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Title	Hip Hop interpellation: Rethinking autochthony and appropriation in Irish rap
Authors	Rollefson, J. Griffith
Publication date	2020-10-12
Original Citation	Rollefson, J. G. (2020) 'Hip Hop Interpellation: Rethinking Autochthony and Appropriation in Irish Rap', in Mangaoang, A., O'Flynn, J. and Ó Briain, L. (eds). Made in Ireland: Studies in Popular Music, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 224-236. isbn: 9781138336032
Type of publication	Book chapter
Link to publisher's version	https://www.routledge.com/Made-in-Ireland-Studies-in-Popular-Music/Mangaoang-OFlynn-Briain/p/book/9781138336032
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Download date	2026-11-05 20:48:07
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/10683



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Hip Hop Interpellation: Rethinking Autochthony and Appropriation in Irish Rap

J. Griffith Rollefson

> When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it
> to hold it back from flight. You talk of nationality, language, religion.
> I shall try to fly by those nets.
> -James Joyce (1916)

> 'Come out ye black and tans, come out and fight me like a man' – that's NWA.
> That's 'Fuck tha Police.' It *is* 'Fuck tha Police.'
> -Blindboy (2017)

Ireland is a nation in which poetry, music, and storytelling figure prominently in constructions of national identity. Indeed, the national symbol is the Celtic harp, icon of the ancient bards, the epic storytellers. It is also a country with a proud history of anti-colonial struggle and diasporic consciousness. Not surprisingly, these historical legacies figure prominently in the ways that hip hop has been engaged as a tool of cultural expression and political resistance by Irish MCs and DJs—from the street reporting, revolutionary lyrics, and "Celtic Funk" of Irish hip hop pioneers ScaryÉire, Marxman, Ár Lá, and Lunítíc to the epic references, Joycean wordplay, and trad soundscapes of contemporary artists like Spekulativ Fiktion, Temper-Mental MissElayneous, and Paul Alwright. Indeed, such "Knowledge of Self" (KoS) is of central ideological import in hip hop praxis and a prominent topic of hip hop scholarship. As Dublin MC, Mango, put it recently: "If you don't know where you're from, where you're from won't know you. You know? And that's the essence of hip hop" (Fitzgerald 2017).

In this essay, I lay a groundwork for how Irish artists demonstrate KoS – this "essence of hip hop"—paying close attention to local and national legacies that find form in what I term "gems of knowledge"—the intertextual sounds, symbols, and archetypes that are the lifeblood of hip hop community. Through close listening, interviews, observations, and other forms of ethnographic and archival research this chapter tells a history of hip hop KoS in Ireland by tracking some of those gems. I then focus upon one such archetype in order to make a larger claim about the relationship between the ways that this iconic black American art form has been appropriated globally and, on the other hand, the ways that "entrenched oral traditions of storytelling and poetry stretching back thousands of years have incorporated hip-hop into their cultures" as Alastair Pennycook and Tony Mitchell put it in their article, "Hip Hop as Dusty Foot Philosophy: Engaging Locality" (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009, 30).

Indeed, it is here in the landmark collection *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language* (ed. Alim, Ibrahim, Pennycook 2009) that the scholars theorize the organic intellectual "dusty foot philosophy" of Somali-Canadian rapper, K'Naan, suggesting that indigenous cultures access hip hop through their own lifeways. Exemplary of this inverted orientation, the authors examine the cultural claims of the Aboriginal Australian rapper, Wire MC, who suggests that "Hip Hop is a part of Aboriginal culture, I think it always has been" (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009, 30) According to Wire, hip hop is "still the same corroboree (get together), still singing and dancing and telling the same stories about the immediate environment" (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009, 26).

While we might dismiss the idea that hip hop has always been part of Aboriginal Australian culture as manifestly absurd, Wire's salvo displays a deep understanding of and

commitment to hip hop ways of knowing and being. Here, he performs that understanding in a distinctly hip hop way, "flipping the script" on Western logocentric and teleological notions of cultural development and evolution (Rollefson 2017, 8). Further, his performed knowledge inverts the glocal gaze, suggesting a different relationship between the autochthonous or indigenous and the appropriated, borrowed—or worse—stolen, as it usually goes with black music (Eoyang 2007, Lott 1993).

