

**Niche Publications and Subcultural Authenticity:**  
**The case of *Stealth* magazine**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Authenticity is often constructed as an absolute subcultural value. Within the field of subcultural studies, a relatively small amount of literature exists regarding the relationship between different forms of media and subcultural notions of authenticity. Even less literature examines the relationship that individual media texts foster with subcultural niche markets or the internal techniques such publications utilise to discuss authenticity. This thesis aims to address these gaps by performing an in-depth analysis of a Sydney-based hip hop publication, *Stealth* magazine. The analysis explores how subcultural authenticity is constructed within this publication. In doing so, the nature of authenticity is called into question.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institutions of higher education;
- ii) contain any material previously submitted or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- iii) contain any defamatory material

Signed:

Date:

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## INTRODUCTION

The desire to discover ‘authenticity’ permeates a countless number of human experiences – people search for ‘authentic’ music, food, art, dance, personalities, nations, meanings, roots, products and so forth. Charles Lindholm, one of the few academics to systematically explore the complexities of the term, argues that authenticity is “the leading member of a set of values that includes sincere, essential, natural, original and real” (2008: 1). He believes that in contemporary life, authenticity is generally regarded as an absolute value – the authentic is consistently superior to the inauthentic. Of course, this is not to say that any particular human experience *is* inherently authentic, genuine or real. Allan Moore argues that authenticity is “ascribed, not inscribed” (2002: 210). While authenticity is recurrently deemed a superior value by individuals or social formations, that-which-is-deemed-authentic can change from person to person, such that “every example can conceivably be found authentic by a particular group of perceivers” (Moore 2002: 220).

In the field of subcultural studies, research around the quest for authenticity has been paramount. Subcultures can loosely be conceived of as distinct social formations which separate themselves from the ‘mainstream’ through certain parameters – such as dress, speech and musical taste – which determine membership (see for example Hebdige 1979; Muggleton 2002; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003b; Thornton 1996). Authenticity is necessarily important, because the “problem of authenticity is really the issue as to what constitutes ‘proper’ or ‘genuine’ membership” (Muggleton 2002: 20). In other words, “collectives are authentic ... if the members act in the proper, culturally valued manner” (Lindholm 2008: 2). But if

authenticity is ascribed rather than inscribed, who or what determines the characteristics of proper or genuine membership and how is authentic membership determined?

My own engagement with this question began with my interest in the Australian hip hop subculture. Whether or not you could say I am actually *involved* in the subculture, I am not sure. I listen to hip hop music from Australia. But I do not have a set of rules that I abide by which might constitute subcultural membership – I just like the music. In fact, up until 2008 when I conducted an interview with Sydney hip hop expert Mark Pollard, I did not know anyone who called themselves a member of this subculture.

My only interaction with Australian hip hop (the subculture, as opposed to the musical genre) was via a local publication called *Stealth* magazine. This is a Sydney-based magazine which has been running from 1999 to the present and has fourteen published issues which have been released sporadically (1999a; 1999b; 2000a; 2000b; 2001a; 2001b; 2002; 2003a; 2003b; 2003c; 2004a; 2004b; 2005; 2007).<sup>1</sup> *Stealth* is largely the brain-child of CEO/editor/journalist/designer Mark Pollard, who has transformed the publication from a fanzine with a limited circulation of about 1,500 issues to a consumer niche publication with a circulation of about 10,000 issues. Pollard says the magazine explores not only Australian hip hop but foreign scenes also, primarily through interviews with hip hop *aficionados*. It appeals to members of the Australian subculture, rather than people who just listen to the music.

Upon reading all fourteen issues of this magazine, I noticed that it was obsessed with the notion of authenticity. *Stealth* was constantly attempting to reinforce what was authentic and what was inauthentic. I had never met an Australian

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<sup>1</sup> Although the publication is released more than once a year, the month of its publication is often not cited in the magazine. Hence I reference each issue as such: 1999a, 1999b, etc.

hip hopper, but already I had a vision of what constituted proper membership. The magazine was not only discussing authenticity, it was also attempting to establish *itself* as an authentic cultural artefact through its attempts to engage with its readership. It seemed that media texts were responsible, at least in part, for ascribing authenticity. This observation led to the more intriguing question: How do individual texts like *Stealth* go about doing this?

An examination of the available literature within the field of subcultural studies reveals that few academics have systematically examined the relationship between individual media texts and notions of subcultural authenticity. Earlier subcultural academics such as Dick Hebdige (1979), John Clarke et al (1976) and Stanley Cohen (1987) either ignore the interrelation or discuss a generic 'mass media'. More recent subcultural scholars (see for example Muggleton 2002; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003b) acknowledge the role of the media, but instead champion the role of social actors in ascribing authenticity to themselves and their subcultures. Only Sarah Thornton's *Club Cultures* (1996) provides a relatively in depth account of the role that media play in determining subcultural authenticity. While her primary focus lies with the club culture she studies and its members, she still provides an account of how different forms of media (mass media, niche media and micro-media) generate cultural knowledge. Still, Thornton provides a generalised account rather than any in depth study of individual media texts, and her focus rests with the subculture rather than media processes.

An inspection of literature within the field of media studies, and in particular the emerging field of magazine studies, proved fruitful. Several scholars, including David Abrahamson (2007), Stephen Duncombe (1997) and Tim Holmes (2007) have explored how magazines form a specific relationship with their readership in order to

engage in numerous forms of cultural representation, but few explore individual publications in-depth. As a consequence of the lack of work on how individual publications take part in ascribing notions of genuine membership within subcultures, I wanted to address this gap by conducting a textual analysis of an individual case study (*Stealth* magazine) while drawing on discussions of subculture from the fields of media and cultural studies.

In light of the above concerns, this thesis engages with the following question:

**How do individual niche publications, and in particular *Stealth* magazine, reflect and construct notions of subcultural authenticity?**

### **Research Question and Chapter Outline**

The question involves three objectives, which correlate with the three chapters of this thesis. First, the thesis aims to establish that niche media texts do play a role in reflecting and constructing notions of subcultural authenticity. Second, the case study of *Stealth* will explore how this serial media text develops the credibility to ascribe authenticity. Third, a textual analysis of *Stealth* will examine the internal techniques utilised to determine authentic membership.

Chapter One uses Thornton's definition of subcultures as cultural formations defined as such by the media (1996: 162) as a framework for establishing the interrelation between subcultures and the media. This chapter is a literature review of the academic work on subcultures and the media, and aims to provide a theoretical basis for my analysis of *Stealth* magazine. It examines existing subcultural theories regarding the role of the media in ascribing authenticity, and determines that different

types of media texts each have a particular relationship with subcultures and play a different role in subcultural representation.

Chapter Two examines how magazines are an exceptional form of print media able to foster unique relationships with their readers through the creation of niche markets. Drawing on interviews conducted with Mark Pollard and textual analysis, this chapter looks at how *Stealth* constructs its close relationship with its readers and how this aids the magazine's credibility to determine subcultural authenticity.

Finally, Chapter Three conducts a close textual analysis of the various notions of authenticity in *Stealth* so as to establish how the magazine is able to determine what is authentic and what is inauthentic for Australian hip hop. This chapter explores four overarching distinctions used to ascribe authenticity: 'hip hop' versus 'the rest', 'underground' versus 'mainstream', 'local' versus 'global', and 'independent' versus 'commercial'.

## **Methodology**

This thesis conducts a qualitative textual analysis of a case study, *Stealth* magazine. This is a case study, or "an in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single social phenomenon" (Feagin et al 1991: 2). We choose a case study due to its particularity and complexity (Stake 1995: xi). *Stealth* has been chosen for numerous reasons. In comparison to the other two established hip hop magazines in Australia, *Hype* and *Vapors* (which were examined in the initial stages of my research), *Stealth* is primarily concerned with issues of authentic identity, and promises to be a richer source for the exploration of notions of authenticity. Moreover, the magazine has been in publication since 1999, which

allows for both a diachronic and synchronic analysis. Only fourteen issues have been published over this period so I could study every issue in depth.

My aim is to explore how niche publications in general are related to notions of subcultural authenticity. Robert K. Yin (2003: 10) cites the major flaw for case study research: “How can you generalize from a single case?” Nevertheless, Joe R. Feagin et al, Robert E. Stake and Yin agree that one can apply case studies to pre-existing theories so as to confirm or modify them. This thesis is applying the findings from *Stealth* to a wide array of media and cultural theorists so as to confirm or modify their views and address gaps in existing theory.

The major methodology of this case study will be textual analysis. Alan McKee explains that textual analysis leads to “the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text” (2004: 1). Analysts examine the internal features of a text while understanding the context of reception so that an educated, evidenced and defensible interpretation of that text may be reached. Chapter Two examines the various internal techniques that the magazine utilises to forge a close relationship with its readers. These range from the editorial choice of the Question and Answer interview as the predominant feature genre to covering the subculture positively to establishing the magazine’s staff and interview subjects as experts. Chapter Three conducts a close examination of the distinctions of authenticity in each issue, comparing terms and themes that are deemed authentic or superior with those that are considered inauthentic or inferior. Each issue was analysed intensely, appropriate categories of authenticity were formulated and the most representative examples were selected. Chapter Three focuses only on the Question and Answer interviews, largely because these interviews allow us to hear the least mediated voices of the widest range of members of the subculture, allowing for notions of subcultural authenticity to

be articulated. The focus is only on the interviews with Australian hip hop artists to allow an exploration of notions of authenticity within an Australian subculture.

Apart from counting the amount of advertisements in relation to editorial pages in the publication for the purposes of determining what category of magazine *Stealth* might be (in Chapter Two), the methodology is qualitative, not quantitative. The point of this thesis is not to count how many times different conceptions of authenticity appear, as this would render authenticity as too simplistic. The aim is to analyse *Stealth* through a more complex and nuanced set of interpretive categories.

Feagin et al claim that:

those who adopt the qualitative approach generally picture a world of complexity and plurality ... [I]nstead of adopting a set of standardized questions and categories with which to categorize ... social action, the qualitative researcher wishes to permit as much flexibility into the judgements made about the world as possible. (1991: 23)

Textual analysis is an educated guess at the most likely interpretation/s of a text made by people who consume it (McKee 2004: 1). Problematically, different people interpret texts in different ways – so how do I determine the dominant interpretation? An ethnographic examination of *Stealth*'s readers might have proved useful, and indeed could have been possible due to the existence of *Stealth*'s online forum at [www.stealthmag.com](http://www.stealthmag.com). However, given the word limit of this thesis, and given my primary question of how subcultural authenticity is constructed within the magazine itself, this was not considered a necessary step.

Nevertheless, if I am exploring dominant ways of decoding *Stealth*, how can I say my own interpretations are valid? Stake believes the biggest problem with qualitative research is the issue of subjectivity (1995: 45). But a thorough knowledge of the wider context of this publication allows the interpreter to make an “educated guess” (McKee 2004: 1). An informed analysis can be achieved through interaction

with various theorists in the fields of music, subculture and media. This will provide contextual information on niche publications and subcultures, as well as the cultural context out of which the magazine was produced and to which it responded. This “educated guess” will be further refined through an interview with Mark Pollard (see Appendix), who was able to provide contextual information on the magazine itself and the hip hop subculture. It may seem strange to interview only one person, but no others have contributed to the magazine to anywhere near the same degree and over the entire period of *Stealth*'s publication, and could therefore not provide the same degree of insight.

The following chapter begins to establish this theoretical and contextual framework for an analysis of *Stealth* by exploring existing literature in the field of subcultural studies.

# I

## SUBCULTURES AND THE MEDIA

In the early academic work on subcultures, scholars such as Dick Hebdige (1979) and the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) define subcultures as movements of resistance which exist outside and in opposition to a generic mass media. Subcultures can more accurately be perceived as specific niche fragments of society which are inextricably interconnected with numerous forms of media (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004b: 10; Muggleton 2002: 134-43; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003b: 8; Sercombe 1999; Thornton 1996). While a plethora of conceptions of 'subculture' exist,<sup>2</sup> Sarah Thornton's definition is most useful for the purpose of this thesis:

[S]ubcultures are best defined as social groups that have been labelled as such [by the media]. This is the most convincing way to account for the fact that some cultural groupings are deemed subcultural while others ... are not ... Communications media create subcultures in the process of naming them and draw boundaries around them in the act of describing them. (1996: 162)

Problematically, this definition denies social actors of their own agency and assumes that communications media create bounded representations of stable subcultures. However, by positioning the media as primary disseminators of 'cultural knowledge', Thornton declares that the media are paramount in constructing and reflecting what is deemed 'authentic' in a youth subculture. This chapter provides a theoretical framework for exploring the complex relationship between the media and subcultures.

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<sup>2</sup> The primary concern of this thesis is with the relation of subcultures to the media, rather than specifically with subcultures. However, for more information on earlier conceptions of 'subculture' see Cohen (1987), Clarke et al (1976) and Hebdige (1979). More recent explorations of 'subculture' include Bennett (1999), Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004a), Gelder (2007), Hesmondhalgh (2005), Jenks (2005), Miles (2000), Muggleton (2002), Muggleton and Weinzierl (2003a), Nilan and Feixa (2006a) and Thornton (1996).

## Media Fragmentation

Late twentieth century academics generally ignore the interrelation between subcultures and the media, disregard the multidimensionality of media institutions, and portray the media as a relatively homogenous ‘mass media’ which bolsters the ideologies of society’s powerbrokers (see for example Clarke et al 19076; Cohen 1987; Hebdige 1979). A more complex view of the media and its relationship with various fragments of society allows for a more accurate examination of the interconnection between niche publications and notions of subcultural authenticity. Increasingly, the media is regarded as numerous highly fragmented and constantly changing institutions which cater to an abundance of narrowly targeted publics or audiences that are differentiated not only in terms of traditional divisions such as age, class and gender, but increasingly in terms of lifestyle and leisure choices (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 1-17, 271-88; Webster and Phalen 1997: 10).

The copious quantities of media texts in circulation do not simply reflect the social world without complication. Rather, while ‘reflecting’ the social world, they simultaneously construct, define, categorise, frame, interpret and evaluate, generating diverse and ideologically biased *representations* which aid in the construction of the ideologies of differentiated social groups and individuals (Branston and Stafford 2007: 11-14). Here I use John Hartley’s definition of ‘ideology’: “any knowledge [constructed by language] that is posed as natural or generally applicable, particularly when its social origins are suppressed” (Hartley 2002: 103).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The term ‘ideology’ is highly contested, and numerous definitions exist. As a theoretical concept, it comes from Karl Marx, who defined the term as the ruling (and naturalised) ideas of the ruling classes which permeate all levels of society (Marx 1977: 176, 389). However, in an examination of media constructions of subcultural ideology, which is considered ‘alternative’ rather than ‘dominant’, a more widely applicable and contemporary definition such as Hartley’s has proved more useful.

Multiple forms of media play different roles in the process of subcultural representation. David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl say that “various forms of media ... actually aid what are initially diverse and diffuse cultural fragments to cohere as recognizably defined subcultures” (2003b: 8). David Muggleton (2002: 134-43) and Thornton (1996: 116-62) argue that ‘mass’, ‘micro’ and ‘niche media’ each have distinctive relationships to musically based subcultures and their notions of authenticity, and that the particular relationship a text has with a subculture is directly related to its representation of that subculture and the formation of subcultural ideology. These media categories are not specifically defined, but the mass media they refer to seem to be media texts which are disseminated widely to a large national or international audience, while niche and micro-media are those texts which cater to specific niche audiences, with micro-media having a more limited circulation.

