Gypsy Bogdan, a Romanian born crate digger who was based in New York at the time, illustrates the case:

“Friend of mine is in Budapest these next few days, and I just gave him your email. He’s [known American rap star]’s DJ, I think they have a show there (you probably know this better...), and he might be looking for ‘spots’.”

As Bogdan was working at Turntable Lab, one of the significant hip hop specialist stores in Manhattan, he was extremely well connected in the local DJ scene. It was not surprising he was acquainted with the visiting DJ, knew about his plans, and decided to help him out. Half a day after receiving Bogdan’s letter, I got the following e-mail from the DJ in question:

“Peace. What’s good? I’m a friend of Bogdan in NY, and he told me to contact you [in order] to link up in Budapest. I’ll be there with [name of a known rap star] by the end of this month. Probably will only be there for a day, but if you want to come to the show let me know for sure. If I have time I’m a try and hit a record store. Bogdan said you know the spots. Let me know what’s good.”

Such requests are most often positively responded to. Mutually known friends provide some sort of guarantee that the person they recommend is cool to hang out and dig with.

Furthermore, the solidarity and help one provides to a friend is transferred to his acquaintances to some degree. It is worth making the effort and meet travelling diggers, not only because it's usually fun to meet people sharing the enthusiasm for the same sort of music, but also because they are likely to point out records one was unaware of. Some of them may carry records to trade, or, like Matt, could become important trading partners in the longer run.

After such initial meetings, it is usual that digging together remains an important way in which these relationships are maintained and strengthened upon further visits. My experience regarding the importance of record buying practices in developing and reinforcing translocal connections resonates with what Joseph G. Schloss observed among hip hop producers:

“digging in the crates serves as an important form of socialisation. [...] When producers travel to other cities, it is a common practice for local producers to introduce them to prime digging spots [...]. *In addition to its educational benefits for both parties, the practice also reinforces social bonds between producers in different locations which remain in effect after the traveller returns home.*” (Schloss 2004: 97, my emphasis)

In this section, I was focusing mainly on explaining the centrality of sites of record exchange to scenic interaction. I have argued that even if one digs alone, record buying practices have a certain social significance, as discussing one's finds and telling digging stories are important means through which scenic identities are enacted and experienced in collective settings. I then described a number of ways in which digging together fulfils similar functions in a more direct way, and provided examples of the ways in which sites of record exchange facilitate the forging, maintenance, and reinforcement of connections among participants as well as the circulation of scenic information both locally and translocally.

In the literature that I have reviewed in the previous section, record shops are presented as socially significant sites either because they offer a specialist selection of the music that is highly relevant to a particular collectivity or because their owners or staff are thoroughly involved with the – local or generic – community that their shops service. Within the crate digging scene, however, a much wider range of local record spots – flea markets, yard sales, used bookshops or antique stores that also stock vinyl, second

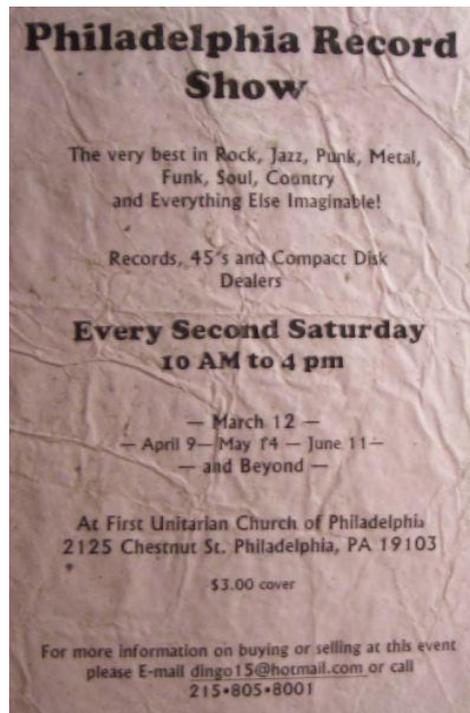
hand shops – serve as the sites of regular scenic interaction regardless of their degree of specialisation or whether their staff is affiliated to the scene in any way or not. In the following two chapters, I will describe two specific institutions of second hand record trade that serve somewhat different roles in facilitating sociability and the circulation and organisation of information within the scene: record fairs and specialist stores.

### 7.3 RECORD FAIRS: SITES OF LARGER PUBLIC GATHERINGS

As I have described in the previous section, it is quite common that crate diggers meet at local record shops or flea markets by arrangement or chance. However such encounters seldom involve more than three or four participants at a time. Record fairs – also called record shows or record conventions – however, often serve as the sites of larger gatherings of diggers from a particular local scene and beyond. The opening times of second hand record shops and the periodicity of flea markets, yard or car boot sales poses certain temporal limits to the social uses of such sites. Still, stores are open in too wide a time frame, local second hand markets usually happen too frequently and offer too slim a chance of coming across sought after recordings to attract significant numbers of participants simultaneously.

Record fairs in contrast, offer a much wider and better selected repertoire of records by bringing together a significant number of record dealers and less specialised sellers in larger halls, are also organised less frequently, and are usually limited to a day or two.

Although these gatherings vary in scale – from local fairs involving a handful of sellers in community centres, churches to international conventions with dozens of dealers and thousands of buyers visiting from great distances – they function as heavily temporalised places (cf. Lefebvre 1995) of exchange and provide grounds for the most significant large scale social events within the crate digging scene and other record collecting collectivities. In this section, I will discuss the significance of two kinds of record fairs in facilitating scenic get-togethers: events of local or regional scale and transnationally significant conventions.



Flyer for a local record fair in Philadelphia, 2005.

## LOCAL EVENTS

In Budapest – and other cities that do not have specialist crate digging oriented record stores that would provide such a locus of scenic face-to-face interaction – it is the quarterly MegaBörze record fairs that bring people together from the scene in the same hall at the same time. Although collectors and dealers occasionally make attempts at organising alternative events, none of these endeavours succeeded in attracting a substantial number of sellers and buyers.

In the absence of other similarly significant events, MegaBörze maintains its regional exclusivity in bringing together dozens of local record shop owners, dealers and collectors from Hungary and some neighbouring countries. Whereas the selection on offer here is limited in terms of American records compared to Vienna – because of the lack of Western imports during the socialist era – it is quite broad in terms of local releases, and offers better chances to pick up rarer LPs and singles that only occasionally surface in local shops. The fact that these fairs were held at the same venue during the last decade contributes to their significance: although they are not always attended by all scenic participants, people try to keep track of when the following event will take place, and – if their budget and time allows – make it there.



MegaBörze record fair. Budapest, 2008.

These occasions are especially important for collectors living outside of the capital – where record shops are few and far between – and play a significant role in facilitating meetings between them and local diggers who tend to meet more regularly at local shops and club nights. Although participants visit these events primarily in order to buy records, greeting each other and engaging in small talk or pointing out records to each other while digging through the racks is as much part of the experience as the conversations over a coffee or a beer in the cafeteria of the venue. The most usual way to finish the fair is by going for a drink or a late lunch with friends, and going through each other's finds.

### **CONVENTIONS OF TRANSNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE**

There are a few larger record conventions attracting dealers from continents away and buyers from well beyond the neighbouring countries in both Europe and North America. Some of these involve so many sellers that they last for two days in order to provide enough time for visitors to look through the relevant stalls, and an extra day for sellers

prior to the event to set up their stalls and browse each others racks for records they could resell. *These events play a central importance in the translocal circulation of records as many local stores and specialised dealers sell and source their merchandise here. Furthermore, such larger record conventions often serve as the meeting points of the most dedicated diggers and dealers who buy or trade intensively enough to make the journey worthwhile*<sup>137</sup>.

“Recently we go to America quite often, but before we went to Europe to buy records also. I went to a record fair in Georgia. I saw [American hip hop producer] Lord Finesse coming. And he arrived probably ten o’clock in the morning. He just took airplane in the morning, so he just arrived. And he told me everything was cheaper than [in] New York. So it’s getting harder to find a good record in New York for a reasonable price.” (Japanese record dealer in Beatdawg 2007)

As the account of this Japanese record dealer suggests, transnationally significant record fairs not only facilitate the circulation of records, but also collecting related information among scenic participants from different cities.

While better known scenic figures like Lord Finesse are not uncommon at such conventions, these events are often not densely populated by scenic “celebrities”. Furthermore, crate diggers blend in with the mixed crowd of record collectors and music enthusiasts that frequent these sites. While chance meetings such as the one this dealer describes are not unusual, they are often arranged beforehand.

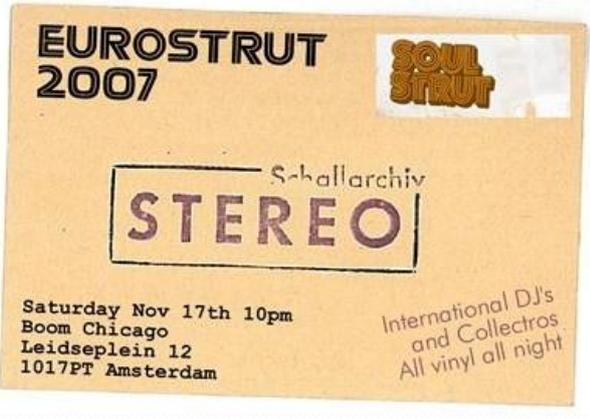
Discussions about who is going to attend the upcoming conventions are not uncommon in crate digging related online forums. In some cases, local participants organise low key club nights where visiting diggers can drop in, play records and socialise. Such events in many cases provide opportunities for the first real life meetings of collectors who previously might only have had exchanges over the internet, and for rare get-togethers for already acquainted diggers and dealers from local scenes all over Europe and America.

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<sup>137</sup> As these occasions offer chances to buy many sought after records at lower prices than what they would cost in one’s immediate surroundings, by buying large quantities one actually “saves” enough money to pay for the trip.

 **nzshadow**  
 Posted: 07 November 2007 07:36 AM





OK guys, this is what we came up with,

Dinner before hand, so PM NZshadow or Fej Melba and we will add you to the list.

any questions PM Fej Melba or NZshadow and we will let you know the details, otherwise just turn up on the night.

And remember: if you want in on the bartab: you have to bring records.

After a longer discussion, the final plans for Eurostrut 2007, an after event for the Utrecht Mega Record and CD Fair on *Soulstrut*<sup>138</sup>.

While it often becomes a challenge to locate even one's friends in the rustle and bustle of large conventions, such after events offer a way to meet others in more relaxed surroundings, to listen to each others' finds, to share stories, and make new translocal connections. Such events do not necessarily involve significant DJs or producers. They are more likely to involve diggers who spend significant time following and contributing the discussions on such online.

*Whereas digging locally with others offers a sense of one's involvement with scenic practices and the context of personal relationships, such rare occasions – as music festivals in music scenes organised around live performances (Hodkinson 2002; Cummings 2007) – provides an immediate experience of belonging and participation in the wider social world of the scene.*

<sup>138</sup> <http://www.soulstrut.com/index.php/forums/viewthread/44806/#637832>, accessed 19 August 2010.



Eurostrut 2007, Boom Chicago, Amsterdam 2007

The fact that recent record conventions are often reported in various scenic media in the form of photo essays or articles (e.g. Mason 2002b; Anon. 2006a) further indicates their significance for scenic participants.

In this section, I described record fairs as heavily temporalised places of scenic interaction and exchange. Although my discussion concentrated primarily on the ways in which these sites provide grounds of larger gatherings of scenic participants that contribute towards the development and strengthening of social relationships within the scene both locally and translocally and offer means for them to experience the wider social world of the scene.

In the next section, drawing on some of these insights, I will further explore the significance of specialist dealers within the scene focusing on record stores that are managed by scenic participants and keep a well selected stock of records that are of interest to crate diggers.



Significant events: photos from the pictorial on the Austin Record Show in *Friends of Sound* (Anon. 2006a), a crate digging related online magazine. Photographer unknown<sup>139</sup>.

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<sup>139</sup> <http://friendsofsound.com/8/austin4.html> and <http://friendsofsound.com/8/austin3.html>, accessed 25 May 2006.

## 7.4 SPECIALIST RECORD SHOPS: ACCUMULATING, ORGANISING AND DISPLAYING SCENIC MUSICAL CULTURE

In the first section of this chapter I have suggested that, of all the various kinds of record retailers, only specialist stores were described in more detail by academic commentators with regard to their significance within musical collectivities. There, I have argued that Hodkinson (2002) and Bannister (2006) offered important insights regarding the ways in which these shops – apart from merely making available a well selected repertoire of recordings that are significant within the scene – facilitate sociable interaction among enthusiasts and play important roles as sites of musical education and influence. Whereas this section is indebted to Hodkinson's and Bannister's work in discussing the roles that specialist record stores play within the crate digging scene, it also pays closer attention to the actual practices through which these sites accumulate and organise records as well as musical information, and provide a sense of participation in the wider social world of the scene.

The first subsection concentrates primarily on the ways in which these stores function as hubs for the local and translocal circulation of records and musical knowledges, while the second one – drawing mainly on Gregson and Crewe's (2003) observations of second hand fashion retail – discusses the ways in which these places shape the aesthetic hierarchy of scenic records and evoke a sense of collectively traversed scenic spaces through strategies of display.

### **LOCAL AND TRANSLOCAL HUBS**

Similarly to what Hodkinson (2002) observes with regard to music stores that specialise in goth related material, record stores that cater primarily to crate diggers are few and far between. They are located in cities – like New York, San Francisco, Tokyo, Osaka, Amsterdam – that are inhabited by a significant number of local diggers and are situated at the crossroads of the translocal routes of scenic participants. However, while these stores are managed by knowledgeable diggers with a background in hip hop and an ear for breaks and samples, they cater to a significantly wider clientele including soul enthusiasts, jazz heads, disco collectors and rap fans. Conversely, specialist stores that



made apparent in the interviews with their owners in scenic media (e.g. Keilch 2002; Wang 2002b; Wells 2010), but also the records, magazines and mixtapes they stock and display on their walls. Whereas the goth specialists that Hodkinson describes specialise mainly in stocking new releases and recent editions of classics on CD, *scenic specialist stores focus primarily on second hand vinyl records, and carry only a very limited stock of new releases and reissues*. Although their advertisements might not refer explicitly to crate digging, the strong presence of classic and sought after hip hop records – alongside groove oriented jazz, funk, soul, disco, Latin, and reggae music – in the repertoires is indicative of the tastes and musical backgrounds of their staff and many of their customers.



Specialist store as a site of sociability. BBQ party in front of A-1, New York. Date and photographer unknown.<sup>141</sup>

In most local shops the owners and assistants are not part of the digging scene and have different musical interests that are also reflected in the records they stock. As I have described in an earlier section, chance meetings between participants do happen occasionally at such places of exchange, however, these spots seldom become the sites of lively interaction in local scenes or important destinations for travelling diggers. In contrast, specialist stores such as the San Francisco based Groove Merchant and New

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<sup>141</sup> [http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=2633626&id=101092607186&ref=fbx\\_album](http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=2633626&id=101092607186&ref=fbx_album), accessed 23 August 2010.

York's A-1, Sound Library and Good Records NYC are often places that many local participants regularly visit to browse the racks, but just as importantly to leave flyers or put up posters for their upcoming events, discuss music and news with each other as well as the people who work behind the counter. Specialist shops are also frequented by travelling scenic participants ranging from touring DJs and record dealers to occasionally visiting lesser known scenic participants who happen to be in town.