The 2009 Pennycook and Mitchell article marks the first reported instance of a widespread phenomenon that I found in my own fieldwork with hip hop artists in Germany, France, Britain, and Ireland—namely, that artists across Europe have affiliated themselves with hip hop based on hearing something in the African American call that resonated with them. In Berlin, the Turkish German MC, Chefket, explained it to me thus: "I heard myself and my community in hip hop" (Rollefson 2018a). Likewise, the Afro-Irish MC, God Knows, rapped "I just wanted to be Harlem / I just wanted to be London" before having his epiphany: "Now it's time to be Shannon / Now it's time to be Limerick" (Rusangano Family 2016). Based on these and countless other interpellating examples, I argue that hip hop knowledge is found through local experiences. While hip hop ideology unequivocally rejects misappropriation—and has a well-developed lexicon around "fronting" (faking) and "biting" (copying)—it encourages artists and fans to find themselves and their cultures in and through hip hop, localizing hip hop wisdom within local knowledges and claiming the art form as their own. That is, by hip hop's own standards the most hip hop thing you can do is, as the colloquialism goes, to "dig where you stand." If you dig deep enough, you'll find hip hop.

Building on the work of Pennycook and Mitchell and landmark essays in the Alim, et. al. (2009) and Mitchell (2001) collections, I thus posit the "hip hop interpellation thesis": that hip hop spreads not as a copy of an African American original, but, through its performance of knowledge, emerges as an always already constituent part of local knowledge and practice.[1] To be sure, rap music spreads in many ways, but when hip hop culture takes root in all its performative and ideological forms it does so via local roots—or better, it sprouts anew from roots that had been there all along.

In the next sections, I explore this thesis by looking at lyrical, musical, rhetorical, and other performative gestures that relate to Irish KoS and particularly hip hop ways of meaning making—those hip hop "gems of knowledge"—concluding with a focus on one such gem: the idea of one's own footprints and/as legacy in hip hop's recorded archive. By tracking the ways that these gems situate indigenous au/oralities, revolutionary histories, and local ways of knowing in hip hop contexts, I explore how we might better understand the relationship of the local to the global, the indigenous to the foreign, the autochthonous to the appropriated. Further, I complicate and reimagine the relationship of these binaries and show how hip hop praxis suggests their mutual implication in an unbounded network of postcolonial entanglements (Lipsitz 1994, Rollefson 2017). Indeed, the doubled figure of "au/orality" recognizes that oral storytelling traditions are nothing without the aural praxis of listening, interpreting, and synthesizing stories into one's own worldview.

[1] See, for example, Urla, J. (2001). "'We are all Malcolm X!' Negu Gorriak, hip-hop, and the Basque Political Imaginary" in Mitchell's *Global Noise*. In her study of Basque performative solidarities with hip hop, Urla writes: "Rather than try to sort out the autochthonous from the borrowed, we need to consider the uses musicians make of hip-hop, how they understand its relationship to their own condition, and what new meanings are generated by its use."

As one case in point, the widely influential artist and cultural critic, Blindboy, of Limerick's Rubberbandits, recently echoed Wire's Māori claim to hip hop's global (au/oral) indigeneity. Dropping knowledge about Ireland's own ethos of resistance and laying claim to hip hop through his own gift of gab, Blindboy's "hot take" puts it this way.

> You listen to old school trad tunes, especially shit by the Dubliners… there's a hip hop nature to it: even, like, the Clancy Brothers, the song 'Mountain Dew.' 'Mountain Dew,' by the Clancy Brothers, it sounds diddley-eye, but what it's about is fuckin brewin' *poitín* (moonshine) up a mountain, beatin' the heads off guards (police). The fuckin' 'Come out ye black and tans (colonial-era troops), come out and fight me like a man' – that's NWA. That's 'Fuck tha Police.' It *is* 'Fuck tha Police'" (Fitzgerald 2017).[2]

The metaphysics at play here are important. Blindboy's performed repetition and emphasis in the interview underscores that Irish traditional music is not *like* NWA's anti-police brutality anthem. In Blindboy's view it *is* that anthem. It *is* hip hop.