The mass media do not have a simple relationship of opposition or incorporation. Thornton argues that negative media coverage is, in fact, necessary for subcultures to be seen as resistant, and serves to “legitimize and authenticate youth cultures” (1996: 132; see also Muggleton 2002: 135).

While subcultural studies have tended to argue that youth subcultures are subversive until the very moment they are represented by the mass media ... here it is argued that these kinds of taste cultures ... become politically relevant only when they are framed as such. (Thornton 1996: 137)

Conversely, positive coverage by the mass media is seen negatively as a sign of that subculture ‘selling out’. Although, ironically, “subcultures that never go beyond their initial base market are ultimately considered failures” (Thornton 1996: 128).

Media with niche audiences have a decidedly different relationship with subcultures. Narrowly targeted, low-circulating micro-media such as fanzines have the most credibility among subcultural members. They are considered authentic components of cultural formations because they are seen as emerging from within

those formations (Duncombe 1997; Jenkins 1992; Williamson 2001), in that those producing them are subcultural members. Such media texts are seen as vital components within cultural networks which provide a sense of community and have “original motivations of networking and communicating” (Williamson 2001: 38). More widely disseminated niche media, which Thornton (1996: 153-5) and Muggleton (2002: 135) call the ‘subcultural consumer press’, are deemed to provide credible representations of subcultures because they affiliate themselves with subcultures, and because their staff are generally previous or existing members of similar subcultures. Such publications “categorize social groups, arrange sounds, itemize attire and label everything ... [T]hey do not just cover subcultures, they help construct them” (Thornton 1996: 151).

Niche publications such as fanzines and the subcultural consumer press, due to the credibility afforded them by subcultural members, are able to contribute to notions of subcultural authenticity. They are able to determine what is authentic and inauthentic in the process of covering and constructing subcultures.

### **Authenticity through Distinction**

‘Subcultural distinctions’ are the markers of subcultural authenticity (Thornton 1996: 6). Thornton states that hierarchical distinctions, which are used by subcultural members and appear in the form of binary oppositions, distinguish between who is ‘in’ and ‘out’, who is authentic and inauthentic, and hence draw boundaries around the subculture. They not only separate clubbers (who are the focus of her study) from ‘the rest’, they also generate highly stratified hierarchies within club cultures and determine who is a more authentic clubber. Thornton explores three

overarching hierarchical distinctions: the ‘authentic’ versus the ‘phoney’, the ‘hip’ versus the ‘mainstream’ and the ‘underground’ versus ‘the media’, and argues that ‘in’ clubbers associate themselves with the ‘authentic’, the ‘hip’, the ‘underground’, while ideologically separating themselves from those who are ‘out’ – the ‘phoney’, the ‘mainstream’, ‘the media’, the ‘other’. In an analysis of Thornton’s work, Muggleton and Weinzierl say this “attempt at demonstrating ‘distinction’ occurs through the construction of a commercialized subcultural or mainstream ‘Other’ as a symbolic marker against which to define one’s own tastes as ‘authentic’” (2003b: 10).

Thornton is borrowing from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984). He argues that the middle classes, who lay claim to political and economic power, legitimate their lifestyle and cultural tastes via access to symbolic or ideological control. They gain distinction for themselves by distinguishing their ‘legitimate’ tastes from those which are ‘illegitimate’. Status is maintained through the management of ‘cultural capital’ –those cultural labels, consumer goods or modes of behaviour, attitude and taste which are deemed legitimate. Those with more cultural capital have a higher cultural status.

Status within subcultures, on the other hand, is articulated by subcultural distinctions and gained by access to ‘subcultural capital’. Thornton says, “Subcultural capital confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder” (1996: 11). Those who are ‘in the know’, those who have the fashionable haircuts or the right record-collections, those who use the current slang or perform the grooviest dance styles while making it all appear like ‘second nature’, those who have access to subcultural fanzines and niche publications, are deemed to have more subcultural worth than those who do not. As a result, they are higher in subcultural capital, and a

higher (subcultural) social status is conferred upon them so that they are considered more 'authentic', 'hip' and 'underground' (Thornton 1996: 10-14).

These notions of authenticity are directly linked to the media, particularly the niche media which construct these distinctions in their representations of youth:

The stratifications of popular culture or ... would seem to operate in symbiotic relation to the media. This is not only to say that assorted media act as symbolic goods – bestowing distinction upon their owners/readers/listeners – but also to contend that the media are a network or institution akin to the education system in their creation, classification and distribution of cultural knowledge. (Thornton 1996: 161)

It is important not to deprive social actors of their own agency. However niche media are essential to subcultural members' perceptions of where they belong and what is authentic.

### **Ideological or Empirical**

The hierarchical distinctions of subcultural movements are not representative of empirical social groups, they are ideological constructs:

[Subcultural] dichotomies ... do not relate to the way dance crowds are objectively organized as much as to the means by which many youth cultures imagine their social world, measure their cultural worth and claim their subcultural capital. (Thornton 1996: 96)

The ideological subcultural distinctions that are constructed in media texts generate apparently well-defined and bounded 'ideal types'. Muggleton says:

The ideal type is the pure case, never actualised, uncluttered by extraneous attributes and ambiguities ... [Ideal types] cannot faithfully represent reality in all its confusion and complexity, but abstract from reality in a consistent manner those features most relevant to our interests. (2002: 15)

In other words, the notions of authenticity constructed in individual media texts generate ideological boundaries around a subculture and produce an 'ideal reader', an

ideal, imagined case that can only be known through the text and which conforms to the ideal notions of authenticity constructed in the text (see Hartley 1987; and 1999a).

Late twentieth century scholars of subculture have often taken the oppositional ideologies generated in media texts or by subcultural members at face value, such that a subculture's ideological opposition to (for example) the mainstream, the media or commerce is posited as social reality (see Clarke et al 1976; Hebdige 1979; McRobbie 1984; and 1991; Willis 1978). When actually applied to historically specific groups of youth, however, these binaries quickly crumble. For instance, definitions of what is deemed subcultural or mainstream will differ greatly amongst individuals and media texts, serving to implode apparently stable boundaries (Christenson and Peterson 1988: 298; Thornton 1996: 96-7). Peter G. Christenson and Jon Brian Peterson analyse gendered accounts of the term 'mainstream' and argue that "for males the label *mainstream* is essentially negative, a synonym for *unhip* ... For females ... mainstream is another way of saying *popular* music" (1988: 298). Moreover, members of what might be labelled a 'subculture' are incredibly diverse, fragmented and mobile, with a vast range of fluid interests and cultural affiliations (Muggleton 2002; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003b: 3). For instance, Muggleton's (2002) interviews with a selection of youths revealed their wide range of labels like 'hippy', 'punk' or 'hippy-punk', as well as their diversity of dress styles and musical interests. He concluded that there is no typical subcultural member. In fact, the fragmentation of the concept of a mass society has ensured that there is no coherent dominant culture against which subcultural resistance can be expressed, and consequently the boundary between subculture and dominant culture is infinitely fluid (Chaney 2004: 47; Grossberg 1987; Muggleton 2002: 48). Chris Jenks argues that the term

‘subculture’ can be seen as a form of conceptual packaging, a way in which to categorise and bundle up a diverse range of individuals (2005: 144).

However, just as it is problematic to objectively posit subcultures as stable empirical groups, so too is it fallacious to see ideological representations or mediated constructions of different subcultures as stable, static or well-bounded. This is the major flaw in the work of Thornton (1996) – she assumes that multiple media texts concurrently construct and structure well-defined entities or representations from real yet highly fluid cultural fragments. However, subcultural distinctions and notions of authenticity can change diachronically and synchronically, and within the highly nebulous boundaries of what might be labelled a subculture there can be several ideal types or several competing notions of authenticity, showing that the once structurally grounded concept of subculture is becoming increasingly problematic (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004b: 11-12).

Different media texts construct (and reflect) an unknowable network of ideological representations, leading David Chaney to claim that “any confidence in a shared space with commonly recognized features has ... evaporated” (2004: 48). Most scholars, however, explore this multiplicity from the perspective of social actors, not media texts. In a process he coins ‘D.I.Y. (Do-It-Yourself) Citizenship’, John Hartley argues that postmodern individuals interact with this vast network of mediated representations (which he calls the ‘mediasphere’) to construct their own ideological notions of identity (1999b: 178-87), or, in the case of subcultural members, authenticity. Due to this diversity of ideological viewpoints, Pam Nilan and Charles Feixa (2006b: 1-13) argue that youths inhabit plural worlds simultaneously, such that an individual is “reflexively constituting his or her subjectivity in a range of local, regional and global identity discourses” (2006: 4). Muggleton (2002) examines a

range of individuals who consider themselves members of different subcultures, and shows that, rather than having one ideal type in regards to subcultural authenticity, there are at least two acting simultaneously: a modernist ideal type which stresses authenticity through collectivism; and a postmodernist ideal type which stresses individuality. Within the fluid boundaries of a subculture, numerous competing notions of authenticity (constructed in and reflected by a myriad of media sources) can exist simultaneously.

This concept is complicated further by Donald Matheson's argument that even an individual media text can present a plethora of diverse and competing ideological viewpoints. Individual texts like consumer magazines "perform on a number of levels – levels which need not make up a single coherent reading position" (2005: 57). This level of complexity will be shown to be apparent in *Stealth*.

However, such complexity does not necessitate a complete re-evaluation of subcultural distinctions. Rather, Muggleton and Weinzierl argue that ideological and mediated "boundaries that establish subcultural identities have not disappeared. Instead ... they are continually shifting and being redrawn through disputes over taste and sensibilities" (2003b: 19).

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Notions of subcultural authenticity are inextricably intertwined with numerous forms of media. Through the use of subcultural distinctions, niche publications reflect and construct a complex network of concepts of authenticity. However, in order for youths to regard an individual publication's representations as credible, the publication must first establish itself as an authentic cultural artefact by establishing a

relationship of trust between itself and its readership. The following chapter will move away from the general and towards the specific case study of *Stealth*, so as to explore how the magazine establishes itself as an authentic piece of subcultural capital.

## II

### **STEALTH: AN AUTHENTIC CULTURAL ARTEFACT?**

In order for *Stealth* to reflect and construct notions of authenticity, the magazine and its staff need to develop a relationship of trust with their readership (Abrahamson 2007: 667-70; Holmes 2007: 510-18; Le Masurier 2007: 128-37). A circular logic exists here: the magazine must be regarded by subcultural members as an authentic cultural artefact which acts as subcultural capital if it is to be given the authority to determine the subcultural distinctions of authenticity. Exploring how *Stealth* forges a particular relationship with its readers will allow us to examine how this magazine is imbued with the authority to determine what is authentic for its readership.

#### **“Magazine Exceptionalism”: Specialist Publications and Niche Audiences**

Magazines are different to other media forms because they have a particularly unique relationship with their audiences, a fact which remains largely unrecognised or underrepresented in the academic community (Holmes 2007: 510). David Abrahamson calls this relationship “magazine exceptionalism” (Abrahamson 2007: 667-70).

The postmodern, post-Fordist transformation (in the 1960s and 1970s) from mass production, mass consumption and mass markets to niche markets meant that consumer goods were increasingly aimed at particular lifestyle groups (Abrahamson 2007: 669; Bell and Hollows 2005: 1-4; Le Masurier 2007: 133). As a result, the majority of (if not all) magazines can increasingly be defined as narrow-casted, highly

specialised publications which cater to particular niches.<sup>4</sup> While other media forms have niche audiences, Abrahamson argues that magazines are exceptional because they *specialise* in the world of the niche, and they “have a special role in their readers’ lives, constructing a community or affinity group in which the readers feel they are members” (Abrahamson 2007: 669). Megan Le Masurier argues that magazines focus “on readership communities that [can] form around special interests, lifestyles, and clearly differentiated formations based on class, age, gender and taste” (2007: 133). A successful magazine will create or target its own independent readership, and will generate a bond of trust with that specific group by basing its content on the interests of that group, so that readers will personally identify with the magazine (Holmes 2007: 514, Jackson et al 2001: 48).

Mark Pollard is the editor and CEO of *Stealth*. Although the occasional freelancer has contributed journalism throughout *Stealth*’s fourteen issues, Pollard’s contribution to the magazine outweighs that of anyone else. The magazine was his own idea, self-funded and under his control. He believes the publication has carved out a particular niche market for itself. Certain elements of this niche are noteworthy. *Stealth* has never been audited, so it is difficult to know how many people read the publication and to determine the size of its niche market. Pollard states that he printed anywhere from 1,500 copies (in the earlier, smaller circulation issues) to 10,000 copies (in the later issues), of which he would sell about 75 per cent. However, “in terms of readers per copy [which refers to an estimated average of how many people’s hands each individual magazine passes through] it is hard to tell because we were never audited”. This niche market has an interest in hip hop. Pollard says, “the

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<sup>4</sup> This definition is certainly broad, but is more than adequate for a thesis which is concerned with the notion of the niche. For an exploration of the conceptual difficulties in regards to defining the term ‘magazine’ and debates surrounding the concept, see: Abrahamson (2007), Holmes (2007), Le Masurier (2007), Leslie (2003), and Losowsky (2007).

magazine is aimed at good people who happen to be into hip hop”. Furthermore, this niche for *Stealth* exists primarily in Australia. Pollard states that the magazine has been sold in newsagents and music stores in New Zealand, Japan, England, Canada and North America, but this distribution was only sporadic. His focus was always on an Australian audience, meaning that the ideal niche readership he carved out for himself was certain members of the Australian hip hop subculture.

However, *Stealth* is not the only publication sold in Australia which has catered to the (Australian) hip hop subculture. *Stealth* has competed with international magazines such as *The Source*, *HHC*, *XXL* and *Stress Magazine*, as well as local Australian zines or magazines such as *Hype*, *Vapors*, *Blitzkrieg*, *Slingshot* and *Acclaim*. Each of these magazines has (or had) a slightly different focus and hence a slightly different relationship with their specific niche, though different niche markets would often overlap. Pollard compares his niche with that of *Acclaim*, a Melbourne based magazine which has similar style and content to *Stealth* but a different:

idea of authenticity ... We [Pollard and the editor of *Acclaim*] seemed to attract different groups of people. There was a small overlap, but we had our own groups of people that we naturally gravitated towards, based upon our own individual personalities.

Of course, *Stealth* would have competed with other non-hip-hop publications such as music magazines like *Rolling Stone*, but the fact that *Rolling Stone* covers a wider range of musical genres would mean a small overlap in readership.

Magazines rely on a close relationship with a certain niche market. But how is this relationship actually attained? Thornton states that niche publications “accrue credibility by affiliating themselves with subcultures” (Thornton 1996: 155). This affiliation is achieved by removing the “journalistic distance” championed by the traditional world of news journalism (Abrahamson 2007: 669), such that the editors

and writers of a magazine put themselves in the shoes of their ideal reader. Le

Masurier says:

Editing and writing for magazines is an exercise in imaginative specificity, of making choices ... from a clearly defined social and cultural space that (it is imagined) readers too imagine themselves as occupying. (2007: 134; also see Morrish 2003: 41)

This blurs the boundary between producer and consumer and forges a bond of trust between the two. The idea is that ‘we’ (the staff) are ‘you’ (the reader) (Le Masurier 2007: 134).