Huw72, who used to work at Mr Bongo – a now defunct, but once internationally renowned independent hip hop specialist store in London that kept a small but well selected section of second hand break related records – reminisces over the international coming and going that went on in the shop:

*Yeah, I got to know them [regular customers], yeah. It was really nice. Some of them I'm still very good friends with. And it's quite a lot of worldwide people who used to come in and order stuff as well. And then when the word spread to, like, New York and stuff, Kenny Dope [a legendary New York based hip hop and house producer] used to come in a lot, buy stackloads of stuff. And so [I told him on one occasion] "Wow! You could've bought [these] in New York, I've just brought it [i.e. the records Kenny Dope was buying] back!" Yeah, loads of... lot of European[s would] come over, and by that time it was good economy in Japan, and, so Japanese came in as well.*  
(Huw72 2007)

As Huw's account indicates, such visits contribute to the development of translocal ties that connect particular local scenes by forging personal relationships among the most involved participants – the people working in such shops as well as regular visitors. Of course, such clients are often valuable sources of information about rare, locally unknown or unavailable records as well as the records themselves:

*When I first got into records, ninety percent of what I've learnt was through trading records. And it's something that I... till this day...It's, like, really a strong part of why I get the records I'm dealing here, 'cause I encourage trading since day one. Trade has been like really strong. I was telling people always to bring trades when they're coming to town. It's always interesting records going through. [...]  
When I was coming up it's just... you've learnt from trading. That was*

*the way. (“Cool” Chris, owner of the San Francisco based Groove Merchant record store, 2005)*

“Cool” Chris’s account – similarly to interviews with other specialist store owners (Keilch 2002; Wells 2010) – suggests that such businesses profit from their position as central nodes within the translocal networks of the crate digging scene and can thus accumulate not only a wealth of knowledge about obscure records, distant record spots and merchants, regional market trends, but also an outstanding stock of sought after and rare items. People who manage these record stores are information brokers: by meeting a lot of knowledgeable collectors in the shop as well as at the far away places they travel to in order to source new records, they constantly learn about and acquire music that is yet unknown locally and disseminate this knowledge and the records themselves to both their local clients and visiting diggers.



Groove Merchant, San Francisco. Photographer and date unknown<sup>142</sup>.

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<sup>142</sup> [http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=4616719&id=316979256514&ref=fbx\\_album](http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=4616719&id=316979256514&ref=fbx_album), accessed 23 August 2010.

*And in lot of ways like discovering the Groove Merchant [...] fundamentally, I think, elevated sort of my level in terms of what to look for and what to think about. And, you know, since then, I usually on average go to that store probably once every week, once every two weeks. And I'm always learning like new stuff via Chris. [Shop owner] "Cool" Chris is just an amazing resource in terms of just learning about music from. And I like to think that my collection... like the best pieces I have in my collection, the vast majority is stuff that I've gotten... that has come about either directly or indirectly through shopping there. If it's not stuff that I've actually bought from the Groove Merchant than it's records that I've learnt about from him and later found on my own or what have you. (Oliver Wang 2005)*



Groove Merchant, San Francisco. Photographer and date unknown<sup>143</sup>.

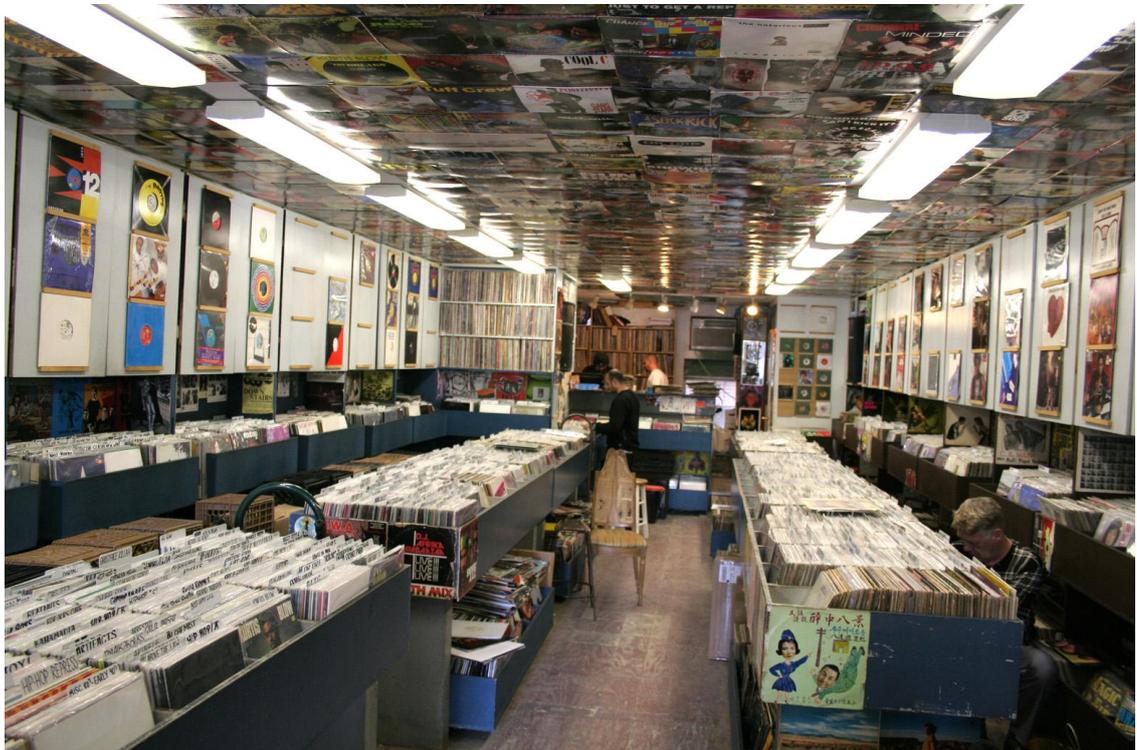
Oliver Wang's discussion of the significance of Groove Merchant for the development of his musical knowledge resonates with Bannister's (2006) insights regarding the ways

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<sup>143</sup> [http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=4616968&id=316979256514&ref=fbx\\_album](http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=4616968&id=316979256514&ref=fbx_album), accessed 23 August 2010.

in which owners of second hand specialist stores are often important sources of musical influence and education. Taking into account the tiny space that the Groove Merchant occupies in contrast with larger specialist shops like A-1, the significance of “Cool” Chris Veltri’s personal selection becomes more apparent in forming the musical interests and collections of his regular customers.

However, even larger specialist shops – and their knowledgeable owners and staff – play similar roles as taste makers as Hodkinson’s (2002) account suggested in the first section of this chapter: through personal recommendations as well as what they choose to stock and exclude from their selections. Upon my visits to these shops, I never found extreme metal, 1990s indie rock, 1980s pop or classical music in their racks, not even in the “cheap bins” that are located on the floor, underneath the shelves that contain records that are considered musically and commercially valuable.



A-1. New York, 2009. Photo by Márton Bodó.

Although the significance of the spatial organisation of music superstores have been recognised as a means of orienting consumption (Straw 1997a) this insight remained largely unexplored in scholarly discussions of specialist shops. In the remainder of this section, I will address the subtle ways in which strategies of display work towards presenting and shaping the aesthetic hierarchy – and commercial value – of records in

the space of specialist outlets and representing the wider social world of the crate digging scene.

### STRATEGIES OF DISPLAY

“A lot of people were coming in just amazed at the selection. And of course, we’ve been dealing with a lot of [hip hop] producers for a few years. A lot of them came to buy stuff we had and gradually things just improved and improved. And we had a very nice looking store, very well presented, organized, clean, tidy. It makes life a lot easier for the customer. (Robert Corrigan, owner of Sound Library in Keilch 2002: 10)



Sound Library. New York, 2005. Photo by Zed Adams<sup>144</sup>

Robert Corrigan mentions that their records are “well presented”: in fact, presentation – like in other areas of more specialised second hand retail (Gregson and Crewe 2003) – has everything to do with creating and signifying the value of particular commodities.

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<sup>144</sup> <http://www.flickr.com/photos/51167738@N00/503018159/sizes/l/>, accessed 23 August 2010.

Although the interior of Sound Library – with its art gallery-like white walls and lighting – indicates a very conscious approach to creating a retail space that orients consumers regarding the worth of records that are on display, its design merely takes already existing conventions of the spatial organisation of specialised second hand record shops to an extreme. Many of the same display strategies are clearly present at most used record stores that take care of organising their records not only according to generic categories, but also in a way that signals their desirability within the particular groups of music enthusiasm they cater for.

The crates or shelves that are positioned in the most marginal part of the retail space – usually on the floor, underneath the racks – contain what shop owners consider the most unwanted records, either because of their abundance on the second hand market, or because they are unknown or aesthetically insignificant. As these factors often correspond – what is significant within a particular community is also in demand, even if it was originally pressed in larger quantities<sup>145</sup> – these boxes contain the cheapest and musically less valued records.

Above them, in the racks that enable easier browsing, records are often put into protective transparent plastic sleeves, organised by genre and sorted in alphabetical order, in some cases even by the name of the artists. The protective sleeves suggest significant worth that could be destroyed by wear and tear as a result of people flicking through the records. The care that goes into the organisation of records suggests that these items are worth the effort. The same records that a few days ago might have lied around neglected, often without sleeves, as unmarked components of a pile of seemingly identical vinyl junk, here appear as individual objects that have their own place within the systemic order of the history of recorded music: they fill gaps in generic sets or the collected body of work of certain artists depending on the shelving categories of the store.

The exceptionally rare and sought after records – often called “wall pieces” in record collecting parlance – are usually displayed on the walls of shop as paintings in a gallery, representing their uniqueness, showcasing them as beautiful and precious objects.

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<sup>145</sup> I will provide a more detailed explanation of the ways in which rarity, demand and price are interrelated on the second hand record market in the following chapter.

*Such strategies of display produce a material manifestation of scenic canon by laying out the records in the physical space in a way that corresponds to the hierarchy of their significance and worth. Rather than merely representing a commonsensical scenic value hierarchy, the tastes of specialist merchants is just as apparent in the spatial arrangement and pricing of records, as their perceptions of rarity and demand.*



From “dollar bin” to “wall of fame” in A-1. New York, 2010. Photo by Márton Bodó.

Whereas the judgement of specialist sellers could be – and in certain cases is – debated, the ways in which Oliver Wang describes the owner of Groove Merchants records – and the fact that scenic participants often visit these sites afar – suggest that *their opinions are trusted and influential*.

The authority of these shops in representing – and shaping – the scenic canon is further cemented by the photo galleries that indicate the importance of these retailers for prestigious crate diggers. In Mr. Bongo, a row of hip hop records signed by the artists who had visited the store used to decorate the walls. In other places – like A-1, or Beatin’ Rhythm in Manchester – snapshots of well known collectors and DJs were displayed in highly visible places – in the shop window and over the listening booth respectively at the time when I visited them. If “wall pieces” present records that belong to the top of the scenic hierarchy of desirable records, these galleries present the diggers who belong to the elite or “inner circle” of the international elite of the scene.



Snapshots of visiting DJs at Beatin’ Rhythm, Manchester’s 7” single specialist store that partly specialises in serving crate diggers. 2008.

In many cases, specialist stores also sell mix CDs produced in very limited quantities by well known diggers, who bring these in to sell or trade when they travel through town. These photo galleries and mixtapes make apparent that these specialist stores lie at the crossroads of the paths of scenic participants and evoke a sense that – by sifting through records in the same crates as some of the most emblematic diggers – one participates in the wider social world of the crate digging scene.

## 7.5 FROM SPOTS TO SPATIALITY

“To me, ‘crate digging’ means going to used record stores instead of sightseeing when you are on a tour. When you come back home and your family asks you what the cities were like, all you can describe are the used record stores.” (Peanutbutter Wolf in DJ Day n.d.)

In this chapter, I have described the centrality of places of second hand to scenic participation and interaction that prevails in spite of the general trend towards the decreasing significance of physical sites of exchange for both music retail and the collective rituals of music enthusiasm. Drawing on – but also moving beyond – the relatively limited available literature on the social significance of places of music consumption, I have described a number of ways in which flea markets, local shops, record fairs and specialist stores contribute to fostering sociability and the circulation and organisation of records and digging related information within the scene.

Although Peanutbutter Wolf’s account might be somewhat exaggerated, it resonates with my earlier discussion of the ways in which record buying practices work towards the production and experience of scenic identities. Not only is his definition of crate digging indicative of the ways in which record buying practices are mobilised to constitute difference discursively – by contrasting the ways in which diggers and other kinds of travellers explore particular cities – but also of the ways in which they are productive of very specific experiences and perceptions of urban localities. Indeed, scenic distinctions with regard to where are bought records imply that there is a shared understanding of the geography of second hand record exchange among participants that is mobilised in – as much as reproduced through – both digging stories and record buying practices. In the following chapter, – focusing on the spatiality of scenic practices and identities (cf. Massey 1984; Lefebvre 1991; Harvey 2001) – I will explore this alternative geography as a shared space of belonging.

## 8. AN ALTERNATIVE GEOGRAPHY OF BELONGING

**“ALL EARS RECORDS AKA ‘THE DINER’ (New Brunswick, NJ) ... defunct.**



The Diner, New Brunswick, NJ. Date unknown. Photo by J-Zone<sup>146</sup>

Damn, what a joint. After searching high and low for the first four Kool & The Gang albums to no avail, I resorted to the Yellow Pages (no internet in 1990 and I was depending on my pops to drive me around). This dude had his # in the Manhattan Yellow Pages for some reason, so I gave him a buzz. Not only did he have every record I was looking for, but the prices weren't on the standard Colony / Bleecker Bob's / Golden Disk / House Of Oldies<sup>147</sup> tourist bullshit. [...] No browsing allowed. You call, he goes to his 'warehouse' and gets the records and meets you at the 'diner'. The first Kool & The Gang album for \$20 was a steal even back then, but now the shit is over \$100 and getting harder to find by the day. [...] Legend has it that Q-Tip, Juju (Beatnuts) and Large Pro[fessor]<sup>148</sup> got access to the 'Warehouse'. Word also has it that all of these records were a front for some federal crime related shit the dude was doing, and he's probably playing dominoes somewhere upstate now. Could just be a rumor though, who knows. Either way, I passed by the diner in 2007 and to my surprise, it's still standing. It's vacant of course, but it felt good in knowing gentrification didn't wipe out my own personal landmark.

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<sup>146</sup> As posted by J-Zone (2009).

<sup>147</sup> Record stores in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

<sup>148</sup> Well known hip hop producers.

Sorry I don't have any Egon<sup>149</sup>-like stories of getting arrested in Peru while finding records, but I never had the money/time to really smash overseas. When I was there, it was always venue, hotel, airport and maybe the most common record spot in town if we had time. [...]

60 Responses to 'J-ZONE'S TOP 10 ADVENTURES IN DIGGIN''

[...]

### **19. Easy Mo Bee Says:**

[...] I felt you man on those dusty, molded spots. [...] I've been collecting records since around 8 years old. In my many travels, I came up on gold. Let's break some o' da spots I stumbled upon: Korvette's & May's Department Stores went outta business. That's where I caught my sealed doubles for Olympic Runners' *Put The Music...* [*Where Your Mouth Is*], T-Connection['s] *On Fire, Fallin In Love* by 9th Creation, and so many more gems at 59 cents/2 for \$1. I cleaned they ass OUT 'til they closed! Music Factory downtown B[roo]klyn and 40 Deuce locations, Second Hand Rose 14 St in Manh[attan], Vinylmania (when Manny used to actually be there), Downstairs (in the 42 St train station), Barry's Stereo on 23rd, Sounds on St Mark's, all the sidewalk vendors in the Village, the public library, Mr. Green Thrift Store in B[roo]klyn, Birdells, them thrift shops on Atlantic Ave in the now antique district, any Salvation Army or Goodwill, The Bruised Apple in Peekskill, Disco Mat, The Wiz (2 for \$1), Bondy's in Park Row, Exotica on Portobello Rd in London, Wall Street Stereo, Colony (yes J... when they sold everything for \$2.98), and so many other book stores, thrift shops, record stores under the J train in Brooklyn that I don't remember the names of, and countless other spots that closed since then that I don't remember cuz o' the constant weed haze of my youth. (J-Zone 2009)

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<sup>149</sup> Eothen "Egon" Apalatt, the general manager of Stones Throw hip hop label, well known digger who often publishes digging related stories and interviews with significant musicians in Wax Poetics. His account of meeting Count Bass D was described in Chapter 6.