Why has this highly localized, particularized, and authenticizing black American music translated so easily to far flung communities and contexts around the globe? As Wire MC suggests, it is because those people and places were already hip hop. They just didn't know it yet.

Filthy Folklore: A Brief History of Hip Hop KoS in Ireland

In a personal interview with Irish hip hop pioneer, Stevie G, the DJ and radio personality described how the rise of hip hop on the island was preconditioned by the popularity of roots reggae and Jamaican dancehall which were introduced to the port cities of Cork, Dublin, and Belfast by West Indian sailors in the 1960s and 70s (Stevie G 2015, Cullen 2014). Hip hop music

[2] The Blindboy quote is at 16:05 in the documentary.

and its culture arrived in the 1980s via personal and diasporic links with US cities, the circulation of mixtapes and LPs, and the early cinematic explorations of the culture captured in the widely influential hip hop films *Wild Style* and *Beat Street*. Thanks to these developments and the popularity of *Yo! MTV Raps* across Europe in the late 1980s, thriving underground scenes had formed across the island by the early 1990s.

The groundbreaking Irish hip hop crews ScaryÉire (formed in Dublin in 1990) and Marxman (formed in London in 1989) used the music to voice revolutionary critiques that focused on social and economic problems like income inequality, substance abuse, domestic violence, and the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland known euphemistically as "The Troubles." Indeed, as we will see, Irish hip hop artists have painted striking portraits of the neocolonial situation that has resulted from the continuing British occupation of Northern Ireland, eschewing the evasive euphemism and confronting the daily realities and mental stresses head-on. The most influential Irish hip hop group to this day, ScaryÉire used a mix of revolutionary lyrics and street reporting set to the soundtrack of Irish traditional music and black Atlantic sounds, inventing their signature genre of "Celtic Funk." Indeed, the crew's name is a play on the Irish (*Gaelige*) word for Ireland, "Éire," linking this linguistic heritage and cultural pride with the perceived "scary" threat that might come with the rising of such "Knowledge of Self" (KoS).