Often the connection between the producer and consumer is more than imaginative. Editors and writers of magazines often share the backgrounds and interests of the niche markets to/for/about whom they write (Abrahamson 2007: 669; Johnson and Prijatel 2006: 150; Le Masurier 2007: 135; Thornton 1996: 153; also see Atton 2002; Duncombe 1997; Jenkins 1992; McLaughlin 1996; Williamson 2001). In the case of *Stealth*, Pollard says that the magazine has had:

a closer relationship to the hip hop subculture because the people working on it had a closer relationship to the subculture ... I always wanted to have a little bit more of a representation of people who were actually more actively involved.

Pollard considers himself an ardent member of the Australian hip hop subculture – he could be considered an avid (even obsessed) fan or *aficionado*. His involvement includes: rapping and writing graffiti from age thirteen; hosting Sydney’s hip hop radio show *The Mothership Connection* (on 2SER, 107.3FM) in 1998; teaching inner city youths about hip hop at a Sydney youth centre called Cell Block; writing hip hop related articles for several publications including *3D World* and *Impress*; and producing Sydney’s *Stealth* magazine almost single-handedly.

The motivations behind *Stealth* magazine derive from a genuine concern for the Australian hip hop scene. The American magazine scholar Samir Husni believes

that editors of magazines fall into one of two camps, “the merchants”, who regard publishing as a job, and “the missionaries”, who are emotionally tied to their magazine and believe it will have a positive impact on their relevant social world (2007: 11-18). Pollard fits into the category of missionary. He claims that the aims (and accomplishments) of his magazine are: to represent the unrepresented; to create a sense of community and belonging throughout the world of hip hop, where reading the magazine makes you feel connected to other unknown people who might read it; to galvanise the local scene and give a positive face to a subculture that was originally frequented by “misfits”, “outsiders” and “underdogs”. He admits that this magazine has been as much about self-expression as representing the subculture, but emphasises his belief that what interests him will interest his reader (due to his own considerable involvement in the local scene).

Although the notion of “‘we’ are ‘you’” (Le Masurier 2007: 129) is essential for *Stealth* to be considered an authentic source of cultural knowledge, the position of the magazine and its staff needs to convey the authoritative status of the ‘expert’. The notion of ‘journalistic distance’ in traditional news journalism lessens the importance of the involved expert (Abrahamson 2007: 669), but in the case of specialised journalism, and in particular music journalism, the readers expect someone who is not only interested in the topic, but who is knowledgeable and highly involved (Brennan 2007: 437-8). This is particularly important because magazine readers are often “specialists” themselves (Holmes 2007: 511). Thomas McLaughlin argues that, in the case of niche publications such as fanzines, the “editors and writers may legitimately be thought of as ‘elite fans’, fans who have accumulated textual and historical expertise that places them above the average couch potato” (McLaughlin 1996: 76; see also Hills 2002: 16-17). These elites, who Matt Hills calls ‘academic-fans’ (Hills

2002: 16-17; and see also 2007), do not accumulate status through educational accomplishments or social background, as is the case with elites of ‘legitimate culture’ like academics or traditional journalists. Rather, their status is achieved by their access to that-which-is-deemed-legitimate by those for/to/about whom they write (Atton 2002: 153). Access to subcultural capital, for example, confers the legitimacy to speak authoritatively and determine what is authentic (Maxwell 2001).

By putting experiences and opinions in a publication, the editor is automatically permitting him/herself to speak authoritatively (Atton 2002: 67). Moreover, in the Question and Answer (Q and A) style interviews in *Stealth*, the questions (which most clearly portray the voice of *Stealth*’s expert staff) bolster this authority by indicating access to subcultural capital. Two excerpts from *Stealth* Q and A’s can make the point here:

I notice that most of your shows are with other ‘two turntable and a microphone’ type hip hop artists whereas some bands that work with hip hop use the live instrument element to really focus away from a traditional (live) hip hop audience. What are your thoughts on this? (Pollard 2003c: 25)

Swarmy, at the start of 2006 you released your own solo project titled *The Appetiser* EP. What made you focus on a solo release before the crew’s LP? (Izzo 2007: 37)

These questions signify: knowledge of artists’ songs, albums and performance techniques; familiarity with musical and hip hop related jargon such as “LP”, “EP” and “crew”; and an understanding of trends in hip hop, such as the discussion of traditional and alternative modes of performance.

In general, magazines foster a specific relationship with a particular niche through a blurring of the consumer and producer (Le Masurier 2007: 134-5). One cannot ignore the fact that entertainment is the major factor which draws readers to such texts, and it is this vector of pleasure which essentially allows a relationship of trust to be forged (Holmes 2007: 510). However, it is the particular and intimate

relationship that subcultural publications fashion with a defined readership which provides them with the credibility to reflect and define notions of subcultural authenticity.

### ***Stealth: Zine or Consumer Magazine?***

Because the term ‘magazine’ is applicable to such a vast array of publications, there have been attempts to classify magazines into several sub-genres, including: consumer magazines, zines, fanzines, microzines, customer magazines and e-zines (Holmes 2007; Leslie 2003; Jacovides 2003; Losowsky 2007; Thornton 1996). However, the boundaries of these classifications are highly fluid. It is difficult to place *Stealth* into one particular category.

Pollard says that over its nine year lifespan, *Stealth* gradually transformed from a fanzine into a consumer niche publication. Fanzines are generally defined as non-commercial, highly specialised texts written by fans of particular social phenomena which stress a Do-It-Yourself ethic and have limited, localised circulation. They are generally composed by a single individual or a small group of people who produce, publish and distribute the text themselves and who see themselves as actively participating in the community they are writing for/about/to (Duncombe 1997; Haegele 2007; Jenkins 1992; Poletti 2008; Williamson 2001). Chris Atton stresses the concept of the ‘personal’: “the fanzine is as much to do with expressing that editor’s own desires, opinions and beliefs on a chosen topic as it is about informing or educating – or even communicating to – others” (2002: 55; see also

Poletti 2008).<sup>5</sup> Consumer magazines, on the other hand, are usually defined as widely distributed publications which foster particular relationships with niche markets through their editorial. Their staff ‘sell’ these specialised markets to advertisers, whose advertisements – which generally fill about 40 per cent of the pages of commercial texts (McKay 2006: 145) – have the potential power to influence editorial content (Holmes 2007: 515; Le Masurier 2007: 129-32; Leslie 2003).<sup>6</sup> Selling to advertisers is not the only function of consumer publications of course, but the relationship with advertisers and the role of advertising in the continuation of the publication is essential. An examination of *Stealth*’s lifespan shows what might be seen as a fanzine-to-consumer magazine transition, as Pollard claims, but a closer inspection reveals that elements of both genres have existed in each of its publications.

Issues one to three (1999a; 1999b; and 2000) seem to particularly reflect the elements of a fanzine. Issue one (1999a), for example, has poor production quality, numerous spelling mistakes, no page numbers, only twenty-eight pages, segments of text missing, black-and-white matte pages, and the kind of self-interested comments you might read in a zine such as, “This is raw, opinionated self-expression” (Bloxta 1999: 21). This issue also had a limited circulation, in that about 1,500 were printed, of which about 75 per cent were sold (primarily through ‘underground’ modes of self-distribution like the mail, rather than through newsagencies). In comparison, issue fourteen (2007) was printed using high quality digital technology, with a hundred

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<sup>5</sup> The term ‘fanzine’ and its definition have been debated by several scholars. However, I have focused only on those aspects which relate to *Stealth* magazine, due to my specific concentration on this particular cultural product. Further information regarding contentions surrounding the term can be found by reading Atton (2002), Duncombe (1997), Haegle (2007), Jacovides (2003), Jenkins (1992), McLaughlin (1996), and Williamson (2001). Perhaps the most thorough (and contemporary) exploration of debates is conducted by Anna Poletti (2008).

<sup>6</sup> Again, for the sake of specificity, in my definition of ‘consumer magazine’ I have concentrated only on those features which I believe are relevant to *Stealth*, rather than providing an extensive summary of relevant literature. A more in depth analysis of ‘consumer magazine’ as both a term and a media form is constructed in Abrahamson (2007), Holmes (2007), Jackson et al (2001), Le Masurier (2007), Leslie (2003), Losowsky (2007) and Monteyne (2002).

thoroughly edited (and numbered) glossy colour pages and a much larger print run of about 10,000 copies which were distributed via international media companies like Tower Records and sold in newsagents and music stores. This does not fit the fanzine definition.

A closer inspection of the magazine and its production, however, reveal similar fanzine elements throughout each issue.<sup>7</sup> First and foremost, Pollard states that in all issues his own contribution outweighed that of any others to such an extent that he could almost be labelled the publication's sole contributor. His passion for the hip hop subculture was soon eclipsed by his passion or "obsession", as he says, for the magazine itself. He worked up to 600 hours per magazine and had his hand in all levels of production, publishing and distribution:

Apart from other people helping out from time to time it was pretty much just me, because I did everything. I did the advertising, I sold the ads, I designed it, I wrote the majority of it [using my real name Mark Pollard or my pen name LoQuay], I organised the distribution, I did all the invoicing, I did all the sales, I packed all the subscriptions up in envelopes (with my wife) ... it was a lot of work.

Furthermore, in a consideration of commercial aspects, Pollard says that he was never able to quit his day job. *Stealth* had to remain a hobby rather than a vocation. The magazine was often funded from his savings and he was rarely able to pay anybody for their contribution, so it could not be said that he had a 'staff' (as traditionally understood as paid full, part-time or freelance employees). And, most importantly, the magazine never made an overall profit yet has stayed in production for nearly ten years.

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<sup>7</sup> An examination of the catalogues of all Australia-wide libraries reveals that only the National Library of Australia in Canberra has an archive of *Stealth* magazine, and even that was incomplete. It holds issues four to seven (2000b; 2001a; 2001b; 2002) and nine to thirteen (2003b; 2003c; 2004a; 2004b; 2005). The lack of earlier issues (as well as the absence of issues in other Australian libraries) perhaps indicates that *Stealth* is not regarded as a consumer magazine but a zine of sorts, at least in earlier issues, because zines tend to not be archived in libraries. My own textual analysis had to be conducted on the copies personally owned by Mark Pollard.

On the other hand, analysing *Stealth* from the perspective of the advertising it contains certainly reveals elements of the consumer magazine, particularly in later publications. The appearance of well-known, corporate advertisers from issue six (2001b) onwards seems to infer a change in the magazine's direction. These major advertisers include TDK (2001b: back cover; 2002: back cover), Yellow Pages (2001b: 5), Red Bull (2003b: back cover) and Sprite (2003b: front cover, 1; 2003c: 36-7). Pollard stresses that at no time did he allow such advertisers to influence editorial content and that the profits gained were used to benefit the magazine. (For instance, the profit gained from the Sprite advertisements was used to generate a more up-market interface.) Many large-scale corporate advertisers were turned away because they wished to bully editorial. Furthermore, the appearance of major advertisers in *Stealth* is limited to one or two per issue, if they are allowed at all.

Nevertheless, every issue contains numerous advertisements from smaller-scale advertisers connected to the subculture such as music stores, hip hop clothing labels, radio shows and local record companies. Figure 1 indicates the percentage of ads per issue and the advertising/editorial ratio in each magazine:

**Figure 1**

Issue	Pages	Full Pg Ads	1/2 Pg Ads	1/4 Pg Ads	%age Ads	Ad/Ed Ratio
1 (1999a)	28	4	5	7	29.46%	~29/71
2 (1999b)	30	7	4	4	33.33%	~33/67
3 (2000a)	40	5	4	3	19.38%	~19/81
4 (2000b)	84	7	5	4	12.50%	~13/87
5 (2001a)	82	9	7	5	16.77%	~17/83
6 (2001b)	84	8	8	4	15.48%	~15/85
7 (2002)	86	10	13	0	19.19%	~19/81
8 (2003a)	84	12	4	8	19.05%	~19/81
9 (2003b)	76	14	2	6	21.71%	~22/78
10 (2003c)	76	13	4	4	21.05%	~21/79
11 (2004a)	76	9	16	5	24.01%	~24/76
12 (2004b)	108	15	9	4	18.98%	~19/81
13 (2005)	108	12	17	1	19.21%	~19/81
14 (2007)	100	10	12	2	16.50%	~17/83

\*Artist/album reviews and competitions/giveaways, though advertisements of a sort, were not counted.

This table implies that all issues were, to some extent, commercially oriented. But it also suggests that later issues were no more consumer magazines than earlier ones, as defined by the level of advertising pages. If anything, these figures show that the opposite is true, since the first two issues (1999a and 1999b) have the highest ratio of ads. Plus, the amount of advertisements in each issue is considerably small for a consumer magazine, as the average advertising/editorial ratio is 40/60 (McKay 2006: 145).

Pollard admits that there is certainly “a symbiotic relationship between editorial and revenue” in that he might write articles about the (hip-hop-related) companies that were advertised. But he contends that he would only allow ads to affect editorial content if they were “connected to the subculture and of value to the reader”. The fact that the magazine never turned a profit from advertising demonstrates that the purpose of advertisements was not to generate fiscal return. Pollard states, “The decision I made five years ago to go full time with work [at the design company Leo Burnett in Sydney] gave me an excuse to not take too much advertising, to not be more commercially oriented”.

*Stealth* certainly underwent transition and growth in several areas, yet it remained trapped between the poles of avoiding and embracing commercial orientation. From its inception the magazine had several features of the traditional consumer magazine. Viewing recent issues on the stands of a newsagent would conjure images of a widely-distributed, professional publication, due mainly to the sleek colour covers. But even the earliest issues had well-produced colour covers, because, as Pollard recalls, by 1999 (when *Stealth* first emerged) affordable and readily available design software for home computers was at industry standards, so that it was effectively possible to make a quality magazine in your lounge room.

Figure 2:





\* Left to right, top to bottom: Issues one to fourteen (1999a; 1999b; 2000a; 2000b; 2001a; 2001b; 2002; 2003a; 2003b; 2003c; 2004a; 2004b; 2005; 2007)

The difference with *Stealth* is that the personal element, usually a means to an end in commercially-oriented texts (Holmes 2007: 515), remains incredibly resilient in the figure of Mark Pollard. Even as the magazine grew, he remained the obsessed fanzine writer, “the missionary” (Husni 2007: 11-18), who was passionate about the magazine, his audience, his own self-expression and hip hop. This corresponds with Anna Poletti’s arguments regarding the personal nature of zines as sites of autobiography and self-expression (2008). While readers may not be actually aware of what goes on behind the scenes, it is this highly intimate relationship that Pollard has with *Stealth* that allows him to be more responsive to the desires and interests of his readership (Jenkins 1992: 159). In turn, this further facilitates a relationship of trust between the magazine and its readers, providing *Stealth* with the authority to reflect and construct cultural knowledge.