J-Zone's blog post on his top 10 digging adventures and the comments it received – from which the above excerpts are taken – make apparent the complexity and detail of spatial knowledge that is acquired by scenic participants through years of digging and discussing places of exchange. The accounts of J-Zone and Easy Mo Bee are indicative of the ways in which the geography of second hand exchange is a matter of common knowledge among crate diggers: the casual manner in which they refer to “standard tourist bullshit places”, “common” and “major record spots”, “warehouses” and “thrift stores” suggests that the meaning of such terms requires little explanation in scenic conversations. The fact that such categories and terms are widely shared within the scene enables participants to make sense of others' digging stories even if they never visited the particular cites and record spots in question. In contrast, the significance of such references and conversations might be difficult to decipher for an outsider. Similarly to the group specific connoisseurly competence regarding music and records (cf. Dougan 2006), the categories and dimensions through which the places and spaces of second hand exchange are rendered meaningful within the scene are important means through which lines of commonality and difference are constituted and experienced among crate diggers. Furthermore the ways in which particular sites of exchange take on the significance of “personal landmarks”, and the significance of spots in providing a sense of place – of being at home or away – is also apparent from the above accounts. While heavily involved New York based diggers like J-Zone and Easy Mo Dee are as familiar with local shops and sidewalk vendors as with the route of the J train, they are less informed regarding the geographies of digging in distant cities they might visit.

Whereas such accounts call attention to the significance of participants' collective engagement with issues of spatiality in the production of scenic identities and attachments, the practices through which shared geographies of belonging are produced and experienced within musical collectivities are generally neglected within popular music studies. In this chapter, however, drawing on insights from philosophy (Lefebvre 1991), anthropology (Basso 1996) and human geography (Massey 1984; Harvey 2001) I will explore the significance of these practices in the making of a shared geographical understanding and the spatialisation of scenic identities.

In the first section, I will describe the relevant academic literature regarding spatial practices and the collective production and experience of space. I will then discuss how sites of record exchange are woven together into a larger alternative cartography of

urban space through rituals organised around record buying and the discussion of record spots. In the third section I will explore the commercial and spatiotemporal logics according to which the shared cartography of scenic practices is organised, and explain the ways in it provides a spatially situated sense of space for scenic participants. In conclusion, I will discuss the ways in which this shared understanding of space contributes towards a distinctive sense of commonality among crate diggers.

## 8.1 SPATIALISING IDENTITY AND BELONGING

“[...L]ocally significant places get depicted and appraised by established local citizens almost as often as suspicious marital upheavals, bad weather, and the shortcomings of people’s children. Surrounded by places, and always in one place or another, men and women talk about them constantly, and it is from listening in on such exchanges and then trying to ascertain what has been said that interested outsiders can begin to appreciate what the encompassing landscape is really all about. Stated more exactly, the outsider must attempt to come to grips with the indigenous cultural forms with which the landscape is experienced, the shared symbolic vehicles that give shape to geographical experience and facilitate its communication – it’s re-creation and re-presentation – in interpersonal settings.” (Basso 1996: 57)

“Institutionalized geographic knowledges [...] are particularly important to Geography as an academic discipline. But there are far wider and more general kinds of geographic knowledge embedded in language, local ways of life, the local symbiosis achieved between nature, economy and culture, local mythologies and diverse cultural practices and forms, common-sense prescriptions and dynamic sociolinguistic traditions. Specialized geographical knowledges (everything from urban knowledge of the taxi driver to the particular knowledge of amateur ornithologists or local antiquarians) abound.

Local knowledges, for example, often amount to relatively complete geographical descriptions albeit structured from a certain parochialist perspective. Local and regional identities, conversely, are themselves built (as is the nation state) around the formation and articulation of certain kinds of geographical [...] understandings.” (Harvey 2001: 141)

Keith H. Basso’s and David Harvey’s suggestions above serve as important sources of inspiration for my discussion in this section. Whereas Basso calls attention to the centrality of the “indigenous cultural forms with which the landscape is experienced” in the constitution of identities and attachments in conventional, locally bound communities, Harvey’s account focuses on the practices that are productive of shared understandings of spatiality in the context of culturally heterogeneous groups that inhabit the contemporary city, and argues that the “specialised geographical knowledges” play similar roles in constituting collective attachments and differences between different urban collectivities.

Crate diggers, similarly to taxi drivers and local antiquarians, experience their immediate surroundings and the wider world through a shared “parochialist perspective” building on the “local knowledge” they gathered primarily through scenic practices. As I will describe in the following sections, regular digging routines and routes, road trips, articles, photo essays and scenic talk about places of exchange contribute towards the weaving together of particular record spots into a larger geography of digging. Furthermore, these practices are also central to the development of specific kinds of “localized knowledge” that are not only productive of a shared geographical imagination within the scene, but also “guide affective loyalties and [...] identities” (Harvey 2001: 216-217). Before describing these practices and spatial knowledge that are distinctive of crate diggers, I will provide a brief overview of the most relevant theoretical insights that inform my discussion.

Spatiality is one of the focal points of the discussions regarding the relationship between music and identity within popular music studies (cf. Shank 1994; Mitchell 1996; Gelder 1997; Bennett 2000; Fairley 2001; Mitchell 2002; Connell and Gibson 2003; Bennett and Peterson 2004b; Whiteley et al. 2004). However, the actual processes and practices through which identities are spatialised in particular collectivities surrounding music are largely neglected, even though such a research perspective is well established within

human geography (cf. Cresswell 2004) – particularly within gender (Massey 1984) and queer studies (cf. Valentine 2000; Rooke 2004) – as well as anthropology (cf. Feld and Basso 1996). Most of this spatially oriented literature either explicitly draws on or resonates with Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) ideas regarding the ways in which spaces are collectively produced through “spatial practices”. Furthermore, Lefebvre suggests that the “logic and forms of” knowing these spaces, “and the ideological content of codes, theories and conceptual depictions” (Shields 1999: 163) through which they are rendered meaningful – as lived spaces – are also productive of spatialised identities. As a detailed discussion of this particular area of social research is clearly beyond the scale and scope of this project, in this section I concentrate on the insights offered by two studies describing the production of shared geographies in two particular collectivities.

The work of Nicky Gregson and Lousie Crewe on second hand clothes trade offers an illuminating description of how various spaces of second hand exchange are produced: “Second hand sites [...] tend to be woven together” (2003: 85) and form *shopping geographies* through both the shopping routes and the accounts of the women they have interviewed. In these imagined spaces the distinct sites of second hand trade become meaningful parts of a larger network of places, geographies that are structured along specific dimensions – such as price level, geographical position, strategies of display. This multidimensional map is at the same time intertwined by social rules and meanings – alternativity, hipness, respectability, subsistence and so forth – that govern and lend meaning to consumption practices at various locations within the shared space of second hand exchange. Within these geographies of consumption sites become both “a means of encountering and making sense of place” and places of

“identity formation. Open to various permutations, they can be mobilized to constitute ‘difference’, or work as a space for enabling other identities to be temporally reasserted, but equally and much more negatively, they can be spaces that mark out and reinscribe exclusion” (Gregson and Crewe 2003: 87).

Gregson and Crewe present numerous case studies which demonstrate that different kinds of consumers – from economically deprived single parents to non-conformist alternative fashionistas – construct different shopping geographies that enable them to make sense of these places – and their own positions – in it in often very distinct ways.

While Gregson and Crewe mostly focus on individual understandings and narratives of the space in geographically bounded sites, Ian Borden's (2001) study of the ways in which skateboarders use and perceive urban places offers more insight regarding the collective production of group specific alternative geographies. His focus on both local and translocal landscapes of skateboarding, and his observations with regard to how such specific geographical knowledges become constitutive elements of group identities are particularly valuable for my following discussions of the spatial aspects of crate digging.

Borden suggests that specific urban places – skate-spots – are woven or edited together, by the bodily movement of skaters as they ride through a particular city:

“[S]kateboarders undertake a discontinuous edit of architecture and urban space, recomposing their own city from different places, locations, urban elements, routes and times, involving the twin process of asyndeton (omitting certain elements) and synechdoche (substituting one part for another, or the whole.)” (ibid.: 101-102)

“The city for the skateboarder becomes a kind of *capriccio*, the tourist's postcard where various architectural sites are compressed into an irrational (in time and space) view, except the editing tool is not the eye, camera or tourist coach but motile body.” (ibid.: 219)

Although Borden stresses the role of lived and embodied experience in his description of such spatial practices rather than that of talk – which is the focus of Gregson and Crewe's study – he is aware of the representations of skate spots in online lists, skateboard magazine articles and videos that link together sites across the globe. This virtual geography of skateboarding creates a global skate-scape (Kacsuk 2004), a “parochialist view” of cities around the world:

“New York, for example, is for skaters not the New York of the Statue of Liberty, Times Square, 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, Central Park and the Empire State Building, but of the Bear Stearns Building (46<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup>, Park and Lexington), ‘Bubble banks’ (south side of 747 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue), ‘Harlem banks’ (Malcolm X Avenue and 139th), ‘Brooklyn banks’ (Manhattan end of Brooklyn Bridge), Washington Square Park, Mullaly Park in Brooklyn, Marriot marquis Hotel (45<sup>th</sup> and Broadway), Bell Plaza banks, etc. [...] Other cities receive the same

treatment: Rotterdam is perceived as the weena covered walkway, Beurs stairs, Blaak interchange, Oosterhof mall and Alexanderpolder station. (Borden 2001: 221-222)

But to what extent are such alternative geographies shared? As Borden notes, *skateboarders' cognitive representations of space are always situated, changing from person to person and also transforming as time passes by*. Although their 'postcards' might contain different elements depending on where they skate and what media coverage of distant places they see, *what connects them is the way in which this particular kind of geographical knowledge is structured by categories of understanding that focus on skateable surfaces and architectural elements that emerge from their embodied experiences of local skate spots:*

“The city for skaters is not buildings but a set of ledges, window sills, walls, roofs, railings, porches, steps, salt bins, fire hydrants, bus benches, water tanks, newspaper stands, pavements, planters, curbs, handrails, barriers, fences, banks, skips, posts, tables and so on” (ibid.: 221)

Borden argues that this shared perspective is a constitutive element of the collective identity of skateboarding: it is *a mode of knowing urban space* – rather than an awareness of the same spots – that creates a shared context within which skaters living in distant cities feel that they have more in common with each other, than with non-skaters from their immediate surroundings.

In many ways, Borden's observations bring to mind Edward S. Casey's phenomenological discussion of the ways in which one's own experiences of particular places provide an understanding of a wider geography of similar sites:

“Standing in this place thanks to the absolute here of my body, I understand what is true of other places over *there* precisely because of what I comprehend to be the case for this place under and around me. This does not mean that I understand what is true of *all* places, but my grasp of one place does allow me to grasp what holds, for the most part in other places of the same region.” (Casey 1996: 45, his emphases)

Casey defines “region” not as a concrete geographically bounded area, but as “collocation of internally related places” like islands connected by the exchange of kula shells and canoeing routes (ibid.: 41), but also translocally dispersed sites that are specific to the spatial practices of collectivities such as retro clothing enthusiasts, skateboarders, or crate diggers. Casey’s suggestions resonate with Arjun Appadurai’s (1995) ideas regarding the “production of locality” – a translocal sense of place that has more to do with a feeling of cultural familiarity and belonging than any specific location.

Drawing on these insights regarding the ways in which “different human practices create and make use of distinctive conceptualizations of space” (Harvey 2008: 13-14), I will now turn to discussing the crate digging scene as a space of belonging. As I will describe in the following sections, through traversing, exploring and discussing record spots, scenic participants “are forever performing acts that reproduce and express” their “sense of place – and also, inextricably, their own understandings of who and what they are” (Basso 1996: 57)

## 8.2 WEAVING PLACES TOGETHER

“The first time I went to Chicago years and years ago, I came up really heavy. I used to have a great time looking for records in Providence, RI. I once spent an entire afternoon going through a now-defunct store on the main drag up from Brown University. I found the only two decent records in the store: two copies of Kool G Rap’s ‘Truly Yours’ 12”. It was the best waste of four hours!

But the town that I’ve routinely had the most, and weirdest, luck in is Mattapoisett, MA. There’s a Salvation Army there about a half mile from my grandfather’s house. I’ve come up on very cool novelty records, some great Prestige, CTI, 70’s Blue Note jazz, and, best of all, the entire Sugarhill Records catalog. Granted, not crazy rare records, but bizarre to find at a thrift store in a small, southeastern Massachusetts town.” (DJ Eleven in DJ Source-1 2008a)

DJ Eleven's account is not unlike J-Zone's top 10 list or Easy Mo Dee's lengthy discussion of digging spots that opened this chapter. Digging stories and scenic conversations like these make apparent the ways in which particular spots are often discussed as places within a wider landscape of scenic practice. The cartographies of second hand record exchange that emerge through digging experiences as much as scenic conversations are overlaid on maps of local neighbourhoods and distant cities and are indicative of a particular mode of using and encountering urban space. The scholarly accounts that I have described in the previous section suggest that such a specific understanding of spatiality plays an important role in constituting commonalities and difference and evoking a sense of attachment among crate diggers. Before proceeding to a more detailed discussion of the spatialisation of scenic identities, in this section, I will explore the practices through which scenic participants weave together particular record spots into a larger geography of digging.

#### **LOCAL SHOPPING ROUTES**

*"We were just really into it. [...] For our age group it was like every Saturday, that was the day. Everyone goes up to town does the circuit of the record shops, and then we just go off to the Exchanges, the Recklesses, or some small shops in the countryside after that. It was always a Saturday.*

So you did like a circuit, more shops in a row.

*H: Big circuit. And it got bigger and bigger as I found out more.  
(Huw72 2007, my emphasis)*

Although I have already quoted a part from the above interview excerpt, I return to it here, because it resonates with Gregson and Crewe's (2003) observations of the role that regular shopping practices play in weaving together the geography of second hand clothing retail, as well as Borden's (2001) suggestions regarding the ways in which skateboarders' use of urban space – more specifically the routes through which they connect particular skate spots – is productive of larger geographies of skating. Huw's account here is also indicative of similar pathways travelled regularly by crate diggers: rather than digging at a single site, scenic participants often visit a number of flea markets, garage sales or record stores in the course of a whole day or an afternoon. The

ways in which different places are discussed as points within a larger cartography of digging in participants' accounts suggest that such shopping circuits collocate record spots within and around particular localities. Huw's account is also indicative of the ways in which one's awareness and understanding of the local landscape of second hand record exchange develops gradually over a longer period of time through the regular repetition, extension and combination of such routes.

The fact that the names of such spots are often used in conversations among crate diggers in particular local scenes as points of spatial reference suggests that – apart from newly opened or relatively hidden record spots that are kept secret by scenic participants in order to keep unwanted competition away – the whereabouts of these places is common knowledge among participants in particular local scenes. As parks, significant buildings or other landmarks, they become places on the grid of orientation through which crate diggers encounter their immediate surroundings, but – as the accounts that opened this chapter indicates – often also distant cities.