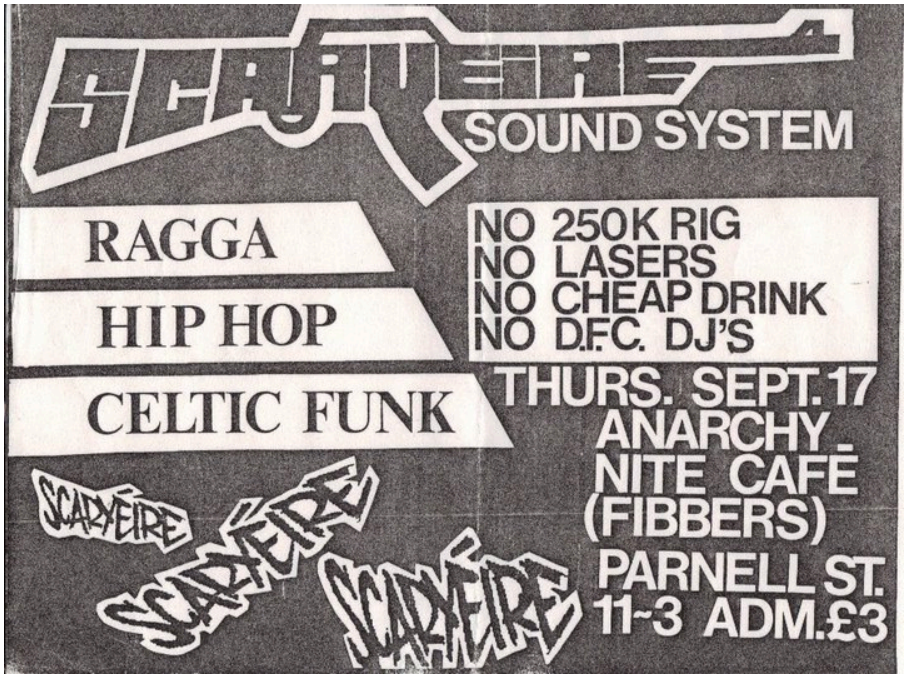


Fig. 1 – Newspaper advert for an early 1990s ScaryÉire show. Here the "scare" takes the form of a Kalashnikov assault rifle – a thinly-veiled reference to continuing IRA militancy before the Good Friday Agreement. See also Stephen Millar's Chapter, "_____," in this volume.

Indeed, despite the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and the peace that followed, language politics remains a heated terrain in the political landscape of the divided island.

The article "ScaryÉire: Live in Barnstormers" from the February 1994 issue of the underground Irish publication, *Hip Hop Connection*, captures the ethos, style, and sound of this groundbreaking Irish rap crew and paints a vivid picture of hip hop's core elements on display at a 1990s Dublin hip hop show.

> As the audience fills and gathers around the small two-foot stage, simply adorned with a pair of decks and two mics, three quarters of ScaryÉire huddle in a corner, getting busy with the pre-gig herbals. They're an odd-looking bunch—half street urchin, half b-boy—you wouldn't guess they were Ireland's premier rap crew if you passed them in the street… There's little recourse to accepted rap stylings, just full-on, hard rhyming in an accent as thick as the local Guinness. And what rhymes. There's an underlying aura of malcontent to ScaryÉire's material. It's more than evident in the ska-infused "Truncheon Song," another take on the old rap staple of police brutality… And while they prove they're more than capable of

> jumping around and working a crowd, ScaryÉire give the lie to the notion that they're a one trick pony. Two thirds through they drop some mellow tackle that hitches a ride on the slow-mo P-funk bandwagon… Elsewhere the beats seem to borrow from all quarters—reggae, traditional Irish music, the old skool—the double deejay stint allowing for some assured scratching between the breaks, as they flip some maverick dance styles (Cowan 1994).

Together, the lyrical explorations of KoS and polycultural Celtic Funk sound that this vignette captures had a profound effect on the Irish hip hop that would follow. As Galway's DJ Hazo put it: "The thing with ScaryÉire was that in the '80s, trad groups had tried to mess around with black music and it didn't work, whereas here you had these gigs where Mek would start playing alongside a *bodhrán* and a flute and it wasn't gimmicky. It was of its time certainly. House of Pain was gimmicky: this wasn't" (Worrall).

As Hazo suggests, the noted Irish-American identified crew House of Pain is a common, but problematic one in discussions of Irish hip hop. While the Los Angeles crew did achieve some success in Ireland with their 1992 hit, "Jump Around," reaching number 6 on the Irish charts, their music and videos portrayed a tired stereotype of Irish people—a "plastic paddy anthem" (Mango 2017). As much as the track opened people's minds to the possibility of a thing called "Irish hip hop," the track likely painted Irish hip hop into a corner just as it was developing a voice of its own (Stevie G 2015).

In fact, the most important diasporic Irish crew of the early years was a multiracial quartet with roots stretching from Dublin to Jamaica—the militant socialist hip hop collective, Marxman. On their 1994 track, "Ship Ahoy," the Black Bristolian, Phrase D, and the Dublin-born Londoner, MC, rapped about "mind-forged" manacles, featuring a hook by a new superstar named Sinéad O'Connor. The deeply historicizing track connected African colonization and the transatlantic slave trade to Ireland's history of colonization, famine/genocide, and forced

dispersion, drawing continuities between those historical injustices and contemporary forms of religious, economic, and political oppression. With the lyrics: "Think you're not a slave, 'cause no whip marks your back / Now a bureaucrat wields the nine tails of the cat" and "Search and look around, my birthplace is torn / But England has fallen, dusk negates dawn" they connected Ireland's particular history to postcolonial resonances around the world. Indeed, their militancy earned them the twin honors of being banned by the BBC (for perceived IRA sympathies) and featured on the BBC's flagship program *Top of the Pops* (for their groundbreaking domestic abuse track "All About Eve").