## Question and Answer Interviews and Interview Subjects

A personal and unique relationship between *Stealth* and its readership is further developed by the utilisation of Question and Answer (Q and A) interviews as the primary mode of feature writing. Pollard provides his motives for employing this genre:

The fly-on-the-wall, here's-the-question-here's-the-answer format is what the reader wants ... It's about being close to the artist and the culture; it's about letting the reader see what is going on without the veil of the journalist ruining it. The interviewer is not storyteller; they are facilitator of the interview subject's story.

This idea of unencumbered observation is largely a fiction, since the interviewer always controls the direction of the interview and what quotes go into the story. The sub-editor or editor also play a part in controlling the final copy (Bell and van Leeuwin 1994: 8-10, 23-6; DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006: 317). Nevertheless, the Q and A format gives the impression of unfettered insight into the subculture, making the publication seem more authentic to its readership and therefore providing *Stealth* with the authority to determine what is authentic and what is inauthentic.

Just as the notion of 'we' (the staff) are 'you' (the readers) is paramount in establishing a relationship of trust between magazine and reader (Le Masurier 2007: 134), so is the concept that 'we' (the staff) are interviewing or interacting with 'you' (the subculture). Pollard generally selected interviewees who were considered reputable members of the subculture. The Q and A interviews hence give the impression of one expert (the interviewer) discussing hip hop with another expert (the interviewee), giving the magazine the credibility to determine cultural knowledge and allowing the social actors interviewed to provide a perspective on their "field of expertise" (Bell and van Leeuwin 1994: 22). In each Q and A article, this expertise is

established by indicating the subject's access to subcultural capital. For example, discussing the skill and subcultural accomplishments of the interviewees is the most obvious method: "Next is also an accomplished DJ ... [He] has placed first in Adelaide's DMC finals for the last 3 years" (Wray 1999: 11). Recounting the person's contribution to the hip hop subculture is another effective way of establishing authority: "Few Australian crews have had the impact, influence and stature of Def Wish Cast. [They are] respected and revered at home and internationally" (Size 13 2007: 67). Technical or hip hop jargon also conveys expertise. For instance, DJ Nikk C of The Coalition says, "Currently my turntable, MPC and midi controllers are all synched up to Ableton Live 4. All my recording and looping is triggered from midi keys and MPC pads" (LoQuay 2005: 33). Naming other reputable hip hop figures with whom they have worked can serve to entrench interview subjects within such a respectable network. Rapper Freddie Foxxx says:

I have been around a lot of producers over the years and I took a little from everyone I have worked with, a little Herbie Luv Bug, a little Primo, a little Pete, a little Alchemist. (Brown 2001: 33)

Finally, respect is awarded to those who have been involved in the subculture for a significant amount of time, such as graffiti artist Spice One: "What was it that captured your heart to the point where 17 years on you are still painting [graffiti]" (N/a 2000c: 71).

The coverage of all people interviewed is consistently positive. Pollard avoids the role of the objective or critical journalist/editor and adopts the position of advocate. Jim Willis explains, "[a]n advocacy journalist is one who goes beyond the line of objectivity to promote or champion a particular cause" (Willis 2003: 10). Interviews always promote hip hop as well as the artist(s) in question:

Defwish and Die C have been together – and connected to hip hop – for years. Known for their livewire ethos of not just doing things right but doing things

explosively, the group they formed over two years ago is currently upping the voltage and brewing a worldwide electrical storm. (Pollard 2000: 21)

Such positive coverage clearly signals an immediate and favourable affiliation with the subculture.

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By positively covering interview subjects, by establishing both the journalist and the interviewee as authoritative voices, by generating a particular relationship with a specific niche through the blurring of producer and consumer, and by remaining responsive to its audience (despite commercial pressures) through the ‘zinester’-like zeal of Mark Pollard, *Stealth* establishes itself as an authentic cultural artefact acting as subcultural capital. It is this authoritative position that allows the magazine to determine authenticity through subcultural distinctions. The following chapter will explore these subcultural distinctions in detail through a close textual analysis of *Stealth*.

### III

#### **STEALTH: DISTINCTIONS OF AUTHENTICITY**

Subcultural members assert their subcultural status through their access to subcultural capital (those labels, goods and behaviour which are deemed legitimate). Subcultural distinctions, which are themselves a form of subcultural capital, distinguish the included from the excluded, the hierarchically superior from the hierarchically inferior. However, in order for members to be hierarchically superior, a fine-tuned knowledge of what is 'in' or authentic and what is 'out' or inauthentic is paramount. This awareness is ascertained through interaction with numerous media texts which construct and reflect subcultural distinctions (and hence notions of authenticity) in their representations of youth (Thornton 1996).

The Australian hip hop subculture utilises distinctions in order to draw fluid boundaries around *ad hoc* communities. This is a local form of a global musical culture which has predominantly African-American and Afro-Caribbean roots and involves numerous cultural elements, including rapping (or MC-ing), DJ-ing, breakdancing, graffiti-writing, producing and beatboxing.<sup>8</sup> The local subculture was not created through a continuity of experience or history as was the case in the United States, which is arguably the centre of hip hop. Rather it was generated through an instantaneous engagement with various forms of media – the music, of course, but also through texts which covered the foreign hip hop subculture (such as the 1981

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<sup>8</sup> This paper is concerned with one particular publication's representations of this cultural formation, rather than with representations in general or with a comprehensive account of Australian hip hop and its practitioners. All references to the subculture will be directly related to the distinctions uncovered in *Stealth*. For more in depth academic accounts of the Australian subculture, see Maxwell (2001; and 2003), Mitchell (1996; 2001; 2003a; 2003b; 2007a; and 2007b), and Mitchell and Pennycook (2007). Explorations of global hip hop or hip hop in America are numerous, and a number of academic debates exist, but some sources which discuss prominent hip hop related issues are: Forman (2002; and 2004), Forman and Neal (2004), George (1999), Huq (2006; and 2007), Keyes (2004), Lipsitz (2001), Mitchell (1996), Osumare (2008), Perry (2004).

American film *Buffalo Gals*, which featured graffiti and breakdancers), and eventually through texts which reflected and constructed home-grown hip hop. The media, present from the inception of this indigenised culture, are therefore connected to its construction (Maxwell 2003: 69-70).

*Stealth* magazine, while not present at the birth of Australian hip hop, is one such media text which reflects and constructs notions of authenticity through subcultural distinctions. As a magazine which has been sold in small numbers internationally and which also covers foreign hip hop cultures, these distinctions certainly have relevance beyond Australia. However, *Stealth*'s editor Mark Pollard claims that an Australian audience was his primary focus. This chapter will concentrate on Australian interviews, which will allow a more specific exploration of notions of authenticity from a largely Australian perspective.

The most prevalent distinctions apparent in each issue are complex, ambiguous and contradictory. They reveal that the ideal or authentic reader is multiple and varied, and that within a magazine there are numerous ideal types (Matheson 2005: 59). While the distinctions uncovered in *Stealth* are ideological formations which simplify social reality for the sake of determining and legitimating the authentic, they are nonetheless more than mere binaries which have an implied 'us' and 'them' status. Having said this, an initial framing of these distinctions as simplistic oppositions will provide a base from which to explore their complexities. This chapter will examine how hierarchies of authenticity are produced and reproduced out of these binaries. As Patrick Fuery and Nick Mansfield argue, "[t]he twin terms of binarism are normally seen as a hierarchy in which one term is superior to another" (2001: 62). *Stealth*'s primary distinctions can generally be classified as: 'hip hop' versus 'the rest', 'underground' versus 'mainstream', 'local' versus 'global',

‘independent’ versus ‘commercial’, where the former is frequently (though by no means always) seen as more authentic than the latter. These distinctions, as well as their logics and roots, will be explored via a close textual analysis of *Stealth*’s Q and A interviews in order to examine how conceptions of authenticity are both reflected and constructed.

### **‘Hip Hop’ versus ‘the rest’**

Since *Stealth* is a hip hop magazine, it seems a truism that ‘hip hop’ would be deemed hierarchically superior to or more authentic than ‘that-which-is-not-hip-hop’. While that-which-is-not-hip-hop, or ‘the rest’, is often not specifically cited, the positive connotations surrounding the use of the term hip hop seem to distinguish the culture as a cohesive formation which is separate from and superior to non-hip-hop formations.

When cultural formations that exist outside the apparent boundaries of hip hop are mentioned, they are categorised negatively in the realm of the ‘mainstream’. This is particularly true of non-hip-hop musical cultures, such as ‘pop’, which is regarded as culturally hegemonic and homogenising (Light 2004; Perry 2004: 192), and it is these features which associate it with the negative mainstream (Huber 2005; Thornton 1996: 89-115). Artists often refer to pop music derogatively. For instance, MC Lazy Grey says, “Make hip hop not pop music” (Scheepers 2005: 56). Specifically in Australia, the pub rock scene or entrenched surfing culture can be described disapprovingly as hegemonic and homogenising. DJ Ransom of musical group Mnemonic Ascent complains that “[everything was] blonde dickheads with surfboards ... Everything was Dire Straits this and Midnight Oil that, shit was wack”

(Stewbakka 2001: 40). The magazine's focus, however, is primarily directed inwards at hip hop and its authenticity.

Interviewees are constantly associating themselves with hip hop in order to be considered authentic. The generic use of the classification 'hip hop' serves to define its boundaries as ideologically cohesive and self-contained, and this automatically separates hip hop from the rest. The collective Good Buddha stress their "love of hip hop" (Crossan 2002: 22) and graffiti artist Atome discusses his association with "straight up hip hop" (Pollard 2004a: 34). When Melbourne MC Dedlee states "he is hip hop" in reference to MC Prowla (Loko One 2003a: 18), he bestows a great deal of authenticity by entrenching the artist and his work firmly within hip hop's apparently cohesive boundaries.

Conversely, while the use of the label 'hip hop' frequently engenders a bounded formation, on several occasions hip hop is championed as fluid and unbounded. This essentially distances hip hop from the mainstream (and its negative connotations of homogeneity) by defining hip hop as a heterogeneous and pluralistic cultural structure which promotes difference and individuality (Huber 2005; Thornton 1996: 89-115). For the sake of avoiding the label of 'mainstream', these notions of particularisation and heterogenisation have become particularly significant for Australian hip hop (Maxwell 2003: 19). The following positive comments regarding the fluidity of hip hop come from *Stealth* writer Stewbakka (in his interview with Mnemonic Ascent) and MC Intalect of hip hop group After Hours respectively: "Quality hip hop has no boundaries" (Stewbakka 2001: 39); and "Hip hop means a lot of different things to different people" (Cameron 2001: 21).

While it is often difficult to decipher whether the use of the term 'hip hop' refers to the music or the culture, the difference is sometimes made quite explicit. One

could compare the statement from the producer/MC/graffiti-artist/breakdancer Sereck of duo Celcius that “[hip hop]’s a lifestyle, [and] we’re livin’ it” (Lalabalavu 2000: 43) with MC Draino’s comment that “[for] Australian hip hop artists – the main focus is on the music” (Pollard 2003a: 22). The lack of specificity alternating with attempts at conclusive definition seem to be part of the attempt to complicate authenticity and thus inclusion into the subculture (and exclusion from it).

It is expected that authentic subcultural members ‘represent’ the culture while ‘staying true’ to the music. What it means to represent or stay true will change from person to person and over time, but Ian Maxwell (2001; and 2003) maintains that Australian subcultural members invoke an ideological, and largely undefinable, essence of hip hop, a transcendental concept which asserts that those who are authentic will automatically know when they are representing or staying true because they are in tune with the culture and the music. Such an essence is being invoked when breakdancing crew Wickid Force say, “[Y]ou [have to] feel it and respond with the music” (Blaze 2002: 52). This essence of hip hop makes the culture and music appear like two well-defined formations which have underlying universal principles and which bestow authenticity upon those who dwell within their boundaries.

However, when hip hop is defined as a culture or lifestyle, numerous complexities emerge. For instance, rather than being a cohesive cultural formation, hip hop consists of numerous independent-but-connected cultures – such as rapping (or MC-ing), DJ-ing, breakdancing, producing, beatboxing and graffiti-writing – which require their own sets of skills and knowledge, and provide separate points of entry into hip hop (Maxwell 2003: 51; Whiteley et al 2004: 9). Most frequently, when defined as a culture, hip hop refers to the meta-culture of hip hop. However, the separate elements of this culture are often described as distinct cultures. Wickid Force

are referring to breakdancing when they say, “it also helps people get a better understanding of our culture” (Blaze 2002: 53) and Atome is speaking about graffiti when he says, “it was a game between you and your friends and the culture itself” (Pollard 2004a: 37).

Furthermore, defining hip hop as a single culture becomes increasingly difficult when one recognises that hip hop cultures exist all over the globe. While hip hop is often cited as being born in the USA, its origins and influences are more diverse, and the globalisation of the subculture has led to further diversification (Keyes 2004: 17-98; Mitchell 1996: 193-201). Numerous academics (Forman 2002; and 2004; Mitchell 1996: 193-201; 2001; and 2007b; Mitchell and Pennycook 2007) argue that hip hop cannot be rooted in one place, and that it simultaneously refers to numerous cultures based in specific communities as well as a transcendental culture partaking in global flows. For example, when interviewer OHC says to MC Sleeping Monk, “You were first exposed to hip hop culture in ’83” (OHC 2003: 33), it has connotations of a generic and transcendental culture, while Sleeping Monk’s comment, “I wanna hopefully build something to help my hip hop community to get everything together” (Loko One 2001: 30), is much more specific. As a culture, hip hop can be ideologically posited as both a cohesive unit and a subculture with fluid boundaries.

Similarly, when hip hop refers to the musical genre, *Stealth* alternates between cohesion and fluidity. When ‘the music’ is posited as ideologically cohesive it serves to authenticate those who are included within its exclusive boundaries. By referring to his music as “hip hop” and “nothing else” (Scheepers 2005: 55), MC Lazy Grey grounds himself within the well-bounded realm of the authentic. However, as a musical genre hip hop is incredibly diverse and versatile, with a range of sub-genres

which vary greatly in form and content (Keyes 2004; Light 2004; Mitchell 2007a: 2-3). Expressing this fluidity serves to distinguish hip hop as a musical form which detests homogeneity and is hence authentic. For instance, DJ Intalect expresses this diversity when he says, “There’s always going to be a whole spectrum of different styles happening” (Cameron 2001: 21).

In *Stealth*, hip hop is positioned as hierarchically superior to the rest. In doing so, hip hop is ideologically positioned against the rest as a self-contained binary opposition, so that those who conform to its boundaries are definitively deemed authentic. However, fluidity is also emphasised, so that the connotations of homogeneity (which are unquestionably inauthentic) associated with the rest cannot be applied to hip hop. This apparently contradictory line of thought has been identified by Muggleton (2002) in his analysis of contemporary subcultural ideologies, where a modern ideal type (which stresses collectivism) and a postmodern ideal type (which stresses plurality) exist simultaneously.