### **DIGGING TRIPS**

In the last chapter, I quoted Peanutbutter Wolf's discussion of the ways in which visiting record spots – rather than conventional sights, museums and other tourist attractions – serve as his primary means of exploring and understanding the distant places he travels to. Whereas his account might be somewhat exaggerated, it resonates with J-Zone's description of the ways in which touring limits one's movement in the cities visited to “venue, hotel, airport and maybe the most common record spot in town”. Such references are telling of the fact that record spots rank high on the list of potential destinations for travelling crate diggers. For scenic participants who have more conventional jobs, work related trips or holidays provide similar opportunities to visit flea markets and record shops in distant locations:

“My job before I opened the shop [Good Records NYC, a scenic specialist store in New York] was as a junior broker at Marsh & McLennan, a commercial risk management and insurance firm based in midtown. I started with them in San Francisco, however, while I was back there after graduating from NYU. I definitely still dug and dealt records. That's really where it started getting serious, because I had a lot of disposable income to buy records with. I traveled a lot for

business, and had access to all the postage supplies I wanted!” (Jonny Skulte in Wells 2010)

Moreover, it is not uncommon among scenic participants – particularly those who also buy records with the intent to resell on a semi-professional or professional basis – to arrange trips that are dedicated primarily to digging:

“I need a lot of records—all the time—because the turnover at my shop is really high. So I work all the connections I have. I travel a lot; I hit [record] shows, flea[market]s, and shops. And wherever I go, I look for records and I build relationships with people who can get them.” (Jonny Skulte in Wells 2010)

However, as the following account indicate, it is not only professional record merchants who travel to distant places with the primary purpose of buying records:

“I love to travel for beats. Usually I go to Portland and Vancouver around here, and I just came from LA. Later next month, I’m headed out to Toronto and possibly Detroit. Travelling is dope because you get to see some new spots, and when you hit a new store you never know what you’ll come across.” (Jake One in Soulman 1999c)

Similarly to local shopping routes, such trips wave together different kinds of record spots as parts of the same grid that is overlaid the imaginary maps of particular neighbourhoods, regions and cities. Whereas the cartographies that are produced through the spatial movement among particular spots both home and away are often merely metaphorical – mental maps of record spots, neighbourhoods and cities with their particularities and similarities – in some cases they take more concrete forms.

*I’ve actually got ... [goes to get the books from the bookshelf] I’ve got books with all the... the little [business] cards from the stores. I’ve got one for Europe, one for America. I compiled it over the years. Years and years of cards.*

[Takes two large telephone register books of his bookshelf, literally filled with hundreds of business cards and hand written addresses organised by continent and city.]

That was valuable information back then [before the internet], it was hard to get. Wow, it’s beautiful.



DJ Vadim with his book of business cards of American record stores,  
London 2007

*These are the American ones, I've put them under the name of the city.  
Like I for Iowa City.*

You've been there? I've been there [I point to the card of Sweet Living, an antique shop that sold records from its basement].

*Iowa City?*

I was there for a conference. It's like a big basement.

*Yeah that's right, Sweet Livin'. (DJ Vadim 2007)*



Sweet Livin' Antiques, Iowa City, 2005

Whereas I have not encountered anyone else who kept a similarly well organised collection, keeping cards and bags or taking pictures of particular stores as souvenirs are not uncommon practices within the scene.



Plastic bags from various record stores

The accidental recognition of a record store in a very out-of-way place that both DJ Vadim and I had been to is important, because it is indicative of the ways in which –

despite the differences of individual trajectories and the particular spatial knowledge that they produce – occasionally overlapping personal cartographies evoke a sense of a shared space in which participants sometimes cross paths in the most unpredictable ways.

### **THE DISCURSIVE AND MEDIATED PRODUCTION OF SPACE**

Many of the interview excerpts that I have quoted throughout this section resonate with Gregson and Crewe's (2003) observation regarding the ways in which the geographies of second hand clothing retail are produced through both shopping practices and the discussions people have about particular sites of exchange. Indeed, the ways in which street vendors, flea markets and shops in different places emerge in these accounts as specific spots belonging to a collectively known and traversed space, support their argument that – just as shopping itself – discursive practices play subtle, but important roles in weaving these places together.



Benji, the owner of this bookstore in Taksim, Istanbul, 2010. Photo by Eilon Paz (2009b), from his *Dust and Grooves* blog.

Furthermore, digging stories and discussions of particular spots certainly contribute towards the crystallisation and shaping of the shared dimensions of the alternative geography of digging – the categories according to which scenic participants make

sense of these places. Before turning to a discussion of these “distinctive conceptualizations of space” (Harvey 2008: 14) , I conclude this section with a brief discussion of the role that mediated reports play in making the wider geography of digging more apparent to scenic participants, even those who rarely travel beyond their region.

Places of second hand exchange were described at length in some of the earliest reports on crate digging written by scenic participants (e.g. Leland and Steinski 1988; Soulman 1995a). Soulman’s interviews with scenic figures – which in many ways served as the blueprints for later accounts – often included discussions of the interviewee’s favourite local record spots, some regarding the significant places they had visited while on record buying trips, as well as the general trends of the second hand record market (e.g. Soulman 1995b, 1999c, 2000c, 2001). Through reading such accounts, scenic participants could not only find out about distant spots or the particularities of second hand trade in particular cities and regions, but – through comparison – they could also develop a more profound understanding of the similarities and differences between the spots in their immediate surroundings and other areas in the wider geography of digging.



Garage Sale in New Jersey, 2009. Photo by Eilon Paz (2009a), from his *Dust and Grooves* blog.

As I have described in earlier chapters, after the millennium, the scale and scope of scenic media has expanded significantly. Whereas online forums facilitate the discussion of such issues among physically or socially distant participants, the interviews and reports published in Wax Poetics magazine, on crate digging related blogs and websites maintain a focus on digging spots and record geographies. Specialist stores (e.g. Keilch 2002; Wang 2002b; Wells 2010), lesser known spots (Baker 2002; Paz 2009a), record fairs (e.g. Mason 2002b; Anon. 2006a), record buying road trips in America (e.g. B+ 2002; Fladung 2002) and digging adventures in distant countries (eg. Alapatt and Cut Chemist 2003; Gyemant 2005; Paz 2009b) are not only discussed in written accounts, but are often presented in pictures, or captured on film (e.g. Beatdawg 2004; Beatdawg 2007). The abundance of such mediated information about particular places of digging – similarly to the ways in which the coverage of local skate spots in skateboarding magazines and videos is productive of a global skate-scape (Borden 2001; Kacsuk 2004) – contributes towards the production of a collectively known landscape in which scenic practices play out.

In this section, I have explored a number of practices through which the space of second hand record buying is produced, however, so far I have paid little attention to describing the dynamics and dimensions that structure its cartography. In the following section, I will explore the “logic and forms” (Shields 1999: 163) – the collectively shared categories through which the spatial and temporal dynamics of second hand record exchange are understood – according to which particular record spots and geographical regions are perceived and discussed among scenic participants.

### 8.3 THE GEOGRAPHY OF DIGGING

“[Princeton Record Exchange is] great. Every time I go there I get 8-10 inches of records for like 60-80 bucks. You won’t really find anything amazingly rare (though I do know a cat that bought RAMP<sup>150</sup> there for 8 bucks a couple years back) but you will get a lot of solid pieces for cheap. Most LPs are 4-8 bucks and the beauty of

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<sup>150</sup> Roy Ayers Music Project’s *Come Into Knowledge* LP, a particularly rare and expensive boogie disco record.

the thing is that you get a range of genres. You will walk out with a Sonic Youth [record], a Yo La Tengo 12", a mint copy of [Pink Floyd's] *Ummagumma* and [Alice Coltrane's] *Ptah, The El Daoud*, some psych-rock stuff, a Ramones LP, you'll get a bunch of 12" singles and if you're lucky, a *Wordy Rappinghood* single [by Tom Tom Club]. They have a dollar bin below that's good for getting your Billy Joel on. And then you'll find a couple records priced over ten bucks to debate with [your]self. Maybe a heavy jazz piece or three worth the trip if you have the time."

"I've always considered it [i.e. Princeton Record Exchange] the most overrated record store in the NYC metro area, perhaps with the exception of Bleecker Bob's. Mike Sniper who used to work there (and is now at Academy Brooklyn) says that there are locals who visit every day and they get great stuff. It just doesn't work if you drive down once a year. Also, I'm mainly a 7" singles collector, and they are way more focused on 12"/LPs."

"To provide a more positive counterpoint (although I've only been there once, like 9 years ago), it's a very big store and they have everything... for someone like me, who listens to a wide variety of musics, it's cool... it's actually a lot like Academy B[roo]K[lyn], where they price things very fairly, just to move stuff out of the store... I didn't think it was like the best store on earth or anything (I guess I would have went back...), but I remember it as being a pretty solid store with a large large selection."<sup>151</sup>

Crewe and Gregson (2003) note that – in contrast with the relatively steady and easy availability of particular items in first cycle of commodity exchange, used commodities move around following less predictable routes. However, the movement and spatial distribution of used records – similarly to those of books, antiques or other collectibles that circulate in networks of second hand change – are not entirely haphazard. *Through an intensive engagement with shopping practices over an extended period of time crate*

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<sup>151</sup> These excerpts are from a discussion of Princeton Record and Tape Exchange on the *Black Crack* mailing list, 8 November 2006. Due to the semi-private character of this list, I have chosen not to identify their authors here.

*diggers do not only extend the number of locations they know, but – as the above accounts suggest – also develop a general understanding of the particular logics according to which the geography of second hand record exchange is organised.* Not only is such a familiarity with second hand record trade central to finding relevant records at reasonable prices, but – as I have noted in the previous chapter – also to scenic value-judgements regarding the merit of particular record buying practices.

The above discussion of Princeton Record and Tape Exchange took place on a mailing list of mainly New York based record collectors and DJs which is frequented as much by crate diggers as by music enthusiasts with different musical interests. It makes apparent the ways in which *the appreciation of the main dimensions of the geography of second hand trade* – the geographical location of particular spots, the degree and direction of the sellers' specialisation, the size and turnover of stock, the pricing of records, the tastes and interests of other customers, and the kinds of records one is likely to find at a particular spot – *are more generally shared among experienced record collectors and merchants regardless of stylistic preferences.* These accounts are, however, also indicative of the ways in which *the significance of particular sites of exchange might differ to particular buyers depending on their musical tastes and collecting interests.* What might be a great spot from a crate digger's perspective – a place offering a quickly changing and wide selection of reasonably priced music, with occasional gems like the sampled and sought after RAMP record and dollar bin breaks like Billy Joel's "Stiletto" – might be of little interest for a connoisseur of South American progressive rock 7" singles.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that due to the internal diversity of the crate digging scene – in terms of participants' musical interests, involvement, budgets and collections – individual perceptions of particular spots might also differ from digger to digger. As the above accounts suggest, apart from particular differences in musical taste, such sites are also of different significance for locally based regular customers and occasional visitors. However, crate diggers' experiences of a number of similar spots – both in their immediate surroundings and along the translocal pathways they travel – enable them to "grasp what holds [true], for the most part in other places" (Casey 1996: 45) within this larger geography.

In this section, I will first discuss two of the most significant logics according to which shared cartographies of digging are organised: the commercial organisation of second

hand trade and the spatiotemporal dynamics of the circulation of used records. I will then discuss the ways in which this geography has transformed in the last decade due to the growth of the digging scene as well as the increasing significance of online record trade.

### **THE COMMERCIAL ORGANISATION OF SECOND HAND RECORD TRADE**

Unlike at the time of their primary sale, the prices of used records are not set more or less universally, but vary significantly according to the sellers' understanding of their customers' musical preferences, record budgets, as well as the rarity and desirability of particular items. Second hand record trade – like the used clothing and furniture market (Gregson and Crewe 2003) – is structured along lines of specialisation which is reflected in both the repertoires shops and dealers offer as well as the pricing of particular items.

At the lower end of the scale there are the occasional sellers at flea markets, car boot, garage and yard sales who would like to get rid of the collections of their deceased relatives or their own records that have been collecting dust for years. Some of these uninformed sellers are junkmen, who buy up heritages or pick up discarded stuff that others dispose on the street. They have very little knowledge about the overall prices of vinyl records at record shops, and are even less aware of which records are rare, sought after and expensive in collecting circles.

*I wasn't ever prepared to pay money in those days, so [... I did] not really [go to] these record shops, just junkshops, and car boot sales. Car boot sales have always been a favourite. (George Mahood 2007)*

As George Mahood's account indicates, these are the cheapest records to be found, although they are often in bad shape, and are presented as an unorganised bulk that one has to look through laboriously in order to find anything worthwhile. The records sold by such unspecialised sellers are most often very common records: "best of" anthologies or easy listening compilations, classical music standards, middle of the road rock albums, 1980s pop singles, and the like.

Although one has to invest considerable effort going through a large amount of insignificant items at these places, on a rare lucky day, it is possible to snap up highly sought after records for a fraction of what they are sold for at more specialised outlets.

This explains the popularity of these spots among collectors looking for bargains and record dealers who try to maximise profits by getting records for the cheapest possible prices and then re-selling them at a collector's market price or using them as trades that are exchanged with other merchants for pricy rarities.



David Chandra, a – Swiss digger – looking through vinyl junk at a flea market in France. 2010.

American thrift stores, British charity shops – and their mainland European equivalents – used to be similar to the unspecialised sellers at fleamarkets in terms of their prices and the record repertoires they offered. It is rare that people would want to get rid of valuable record collections in one go, for no financial compensation. However, sometimes unknowing owners or their heirs bring in stacks that contain sought after and valuable records. Although the people working in these stores still know very little about how to come up with prices that reflect the actual worth of the records, in recent years, many of these outlets employ dealers to price their inventory:

“Of course most charity shops have dealers with access at the sorting stage. One used to live a street away from me, who had access to the Oxfam clearing house somewhere in Dalston, London. He always paid a fair price for good stuff – obviously not as much as he would sell on for, but 20-30, etc. [pounds] for decent pieces, so that’s why they let

him do it...Thing is, most likely the records people look for on this board are often beyond the radar of these dealers, so there's still potential gold to be found in them hills, as long as you forget chasing the same old shit like Moody<sup>152</sup> etc.”<sup>153</sup>

As flea markets, charity shops and thrift stores offer more misses than hits, looking for valuable records here is indeed similar to digging for “gold” in the “hills” in terms of invested effort and chances, especially after a professional seller has already removed most of the better known rarities. However, as the above account suggests, due to crate diggers’ interest in unearthing yet undiscovered material, these spots still offer plenty of records that record dealers from different backgrounds would pass upon as insignificant. A British digger – who is also buying records to resell – told me that his strategy is to visit fifteen to twenty such shops in an area in the course of a day to increase his chances of coming up with something valuable. According to him, visiting only two-three stores doesn’t make much sense.

There are other kinds of institutions within the infrastructure of second hand trade between unskilled sellers of unorganised, unfiltered and cheap records and knowledgeable record dealers and record stores who provide preselected and organised selections of used records for higher prices. Most of these stores specialise in second hand trade of some sort – selling used hi-fi or photo equipment, instruments, antiques, sheet music or books – so they have an idea that some of the records might be valuable, but will not price them too high in order to avoid being stuck with a stock that has little to do with their main profile.

Record stores and record dealers – specialists who do not have stores and sell records from their home, online, at markets, record fairs and trade with other dealers and stores – are the most specialised sellers on the second hand vinyl market. Being professionals in this trade, they have a better knowledge of the market in terms of demand for – and supply of – certain records and the buying power of their regular clientele. In contrast with flea markets, thrift stores, and other less specialised outlets – where most records come from the local communities in their immediate surroundings – they often carry

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<sup>152</sup> A highly sought after 1973 instrumental jazz funk album entitled *The Gentle Rain* by Moody, a band featuring legendary UK session players like Alan Hawkshaw.