Like ScaryÉire, Marxman's performances employed both poetic and musical devices steeped in both black Atlantic and Irish culture. The group's producer Oisín Lunny was the son of legendary Irish trad musician Dónal Lunny, and that sonic and cultural legacy was foregrounded prominently in the crew's beats. But while Marxman's lyrics and music were steeped in Irish history and culture, and although the group performed with ScaryÉire and toured with U2, the MCs' English accents complicated their relationship with the label "Irish hip hop" in the 1990s (Murcia 2015). Nonetheless, over the years ScaryÉire's and Marxman's mix of lyrics and beats steeped in Irish KoS set a high bar for hip hop artistry and provided a powerful template for Irish hip hop.

Among the standouts from the pivotal turn-of-the-millennium firmament is Exile Eye, the solo vehicle for the former frontman from Ár Lá (our day), another first-generation crew who reigned in Cork, during the heyday of the legendary club, Sir Henry's. Notably, the crew's name is rich in KoS signification, drawing on the Irish phrase "*tiocfaidh ár lá*" (our day will come) a battle cry of Republican consciousness coined by Joyce in 1916 and popularized in the

prison autobiography of IRA militant Bobby Sands. Importantly, given Ireland's history of diaspora, Exile Eye's name also resonates nationally with a bit of global hip hop knowledge around the "third eye" of hip hop consciousness—a naming practice carried on in another crew from that era: 3rd Eye Surfers.

Just as Exile Eye described himself as a "Celtic warrior poet," 3rd Eye Surfers debut 2001 album was titled *Filthy Folklore*, a KoS gem connecting their praxis to traditional au/oralities the world over. Indeed, the press release for that album made explicit the binary collapsing, glocalizing message that their music "combines futuristic hip-hop production with Ireland's history of spoken word and stream of consciousness writing techniques" (3rd Eye Surfers 2001). The 3rd Eye Surfers thus reference not only the "third eye" of African American hip hop consciousness, its polycultural appropriation of the Hindu "ajna chakra" (third-eye chakra) the ancient Irish epics, and Joycean modernism, but also the living tradition of the Irish *seanchaí* (storytellers).

The early 2000s "Celtic Tiger" era, produced an increasingly diverse and prolific set of crews, label, and scenes, including the au/oralities of Sons Phonetic, a crew who Stevie G describes as "Waterford's answer to the Wu-Tang Clan—a crew that has been consistently making solid underground boom bap music over the years." Another important crew from the era was Creative Controle (aka Messiah J and The Expert), about whom the founder of the influential irishhiphop.com (aka "H2Éire"), Kieran Nolan, explained to me "this was a groundbreaker, and I think part of the international wave of indie hip hop inspired by the likes of Rawkus records." Indeed, the duo went on to claim the honor of being Ireland's first rap group to be nominated for the annual Choice Music Prize in 2007.

Rob Kelly is Ireland's best-known hardcore rapper, drawing on his knowledge of Irish boxing traditions to shape his hard knock rhymes about street life and organized crime. In a similar vein is Urban Intelligence, the hardscrabble North Dublin crew who started the influential Workin' Class Records, which produced the legends, Lunítíc, 4 Real, DJ Moschops, Teknikal, GI, Lethal Dialect, and Costello and beefed with their rivals at All-City Records, the South Dublin record store that was home to the prolific Class A's crew of Redzer, Nugget, Nucentz, Terrorizt, and Collie. While the first decade of the new century was steeped in post-*Eight Mile* rap battles, artists like Ballymun's Lunítíc also carried the Celtic Funk torch, producing the trad album, *The Ballad Session* (2010), and rapping with turntable scratches that emulated the rhythmic profile of trad's jigs and reels on the track "No Boundaries" from the *Homemade Bombs* mixtape (2005). Indeed, on the latter, Lunítíc raps a chorus with Buachaill Dána (bold boy) that echoes the "Scary" militancy of a decade earlier, concluding with the hook: "Out to the 32 counties / Worldwide no boundaries"—Republican code for a unified Ireland. In keeping with the Celtic Funk ethos, Lunítíc was also an important part of Hip Nós "a clubnight where hip-hop and spoken word from Dublin would collide and fuse with traditional Irish Sean Nós singing" (Fleming 2014).