### **‘Underground’ versus ‘Mainstream’**

Subcultural authenticity within musically based youth cultures is frequently defined against the ‘mainstream’. While this term is nearly impossible to define or accurately attribute to any specific cultural formation, its connotations of conformity, hegemony and monolithic culture are the antithesis of authentic subcultural formations (Huber 2005; Thornton 1996: 89-115).<sup>9</sup> Tony Mitchell (2003a; 2003b;

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<sup>9</sup> In academic and popular literature, the term ‘mainstream’ and its counterpart ‘underground’ have numerous definitions. I have come across few academic accounts (apart from Huber 2005; and Thornton 1996) which actually explore the complexities of these terms. For instance, Mitchell (2007b) talks of a mainstream without defining what he means by the term or exploring the complexity of the notion. I have taken my definition from Huber’s and Thornton’s discussions of musically based

2007a; and 2007b) argues that Australian hip hop distances itself from the mainstream by constantly associating itself with the term ‘underground’, which has connotations of particularity, heterogeneity, individuality and creativity. The subculture stresses a Do-It-Yourself, independent, anti-commercial, highly localised ethic, which correspond with notions of the underground (Light 2004; Mitchell 1996: 193-201; and 2003; Perry 2004). This is not because commercialisation or expansion (two concepts associated strongly with the mainstream) are negative *per se*, but because it is feared that ‘selling out’, or selling beyond your initial market base, can lead to a dilution of the music and the culture, where artists might succumb to commercial pressures and follow formulaic patterns rather than being ‘true’ to their own musical vision (Blair 2004; Light 2004; Osumare 2008: 267; Perry 2004). According to Maxwell, self-expression, or being “true to the music”, is the most essential element of underground hip hop authenticity (Maxwell 2003: 26, 122), and the conformist logic of the ideological mainstream is at odds with this. Hence the underground recurrently has positive connotations. For example, interviewer Reason refers to the Cannibal Tribe album *Misery* as “an underground classic for the true heads” (Reason 2003: 35) – this defines the underground as authentic.

The underground versus mainstream division not only separates hip hop from that-which-is-not-hip-hop, but generates hierarchies within the subculture’s volatile boundaries, where underground hip hoppers are deemed more authentic than those who are considered mainstream. For instance, “formulated pop bands” (LoQuay 2002a: 20), which seem to exist outside the fluid boundaries of hip hop, are derided as being too mainstream and conformist by the group Downsyde. Furthermore, American gangster rap, while a part of the global hip hop culture, is often classified

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mainstreams, because it is this definition of the mainstream (as a harbinger of homogeneity and conformity) which *Stealth* positions itself against most vehemently.

negatively as too mainstream due to a conception that it promotes commercialisation and formulaic music (Perry 2004: 191-203). Interviewer Crazy Mike speaks of “the tired clichés of ‘gangster rap’” (Crazy Mike 1999b: 10). While the labels ‘mainstream’ and ‘underground’ are not always invoked, notions of individuality, creativity and self-expression are *always* deemed hierarchically superior to notions of homogeneity and conformity.

In most interviews with Australian artists in *Stealth*, the interview subjects stress self-expression, uniqueness and individuality. Mass MC says “[my music] represents me. It’s a sort of insight into who I am” (N/a 1999c: 9); MC Suffa of the Hilltop Hoods argues that they had “total creative control and the time to make it exactly how we wanted it” (Wray 1999: 11); producer/MC Burna of trio Art of War says “[W]e’re just making music for ourselves and that’s what you’re gonna hear when you buy our albums” (Murphy 2005: 41); and rapper Hykoo believes he has a “signature sound” (Pollard 2007: 29). In fact, the authenticating nature of self-expression is so immense that artists who are not seen as existing completely within the boundaries of hip hop can still be authentic, so long as they are individualistic. For example, DJ Peril of the band 1200 Techniques says, “[Our music] was still unique and alternative. It was 50-60% hip hop but I thought, at the time, the way to get my foot in the door was to mix it up a bit” (Pollard 2004b: 49).

Any associations with conformity or homogeneity are avoided stringently. Musical artist Brad Strut states that he made a track against hip hoppers who were “just ripping off techniques ... [and who] weren’t chasing their own authentic sound” (Pollard 2001: 26); MC Muphin says, “I don’t like to feel pigeon-holed” (Pollard 2003b: 26); MC Genetik of duo Low Budget believes that a “great album doesn’t play

to the latest trends” (Stylelistiks 2007: 40). This establishes hierarchies within the subculture based upon ideological constructs of authenticity.

However, when artists like Lazy Grey claim that “this is hip hop” or that their music is “hip hop” and “nothing else” (Scheepers 2005: 55), they effectively assert that there is a definitive conception of hip hop with well-defined boundaries, and imply that, in order to be authentic, subcultural members should conform to it. Pollard explains this ambiguity in the following way:

There is the idea that even though people want to be individual, they also exist under this umbrella that is hip hop ... It’s the idea of being an individual that is part of the group.

### **‘Local’ versus ‘Global’**

As a subculture with foreign roots, the importance of establishing a ‘local’ identity is especially important for Australian hip hop. Mark J.V. Olson (1998) says that with musically-based subcultures, the importance of establishing geographical specificity for the sake of authenticity is paramount (see also Whiteley et al 2004). Murray Forman (2002; and 2004) argues that as hip hop became increasingly ‘global’, due to its expansion and diversification into numerous markets throughout the 1980s, authenticity was established in multiple global markets through grounding diverse subcultures in specific local geographical points of reference (see also Lipsitz 2001). Mitchell (1996: 193-201; 2001; 2007a; and 2007b) and Maxwell (2001; and 2003) argue that in order to transform ‘that thing’ into ‘our thing’ it was important for Australian hip hop to undergo a process of indigenisation and syncretism, where a foreign culture was imbued with local qualities, such as local music with Australian

accents and content relevant to Australia. As a result, the local, with its connotations of specificity and particularity, became an essential marker of authenticity.<sup>10</sup>

In *Stealth*, the local, referring either to specific cities such as Sydney, Melbourne or Adelaide, or to the Australian scene as a whole, is constantly associated with the authentic. Australian hip hoppers stress their connections with and adoration for their local city or town. MC Sinner says, “I love Western Sydney. My Druitt fuckin’ kicks. It’s straight up. People are real. There’s not many fake c^\*ts here” (Reason 2003: 35); MC Dedlee states, “I’m helping run a hip hop workshop in my hometown of Frankston at the moment called Street Science, and I’ve been encouraging all the dudes to write about their city, their environment, their way of life” (Loko One 2003a: 29). There is also a strong desire to differentiate specific locales from other regions in Australia. Jase of production crew Nuffsaid Productions says, “My intention was to establish Melbourne MC’s with their own product and identity, which could then create more opportunity for ... a distinct recognisable sound to Melbourne” (Pryor 2000: 24); while label owner/rapper Liones argues that Brisbane is “a smaller city than Melbourne and Sydney and that in itself has pros and cons” (DJ Groovy D 2004: 26). Placing specific areas in opposition to others can often serve to distinguish certain Australian locales as hierarchically superior to others. However, in most cases one gets the impression that it is the idea of representing the

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<sup>10</sup> My definitions of the ‘global’ as expansion and diversification into new markets, and the ‘local’ as the inward-looking concentration on areas of geographical specificity, are derived predominantly from Forman (2002; and 2004), Lipsitz (2001), Maxwell (2001; and 2003), Mitchell (1996; 2007a; and 2007b) and Mitchell and Pennycook (2007). These academics explore the local/global dichotomy in direct relation to the global spread of hip hop and its appropriation in geographic locales. Of course, this binary is linked to the more general concept of ‘globalisation’, and there are seemingly endless academic debates surrounding the local/global divide. Some useful sources include: Beynon and Dunkerley (2000), Golding and Harris (1997), Huq (2003), Klein (2002), Klein (2003), Nilan and Feixa (2006a), Tomlinson (1991) and Valdivia (2003). The primary point of debate concerns whether globalisation or the ‘global’ causes cultural imperialism and the homogenisation of ‘local’ culture, or if the ‘global’ and the ‘local’ are involved in a more complex process of hybridity, syncretism and cultural exchange.

local (regardless of where the local may be situated) which is authentic, rather than any actual location being deemed more authentic than another.

This concept of representing the local can be applied more generally to the Australian scene as well. Jase of Nuffsaid Productions says, “[W]ith every new track I try to keep an authentic Australian sound” (Pryor 2000: 25) and MC Hau of Canberra’s Koolism says, “You ... speak with an Australian accent, so you should rhyme in an Australian accent. It’s something to be proud of, because it’s fresh and pure” (Crazy Mike 1999b: 10).

Such emphasis on the local constructs notions of bounded local cultural formations. Yet the diverse nature of the local is also highlighted, so as to authenticate the local as non-mainstream and heterogeneous. Andrew ‘Quro’ Bradley of Sydney duo Reference Point and MC Sleeping Monk of the group Ear Infection say respectively: “The situation with people in Australia ... is that it’s so diverse” (Lam 2001: 24); “[In Australia] we all have our own style. None of us sound alike or flow alike” (Loko One 2001: 30).

Nevertheless, positioning the local as authentic or hierarchically superior does not necessarily deem the global (which, in *Stealth*, is typified by the expansion of hip hop music into new markets) as inauthentic. Imani Perry argues, and Pollard agrees, that this would be counterintuitive, since even underground people wish to become more popular and expand (Perry 2004: 192). In fact, local hip hop subcultures around the globe, including Australian hip hop, usually see themselves as forming part of a wider global hip hop culture which transcends place, and is often called the ‘hip hop nation’ (Forman 2002 and 2004; Forman and Neal 2004: 5-6, 57; Huq 2006: 132-3; Maxwell 2003; Mitchell 1996: 193-201; and 2001; Osumare 2008). In *Stealth*, while the local is paramount, the global is nevertheless often positioned favourably.

Musician Brad Strut says, “I just want it [Australian hip hop] to keep growing, I want our shit to get stronger” (Pollard 2001: 26) and MC Pressure of the Hilltop Hoods believes that “Australia easily has enough skills to compete worldwide” (Gee and Pollard 2003: 55).

However, in classifying the global positively, interview subjects like the duo Celcius almost always emphasise the local as more important: “You gotta represent your own but we’re trying ... to concentrate on Europe, LA and Canada, and England as well” (Lalabalavu 2000: 44). This allows artists to expand into new markets (and hence, it could be argued, to become more commercial); however, they remain affiliated with the specificity and particularity of the local or the underground, and hence avoid the apparent strictures of the mainstream, leading to positive classifications such as MC Morganics’ use of the term “underground international acts” (Iten 2003: 25).

Conversely, the global is sometimes classified as inauthentic, generally when expansion into new markets is seen to breed commercial conformity or when artists are seen as discarding the local for the sake of the global. In these cases, the global is usually posited as the United States. Pollard says that the United States has a wide range of hip hop cultures, ranging from “underground to mainstream”, but he continues that America is often ideologically positioned as the locus of the international music industry or “mainstream, global hyper-capitalism”, which authentic hip hoppers distance themselves from in order to avoid its apparently homogenising effects (see also Maxwell 2001; Mitchell 2007a; Osumare 2008; Perry 2004). For example, interviewer Crazy Mike believes:

an increasing amount of ... youths have been corrupted by the propaganda and false ideals created by the [global] mass-marketing of rap music in America, and exacerbated by the likes of multi-million dollar talentless performers.  
(Crazy Mike 1999b: 10)

More frequently, however, the classification of inauthentic is placed upon Australian hip hoppers who discard their connection with the local in order to emulate or become a part of the ideological global model of the United States. Mass MC says, “I’m not trying to go to America coz there’s people over here who wanna go there. Stay here and do it for your people, man” (N/a 1999c: 9); MC Tornts states, “There’s fake American accent homeboy geeks [in Australia] who think they’re from Brooklyn so I take the piss out of them” (DJ Brand 2003: 26). Nevertheless, this distancing from America performs as a broad ideological brushstroke, because individual American artists are often positively cited by artists like the Argonauts: “[Our] audio is very influenced by [American MC] KRS One” (DBP One 2003: 20). The ideological separation serves to imbue the local with authenticity and hence legitimates Australian hip hop.

While the local is continuously considered authentic, there are several occasions, particularly in issues one to five (1999a; 1999b; 2000a; 2000b; 2001a), where the local, or the Australian scene, is considered inferior to foreign or global scenes due to the local scene’s diminutive nature. For example, MC Macross Matrix says, “I hope it [the Australian scene] gets bigger and better, but the criteria for an underground explosion might not be there ... It might stay like now, active but dormant” (Crazy Mike 1999a: 29). From issue five onwards (2001a; 2001b; 2002; 2003a; 2003b; 2003c; 2004a; 2004b; 2005; 2007) one can notice a gradual diminishing of this sense of inferiority. MC Headlock of After Hours believes “[t]he scene has progressed ... I think it’s indicative of the Australian scene as a whole ... Aussie hip hop is really blowing up lately, and that is dope” (Cameron 2001: 21); rapper Die-C of hip hop collective Def Wish Cast contends that Australian hip hop is “getting a lot of exposure at the moment and the best way to ensure that continues is

to make sure the right messages are getting spread” (Size 13 2007: 69). This ideological transition can be attributed to a gradual development of the Australian scene. Both Pollard and Mitchell (2001; 2003b; 2007a; and 2007b) agree that due to commercial successes of Australian artists such as the Hilltop Hoods, the scene has, in recent years, become more popular, receiving a substantial increase in radio play. Mitchell notes that while the scene still considers itself underground, there has been “a gradual shift from a small, self-sufficient, DIY underground subculture to a more widely accepted musical and cultural practice which is beginning to gain mainstream acceptance” (Mitchell 2007b: 2).

### **'Independent' versus 'Commercial'**

In the late twentieth century, American hip hop became increasingly popular, leading to an increased interest from major music labels and the transformation of rap into a multimillion dollar global enterprise (Keyes 2004). Employing the principles of the commercialisation and hegemony theory (Blair 2004), many feared that industrialisation would lead to the co-optation (and dilution) of hip hop by the dominant mainstream (Blair 2004; Perry 2004: 191-203). This resulted in an ideological division between the ‘independent’ or ‘non-commercial’ members of the subculture, who claimed to pursue hip hop for the sake of the culture itself, and the ‘commercial’ hip hoppers, who were seen to pursue the culture primarily for the sake of fiscal profit (Light 2004; Perry 2004: 191-203; Huq 2007). Despite recent interest in the Australian subculture, it has still received limited support from the Australian or international music industry and relies largely on independent music labels. As a result, independent hip hoppers are generally considered more authentic than

commercial hip hoppers (Mitchell 2003a; 2007a; and 2007b). This ideological opposition is frequently revealed in the pages of *Stealth*.

Money is repeatedly referred to negatively, largely because it is thought that inauthentic subcultural members who pursue profit will discard their musical self-expression for the sake of financial rewards. MC Suffa says:

Cash taints the music, if you're independent you can represent your culture the way you feel is best ... Throw cash in the mix and you end up with an album that is commercial and not true to your culture. (Wray 1999: 11)

Artists like MC Matty B assert that motivation for cultural expression should be the music itself rather than money: "It's just the whole making the music [aspect] ... it's not about selling records" (Loko One 2003b: 22).