<sup>153</sup> *Forum post from 2004* by Nick Cope. (<http://www.verygoodplus.co.uk/showthread.php?t=3254>, accessed 9 November 2007.

more filtered repertoires containing records that had not been distributed at the time of their initial release in the particular area in which these merchants operate. They maintain such a selection – as I have described in the previous chapter – by travelling to other cities and countries in order to source new material, and trading with visiting collectors and dealers.

While some of these sellers maintain a broad stylistic focus, others concentrate on buying and selling music in a smaller number of genres. This also means that whereas they might possess very detailed and accurate knowledge of particular musical areas, they might be less aware of the value of records that fall outside of their field of specialisation. The scenic specialists that I have described in the last chapter stock both obscure and well known break records, rare groove related material, as well as classic hip hop releases. In contrast to other stores that might not be familiar with the desirability of particular records among crate diggers and rare groove enthusiasts – and thus might sell these at lower prices – the pricing of scenic specialists reflects an in depth knowledge of their niche, as well as the fact that they provide the service of tracking down otherwise difficult to find items for people who are willing to pay for these:

“I mean, granted you are not going to find a \$100 record for \$5 because we’re a little bit too on the ball for that.

But at the same time, you can be looking for a particular record and go around to a couple dozen stores and maybe one or two have even heard of it, let alone have it. And you don’t have it, because you’ve wasted all this time looking through the stores for records you just can’t get. Now there’s a store that you can call us up, ask for something really obscure, and we’ll either say, ‘Yeah, we’ve got one right now’ or ‘At the moment we’re out of stock but we do get it. Give us a call next week.’ So it’s a different type of store from what used to be around, as far as the kind of music we’re doing.” (Rob Corrigan, the owner of Sound Library in Keilch 2002: 10)

Specialist stores are often blamed for their inflated prices by local diggers who know that many of the expensive records that are sold at these places can be found at other shops or flea markets cheaper. However, they are appealing to visiting diggers who do not have a lot of time to spend at less promising spots, to collectors with higher budgets

and an appreciation for items that are so rare that they almost never surface at other spots. Specialist sellers often justify their high price levels by pointing out the costs involved with travelling for records (Soulman 1999b), sourcing material from other dealers, as well as renting shop space in a frequented area of a major city (Wells 2010). However, as the following account suggests, even specialist stores differ in terms of the scale and scope of selection as well as pricing strategies:

Sound Library [...] started the model that I work on. I tweaked it a bit, is all: smaller space, quicker turnover, broader stock in terms of genres. I wanted to take a little bit of the rock/alt/experimental shops and integrate that with the breakbeat and rare-groove-oriented stores. And I wanted to price things a little more according to what I was seeing online than the traditional rare groove price. Selling stuff like [Eugene McDaniels'] *Headless Heroes [of the Apocalypse]* for \$75 to \$100 instead of \$150. That sort of thing. (Jonny Skulte, the owner of Good records NYC in Wells 2010)

Jonny Skulte's account resonates with the ways in which turnover was linked to pricing in the discussion of Princeton Record Exchange. For the sellers, quick turnover means quick cash that they can use for paying bills or sourcing new material. For the buyers, it means cheaper records, and also a quickly changing inventory that is appealing because it provides a higher likelihood of coming across something they are looking for.

In this subsection, I have described the consequences of the differences in sellers' specialisation in terms of prices, selection, and turnover. So far, I have only touched upon the ways in which the record repertoires that these places offer are connected to particular localities. In the following subsection, I will explore the links between available musical selections and spatiality.

#### **THE SPATIOTEMPORAL DYNAMICS OF THE CIRCULATION OF USED RECORDS**

“Vinyl-heads can smell hard times. Crumbling economies, failed businesses, skyrocketing rents: each loose coveted vinyls from the crannies and basement storage units they inhabited for decades. Plant closed? Let me check out the garage sales. Independent record store gone bankrupt? The mother lode. Hands tremble flipping through

pristine plastic. The search for oddball records has two cardinal rules: read the transformations of class in the United States, and know that race has everything to do with these transformations. Don't be late. Hit the right spot at the wrong time. We all know this. Suburban thrift stores are usually good for REO [Speedwagon] and Bob Seger. Gentrifying neighbourhoods can cause Pete Rodriguez or Doug Carn<sup>154</sup> to float to the surface – for a song. Desperation is the friend of the record collector. Hipness depends on finding a population aggrieved enough to produce good music, suddenly pushed to the point of parting with it.” (Miller 2002: 38)

This account illuminates the specific kind of geographical knowledge that scenic participants acquire and put to use looking for vinyl records that have been released decades ago. The availability of these records in any particular locality is as much shaped by their initial geographical circulation in the first cycle of commodity exchange, as by subsequent socio-economic transformations, migration, and the collective revalorisation of once neglected older musical forms according to the constantly shifting waves of musical interests (Straw 1999, 2000, 2001a, 2002a).

Apart from a relatively limited number of global stars, record production and distribution is still very strongly tied to the particular tastes of local or regional audiences (cf. Rutten 1991; IFPI 2010). This used to be even more so in the vinyl era, prior to the leap in the concentration and globalisation of the recorded music business throughout the 1980s (cf. Burnett 1996). It is thus not surprising that locally available repertoires of used records are often very different even within the same country, as record merchant Jonny Skulte's comparison of New York and the San Francisco Bay Area suggests:

“I would say that the fertile music scenes in the Bay Area provide a really rich history of local music and interest in music for a collector to take advantage of. There's a little bit of everything out there: great soul, jazz, rap, psych, metal. Even into the '90s, there were some

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<sup>154</sup> REO Speedwagon is an American rock band formed in the late 1960s. Bob Seeger is a singer and songwriter from the Detroit area. Peter “El Conde” Rodríguez was a salsa singer who moved from Puerto Rico to the Bronx and recorded many successful records there from the early 1960s. Doug Carn has released a number of sought after spiritual jazz records on the Oakland based independent Black Jazz record label from the late 1960s to the mid 1970s.

major label record company offices in San Francisco, and it has always been an important market. There is a ton of independent issue out there because the scene supported a large amount of musicians.

To contrast, New York City is the genesis of so much: the jazz scene, all the major labels. The 12-inch era is basically focused here with the disco and rap releases. There is great art-rock and punk from the Downtown Scene. Of course, there also is the international stuff: Jamaican and Latin are way more plentiful here than out west.” (Jonny Skulte in Wells 2010)

Many of the more popular American soul, funk and jazz recordings were distributed across the United States – although somewhat unevenly– , and a significant number of these were also issued on local labels in the western part of Europe – primarily in the UK, France and Germany – shortly after they have been released in the US. However, the output of smaller independent labels and most privately issued recordings rarely became available in larger quantities beyond the cities in which they were issued. The ways in which Skulte explains locally available repertoires not only makes apparent *the significance of local musical histories and the distribution networks of larger players in the first cycle of recorded music retail*, but also *the grass-roots music import of specialist retailers that served migrant communities* in New York. In many cases *people also brought along their records when they moved from one country or city to another.*

Many of the records that are most sought after by crate diggers were made by American black and Hispanic musicians and were distributed primarily within their segregated communities. These LPs, 12” and 7” singles are thus most likely to turn up in thrift stores, garage sales and second hand stores in cities and neighbourhoods they once inhabited.

Economic hardships, changing musical interests, or the fact that the CD has replaced vinyl as the dominant medium all contributed to the fact that their original owners parted with these records at some point. However, in some cases it was historical circumstances like the Vietnam War that led to a large scale movement of people and the corresponding development of unlikely local repertoires on the second hand market:

*What’s interesting about Ohio and Michigan is that all the record shops are based on the community there and when and why did they*

*release their records. So any town that we go to that was a small military town in the United States, a lot of hip hop records at the pawnshop... or a lot of like jazz, hip hop and disco records at the pawn shops, 'cause the military community would move in, and it was predominantly black, or at least fifty percent black during Vietnam. So it [i.e. local second hand stores] sell 'em, you know these records, you know, [in] a complete white town with a whole bunch of black music. [...] You saw a military base, stop there, because it's a good chance you're gonna find good records there. (King Honey 2005)*

King Honey's account resonates with the quote that opened this subsection, and is indicative of the ways in which an awareness of *local social histories* develops through – and is put to use in – looking for records. I have heard similar stories from European collectors regarding the record stores in the German towns where American army bases were located.

The ways in which King Honey describes the general ignorance of local sellers and buyers of black music that sat unsifted in the racks of local thrift stores and record shops in predominantly white communities is also telling of the ways in which *contemporary musical interests* shape the spatial understanding of secondary exchange. Greg Caz – who worked for Academy Records in Manhattan when I interviewed him – describes the ways in which relatively abundant records become sought after due to growing interest in particular musical forms:

*You used to see [Led] Zeppelin records all the time for two dollars, and Zeppelin records sold millions and millions and millions and millions of copies. [...] But like Zeppelin records for a long time were just like you know, they were just cheap records [...]. But now a new generation just hits the age of twenty or twenty one, and you know, they are just finding out about this old rock stuff. And now they want those Zeppelin records, all of a sudden you can't find a Zeppelin anymore. (Greg Caz 2005)*

Will Straw observed similar waves of collective revalorization in the second hand stores of Montreal, and described them *as a particular logic at work in the secondary vinyl market*, a process through which the rediscovery and canonisation of previously ignored musical forms, a growing demand from collectors and the disappearance of certain

records from the market are strongly interconnected (Straw 2002a). King Honey's account is indicative of the ways in which the growing awareness and interest in funk, soul, Latin, and groove oriented jazz was mapped on to physical space in the early to mid 1990s. The emerging interest in these musical forms due to sampling in hip hop was at that point not yet apparent in small towns of the American Mid West. The records he picked up in Ohio and Michigan at low prices might have been a lot more difficult to find at reasonable prices in New York by then. His story also illuminates the ways in which renewed interest in these records often contributes to their dislocation from the places in which they were originally appreciated.

As I described in Chapter 4, the generation that became interested in groove oriented black and Latin music because of hip hop had only begun to rediscover this musical field in the early 1990s. However, British and Japanese collectors and record dealers had already travelled to the US in the 1980s in order to buy rare soul, Latin, jazz and jazz fusion records (Hollows and Milestone 1998; Cotgrove 2009)<sup>155</sup>. This music was in demand within their DJ driven local club scenes that were organised around the appreciation of various forms of American black music.

The transcontinental record buying trips and small scale record imports of these entrepreneurs – from the deadstock of US based distributors – contributed towards the development of significant repertoires of American records – which had not been sold transcontinentally at the time of their original release – in many European and Japanese cities. After these records had been relocated, they began to circulate at local sites of secondary exchange and are present there even today as material documents of local histories of DJing, clubbing and collecting. The abundance of dance oriented jazz fusion records in London's second hand stores is indicative of the fact that this city played a central role in the UK "jazz dance" scene in the 1980s, while the large quantity of American soul singles in Manchester's shops is telling of decades of local "Northern soul" enthusiasm.

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<sup>155</sup> These dealers were the successors of European collectors and entrepreneurs who started travelling to the US in order to source rock and roll, doo wop and blues records decades earlier (Cotgrove 2009).



American soul singles boxes. King Bee Records, Manchester, 2008.



Endless racks of soul, funk and rhythm & blues singles. Beatin' Rhythm, Manchester, 2008.

In this section, I have described the ways in which particular repertoires of used records became specific to particular urban neighbourhoods, cities, and regions. I have argued that local histories of music making and appreciation, industrial and grass-roots trading and migration played a key role in shaping the spatial distribution of particular records,

while contemporary waves of musical revalorisation work towards their disappearance from second hand outlets as well as their dislocation from the particular areas in which they were initially consumed. Whereas so far in this section I have described the more general principles by which the geography of crate digging organised are central to the ways in which scenic participants make sense of particular localities and sites of exchange, I will now discuss the gradual transformation of this landscape during the last two decades. I will examine that the ways in which – through their engagement with, and understanding of changing local repertoires and prices – scenic participants experience the growth and spatial extension of the digging scene.

### **THE TRANSFORMING CONTEMPORARY LANDSCAPE OF DIGGING**

Whereas – due to the fact that there was yet little interest in soul, funk, disco and groove oriented jazz, and large quantities of used vinyl flooded the second hand market as CD gained prominence – the kinds of records crate diggers looked for were cheap, and relatively easy to find in the late 1980s, this situation has radically changed during the last two decades due to a growing awareness of auction websites like *eBay*, the increasing availability of information on samples and breaks online, as well as the increasing demand for crate digging related records due to growth and spatial extension of the digging scene. As I have argued in Chapter 4, this change contributed towards the development of interest among crate diggers in music that had been unexplored for breaks previously – releases on small independent labels, 7” singles, 1980s disco, and so forth – but just as importantly, it led to the development of more adventurous means of sourcing records, involving record buying trips to more remote areas as well as abroad.

The increasing awareness of – and interest in – samples and breaks have resulted in growing prices on the second hand markets of cities in the coastal areas of the US, and larger cities in Europe from the early 1990s on. As King Honey’s account in the previous subsection indicates, crate diggers began looking for records in the music shops, thrift stores and flea markets of predominantly black and Hispanic neighbourhoods and small towns near army bases, but also picking through warehouses of defunct distributors and the vinyl archives of local radio stations that already used CDs in their broadcasts. Searching for particularly rare records, dealers also began competing in tracking down musicians and former owners of small local labels in order

to acquire larger quantities of unsold copies. Looking for records, they often came across the trails of other diggers who got there before them: missing pages on record stores in local telephone directories (Pray 2001) or the stories record store and warehouse owners told about earlier visitors made apparent the presence of others on the scene as much as the obviously already sifted through racks and boxes did.