Today, the Irish hip hop landscape is rich and diverse, ranging from leftist militancy and Celtic mysticism to introverted psychological expressions and tales from the rugged street. Ireland's best known rapper is probably the black Irishman, Rejjie Snow, an artist often compared to Tyler, The Creator because of his stream of consciousness flow, iconoclastic imagery, and fresh, minimalist beats. Limerick's Rusangano Family epitomizes the best of an emergent polycultural Ireland, featuring the MCs God Knows and MuRli (of Zimbabwean and

Togolese descent, respectively) and their ethnically Irish DJ and producer MyNameisJohn. The crew holds bragging rights as the first Choice Music Prize nominees to bring home the hardware for Irish Album of the Year as hip hop artists with songs steeped in hip hop wisdom and KoS introspection on their *Let the Dead Bury the Dead* (2016).

Paul Alwright (formerly Lethal Dialect) from the Working Class Records orbit is another artist who has been critically acclaimed in recent years and is one of many who is carrying the torch of ScaryÉire, Marxman, and the Celtic Funk consciousness. His 2015 track, "New Dublin Saunter," takes its name from an old Dublin song and weaves a poetic ode to the city, asking "why our own people hate to hear our own accent" when "you've the same voice as James Joyce... a WB Yeats on beat breaks." Importantly, these stunning KoS lines highlight two Irish greats of world literature that continue to inspire today's urban poets despite the "inferiority complex or malignant shame" of "an oppressed people treated inhumane" and have focused media attention on the unfinished challenges of Ireland's post-"Celtic Tiger" austerity era.

One of the most gifted MCs to come out of Ireland in the last ten years is Temper-Mental MissElayneous, a Dublin MC whose unique mix of working-class feminism and Celtic mythology has shed new light on age-old social problems. There have also been crossover hits from the likes of Dublin's Collie and Cork's GMC, an established MC and producer who has been integral in developing the next generation of young artists—including Irish language rappers—though his acclaimed GMC Beats workshops with the nation-wide Music Generation youth music NGO. Indeed, artists like Muipead have been developing the art of Irish language rap for the last decade leading to the recent breakout of the *Rap as Gaelige* (Irish rap) crew, Kneecap—a reference to sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.

Hip Hop Interpellation: "Like the Tetrapod Footprints on Valentia Island"

With this broad historical background and the gems of Irish KoS we found along the way, here I want to focus in, examining a single track that exemplifies how hip hop has found itself in Ireland; or, how Ireland has found itself in hip hop. Here, I want to examine how hip hop flips the script on globalization and complicates the autochthony/appropriation binary. As I suggest, like many of the knowledges above, the track typifies my theory of hip hop interpellation, suggesting that the artform in Ireland has interpolated itself into global hip hop and its oral storytelling tradition. As we will see, by focusing on a single track we can see how hip hop in Ireland has *found a footing*.