This leads to the ideological separation of authentic hip hoppers from those 'sellouts' within and without the culture who are deemed commercial – and these can vary considerably. Interview subjects like hip hop ensemble The Herd speak against a "corporate driven society" (LoQuay 2002b: 26) and the "consumeristic 'herd' of shoppers" (LoQuay 2002b: 26). The 'commercial' label can be attached to more specific ideological formations, such as pop music or the ideological model of a business-driven United States (which have been discussed previously). Or, it can be attached to musical genres within hip hop that are deemed inauthentic, such as American gangster rap. Independent label owner/rapper Lioness says, "I think heaps of young people get so bombarded with what seems to be the commercial definition of hip hop (pimpin' ladies, and having a bad attitude and fashion) that they lose the true essence of what hip hop is about" (DJ Groovy D 2004: 26). Australian subcultural members who are deemed commercial can also be severely chastised. In an interview with breakdancing crew Wickid Force, the interviewer Blaze says, "I must say that I get somewhat dismayed when I see a commercial ... with a[n Australian] b-boy ... [It

is negative for breakdancing to] be contained within any restrictive corporate structure” (Blaze 2002: 50).

Most frequently, the negative commercial categorization is attached to major international music labels that are generally considered to be the antithesis of self-expression and individuality (Blair 2004; Perry 2004: 191-203). *Stealth* writer Adam Stenlake says:

[I]t would seem that major labels and Australian hip hop mix like oil and water ... One of the main reasons for the negativity towards majors is that they have a tendency to influence the sound of an artist, demanding catchy hooks and choruses or gimmicky radio tracks which results in a watered down sound that isn't true to the artist. (Stenlake 2003: 53)

Moreover, the Australian subculture's association with the underground or non-commercial and particularly with independent record labels is celebrated frequently. In an interview with hip hop group TZU, interviewer Katherine Murphy says, “I see Australian hip hop as being at this really crucial time, and without heavy major label support I see it as still quite pure and unadulterated” (Murphy 2004: 31).

Also, producer/MC Burna says:

We want to release everything independently so we decided to take it upon ourselves to fund the label. We didn't want to be tied down to what people want us to do and just do what we wanted to do. (Murphy 2005: 42)

This division of record labels is more than a little illusory because research has suggested that independent labels are usually involved in vast financial networks which rely on major record companies for sustenance (Negus 2004). This valorisation of the independent record label serves the ideological purpose of constructing authenticity.

Nevertheless, such separation from the commercial is ideological. Artists constantly desire increased popularity or more money, and recognise the financial aspects of the subculture (see Perry 2004: 191-203). The commercial is not always

inauthentic. Joelistics of the group TZU says, “We did work early out in the piece that at the end of the day it is a business and you are being signed for a reason, and you have to be professional about it” (Murphy 2004: 31); MC Torcha laments that “[t]here’s still no money in it [the Australian scene] at the moment even though you have certain crews blowing up like the Hilltops. But even they aren’t making big dollars – not enough to support a family” (Pollard 2004c: 46).

Throughout the lifespan of the magazine, there is a gradual transition, where the commercial is deemed less inferior in later magazines than earlier ones, particularly from issue ten onwards (2003c; 2004a; 2004b; 2005; 2007). This can be seen by a slowly changing attitude towards major labels. MC Pressure believes “[major] labels can push your product to hard-to-reach places and do big things for small groups” (Gee and Pollard 2003: 55). While the commercial is still predominantly deemed hierarchically inferior, this ideological transition can once again be attributed to the increasing popularity and commercial success of Australian hip hop, which is gradually infiltrating new markets (Mitchell 2001; 2007a; and 2007b). Of course, the need for money is constantly recognised, but it is much less prominent in earlier issues. For example, in issue four (2000c), rapper Die-C inadvertently acknowledges the need for profit: “Basically the process takes a while: getting the money together, getting everything online, mastering, everything” (Pollard 2000: 21).

Interviewees who associate themselves with the commercial will usually emphasise that they retain individuality and self-expression, or that they maintain a disdain for the commercial. This allows them to become more profitable artists while retaining the authenticity associated with self-expression or the non-commercial.

These attitudes are revealed when DJ Peril says:

[Sony, the major record company I am signed to, think] I'm difficult because I've got quality control. With record companies, you always have to know where you're going ... Or else they're going to railroad you ... They just want to make money. Music, with record companies, has nothing to do with the passion for music. It's strictly about the dollar bill (Pollard 2004b: 49).

Commercialisation, while being a primary indicator of the mainstream in musically based cultures (Blair 2004; Light 2004; Osumare 2008: 267; Perry 2004: 191-203), is not negative in itself. Rather, the concepts of conformity, homogenisation and betrayal of personal and creative passion – which are frequently associated with the commercial – are deemed the paramount tenets of the inauthentic.

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Even within a single (if serial) media text such as *Stealth*, the notions of authenticity that are constructed and reflected by subcultural distinctions are multiple, complex and often contradictory. They can change significantly both diachronically and synchronically, indicating fluidity in mediated representations and subcultural ideologies. Niche publications certainly utilise language of distinction in the signification of subcultural authenticity, but this is by no means a straightforward process.

## CONCLUSION

Three aims were established at the onset of this thesis: to ascertain that niche publications have a role to play in ascribing notions of authenticity, to discover how niche publications accrue the credibility to ascribe authenticity, and to explore how the internal textual dynamics within a publication construct notions of authenticity. Each goal has been addressed within each of the consecutive chapters.

Utilising Sarah Thornton's definition of subcultures as formations defined as such by the media (1996: 162), Chapter One explored the idea that numerous forms of media draw the boundaries of authenticity around subcultural formations. This chapter examined a variety of subcultural theorists in order to argue that niche publications foster a particular relationship with their readership which allows the publications to determine cultural knowledge. It concluded that once a relationship of trust has been established, niche publications utilise the language of distinction in order to determine authenticity. However, these boundaries are by no means static, and subcultural media texts generate a range of representations which engender highly fluid and volatile boundaries.

The examination of *Stealth* as a cultural artefact in Chapter Two revealed that a number of elements were at work within this publication to foster a close and authoritative relationship between the magazine and its readers, to establish credibility and to ascribe authenticity. The peculiar position of Mark Pollard was seen to be particularly relevant. His own involvement in the subculture and his zinester-like zeal for the magazine made him particularly close and responsive to *Stealth's* particular niche market, despite the magazine's movement towards a more commercial orientation. It was argued that the editorial decision to use the Question and Answer

interview format generated an image of closeness to the subculture, since this gives the (somewhat illusory) impression of unfettered member-to-member conversation. Consistently positive coverage positioned the magazine as clearly on the side of, even part of, the hip hop subculture. Finally, by presenting Pollard, the magazine's contributors and the interview subjects all as experts, the magazine gained the authority to determine cultural knowledge and be regarded as an authentic voice of Australian hip hop.

The exploration of the levels of distinction in *Stealth's* interviews (in Chapter Three) revealed that niche publications do not necessarily construct finite and well-bounded notions of authenticity. There were many constructions of authenticity which were ambiguous and contradictory. For instance, there was a modern ideal type which stressed collectivism, an underlying essence of hip hop and sometimes conformity, by emphasising the local underground and demonising the mainstream forces of global capitalism. This competed with a postmodern ideal type, which emphasised individuality, highlighted fluidity and fragmentation, and embraced the global and the commercial. Furthermore, it was seen that notions of authenticity can change over time. As the magazine progressed, an image of a subculture which was more certain of itself and more willing to expand gradually emerged.

This thesis has shown how niche publications reflect and construct notions of genuine membership within a subculture. In doing so, it has revealed a magazine that is obsessed with notions of authenticity: *Stealth* not only discusses authenticity within its pages, it also constantly attempts to present *itself* as authentic. Therefore, within the magazine there exists an unquestioned acceptance of the absolute value of authenticity. However, by showing how authenticity operates, this thesis has called the 'natural' superiority of the concept into question.

While few academics have comprehensively tackled the concept of authenticity, recent postmodern explorations have argued that this apparently ‘natural’ superiority of authenticity is in fact ideological. Both Charles Lindholm (2008) and Allan Moore (2002) acknowledge that the fluidity and fragmentation championed by postmodernity may not be compatible with concepts like authenticity. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh argue that, in a postmodern world where nothing is real or genuine, authenticity no longer carries its original force (2000: 30). Furthermore, in his study of new subcultures, David Muggleton (2002) explores cultural formations which champion the inauthentic over the authentic. Nevertheless, Moore maintains that, despite its ideological nature, the prominence of authenticity as a superior force remains prevalent in contemporary society (2002: 210-11).

The obsession with authenticity in *Stealth* suggests that the concept remains an incredibly significant aspect of subcultural membership, justifying this in-depth investigation of how one niche publication reflects and constructs authenticity within Australian hip hop culture. Further research might ask why authenticity remains so important. Why are niche publications such as *Stealth* so obsessed with authenticity? Moore (2002: 210) and Lindholm (2008: 3-8) claim that the social and economic alienation produced under modernity (and perhaps intensified under postmodernity) generated a desire for the authentic. However, this question is answered by them only in passing and has not yet (to my knowledge) been examined in depth. It is important to understand the social roots and cultural logics of ideological constructions such as authenticity, and the distinctions behind them, so that we might better understand why they remain so important in contemporary society.

## APPENDIX

### **Interview with Mark Pollard, conducted on June 20 2008 by David Blight at Leo Burnett Design Company in North Sydney Australia.**

MP: A few years ago there was a coming of age of MCs in Australia at least and even overseas. They felt more mature and put themselves out there as being more mature, and along with that came a sense of tolerance. So locally that might be Brad Strutt, not necessarily liking, but not attacking the Melbourne R&B scene. Or it could be someone in the UK, like an underground rapper who, when he was 18 would have hated anyone with a logo on their t-shirt or anything, and then as they come to their mid to late 20s, part of it's just around their idealism changing and part of it's to do with the practical realities of being a self-funded musician. They definitely redefine what authenticity means to them.

DB: Have your own opinions changed in regards to hip hop as you have gotten older? Has the magazine itself matured?

MP: Well I was 19 when I started working on it. At that age you have your cultural identity and as a man you have a masculine identity and because you don't really know your place in the world and you try to convince yourself that you do, at that age you use things external to you, so the brand of clothing that you wear, the friends that you have, the TV shows you watch, the music you listen to, you are projecting who you think you are. At 19 you are a very different person to who you are later on. I'm 30 now with some kids. The thing that has stayed... and even the writings not very sophisticated, and to be honest most of it as we went was less about writing and more about other people's stories. But the one thing that stayed pure, I believe, is that idea of trying to stand for something. In the first editorial I wrote I said I wanted to stand for something rather than just attacking stuff. As a magazine it stands for the best of hip hop values and ideals as I still see them, which are around authentic self expression, and that changes as people change.

DB: One thing I found throughout the magazine is a prevalence of the idea of self expression, individuality, creativity.

MP: I still see this now when younger people contact me to write, and I might look at how they talk about themselves or what their opinion is on a message board, and at 19 it's about a slightly more aggressive idea about what manhood is. Battle raps is your context. Who's got the most skills, who's got the most interesting punch lines. And then a few years later you go "I've heard that for 5 years" and you go "hmmmm, I want to start hearing stories" and it's about stories that are relevant to you at the time. For example, the group Anticon who are the same age as me with a year or two either side, five years ago, so they're in their mid twenties, those guys started to get into folk music. On the one hand it was about being arty and different and kind of being rejected from the New York hip hop scene, even though they weren't from New York but that harder edged hip hop scene, and on the other hand it was about applying their same principles and appreciation of the world around them, which is authenticity and personal stories and creativity, but they actually made that leap, so they would start using folk. And probably around the same time I myself started exploring other music

that I hadn't really thought about since I was about 13, you know, Pearl Jam and Nirvana. And it's just about being comfortable with yourself.

DB: Do you think that you don't need the music to define who you are anymore?

MP: Yeah definitely, which is really weird because now I'm working in, I've only been working in, or been really engaged in more of a corporate world for the past five years. I used to just float with it before. And being in a corporate world and then becoming a dad you really... because for me hip hop was a pure outlet of teenage rage. I used to write rhymes, I've got books of stuff. I was really, kind of, it was a release. And then as you get older and having built up a magazine around that, even though it's not an angry magazine, and you change, and you become an older person, you go "wow, that's weird, my whole identity was based on being a hip hop kid, and now I'm ... not".

DB: Is it that you like hip hop but it doesn't define who you are anymore?

MP: Yeah I think so, yeah. The right hip hop stimulates me. And now what I want to do is try to make sure that other people have a path. You know, a lot of people get to the stage where they have kids and disappear. And just with what we've built online and with the magazine, I don't want that to happen.

DB: Can you run through what your involvement in the Australian hip hop subculture has been.

MP: Well, I've always written poetry, but at the age of 13 or 14 I started writing really childish raps about girlfriends. I also did some pretty bad graffiti. I just kept doing that, and then at the age of 17 or 18 I started spending a bit of time at Cell Block which is a youth centre in the inner city of Sydney, and that was when Mass MC was doing his radio show, DJ Bonez and ESP were sort of helping out, and a guy called PS Vendor who's been around the Sydney scene for twenty years. I started to go on the *Mothership Connection* which was the main hip hop show in Sydney at the time on 2SER. It was a time when, if that show was on and you were into hip hop, you would tune it, you didn't have any other choice, it was before Wild FM and FBI, before Triple J had a hip hop show. And within six months I just kept going up there and freestyling, probably fairly badly, and Miguel d'Souza, who was hosting it, wanted to move on for various reasons, and I took it over at the age of twenty. The catalyst for me going on that show was that I started up a really bad website called *Kanga Styles*, and this was in 1998. I used to just interview hip hop guys, underground guys. This was before *Stealth* magazine. I did *Kanga Styles* first. I was pretty online, doing IRC, internet relay chat, talking to hip hop people about hip hop, and then at Cell Block Youth Centre, you know, rhyming and doing all this other stuff a couple of times a week. Then I went onto 2SER to rhyme, then took over the show, then put together a four page newsletter for *Mothership Connection*, which is actually on our website. It was pretty poor but it was fun. I was a 19 year old, no money, earning a hundred bucks a week. And then, *3D World*, because Miguel d'Souza wrote for *3D World*, he had a column that he wrote for ages, and they asked me to write for them. I felt spoilt taking over my favourite radio show ever; I'd had tapes since I was 14 or 15. I said I think you should find someone else and they persisted, because they liked the show, so I started to write for them every month and every week. Then, I

still had a lot of passion for a lot of the local guys, on top of the international guys and there wasn't really any space for them in the media. If a big artist came into town and there was a big release I would usually do the interview for radio and for *3D World*. It got to a point where I was a little frustrated that I couldn't get more of the people I liked coverage. Most of them were quite talented, even though if I look back now it was an early form of talent, a talent that still needed to be nurtured, but a lot of them have gone on to do really big stuff. So I thought "let's create a magazine". So I taught myself how to design and I was using Publisher back then, I taught myself all the tools of the trade, and found a printer who was happy to help me with whatever money I could raise. He was empathic towards hip hop and the cause. I was 19 earning 150 bucks a week, and I managed to somehow raise 1100 bucks from advertising, so I thought why wouldn't someone advertise.

DB: So you had ads from the beginning?

MP: I had a couple of ads in there, at 200 bucks a pop or something.

DB: Later on the ad revenue would have been much greater?

MP: Yeah but it cost more to print.