This collective activity led to what in scenic parlance is called the “picking through” or “bleeding out” of even remote spots by scenic participants. In this transforming landscape, it became increasingly rare to come across “goldmines”, places that are yet untouched by other diggers, where sellers are unaware of the rarity and commercial value of their stock:

*A goldmine is a place like... where records are cheap as chips and just hasn't been picked through. And you just know when you walk into a place like this, because every record you pull out is like “Oh my God, they've got this! They've got this! They've got this! They've got this!” Like records you've got in your own collection that you know are worth money or are rare, and you just see the price. You're like “Shit!” You know, five Swiss francs, six Swiss francs, two Swiss francs. [...] And before you know you've already got a pile like this [shows the size of a pile of thirty or forty records], and you've only been there for like twenty minutes. [...] Like, other times you go to a record store and could be in there for two hours and you like you pulled out two records [...] and you're like “Oh, this... this place is just shit. It's nothing here.” (DJ Vadim 2007)*

Whereas digging trips and developing local digging scenes already contributed towards the gradual transformation of local record landscapes, it was not until *eBay* became an important channel of second hand exchange that certain records that used to be relatively common and cheap in particular localities began to become more expensive or disappear entirely:

*Between '99 and 2001 I started noticing [...] at the flea markets, at the record shows... [...] when eBay came about and they started advertising. People got hip to the auction website. And these prices started coming about like 20 dollars for Grover Washington, like, “Are you kidding me? Like nobody needs Reed Seed that bad.” [...*

*Y]ou started realising that a lot of people outside of the States and in the States can't find these records. They are in a smaller town, or they are in a town where there's no black population, you know. [...] I started recognising that prices started getting inflated, these dollar records are turning into five dollar records, the five dollar records are turning into fifteen dollar records, and it started becoming a little bit more difficult to find good soul and funk records, because cats started wanting to find samples, and wanting to find records. And this auction site [...] gave the opportunity... to people who can only sell out of their garage door on certain weekends, now they're able to sell to the world. And the first, like, real road trip I did was, I think, it was 2001. We did two weeks from Chicago, to Indianapolis, to Columbus to Detroit, and back to Chicago. [...] And that really opened my eyes, because every little shop, mom-and-pop store in some two book town, was "Let me look at eBay first. Let me look at the prices first." (Justin Torres 2005)*

Justin Torres's account resonates with the ways in which most American and European diggers described the recent reorganisation of second hand record exchange to me. I quoted it at length, because it touches upon the main elements of this transformation. Not only is it indicative of the ways in which *eBay made apparent the growing number of people digging for samples and breaks t scenic participants*, but also *to local sellers* who previously had priced their records according to word-of-mouth information, mail order lists of other dealers and local demand. As record store owners, professional dealers and collectors recognised the opportunities to buy and sell records online, *both buyers and sellers gained a relative good sense of the overall demand for particular items, as well as the frequency with which they turn up. This eventually worked – to a certain degree – towards decreasing previously more significant differences in pricing among sellers from different locations and of different levels of competence.* Furthermore, as Justin Torres's account indicates, *locally specific rarities became increasingly difficult and expensive to obtain at local spots* (Raine 2008), partly because many collectors pick up the copies that surface at flea markets and yard sales with the intent to resell them online. However, it is also clear, that *online trading has also made a lot of relatively common records easier to obtain from places in which they were formerly unavailable. Not only has this provided access to funk, soul, jazz,*

*rock and disco records for crate diggers outside of the US, but also contributed towards the development of interest in collecting African, Middle Eastern, Asian, Central and South American records that were never officially distributed in the Western part of Europe or the US.*

In this section, I have described some of the logics that structure the alternative geography of digging: the commercial organisation of second hand vinyl exchange, and the spatiotemporal dynamics of the circulation and sedimentation of used records, as well as more recent transformations of local record landscapes. I will close my discussion of the geography of digging with exploring the ways in which an understanding of the spatialities of second hand record trade contributes towards a spatially situated sense of identity and belonging.

#### **THE SPATIAL SITUATEDNESS OF SCENIC IDENTITIES**

*A lot of the people who are putting records up online, you know, really have no interest in the records [...]. It's just simply for quick cash, just, you know, it's unfortunate that a lot of the records don't stay inside the [local] scene, or even stay inside the city. That's one thing that kinda bugs me about the internet, it's that it's kinda nice knowing that a lot of records would stay in a regional area, or stay somewhere... you know, a lot of the records... a lot of people I see at the flea market, they just take and don't give anything back to the local community, they just send it out and there's gonna come a day when there's you know, there's just not a lot of local records that are still in the local area. ("Cool" Chris 2005)*

The sense of loss that radiates from "Cool" Chris's account resonates with many other accounts I've heard from participants lamenting the disappearance of local records. Not only is it revealing of the increasing difficulty of finding rare records at reasonable prices, but also the ways in which locally specific record landscapes are often seen as intimately linked to local histories of music appreciation. In other words, their local circulation provides a sense of place to local crate diggers and collectors, both in the sense of a common heritage, and a certain familiarity with the repertoire that is specific to their local community.

Although the processes that I have described throughout this subsection disrupted local record landscapes in terms of prices and available repertoires to a certain degree, due to the vast amount of more common records, it is unlikely that online trading and travelling diggers would entirely eliminate differences within the geography of second hand record exchange.

*What you see here in San Francisco, you don't see in L.A. What you see in L.A., you don't see in Phoenix, and everywhere you travel around the country, you're always gonna find something new. The local kids there like 'Oh, man, that's common', but for us, when you leave your area, nothing is common. (Justin Torres 2005)*

Justin Torres's account is not only indicative of *the prevailing differences in available local repertoires and prices*, but also of the ways in which they *continue to motivate diggers to travel – to other cities as well as abroad – in order to explore new – to them – yet uncharted territories*. As I have suggested at the beginning of this section, such journeys make scenic participants more aware of local differences in terms of participants' awareness and perception of particular records. Through an increasing familiarity with the commercial and cultural logics that structure the cartography of scenic activity, they not only develop a common spatial understanding of record exchange – a shared recognition of particular spots as “tourist traps”, “bled out” shops, or “goldmines” – , but also a sense of their position and movement within this space, as well as their attachment to particular spots or localities. In other words, “Cool” Chris's and Torres's accounts make apparent the ways in which – through providing experiences of familiarity and difference – digging locally and visiting distant spots enables spatially situated perspectives and scenic identities.

## 8.4 A DISTINCTIVE SPATIAL UNDERSTANDING

*DJ Format: My girlfriend at the time had a job interview on my birthday. And my friends in Brighton had taken me out the night before and got me so drunk, I had the... one of the worst hang-overs in my entire life. And I had to wait in the car 'cause we were travelling back to see my family in Southampton. So I gotta wait in the*

*car while my girlfriend is in, having this job-interview, and I feel like death. So eventually I like sort of crawl out the car and go to a café, just to have some lunch, just a kind of roll or some breakfast, just to try and make me feel a bit better. This is in Willingdon, by the way. [Mr Thing laughs.] So, I am... I start to feel a little bit more human, so I just walk around all the little charity shops. And I go to the one... you know the one I'm talking about, in Willingdon, by the fire station?*

*Mr Thing: The little street with all the cafés in that one...*

*Format: Yeah, not in the centre, but it's more out... and you go... this is the charity shop right around the back sort of bit?*

*Mr Thing: No...*

*Format: No? But anyway, I go into this charity shop and the first record... obviously somebody else has picked it up and [...] not bought it. Either that or they just put it there, and the first record in the rack is Bill Doggett['s] Honkey Tonk Popcorn album. [Mr Thing laughs out loud.] And it's like fifty p, and it's my birthday, and I'm like... I'm literally like... I can't contain myself and I'm like "Whoooooo-o!!!! Oh My God!" And the women, the old ladies in the shop are... kinda like looking at me like I'm crazy. (DJ Format and Mr Thing 2007)*

Digging stories are insiders' conversations. Their significance only reveals itself to people who engage with scenic practices long enough to enter the shared space of understanding such discussions evoke. As I have described in the previous chapter and this one, most of this talk is focused on a specific local record spot or describes the places visited on record buying trips. Other times record spots are mentioned as the mere spatial context of the stories scenic participants tell about records, people or specific moments in their lives. In order to properly understand these discussions, one does not necessarily need to be familiar with some of the actual places they refer to. What is more important to their appreciation is the particular way this space is imagined, invested with meanings, values and emotions.

Throughout this chapter, I have described the ways in which this shared geography emerges from scenic practice, as well as the particular forms and logics that operate

within this space, and the ways in which they constitute a particular spatially situated sense of identity and attachment. DJ Format's story brings my discussion to its conclusion by illuminating the ways in which this "parochialist perspective" (Harvey 2001: 141) – a distinctive cartography in which particular sites of record exchange, and the repertoires of records they offer are mapped onto physical space – is productive of a sense of commonality among participants.

Whereas even the uninitiated might find this anecdote amusing – as an account of an unexpected find on the storyteller's birthday that is overshadowed by a terrible hangover and the fact that he made a fool out of himself in front of the ladies present in the store – Mr Thing's laughter is revealing of a more nuanced understanding of the significance of the story. The fact that he finds the story funny already at the mention of the name of the town is telling of his awareness of the spatial logics at work in second hand exchange. I asked Format to tell me one of his favourite digging stories and it starts in a marginal place: a charity shop in an English small town in East Sussex, where the chances of stumbling upon great records is minimal. Mr Thing obviously knows this town, even if he is not familiar with the charity shop in question. However, it seems important for both of them to specify the store in which the story is set. Perhaps, because having a general idea about the kind of unorganised mess of boring records that charity shops usually offer does not appropriately set the scene. Maybe it is an unsuccessful attempt to establishing this shop as a collectively traversed place where they have unknowingly crossed paths. It could even be interpreted as a mildly competitive testing of Mr Thing knowledge regarding charity shops in the area. Regardless of what the reason behind Format's question is, in the process of locating the event, he shares this bit of information with Mr Thing. Whereas there seems to be no need to explain the significance of the Bill Dogett album – both of them know that it is an extremely rare and very sought after American record that is often sold well above a hundred pounds – Format is very specific about the fact that the record was the first in the rack. It is difficult to explain the surreality of this moment for anyone who has not spent years sifting through piles of awful records at charity shops and flea markets hoping to find something at least moderately interesting. DJ Format's story resembles some of the literal dreams I had about finding amazing records – many scenic participants recounted similarly vivid dreams about digging adventures to me – with the exception that he did not even have to dig into the pile; the record was there, almost as if somebody had put it there for him as a present. It is not merely a pleasant surprise, but

an almost bizarrely unlikely thing to happen, especially on his birthday. Mr Thing appreciates the weird beauty of the story when he laughs for the second time right after Format names the record.

To most people, the most entertaining moment of the story would probably be when he embarrassed himself by crying out loud at the sight of the record, to crate diggers, however, the absurdity of his find holds a more profound significance. While the ladies had little understanding for Format's initial reaction to stumbling upon the record, Mr Thing's laughter stems from sharing his friend's recognition and appreciation of the improbability of this event that is enabled by their mutual awareness of the alternative geography of digging. Shared digging adventures and stories like this one not only make apparent commonalities – and create an intimate sense of connection – among crate diggers, but just as importantly constitute a source of difference that sets them apart from outsiders, like the puzzled ladies looking at DJ Format in the charity shop.

## 9. CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE IN A WORLD IN FLUX

“The one drawback to writing is the being alone. The writing part. The lonely-garret part. [...] What’s funny is, you’d be amazed at the amount of time a novelist has to spend with people in order to create this single lonely voice. [...] Most of the reason I write is because once a week it brought me together with other people. This was in a workshop taught by a published writer [...] around his kitchen table on Thursday nights. At the time, most of my friendships were based on proximity: neighbors or coworkers. Those people you know only because, well, you’re stuck sitting next to them every day. The funniest person I know, Ina Gelbert, calls coworkers your ‘air family’. The problem with proximity friends is, they move away. They quit or get fired. It wasn’t until a writing workshop that I discovered the idea of friendships based on a shared passion. Writing. Or theater. Or music. Some shared vision. A mutual quest that would keep you together with other people who valued this vague, intangible skill you valued. These are friendships that outlast jobs and evictions. This steady, regular Thursday-night gabfest was the only incentive to keep me writing during the years when writing didn’t pay a dime. [...] People want to see new ways for connecting. Look at books like *How to Make an American Quilt* and *The Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* and *The Joy Luck Club*. These are all books that present a structure – making a quilt or playing mah-jongg – that allows people to be together and share their stories. Of course, they’re all women’s stories. We don’t see a lot of new models for male social interaction. There’s sports. Barn raisings. That’s about it” (Palahniuk 2004: xvii-xviii)

In the beautifully crafted introduction to a collection of his non-fiction work, American novelist Chuck Palahniuk describes the ways in which most of his writings revolve around lonely people who desperately try to connect to others. In many ways, Palahniuk’s writings reflect upon the ways in which people try to cope with the effects of what Marshall Berman calls the “innovative self-destruction of capitalism” (Berman 1983: 99): “the sense of being caught in the vortex, where all facts and values are whirled, decomposed, recombined; a basic uncertainty of what is basic, what is valuable, even what is real” (ibid.: 121). The flexible reorganisation of production that

characterised the last decades of the twentieth century (cf. Lash and Urry 1987; Lash and Urry 1994) has intensified the experience of uncertainty and alienation that is related in part to the destabilisation of communities organised around particular localities, work, and family as well as the decreasing significance of the traditions such social formations nurtured (cf. Giddens 1991; Jameson 1991). The examples that Palahniuk offers in discussing the prevailing human need to connect to others resonate with Michel Maffesoli's (1996) observations regarding the emergence of new forms of social bonding in spite of the individualisation, rationalisation, increasing fragmentation and fluidity of late-modern societies. One of the important challenges of contemporary social theory is to understand and describe the new affective collectivities – from the “air families” of the work place, through closely-knit creative writing groups and the wider disciplinary communities in academia, to translocal record collecting scenes – that emerge under these conditions. The significance of this task is related to the centrality of the notion of community to the history – and the identity – of sociology as a discipline (cf. Harris 2001). However, its real promise lies in the fact that studying human relationships enables us to illuminate the ways in which transformations of a larger order – such as economic, technological or political changes – affect the lives of people at the level of the everyday (Mills 1959/2000).

Ethnographic writing – similarly to Palahniuk's work – provides a way to engage with the stories people tell about their lives, and simultaneously to make apparent and comment upon more abstract and complex cultural and social transformations (Back 2007). The perspective that this kind of writing affords also makes it possible to account for the ways in which people actively make sense of, cope with, and take part in these larger processes, rather than describing them as anonymous and passive subjects that follow already mapped out destinies bound by external forces. Approaching the crate digging scene through personal stories enabled me to move beyond describing record collecting merely as a distinctive form of male social bonding (cf. Straw 1997b), and opened up the possibility to explore the ways in which scenic participants engage with the consequences of the transforming technological regime of music consumption in their daily practices and discussions.

In this concluding chapter, I will first summarise the findings of my research project focusing on how they further the theorisation of contemporary cultural scenes. I will then move on to describing the ways in which my thesis illuminates the consequences of

the transforming technological regime of cultural consumption, and suggest that my contributions may be used to account for the new kinds of collectivities that have only begun to emerge.

## 9.1 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY

Throughout this thesis, I have described the crate digging scene, a hip hop related record collecting collectivity that had been largely unexplored in academic work. Dissatisfied with the inadequacy of the existing literature in accounting for the emergence and persistence of affective relationships in loosely connected, translocal music scenes, I attempted to contribute to the theorisation of how identity and belonging is produced in spatially dispersed musical collectivities. My multi-sited ethnographic inquiry concentrated primarily on the collective rituals of scenic participants which were organised around the consumption of music. This micro-sociological approach also enabled me to empirically ground and expand theoretical work (Gilroy 1993a; Straw 1999, 2000, 2002a, 2005) that pointed towards the significance of the material culture of music in shaping both translocal cultural flows and the constitution of communities in which particular forms of music are collectively appreciated.

In chapter 2, I have outlined the concept of the *scene* as the theoretical framework of my inquiry, reworking Will Straw's earlier, more elusive definition – a shared cultural space in which a range of coexisting and interacting musical practices “‘work’ to produce a sense of community within the conditions of metropolitan music scenes” (1991: 373) – in a way that is more specific both with regarding what kinds of practices – aesthetic, distinctive, and spatial – shall be taken into consideration in analysis.

Through my discussion of the ethnographic material, I have outlined and connected five areas of inquiry – the collective cultivation of a certain form of musical appreciation, the performance of distinctive practices, the acquisition and passing on of scenic sensibilities and values, the places of scenic practice, as well as a shared understanding of spatiality – and presented a complex theoretical framework for studying practices of identity and belonging in cultural scenes. Whereas my reformulation of Straw's notion made use of the two key sociological approaches – Becker's (1982) account of “art

worlds” and Bourdieu’s theory of distinction (1979/2002) – which are widely used within the study of popular music scenes and collecting groups, it did so by appending them with insights from literary theory (Williams 1971; Fish 1980), feminist studies (Butler 1990, 1993), the pragmatic sociology of music (Hennion and Gomart 1999; Hennion 2001, 2003, 2004, 2007), and media studies (Morley 2003). Apart from refining already existing pathways in the sociological study of musical collectivities, my proposal also extended the study of scenes in a previously largely unexplored direction, importing ideas regarding the importance of spatiality in the production and experience of identities and attachments from philosophy (Lefebvre 1991), human geography (Borden 2001; Harvey 2001; Gregson and Crewe 2003), and anthropology (Appadurai 1995; Basso 1996).

In the following sections, I will discuss the ways in which the findings of my inquiry contribute to the study of affective collectivities surrounding various forms of popular music and, in many cases, of groups organised around particular cultural forms more generally.

#### **SCENES AS SOCIAL WORLDS ORGANISED AROUND THE CULTIVATION OF A SHARED TRADITION**

“I do believe that most experienced surfers have some idea of their lineage. And not all appreciative, by the way, but as they grow older and they grow more into the lifestyle, I think they then have a pretty good understanding. But a lot of it gets lost, and the older I get, the more I realise how precious it is. And... you know, the more I’m in the water, the more I’m surfing, the more I realise how lucky I am to be a surfer. And I ... I voice that a lot of times... I’ll be sitting next to a person half my age or third my age and... and the sun’ll be just going down and we’ll be just hanging waiting for a wave: ‘You know, we are just so lucky to be surfers.’ And to pass that on, that thought... That thought’s gonna grow with every surfer that takes it in. And it will be always be passed on one way or the other.” (Mickey Munoz in Harris 2010)

One of the most important ways in which my reconfiguration of the notion of the scene contributes to social theory is by making apparent *the centrality of a shared tradition* to

the continual remaking of collective identities and attachments in contemporary collectivities organised around the cultivation of particular cultural forms. Although such traditionalism is not necessarily present in all musical collectivities, it clearly plays an important role in many contemporary cultural arenas. As the above account of legendary surfer Mickey Munoz suggests, such a collective cultivation of shared “imagined” lineages is not exclusive to the appreciation of music or other kinds of cultural works – academic and literary texts, artworks, TV series, comic books, computer games, and so forth – it is also present to varying degrees in many other cultural scenes organised around shared activities and interests.

In Chapter 3, I explored the ways in which ideas imported from literary theory can offer a means to produce an aesthetically more engaged sociology of music. Such an approach not only illuminates *the intimate links between group specific forms of appreciation and a shared musical history*, but also the ways in which *aesthetic practices* – such as listening to, discussing and writing about music, producing appropriative works, putting together compilations and so forth – *organised around the collective cultivation of a particular ancestry of significant artists and a canon of musical works can be seen as a form of participation in collective worlds*.

My research thus calls attention to two main areas that are rarely (i.e. Schloss 2006) explored in detail in the now emerging literature on canonicity within popular music studies (Bannister 2006; Dougan 2006; Kärjä 2006; Skinner 2006; von Appen and Doehring 2006; Watson 2006; Holt 2007): grass-roots processes of canon formation and the ways in which the collective shaping of musical histories are ultimately tied to the forging and prevalence of musical collectivities. Furthermore, my account of the individual trajectories and preferences which revolve around the *break aesthetics* – the historically infused form of appreciation of the scene – suggests the usefulness of approaching these groups as *communities of appreciation* in accounting for the diversity of musical tastes and interests within them.

In chapter 5, I have described *scenic distinctive collecting practices as important means through which participants enact their commitment to, take part in, and preserve crate digging as a collecting tradition*. My discussion made apparent the ways in which the generally shared moral principles – *the digging ethos* – that orientate scenic customs are interwoven with same historicity that informs musical appreciation.

My research made apparent the usefulness of combining Bourdieu's notion of the habitus (1977, 1990b; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and Butler's (1990, 1993) ideas regarding performative practices in exploring how belonging and identity emerges through distinctive enactments. Furthermore, *the relational model of distinctiveness* I have proposed offers a way to overcome the constraints of the simplistic, rigid and functionalist approaches to distinctive practices that are prevalent in the literature on musical collectivities (eg. Thornton 1996) and record collecting groups (Straw 1997b; Jamieson 1999; Dougan 2006). I have demonstrated the ways in which such an approach enables us to account for the diversity of individual perceptions and strategies in distinctive cultural scenes, as well as to understand the relationship between customs, shared values, and collective identities.

My discussion of scenic learning in Chapter 6 also made apparent the ways in which the practices organised around the acquisition and passing on of forms of musical appreciation and distinctive approaches work towards the emergence and strengthening of attachments, not only in terms of developing, extending and reinforcing personal ties, but also with regard the internalisation of shared values and sensibilities.

My observations regarding the centrality of a shared tradition to scenic practices run counter to the views of sociologists and cultural commentators who, like Anthony Giddens (1990, 1991), associate late-modernity with the withering away of the locally bound traditions of premodern communities, and are doubtful regarding the possibility of the emergence of new forms of traditionalism. The internal heterogeneity, elective character, loose connectedness, and blurred boundaries of the emerging collectivities – which this thesis sought to describe through the case of the crate digging scene – clearly differentiates their traditionalism from that of premodern societies. However, the importance of long lasting social relationships, the bounding authority of shared moral ideals, and the profoundly affective character of identification that my research made apparent stand in contrast with the highly individualistic and fluid forms of identification – “reflexive life-style projects” – that Giddens and others (e.g. Chaney 1996; Bennett 1999b) associate with late-modernity.

## THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRANSFORMING EVERYDAY MATERIALITIES OF MUSIC

In the introduction of the thesis, I have suggested that the everyday materialities of music consumption shape the “the style in which” community is imagined in spatially dispersed collectivities (Anderson 1983: 6). In Chapter 5, I set out to explore this inspiration by discussing the centrality of the collective rituals surrounding the acquisition, evaluation, use, and discussion of vinyl records to the production and experience of scenic identities and attachments among crate diggers. In Chapter 7, I have furthered my exploration of the social significance of music that circulates in material form, describing the roles that places of record exchange play as sites of sociability – places where relationships are forged and maintained, and where scenic identities are enacted and experienced. Furthermore, I have discussed the ways in which specialist stores could be understood as central nodes in translocal networks that accumulate, organise, display, and redistribute both scenic information and music. In Chapter 8, I demonstrated the usefulness of theoretical insights regarding the “production of space” (Lefebvre 1991) in the study of the spatialisation of identities and attachments in popular music scenes. Concentrating on *spatial practices* within the scene, I described the ways in which *activities organised around record buying at physical sites of exchange contribute towards the development of a distinctive conceptualisation of space among crate diggers: an alternative geography of belonging*. Furthermore, as such a distinctive attitude towards recorded media and music buying practices is not unique to crate digging (cf. Straw 1991; Thornton 1996; Jamieson 1999), it is possible to extend my argument regarding the ways in which the everyday materialities of music consumption shape the manner in which community is imagined to other collectivities in which music is still collected and used in material form – gramophone records, vinyl discs, 8-track cartridges, tapes, CDs, DVDs.

In a way, my thesis provides an explanation for the prevalence of record stores – and record buying practices – “where none should exist” (Foster 2006), two decades after the CD became the dominant medium of music consumption, at a time when the circulation of music is no longer tied to material formats. However, my research also made clear that the transforming technological regime of music consumption – more specifically the ways in which the internet now provides easy and quick access to music, records, and related information – profoundly affect established forms of scenic interaction and identification.

While most of my interviewees made use of at least some of the new possibilities enabled by online communication and trading, they also expressed a sense of uneasiness or concern lamenting the withering away of the “digging mentality”, the loss of “an essential tradition” and the reorganisation of local record landscapes. While they presented this transformation as a disruptive force, my discussion also made apparent the ways in which online communication has significantly contributed towards the crystallisation, documentation, dissemination, and stylistic explosion of scenic culture, and enhanced possibilities to participate in the scene regardless of one’s geographical location.

## 9.2 STUDYING COLLECTIVITIES IN A WORLD OF FLUX

Whereas my discussion revolved mainly around the crate digging scene, I have also suggested at certain points that these transformations affect other collectivities in similar ways. While little more than decade ago, the earliest commentators of emerging forms of social interaction on the internet had to argue at length regarding the capacity of computer mediated communication in fostering both conventional and novel kinds of communities (e.g. Rheingold 1995; Watson 1997; Wellman and Guila 1999), this insight verges on the trivial today. Similarly, the fact that the online exchange of cultural artefacts in digital – music, movies, TV series, home videos, ebooks, old computer games – as well as physical – vintage perfumes, designer furniture, comic books, and used records – form (cf. Hillis et al. 2006; Straw 2007) contributes towards a radical transformation of the cultural landscape is also a matter of common knowledge. Taking into account the unprecedented pace at which these tightly interwoven tendencies unfold, and the scale and scope of their effects, it is not surprising that social theory lags behind in accounting for them. My thesis, in the modest ways that an ethnographic inquiry allows, aimed to contribute to the theoretical understanding of the social consequences of this complex reorganisation of cultural activity.

My research reflected upon two contradictory processes that are at work simultaneously in contemporary cultural scenes. One is the development of a worshipful traditionalism

that – according to Will Straw – became typical of the collective appreciation of particular popular music forms by the end of the twentieth century:

“[Music scenes] survived and developed alongside each other, perpetuating a collective devotion to different styles and historical moments. Doom Metal, death metal, ska, classic punk, LA hard core, garage psychedelia, 1970s funk, indie pop, rockabilly, swing, 1980s electrobreat, German electronica and dozens of other styles now persist within networks of fans and institutions which ensure their continued existence.” (Straw 2001a: 69)

It is in this sense, Straw describes popular music scenes as functioning increasingly “as spaces organised against change” (Straw 2001b:255). As I have described in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6, the internet has significantly enhanced the pace, scale, and depth of the collective crystallization, documentation and cultivation of shared traditions which partly explains Straw’s observations.

While an emerging traditionalism, even conservatism is clearly at work in many contemporary cultural scenes, the other tendency, almost paradoxically, is an increasing interaction across stylistic boundaries, and a diversification of tastes and interests within particular collectivities. This second tendency – that I have touched upon in Chapter 4 and Chapter 8 – stems from the fact that the internet provides virtual meeting points *for participants from different scenes* around certain interests, activities and topics. These encounters, in turn, contribute towards a cross-fertilisation across scenes and an accelerating stylistic explosion within them.

It is in this contradictory world – that is characterised simultaneously by increasing stability and flux – that older scenes prevail and transform, while new collectivities emerge influenced by – and reorganising – older forms according to contemporary sensibilities. Although my research – partly through the extensive amount of online resources it drew on – illuminated some aspects of the emerging culture of music enthusiasm online, it was more oriented at documenting conventional forms, and addressing issues of change. While it remains the task of future research to fully explore the new forms of sociability that are facilitated by the internet, the framework of analysis I have outlined in this thesis provides a means to engage with the ways in which their aesthetic and distinctive practices, and – now often virtual – spatialities work towards producing collective identities and attachments.

Writing ethnography – similarly to the ways in which Palahniuk describes the work of journalists and novelists in the essay I quoted in the beginning of this chapter – is a way of connecting with people. Through interviewing crate diggers and reading their blogs, I’ve encountered many people with whom I shared an enthusiasm for the “same vague, intangible skills” over the years. The same could be said about members of the academic community, both those with whom I regularly discussed my developing chapters and those whose texts became profoundly important for my discussion. My involvement in both worlds not only contributed to the extension of my knowledge significantly, but also provided me with a sense of belonging, encouragement and inspiration that led me through the loneliest hours of writing. For this, I cannot be grateful enough.

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Various (1979) *Super Disco Brake's Volume Two*, LP, US, Paul Winley, LP 137

Various (1980) *Super Disco Brake's Volume Three*, LP, US, Paul Winley, LP 138

Various (1981) *Super Disco Brake's Volume Four*, LP, US, Paul Winley, LP 142

Various Artists (1999) *Super Breaks*, 2 LP, UK, BGP, BGP 2126

Various Artists (2000) *Super Breaks Volume Two*, 2 LP, UK, BGP, BGP 2132

Various Artists (2002) *Super Breaks Volume Three*, 2 LP, UK, BGP, BGP2145

Various Artists (1998) *The Best Of Frank Motley & King Herbert – Canada's Message To The Meters*, LP, UK, Jazzman, JMANLP 001

Various (2002) *The Ultimate Lessons*, 2LP, US, Starchild, STAR 1307

Various (2002) *The Ultimate Lessons 2*, 2LP, US, Starchild, STAR 1309

Various (2003) *The Ultimate Lessons 3*, 2LP, US, Starchild, STAR 1311

Various (1997) *Tribe Vibes*, 2 LP, US, Strictly Breaks, SB-9801

Various (2006) *Ultimate Brazilian Breaks & Beats*, LP, Brazil, Murge Discos, MDLP 001

Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR501

Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR502

Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR503

Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR504

Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR505

Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR506

Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR507

Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR508

Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR509

Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR510

Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR511

Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR512

Various (1987) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR513

Various (1987) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR514

Various (1987) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR515

Various (1987) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR516

Various (1987) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR517

Various (1988) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR518

Various (1988) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR519

Various (1988) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR520

Various (1989) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR521

Various (1989) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR522

Various (1989) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR523

Various (1990) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR524

Various (1991) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR525

Various (2006) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats. The Complete Collection*, 2 CD, DVD Box Set, US, Street Beat, SBR1740

Various (n.d.) *Vinyl Dogs, Volume 1*, LP, USA, Vinyl Dogs, BL-001

Various (n.d.) *Vinyl Dogs, Volume 2*, LP, USA, Vinyl Dogs, BL-002

Various (n.d.) *Vinyl Dogs, Volume 3*, LP, USA, Vinyl Dogs, BL-003

Various (n.d.) *Vinyl Dogs, Volume 4*, LP, USA, Vinyl Dogs, BL-004

Wu-Tang Clan (1993) *Enter The Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)*, US, LP, Loud, 07863-66336-1

DJ Zulu (2006) *Wild Magyar Style. Ultra Rare Rare Original B-Boy Breaks*, mixed CD, not on label

## APPENDIX 1: DISCLAIMER REGARDING COPYRIGHTED ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL

This thesis contains copyrighted images and music:

(1) The images that are inserted in the text include DVD, LP, CD, and mixtape sleeves and liner notes; book, fanzine and magazine covers and page layouts; photographic images or scans of of the round paper labels attached to vinyl discs; photographic portraits of collectors, and pictures of record stores. The sources of these images are listed in their title lines or in the footnotes. Where no source is noted, the images are photographed by the author.

(2) The digital sound files on the DVD appendices that accompany this volume include mixtapes; archive radio broadcasts; individual tracks; compilation albums. The discographic details of these recordings (if available) are listed in the appendix of the thesis.

The purpose of this material is solely to provide a more profound understanding of the issues regarding music and record collecting that I have discussed throughout the thesis. Obtaining permission for the use of most of this material would have been almost impossible: in many cases, the copyrights of the individual recordings that are featured in most mixtapes and compilations had not been cleared by the DJs and compilers that produced them, and their sleeves include little information that could help identifying the original artists, songs, song writers, composers, publishers, and labels. Further, the relatively high number of sleeve designs and sound recordings involved would have posed severe difficulties in finding contact details to current rights holders and negotiating agreements individually.

However, the fact that this material is reproduced as part of a “non-commercial research” project ensures that my use of these images and recordings falls into the category of “fair dealing” according to section 29 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, for which there is no obligation to obtain legal permissions. Regardless, I have successfully contacted most of the photographers of produced the included portraits and record shop photos, so these images appear here by their kind permission.

This obligatory physical reference copy held by the Goldsmiths Library's Special Collections serves important archival goals, while it also ensures that access to the

thesis remains strictly limited to local consultation. The author does by no means encourage the further reproduction of the illustrative copyrighted material that is included as part of the thesis, as such a use – depending on the purpose it serves – might constitute copyright infringement. If in doubt, please contact the library personnel.

## APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW DETAILS

The following list contains the details of the interviews conducted for this project organised by location. Although the accounts marked with an asterisk are not referred to directly in the thesis, in many cases, they provided important insights regarding second hand record trade, reissuing strategies or record collecting in general, or crate digging in particular.