DB: I noticed that in later issues the magazine is not dominated by advertising like lots of niche magazines. Issue fourteen even doesn't have much advertising. Was advertising your main source of revenue?

MP: Yeah it was but it was also while I was working. I wanted to keep that mag pure. We had Yellow Pages or something, and Coke or Sprite and every now and then we'd have advertising in it but to be honest, hip hop wasn't cool until a couple of years ago. And when it became cool that's probably when the magazine quietened down. You know, it was still seen as the "yo yo", every time we dealt with someone who didn't get it, they would be yelling "West Side" at you. That only started to die a couple of years ago.

DB: What were the aims of *Stealth*? Did they change?

MP: The aims never really changed. The core purpose was to give under-represented people, and *Stealth*, a platform to be heard, to tell their stories.

DB: Was it anything to do with networking, where someone in one place reads the magazine and feels connected to someone in another place?

MP: I see that more being a side effect of the goal. And that feeling of belonging, these universal themes, that could be within a city, within a state, Australia to Korea, and that became a purpose, to show that the common thing that we've all, the things that we've all got in common no matter where we live and whatever language we speak, the purpose was to give unrepresented people a voice.

DB: What was your main competition in terms of other hip hop magazines in Australia or from overseas?

MP: When we started there was a big growth in hip hop mags. You had *The Source* which had been around for ages, *HHC*, which has stumbled a couple of times but that's still around, *XXL* mag, I loved *Stress* magazine at the time which was kind of the raw New York magazine, you had heaps of graffiti magazines, then you had these mags which were a bit graf, a bit skate with a couple of topless chicks in them, there was a whole bunch of subgenres that popped up. Locally there had been zines, like there was *Blitzkrieg* around, *Hype* published every now and then, it was a graf mag, there was *Slingshot* the zine, *Alpha Fame* popped up a little bit after us, and they turned into *Acclaim*. They're the ones that spring to mind.

DB: What makes *Stealth* stand out? How is it different?

MP: It goes back to our idea, or my idea, of authenticity. My idea of authenticity is very different to *Acclaim*'s. I've done events with the editor of *Acclaim*, and we did the show, and we are into different things and that's OK, it doesn't mean we can't deal with each other. But his idea of authenticity would be different to mine.

DB: You are trying to represent the Australian hip hop subculture, but is a lot of it still very personal, is it still you getting across your own personal ideas of what is authentic? Is there a balance between representing the culture but also doing it for yourself?

MP: There is no doubt that this is a vehicle for my own self-expression, but it's not about me being famous. And that's where I think, if you look at a lot of the journalism that pops up in the States say in the *Rolling Stone*, or in some of the UK magazines, the journalists fall over themselves to come up with new phrases or terms, to come up with cool stuff, to be liked. And I learnt very young that if you were doing this sort of stuff you couldn't be everybody's friend. You don't have to be a dickhead, but people would befriend you because they wanted a bit of attention. At one stage I was writing for *3D World*, my own magazine, doing radio, writing for *Impress* which is the equivalent of *3D World* in Melbourne, *Ministry*, all this stuff, earning maybe thirty bucks for it, fifty bucks, not very much, and I never liked being manipulated. There were a couple of instances early on where I kind of burnt my fingers and I realised that I've got to be who I want to be. It wasn't necessarily about representing the culture, it was about representing good people who do good things, who happen to be into hip hop. Not the other way around. It was never supposed to be about being a cultural ambassador. The magazine is aimed at good people who happen to be into hip hop.

DB: Would you say that *Stealth* was competing with these other publications?

MP: In a young man ego kind of way, for sure. But it was really interesting because we seemed to attract different groups of people. There was a small overlap, but we had our own groups of people that we naturally gravitated towards, based on our own individual personalities. *Alpha Fame* and *Acclaim*, they're in Melbourne, we're in Sydney. We had better relationships for a time with certain people in Melbourne than they did, and they probably had better relationships with certain scenes in Sydney. So, I never saw it as direct competition, but, if they released an issue, whether or not I personally really enjoyed some of the articles, I would go "fuck, I want to do better".

It was inspiring more than a battle. It was more about pushing ourselves, upping the ante, sleep less.

DB: What do you think *Stealth* contributes to the Australian hip hop subculture?

MP: I think for a time it really did affect or influence the scene. Just based on what people say. I think I'm not the best person, well it would be pretty egotistical to answer that sort of question. Some people for a time felt that it really gave a positive face and galvanised the scene, and spoke about and to the scene in a way that people really understood and wanted.

DB: Did it in some ways construct the scene in terms of determining what is in or out?

MP: I wouldn't want to say yes. But I would say that the combination of everything in the scene from record stores to DJs to writers and magazines does that. *Stealth* definitely had a place amongst all the media that kind of worked in unison to determine what was in or out. It definitely made a contribution. Even on the radio show when 12 inches were big we would sometimes play a track and Next Level Records would sell out 30 copies of that 12 inch within a day or two. So there was definitely influence but it wasn't a P Diddy, self congratulatory influence. It was self-expression first and foremost.

DB: Do you think *Stealth* had a different relationship to the subculture than other types of media? In comparison to more general music magazines or more mass media forms, does it have a different relationship to the subculture?

MP: Yeah. Even though I distanced myself in some ways and I was quite picky about the people I would talk to, not in an arrogant way but in a self protectionist, "I don't have all the time in the day" kind of way, we were the magazine that the other magazine would read before they interviewed the people. People would get funding, non hip hop people would get funding to make documentaries for SBS or for radio, and then they would come to people like us, not just us but people like us, and others like Blaze and Dr Phibes when he was running Next Level, and people in Melbourne. So we were closer to the culture, but had enough distance to not be a magazine for the boys. That was the balance I always tried to strike. *Stealth*, compared to a magazine like *Rolling Stone*, has a closer relationship to the subculture. It has a closer relationship to the hip hop subculture because the people working on it had a closer relationship to the subculture. But *Rolling Stone's* journey has changed along the way, and *Rolling Stone* in Australia would be different to *Rolling Stone* in America. We've had a few people write for us that are maybe a little bit more bedroom hip hop fans but if they can express themselves well then that's OK, but I always wanted have a little bit more of a representation of people who were actually more actively involved, give them a way to express themselves.

DB: Can you tell me about the transition of stealth from a fanzine into a consumer niche publication?

MP: We'd done three issues. Then the dot com boom happened. I got a job at a place called K-Grind which was kind of one of the more spectacular dot com failures in

Australia. They funded us to go full colour with the first issue. But by the time that had finished, everything else was me working multiple jobs, distributing records and running events, conferences and designing stuff and getting underpaid to write for other magazines. So that was the catalyst, because I had no money, I had nothing, just finished uni, I had HECS debt. So that, along with Miguel D'Souza and 2SER, were really two key bits of synchronicity.

DB: Did the transition affect the content?

MP: I don't think so. I mean the first couple of issues we were still trying to figure out what we were all about. Again I was 20 or 21. If I had that opportunity again it would probably be a little bit different. We flirted with things like video game reviews, but only because I was playing Playstation at the time. I would never have covered anything that didn't fit with what we were about as individuals. For instance I would never let things like advertising affect editorial content. Well, not really, specifically. But sometimes when people advertise they would want a news item. But, and again in our first few issues we were probably still finding our way around that, but I would never have, it's not Fox News manipulation kind of stuff. It's all stuff that is still a little bit connected to the subculture and it has to be of value to the reader. I mean, you have to be aware of your reader. You have to form a relationship with your audience so they will keep coming back and also so they'll trust what you have to say.

DB: So in the end it still comes down to the values of the magazine before anything else?

MP: Yeah. In all media there is a relationship between editorial and revenue, which is probably why you don't find that much advertising in *Stealth*. Because when we started to deal with some of the bigger advertisers they would all of a sudden want you to write about their soft drink, and I'd be like "that's got nothing to do with anything". Whereas with Obese, who were really supportive for us in terms of advertising, it wasn't really an issue to cover their artists because that's who we were into anyway. So, again, there was a symbiotic relationship between editorial and revenue, no magazine has pure editorial unless they don't take ads, but never beyond, never into manipulation or being fake.

DB: What were some of the bigger advertisers? Did they have any demands or impact on the magazine?

MP: Sprite, TDK, Yellow Pages. TDK we did a giveaway for a demo comp. Someone got a burner for it so again the reader got something. Yellow pages, they just wanted us to do something a little bit unique in the media, which was a dog ear, where you turn the corner of the page down, we didn't write about them. They probably just did that, the thing is some advertising and media agencies, they approach smaller magazines to run more innovative ideas in so they can enter them in awards. No one ever said that to me about the Yellow Pages but I have a feeling that's what they might have wanted to do. And the other one was Sprite. We charged them a little bit of extra money to get branding on the CD rom. But then that gave us a little bit more money to get, what was at the time one of the best digital designers in Australia, to create a cool interface. So again it gave value back into the magazine.

DB: Were there ever times when you would not take advertising?

MP: Yeah there were a few. We've taken ads from a few, there were a few Aussie groups that really weren't that good. I've turned down mostly Aussie groups who weren't good and were trying to bully editorial as well. So, "we want to take a full page ad but you to write about us". So yeah we've turned down a considerable amount of stuff.

DB: As the magazine progressed, do you think it became commercially oriented?

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MP: No not at all. If anything the decision I made five years ago to go full time at work gave me an excuse to not take too much advertising, to not be more commercially oriented. Because if it was my full time gig it'd have to make money and put food on the table for my family.

DB: Did you ever make any profit from it?

MP: Overall I don't think so. We've had issues that have turned a little bit of profit, but you're talking 400 to 600 hours of work per magazine.

DB: As editor and CEO how much personal power did you have in terms of editorial content?

MP: For the most part it was just me. I used to do the design, I used to write most of it under different pen names. I went under my real name and there was the pen name LoQuay, which was the pen name I used to write in *3D World*. But to be honest I have a little bit of a policy that if you want to write for us and people don't already know that you're Blaze you have to write under your real name, again for the sake of authenticity, not hiding behind a screen name kind of thing. So power is a pretty big word but it was a lot about me. The past three or four issues I got Ben Funnel, April 77 more involved as a designer, but I still did a shitload of the type layout just because I couldn't afford not to.

DB: Were there more collaborators later on than earlier?

MP: We had heaps. And because it costs so much to do and with magazines it takes ages to get your money back. I could release a magazine today and not get paid for six to nine months. Now if I want to get another two or three issues out in the meantime and am not turning big profits or much profit at all, that's a pretty big ask. Every now and then we would get on a roll and people would believe in us and contribute more, and then we had gaps when people would be not so sure. When I say contribute, I don't mean money, I mean writing and expressing their views and stuff. Most of the money that we got was from advertising. We did a couple of events but you don't make much money from that. So it was just my day job and advertising. A lot of my own personal money was going into the magazine. I mean a lot of it. But it was my passion and it was a hobby and I guess I justified it in some ways, like, overall, it was like going to the gym. From a career point of view, it was more of a hobby. It was never meant to be this but people ... I never used to talk about hip hop or magazines if I was talking profession, but people are actually interested in it, and they are like

“fuck you started out at 19 that’s pretty cool”. It tells them that you are a doer. I tell my wife that that justifies the personal financial pain.

DB: In terms of the people around *Stealth*, was it ever an actual staff, or was it more just mates or people involved with the scene?

MP: Yeah, people involved with the scene whose opinions I respected, who were passionate and committed and had an interesting point of view.

DB: Did they ever get paid?

MP: No. There were a couple of people that I have along the way. The fact that I haven’t been able to pay these people is something that has really shat me, because, that’s when I don’t feel my job is done. I really wanted this to be something that could help people, not just give them a voice, but help them in their own industry. I would have liked to have been able to pay them. That’s something that, I don’t know if we’re going to do another magazine, I think the model we’ll go to is doing an online business and doing small run zine/book type things on a special topic of interest. But if I can pull it off, it would probably be easier to pay people and justify paying them if it was an online business, because you don’t have to spend five figures every time we go to print, and not get it back for nine months.

DB: Did you still have final say on the material of the contributors?

MP: Did I edit? Well I would work as editor. Firstly, if someone wants to write for us I would always go “what are you passionate about”. Don’t ask me what I want someone to write about. I would also want to see work they’d done, see stuff they’d written just to see how they’ve thought. And if someone was too much in that 19 year old head space of “I want to prove something to the world” then that doesn’t necessarily lead to good writing that appeals to people who are older than 19. So, making sure they were out of that. So, passionate, intelligent, good point of view, and tell me what you want to write about and if it feels like it fits go for it.

DB: Was it usually people who were dedicated to the subculture?

MP: Yeah, a couple of them were dedicated from the bedroom, and others were on the stage or in the shops. You didn’t have to be a known figure. You could just be someone who was interested and had something to say. The amount of contributors would vary based on who I had time to talk to. I did all this stuff in the middle of the night, it wasn’t like smooth, organised, clockwork operation.

DB: Why did you choose the Q and A format?

MP: Because it was hard to find people who knew the subject and could also write well. It was hard to find people who could write well who didn’t want to write themselves into articles. So I remember, when I was 20/21, reading some stuff from some people who’d sent me things and then just reading some of the us magazines, and it would always be an interview with some person who I wanted to read about, and they would spend half of it talking about how they waited for the interview subject in the cafe, and the smoke wafted around the room, and the barista looked at

me intensely, and all I'd do is skip to the quotes and I thought "well if that's what I do, maybe other people are just going to do that as well". The fly-on-the-wall, here's-the-question-here's-the-answer format is what the reader wants. It's not sanitised. It's about being close to the artist and the culture. It's about letting the reader see what is going on without the veil of the journalist ruining it. The interviewer is not storyteller; they are facilitator of the interview subject's story. Again, authenticity is the key, it's about being authentic.

DB: How did you choose your interview subjects?

MP: Mostly artists that I liked or the group of us liked, and I would allow stretch there, there were people we covered that I probably don't listen to, but either me or someone connected to us needed to like them, they needed to have a decent mark on the culture, and they needed to be a good interview. That way of thinking has become clearer over the past few years rather than at the start. But at this point now I would never go up to someone just because they are big. I have interviewed Snoop Dogg and you get one word answers out of them. Back then I wouldn't have necessarily run that in my magazine but to get paid I would have done it somewhere. Now it's about the combination.

DB: So you have interviewed someone and not used it?

MP: Yeah for sure.

DB: With the interview subjects, is it important that it is someone who has some type of reputation or credibility in the subculture?

MP: Yeah. Well, we've covered people who didn't have that and we were the first people to cover them in Australia though. So then it comes down to our judgement on whether they are skilful, whether they are doing something unique, are they telling interesting stories, are they worthy of our readers attention?

DB: Was it: they are worthy of our readers attention because they are worthy of our attention?

MP: A lot of it was based upon personal opinion, of course.

DB: Do you feel that for interviews with musicians or subcultural members to work, you as the interviewer need to have some degree of credibility as well.

MP: Yeah the fact that I was doing the magazine, people knew about it, around the world, all the independent labels, because they really boomed in the late 90s, they all knew about it. I've shared a bedroom with Sage Francis for a week, so I interviewed him last year and we'll talk about family stuff briefly and then you know, he'll know a bit about me and that'll be in the interview. You know it's not, well it is about credibility, but you can easily lose that with a couple of dumb questions. Most American artists, the Australian guys are getting used to this just now, but the American artists are so used to being on the interview trail, that you've got to... sometimes you don't want to read their press release. Firstly a lot of them are with PR people, and even the big independents, they are quite savvy and they try to bring

answers to your questions back to their album. I interviewed Guru from Gangstarr, he's independent now, and back then he kind of wasn't, but you could ask him what colour the wall was and he'd somehow bring that back to the name of his album. I joked about it with him. Credibility is key, but I think just not being an idiot is even better. Now when I interview people, and I haven't done it for a couple of months, like LP from Company, he said "this is the most psychological interview I have ever done". You know, I'm not interested about the album, I like listening to it, I'm interested in who they are and what fucked them up in life, and what fights they've fought to get where they are and how this made them a different or better person, and as soon as you start getting into that stuff a lot of people go along with it. I am interested in people's roots.

DB: Was it easier getting interviews in the later stages of your career? Had you accrued a bit more credibility?

MP: Yeah. What was weird was that at the start no one was doing it and the major labels, a lot of them like Universal, rarely covered, like they weren't even going to release one of Common's albums until I was like "what's going on here" and then he started working at Def Jam in the States but they would never give us any credit for that. And Jurassic 5 or Black Eyed Peas weren't going to release it. So we'd have to find people online, like managers or friends to get in contact with people. In that first issue we spent three hours in Flava Flav's room through a mate just bumping into him. We'd have never gotten that through the record label at that time. But once we had a bit of momentum and we were playing interesting interviews on the radio and in the magazine, there was a point where really on two or three people were doing that in Australia so anything that came out we would do the interviews. So we'd always get that, or we'd go around people and find the people that we wanted to talk to, here or overseas. As we've gone on I've really detached from the major labels, because at one stage some of them had interesting music, like around the late 90s and early 2000 you had Loud Records were doing kind of some interesting stuff but they went a bit naff, and Universal had all this interesting stuff. So my interest in some of that stuff has decreased and it's been more about the guys who when I was 19 were probably 19 like Sage Francis, he represents one school of things that I'm into and what not, the Boston scene and underground New York guys. So, I think access has never been a problem; just we've changed what we want access to.

DB: Tell me about your passion, and the time and effort put into *Stealth*.

MP: *Stealth* has nearly killed me. It's seriously nearly killed me. Because I used to burn out on it. Every time I did an issue I would burn out, then I would get seriously drunk frequently, until, you know, worrying about that nine month cash cycle, thinking am I going to earn money for this, not earning much money. But I'm still addicted to it and I love it, and I feel like I'm doing a good thing, and what not. It was tough in some personal ways. I spent huge amounts of time on it. I would be at the computer at seven in the morning on a Sunday morning. I calculated once how many hours went into each magazine, and it was anywhere between 400 and 600 hours. And apart from other people helping out from time to time it was pretty much just me, because I did everything. I did the advertising, I sold the ads, I designed it, I wrote a lot of it, I organised the distribution, I did all the invoicing, I did all the sales, I packed all the subscriptions up in envelopes with my wife ... it was a lot of work.

DB: Were there any other contributors putting in anywhere near as much time as this?

MP: No, not that sort of time. Blaze has sort of become a pretty good solid frequent contributor. He would give up a few days voluntarily. But a lot of it was just by myself. Maybe three or four issues ago I thought 'this is crazy' because I was also working full time, but that gave me a bit of money to get Ben in to do a bit of design work, and he would give me a couple of design templates and I would do the rest and he would do a bit more the next one. So, it's a lot of work, it's not for the faint hearted, you've got to be a bit slightly obsessive.

DB: Did you ever feel you didn't want other people contributing too much because it might ruin your own creative vision?

MP: No, it was never that I didn't want people to contribute, it was about getting the right contributors. That was the hard thing. There were often people that wanted to contribute that I had to say no to. You know, we probably, when we were more prolific with publishing schedule, we'd get maybe two to five people asking to contribute per week and only one or two of them every now and then would make it into the mag. That was because some of those people try to latch onto stuff that was cool, and we were never a magazine that was going to cover the generic stuff like women into hip hop or Aborigines in hip hop, it was about the individuals and their stories. So if you were Aboriginal, I'd rather talk to you just about hip hop in your life, and it might cover being Aboriginal, but that was not going to be the headline. But a lot of people came with an angle or an agenda.

DB: Does your passion for the magazine reflect a passion for the subculture or the magazine itself?

MP: It started as a passion for the subculture, it became my own self expression, and I mean that in an ego way but not a dickhead ego way, ego as in what satisfies your creative spirit. And then it turned into loving the magazine and getting a kick out of being an individual that was making a difference.

DB: How are you making a difference?

MP: By helping people express themselves, and helping people who read the magazine understand that they want to learn, because it began back in the 90s when I was a teenager, and if you were into hip hop you were probably the only guy in the class or the school that was into it. You were always an outsider. A lot of the outsiders or misfits that I have met that were into hip hop, a lot of them came from a broken home, from broken families, maybe they were orphans, they had issues, they were underdogs, so it was really just about, just saying to these people "here are some stories that you can probably relate to; and you may not feel so isolated".

DB: Did you feel you had a responsibility to the subculture and representing it?

MP: I don't know. I don't believe there are that many absolutes in life, other than the subjective ones we create. Again my interest was in good creative people with good stories, who might have needed a bit of a hand, it was underdog you know.

DB: How did you imagine the reader of *Stealth* and has this changed?

MP: I think it's changed with the culture. There are a lot of older guys now. I read something about this the other day. When hip hop it started in Australia, you're talking teenagers. And now you're talking maybe an 8 year old up to a 50 year old, actively rapping or breakdancing or documenting things or whatever. So I think people who read *stealth* reads it because it's not tabloid. I'm not going to say its intelligent, I don't want to over intellectualise stuff, because it is day to day stuff, it doesn't need that politically correct filter put on it or the academic put on it, it's just real stories. We probably reach everyone from wilder graf writers through to academics, left wing to right wing. You don't necessarily have to be a hip hop head. A few issues into the full colour era of the mag I just wanted to write and tell stories that anyone could read whether they were into it or not. Something that my dad could read. My grandparents would read it and go I don't really get this but I still aimed for universal human stories, truths.

DB: When putting the magazine together, do you keep the reader in mind or write for yourself?

MP: I keep them in mind with little things like trying to make it more reader friendly, thinking about fonts and headlines and design. But ultimately the role of the editor is to find stuff that is interesting and present it, and allow the reader to make their own decision.

DB: As a part of the subculture, did you just imagine yourself as the reader?

MP: Yeah but again I didn't only cover stuff that I was exclusively interested in. I'd allow people to stretch it. You know, like Blaze would stretch it into funk 7 inches. And someone else might stretch it into a bit more of an Aussie thing. So I think as a writer and editor you have to approach from what you think is interesting.

DB: Can you tell me about the magazine's print runs, circulation and readership?

MP: We've never been audited, but we used to print like 8000 copies. With the first three zines we printed anywhere from 1500 to 2500. The full colour issue, we were originally going to print heaps and I'm so glad we didn't because I would have been fucked. But with the full colour ones we printed between 5000 and 10,000. The most we printed would have been 10 with the CD. The CD made it more expensive. It was weird because at that time people would look at \$9.95 and think that's pretty expensive for a magazine because everything else was like 4.95 Australian made, but then you'd get a CD with music and like 70 minutes of music with it. In terms of circulation, the actual copies that were sold, it would depend on all sorts of stuff like distribution. Some of the earlier less sophisticated stuff we sold more of which was really bizarre. It was pre 2001, because September 11 really shook a lot of record labels and the whole music industry just because it stuffed up, it affected the economy pretty badly, a lot of people closed, and then that got hit again by online downloaders and things like that. Our access to distributors who were willing to support magazines diminished. I think now with magazines if you're selling 45 to 50% of what you print you're doing pretty well. We would usually eclipse that. In terms of readers per copy

it is hard to tell because we were never audited. It's the sort of magazine that you might get ten graf writers reading it, you might get some other kid who it's just them on the train. So we never audited it, we didn't need to, because fairly earlier on, after I flirted with some of the bigger advertisers and got the "yo yo" or "West Side" from a lot of people who just didn't get it, pre Hilltop Hoods, I just really focused on the people who got it, you know, the record stores, the graffiti or spray paint suppliers.

DB: Can you tell me about the magazine's distribution?

MP: At first a lot of it was done through underground distribution, mail and stuff like that. We sold it out of newsagencies in Australia, we did a couple in New Zealand but I never got paid for it so I stopped it. Record stores in Australia, again a couple in New Zealand but again I never got paid for it. And then we had a couple of music distributors in Japan at one stage and England, and Canada we did newsagency distribution, and we used to do OK, and north American magazines are usually quite, even their subscriptions are like ten bucks, because then they go to advertisers and go "we've got a million subscribers and therefore we're going to charge you more". It's hard to do that from here and our currency was pretty crap back then. When it became good we stopped making any money on it, having paid for the shipping and the printing and waiting nine months to get paid. Canada we did quite well the first couple of colour issues. North America we had a couple of newsagency and record store distributors, but probably about four issues ago I really just wanted to focus on Australia. In overseas countries it would have only ever been a couple of issues that got sold, not all of the issues, because if we didn't get paid it was a bit tough. But then, one of our issues I think the second full colour one we sold a hundred in Japanese in just one Japanese hip hop shop, one of my mates took them in and just sold them, just like that, and then that didn't happen again, it was weird. Even though they'd sold out of them within a few days, and then nothing. There is a little bit of an Australian cultural cringe around the world, again if I did it now and had a little bit more money I'd probably do it a bit differently.

DB: Did you use a different printing process as the magazine evolved?

MP: The printing process had to change as it became more digital, and broadband speeds and costs weren't as prohibitive. But we didn't, I haven't really fully exploited that new technology. But by the time, I didn't, well when I started making the magazine, technology was so good that you could pretty much make a quality magazine out of your own home.

DB: How has the Australian hip hop subculture changed over the last ten or fifteen years and why has it changed?

MP: I think it has diversified. There are little subgenres popping out. You can get angry Aussie rap, politically inclined Aussie rap, there's American inclined Aussie guys. I think it is more diverse, that reflects who the people are and the music they're into. They're giving themselves permission to represent that in their music rather than being held hostage to one or two arbiters of taste. It's obviously gotten more mature as the guys have gotten older. There are guys who were making music who are starting to get in their mid thirties now. Some of them have kids, they're more interested in life, so that has changed.

DB: Do you think it has gotten more popular?

MP: I think it has become more popular and accepted by the general Australian public. Again, I remember being the only hip hop kid, people would mock you for being into it, but now sometimes you might go to a house party and you're looking around the room and there are really normal looking people, you know, maybe they're professionals, or they might be Eastern Suburbs people and then there's an Aussie hip hop CD on and it's like "what the fuck, you know how much flack I would have copped for that ten years ago", which is kind of cool.

DB: The magazine has a large focus on the 'local'. Can you comment on this?

MP: I think that is because of two reasons. One's just because hip hop is not just about where you're at it's about where you're from, geographically and mentally, and how that turned you into who you are today, and I think the other one is that a lot of hip hop guys who are really into the music and knowing who produced what, are interested in the family tree. So if you came from a certain suburb or city, you might have know this producer. On the one hand you are trying to draw the links and on the other hand you are trying to find new links to explore based on where that person is from. Thirdly, understand their idea of local or issues in their context and whether that is the same as you. This idea of the local is a shortcut to knowing what someone is about. If you're an MC and you've legitimately worked with DJ x and I know DJ x then that means we are probably on the same page. It had a lot to do with the idea of networks.

DB: Many interview subjects seem to want to distance themselves from the American scene. Can you comment on this?

MP: I think it would be easier to generalise that everyone wants to do that. I think we are at the point now, well, early days we were always compared to the US scene, like how were we different, via the media. And as the guys have gotten older it's like, look, you're into American, or UK hip hop or only Australian hip hop, cool, whatever, and now they're in an area where they can just focus on what they're about. The distancing, well, some of it is because every few years someone like Tupac or P Diddy or Fifty Cent pops up, and everyone is like "I'm not about that, stop giving me the 'yo yo's' and the 'west sides'" and some of its just to distance themselves from the world's perception of a society which promotes mainstream, global hyper-capitalism and whose music reflects that, whose mainstream music reflects that. America's got amazingly underground innovative creative people, it has everything from underground to mainstream, it's just amazing, so it's a pretty simplistic desire to distance yourself from America generally, but that is the ugly side of America, an image of America.

DB: The magazine often discusses commercialization in hip hop. Can you comment on this?

MP: It's just such a big topic. You know, if an underground label gives you a couple of t-shirts and you wear them are you, you know, what's that? If you're selling your music you've commercialised yourself. You're a business you're not just an art. There

are a lot of greys. There also practicalities that hit you when you're in your mid twenties and you go "oh shit, I've just spent ten years spending so much energy on this thing, I'm not really that interested in much else in life, I need to make it work so I can feed my family". There are shades of grey, the gravity of simplistic arguments are challenging in that area. Anyone who writes or talks about this kind of stuff is going to be contradictory at one time or another. I think a lot of the themes that pop out of this are going to be contradictory themes. Is the question "are you or am I an independent thinker that thinks like me". As a culture you are looking for people who are like minded, people like you, but you want to know that they are independent thinkers. Depending on who you are talking to, where and when, what those words mean changes.

DB: The magazine has themes of individuality and creativity being superior to conformity. Can you discuss this?

MP: Again, that is there, but the thing is, and I was conscious of this as a kid, as a hip hop kid, that you are still conforming. You're still saying "I have a couple of new thoughts but they're from this legitimate hip hop source". You are an individual but you don't want to be too individual. There is the idea that even though people want to be individual, they also exist under this umbrella that is hip hop – this is the idea of the hip hop nation. It's the idea of being an individual that is part of the group. You're not going to rock up to a hip hop gig wearing a white suit and a feather in your cap. It's the idea of being an individual that is part of a group, that's tribal, that's built into us. The whole movement nation thing, that really comes from some of the core people involved with hip hop in America having to create a voice for themselves, to be defined as a group, and then it was latched onto I think maybe in the 90s. You hear someone like Chuck D or KRS One talk. There had been this quasi religious, also this idea that being at a gig is like, almost like fascist, like the brown shirts at Nazi Germany. Idea of "YOU'VE ALL GOT TO BE DIFFERENT, AT THE SAME TIME. WE'RE ABOUT THE 4 ELEMENTS. WE'RE NOT ABOUT WHAT P DIDDY IS INTO. WE'RE ABOUT THIS. EVERYONE AGREE. YES! OK!" It's weird.

DB: How have you matured, in terms of putting the magazine together or you as a person?

MP: I think through my twenties I nearly broke a few times. So I'm really interested in people's breaking points. When I was going through breaking point, either because I've searched out books or things have happened, a lot of really interesting people in life have had to really struggle, and I'm interested in that internal struggle more now than probably I was at a younger age because I probably didn't get it. For me it was just about projecting a sense of strong man even though you're probably quite small, 18/19 or whatever. That's probably been the biggest change, I'm a bit more sure of myself and my identity. It's a combination of being to the brink and back and address what you're about, and being OK with that.

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