### NEW YORK CITY, USA

Pro Celebrity Golf / Rob Lipitch, Brooklyn, 27 April 2005.

*DJ, crate digger and record dealer. He is also the owner of the Chopped Herring record label, and one of the producers behind Three Sinister Syllables, the densest break mixtape ever assembled. As DJ Chubby Grooves, he played an important role in Manchester's music scene throughout the 1990s.*

Cosmo Baker, Brooklyn, 27 April 2005

*Brooklyn based crate digger and eclectic DJ, originally from Philadelphia. His column in the On the Go magazine in the mid 1990s is generally acknowledged to be the first regular section on crate digging culture to appear in a print publication. He is also a founding member of The Rub DJ crew.*

Skratch Famous / Jeremy Freeman\*, Manhattan, 27 April 2005

*Reggae collector and DJ, who run Deadly Dragon, a Manhattan based reggae specialist store, and a related reggae reissue label at the time of conducting the interview.*

“Cool” Gipsy Bogdan / Bogdan Untea, Bronx, 29 April 2005

*Romanian born DJ and crate digger who, at the time of conducting the interview worked at Turntable Lab, a Manhattan based specialist store focusing on new, hip hop related releases and reissues.*

Greg Caz / Greg Casseus, Manhattan, 29 April 2005

*Music enthusiasts with an eclectic taste and a great collection, specialising in Brazilian music. He worked at Academy Records, a Manhattan based second hand record store at the time of conducting the interview.*

Duane Sherwood\*, Brooklyn, 30 April 2005

*Reggae collector and experimental photographer in his sixties. His Crucial Roots compilation CD series circulate in limited numbers among his friends, containing amazing rarities.*

Tyler Askew\*, Brooklyn 30 April 2005

*DJ and graphic designer, involved with the contemporary eclectic scene organised around jazz related music, one of the people behind the Rude Movements label and clubnight.*

Monk One / Andrew Mason, 25 April 2005

*DJ, crate digger, hip hop producer, and music journalist, involved with the Names You Can Trust DJ crew and record label.*

Matt Mikas\*, Brooklyn, 27 April 2005.

*DJ, record collector, specialising mainly in the lounge music of the late 1950s and early 1960s.*

#### **THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA, USA**

“Cool” Chris / Chris Veltri, San Francisco, 8 May 2005

*Owner of the Groove Merchant specialist store in San Francisco, one of the people behind the Dis-joint record label, and the legendary Trap Door psych mixes.*

Oliver Wang / DJ O-Dub, San Francisco, 9 May 2005

*Crate digger, Latin music connoisseur, writer on popular culture and music, author of the Soul Sides<sup>157</sup> blog, compiler of compilation albums of the same title, and sociologist.*

DJ B.Cause / Josh Bea, San Francisco, 9 May 2005

*Crate digger, DJ, producer of blends – hip hop acapellas over older recordings – and mixtapes, author of the Diamonds in the Dust<sup>158</sup> blog. He worked part time at the Groove Merchant at the time of conducting the interview.*

Justin Torres, San Francisco, 10 May 2005

*Crate digger, soul music connoisseur, and record dealer.*

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<sup>157</sup> <http://www.soul-sides.com>, accessed 26 September 2010.

<sup>158</sup> <http://diamondsinthedust.blogspot.com/>, accessed 26 September 2010.

Jason Yoder\*, San Francisco, 12 May 2005

*Collector and discographer of 7" singles released in the state of Indiana. He runs a Indiana 45s<sup>159</sup>, website dedicated to his discographic project.*

Matthew Africa, Oakland, 13 May 2005

*Crate digger and DJ, and producer of an influential radio show on the Berkley based college radio station KALX with Beni B from 1993.*

Beni B / Ben Nickelberry, Oakland, 13 May 2005

*Music enthusiast – widely acknowledged as one of the most knowledgeable crate diggers by other scenic participants, but he refused being categorised as such – DJ, and president of the hip hop record label ABB.*

Andrew Jervis, San Francisco, 12 May 2005

*British DJ and record collector who has moved to San Francisco in the beginning of the 1990s. He used to work in Groove Merchant and went on to work as A&R agent and Vice President of Ubiquity records, a company that specialises in reissuing rare jazz, funk, soul and disco records – on its Luv N’Haight label – as well as releasing new productions drawing on these influences.*

## **PHILADELPHIA, USA**

King Honey / Maximillian Lawrence, 12 April 2005

*Crate digger, DJ, hip hop producer, MC and – using his real name – artist.*

JT / Junius Taylor, 14 April, 2005

*Philadelphia based hip Hop DJ, crate digger, and custom made furniture maker.*

Soulman / Phill Stroman, 17 May 2005

*Crate digger, DJ, producer of hip hop beats and mixtapes, record dealer, author of the That Real Schitt<sup>160</sup> blog. His “World of Beats” column in Rap Sheet magazine, and his later website of the same name was an important source of information about the crate digging scene when little information wa available elsewhere.*

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<sup>159</sup> <http://www.indiana45s.com/>, accessed 26 September 2010.

<sup>160</sup> <http://www.thatrealschitt.com/>, accessed 26 September 2010.

## **LONDON, UK**

Huw72 / Huw Bowles, 5 December 2007

*Crate digger, DJ, producer, record dealer, former employee of Mr Bongo, a now defunct London based hip hop specialist store. Huw is a member of a British rap group called Beyond There, and runs the hip hop label 72 Records.*

Quinton Scott, 10 December 2007

*Music enthusiasts, former A&R for the Harmless record label. He worked for the Strut label at the time of conducting the interview. Quinton produced many jazz funk, disco, and afrobeat related compilations, and worked with DJ Pogo on breakbeat themed compilations for both labels.*

DJ Vadim / Vadim Peare, 10 December 2007

*World renowned British crate digger, DJ, and hip hop producer drawing on soul, reggae and electronica in his work.*

DJ Format / Matt Ford

Mr Thing / Mark Bowles, 12 december 2007

*Internationally known British crate diggers, DJs, and hip hop producers who were also active on the mixtape circuit at the time of conducting the interviews. Mr Thing is the winner of the DMC Scratch Championships 2000, and a former member of the Scratch Perverts, a British turntablist group. DJ Format is part of The Simonsound, a two member production team exploring space age electronica.*

## **MANCHESTER, UK**

George Mahood, 8 December 2007

*Crate digger, DJ, former music journalist, founder and editor in chief of Big Daddy magazine. At the time of conducting the interview, he collected mainly rare funk 7" singles and folk music, and worked as a record dealer.*

Andy Votel / Andrew Shallcross, 9 December 2007

*Crate digger, DJ, former hip hop producer. He runs Finders Keepers – a label specialising in reissuing obscure folk and psychedelic rock recordings as well as music from the from Middle East, Asian and Eastern Europe – and releases his own mixes consisting of similar material. He is also the man behind Twisted Nerve – a record label focusing on contemporary experimental music – and the underground magazine B-Music.*

## **RAYLEIGH, UK**

Danny Breaks / Daniel Whidett, 10 December 2007

*Internationally acknowledged British crate digger, DJ, and hip hop producer. He began his career producing happy hardcore music under the alias of Sonz of a Loop Da Loop Era in the early 1990s, had a successful career as a drum and bass producer, DJ, and owner of the Droppin' Science label throughout the decade. From 2002, he produced mainly instrumental hip hop beats that he released on his Alphabet Zoo label.*

## **BUDAPEST, HUNGARY**

DJ Suhaid / Kristóf Kürti, 18 June 2008

*Budapest based crate digger, DJ, and promoter, interested in a wide range of music from 1960s jazz to house. Member of Brakecsokkerz, a DJ crew organised around the appreciation of obscure Hungarian music from the past decades.*

Angel Twosix / Fejes András\*, 18 June 2008

*Radio presenter of Sample Temple – a show on the Budapest based Tilos Rádió – who collects sampled originals mainly by downloading them from the internet.*

Takeshi / Viktor, Vitéz\*, 22 June 2008

*A crate digger, DJ and hip hop producer based in Érsekvadkert, a small village in the Northern region of Hungary.*

Ferenc Plesovszki\*, 22 June 2008

*Hip hop enthusiast from Tiszatenyő, a small village in the Eastern part of Hungary who collects mainly library music by downloading it from the internet.*

## **PÉCS, HUNGARY**

Sim Nice / Simran Sandhu, 5 July 2007

*A crate digger, hip hop DJ and producer from California who was studying at the University of Pécs at the time of conducting the interview.*

Beware / Bosnyák János\*

Air-D / Krisztián Erdei\*, 3 August 2008

*Two crate diggers and hip hop DJs from Pécs, a town in the south of Hungary. They promoted a local club night series called Funky Beatz dedicated to funk, soul and disco at the time of conducting the interview.*

## APPENDIX 3: CONTENTS OF THE DVD APPENDICES

Both DVDs contain DJ mixes that were initially released on mixtapes and CDs without clearing the copyrights of the recordings used. Partly in order to avoid the legal consequences of copyright infringement, information such as tracklisting, year and place of release, label, and catalogue number was rarely indicated on their sleeves. Although their circulation was limited – both in terms of geographical distribution and the number of copies – they are now available via file-sharing networks and often published on audioblogs. However, accurate discographical information – especially for earlier tapes – is still difficult to find.

### DVD APENDIX VOLUME 1

#### **UBB themed mixes**

Kid Capri (1989) *52 Beats*

Kenny Dope (1994) *Break Beats*

DJ Q-Bert (1994) *Demolition Pumpkin Squeeze Musik. A Preschool Break Mix*, mixed cassette, not on label

DJ Superix (2008) *Ultimate, Ultimate, Ultimate!*, mixed CD, Southern, RIXCD100

Grandmaster Roc Raida (2008) *52 Beats 2008*, mixed CD, US,BBP Records, BBP-005CD

#### **Original sample mixes**

Biz Markie (1999) *Diggin' On Blue*, mixed CD, Japan, Toshiba EMI Ltd / Blue Note, TOCP-65247

Lord Finesse (1999) *Diggin' On Blue*, mixed CD, Japan, Toshiba EMI Ltd / Blue Note, TOCP-65248

Pete Rock (1999) *Diggin' On Blue*, mixed CD, Japan, Toshiba EMI Ltd / Blue Note, TOCP-65249

DJ Muro (2001) *Incredible Blue Note*, mixed CD, Japan, Toshiba EMI Ltd / Blue Note, TOCT-24597

Conmen *Don't Even (Sample This)*

Conmen *Jelous Toys Die*

Conmen *Smooth Criminals*

Conmen *The Masters*

Conmen *Veteranos*

DJ Muro *King of Digging Volume 1*

DJ Muro *King of Digging Volume 2*

DJ Muro *King of Digging Volume 3*

DJ Muro *King of Digging Volume 4*

DJ Muro *King of Digging Volume 5*

DJ Shame (n.d.) *Traveling Through Sample Land*, 2 CD, US, Direct Records, DR-1225 CDX2

DJ Shame (2004) *Traveling Through Sample Land Volume 2 The Wizzard of Music & Rhythm*, 2 CD, US, Reanimated Vinyl Music, RVM 002.

Fraykerbreaks (2006) *The DJ Shadow Breaks Set*, online mix

Fraykerbreaks (2007) *Caged Heat. The DJ Shadow Breaks Set 2*, online mix

Fraykerbreaks (2008) *The DJ Shadow Breaks Set 2.5 The Leftovers*, online mix

Ken Sport *Original 24*

Ken Sport *Original 34*

Ken Sport *Original 25*

Ken Sport *Original 37*

Kon & Amir *On Track Vol. 1* (1996)

Kon & Amir *On Track Vol. 2*

Kon & Amir *On Track Vol. 3*

Kon & Amir *On Track Vol. 4*

Kon & Amir *On Track Vol. 5*

Kon & Amir (2006) *On Track Vol. 6*, 2 CD, US, not on label, AA006

Pro Celebrity Golf and Jay Glaze (2004) *Three Sinister Syllables*, mix CD, UK, Chopped Herring, CD5H1T0FF01

?uestlove (2005) *Sample Lesson*, guest mix on BBC 1, aired 25 September 2005

Soulman (1998) *World of Beats Vol. 2*, mixed cassette, US, Philasoul Recordings

## DVD APENDIX VOLUME 2

### **Digging Beyond Breaks**

Andy Votel (2005) *Songs In The Key Of Death*, mixed CD, UK , Fat City, FCCD018

Bakto, Woo-D & Borka (2007) *Tektine Radosti*, Slovenia, mixed CD, not on label

“Cool” Chris Veltri, Vinnie Esparza, Jr. & Sean Julian *Trap Door* (2005)

“Cool” Chris Veltri, Vinnie Esparza, Jr. & Sean Julian (2006) *Trap Door: An International Psychedelic Mystery Mix*, mixed LP, US, Dis-Joint Records, DJLP 007

Danny Dann “The Beatman” (2008) *Dusty Fingers Present The Mix CD. Rare Original Breaks*, mixed CD, US, Rock-N-Soul Records, RSR 01975

DJ Format & Mr Thing (2005) *Holy Shit!*, mixed CD, UK, not on label

DJ Mitsu The Beats (2008) *Library*, Japan, mixed CD, Show Tiku Bai, STB-014

DJ XXXL (2005) *Nippon Breaks & Beats From the Land of the Rising Sun*, mixed CD, US, BBP-003CD

DJ Nuts (2004) *Cultura Cópia*, mix CD, US, Mochilla, MOCD-002

DJ Shadow & Cut Chemist (1999) *Brainfreeze*, mixed CD, US, Sixty 7

DJ Suhaid & DJ Haze (2010) *Kis Beatek a Nagy világból*, online mix.

Zulu DJ (2006) *Wild Magyar Style. Ultra Rare Rare Original B-Boy Breaks*, mixed CD, not on label

Leo Lateks (2009) *untitled promo mix*, mixed CD, Norway, not on label

Quantic (2006) *Mofongo Para El Alma*, mixed CD, UK, Discos Mulato, 001

Soulman (2009) *Beautiful*, online mix

### **Significant recordings**

Afrika Bambaataa (1983) *Death Mix Live!*, mixed 12” single, Paul Winley Records, 12X33-10

Double Dee & Steinski (1985) *Lessons 1-3*, 12” single, US, Tommy Boy Music, TB 867

Mantronix (1988) ‘King of the Beats’ In *Join Me Please... (Home Boys – Make Some Noise)*, 12” single, US, Capitol, V-15386

DJ Q-Bert (2006) *Breaktionary Volume 1*, LP, UK, Spinternal Organs, BREAK-001

DJ Q-Bert (2006) *Breaktionary Volume 2*, LP, UK, Spinternal Organs, BREAK-002

DJ Q-Bert (2006) *Breaktionary Volume 3*, LP, UK, Spinternal Organs, BREAK-003

DJ Q-Bert (2006) *Breaktionary Volume 4*, LP, UK, Spinternal Organs, BREAK-004

## **Ultimate Breaks & Beats Volumes 1-25**

Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR501  
Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR502  
Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR503  
Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR504  
Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR505  
Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR506  
Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR507  
Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR508  
Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR509  
Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR510  
Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR511  
Various (1986) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR512  
Various (1987) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR513  
Various (1987) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR514  
Various (1987) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR515  
Various (1987) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR516  
Various (1987) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR517  
Various (1988) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR518  
Various (1988) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR519  
Various (1988) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR520  
Various (1989) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR521  
Various (1989) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR522  
Various (1989) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR523  
Various (1990) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR524  
Various (1991) *Ultimate Breaks & Beats*, LP, US, Street Beat, SBR525

I have included the tracklisting of each volume on the DVD Appendix Volume 2.