On his 2018 *Effigies EP*, Cork MC Spekulativ Fiktion describes our 21st-century global condition from an unmistakably Irish position. Like the 3rd Eye Surfers' binary collapsing *Filthy Folklore,* some 15 years earlier, Spek's *Effigies* also finds hip hop in "Ireland's history of spoken word and stream of consciousness writing." To begin with, Spek performs his speculative, conscious, and script-flipping Joycean glocal critique while riding the hazy, detuned, hiccupping, and utterly *filthy* beats of County Clare's DJ Mankyy. Although my ears would have instantly recognized Mankyy's beats as "filthy" before I ever knew Ireland, I wouldn't have made the connection to the DJ's name without immersion in both hip hop culture and Irish culture. For "Mankyy" is Irish slang for "filthy"; the perfect articulation of a global hip hop aesthetic described—and *performed*—through a local linguistic practice. No, more than that – the naming is proof positive of the interpellative resonance; evidence of how this artist discovered a filthy hip hop aesthetic in his Irish sociolinguistic context. Indeed, Mankyy described to me

how the name located his "filthy," "gritty, not polished, not-perfectly mastered" hip hop aesthetic in Ireland, but how that aesthetic was made possible by the exceedingly experimental, filthy, anything-goes ethos of regional artists like Spek, Deviant and Naïve Ted, and MyNameisJohn. "What really inspired me was that these people were from where I was from. This crazy, amazing, weird stuff was from around here" (Mankyy 2018).

On the fourth track of the EP, "Google," Spek raps in his signature compellingly frank flow over Mankyy's ill and stuttering beat that counterposes a sustained horn stab with an eerie broken vibes arpeggio. Spek begins in a pitch-shifted whisper—"Life is stress but the dead rest easy"—before the verse begins: "Terror schemes and Semtex seizures / Best wake up and smell the diesel." Just as this troubling first couplet calls to mind the ubiquitous threat of global terrorism—and its presumed Islamist perpetrators—so too does it correct that image with the sensually simpler and more immediate (olfactory) cultural memory of homemade IRA bombs and Molotov cocktails. Most importantly, as we'll see, this all comes in the context of a track about hip hop "consciousness" and its entreaty to "wake up."

For in the very next set of couplets Spek turns his critique to millennial-era social media, its culture of distraction, and what he regards as a dangerous trend toward intellectual death. Indeed, it's worth remembering that the (concept) album on which the track appears is titled *Effigies,* a fact of which Spek's reminds us with the *conscious* lines "Algorithmic brain suppression never killed anybody" on the fittingly titled track, "Likes." Spek continues:

> Systematic messages of doom and despair
> Suicidal shit like spoonin' a bear
> Sticks in your head like glue in your hair
> *Fuck* learning, that's why Google is there

After facetiously proclaiming the victory of the internet meme over actual "learning," he corrects the record:

> But this mentality is flimsy and callous
> And tryin' to keep up is like sprintin' in sandals
> I place my focus on linguistics and samples
> And get respected for my effortless chatter

While Spek grew up mere minutes from Cork's Blarney Castle and its gab-gifting stone, the "effortless chatter" that is his Irish cultural inheritance comes instead from farther north and west.[3] For Spek locates the truest expression of his verbal dexterity and conceptual excellence embedded in a different stone—the "Tetrapod Trackway" of Valentia Island, County Kerry. Employing his silver tongue to extemporize on hip hop's worst solipsistic tendencies, he corrects the record and brings the knowledge home, chatting:

> Spek's on a good ting, it's feckin' timeless
> Like the Tetrapod Footprints on Valentia Island
> Sorry lads, no point tryin'

Thus ends the track, "Google."

When I first heard the "Tetrapod Footprints" line at the *Effigies* release party in Cork's Poor Relation in the Spring of 2018 my still-too-American mind was blown. Did he just drop the mic after namechecking the fossil record? In point of fact, I'd just been to the lonely, windswept point in County Kerry the previous autumn and was struck by the remote smallness of the place. There, barely marked, off a narrow road is a pathway down to a rocky coastline that bears witness to the transition of life from water to land over 350 million years ago. There, near the northernmost point of Valentia Island is "the oldest reliably dated evidence of four

[3] Legend has it that if one kisses the "Blarney Stone" he or she will be gifted with a 'silver tongue'; the gift of fine speech and wordplay; the 'gift of gab" in local parlance.

legged vertebrates moving over land" in the world—the "Tetrapod Trackway"—made when Ireland was south of the Equator and joined to what is now North America (Valentia Island 2018).

Essentially, here Spek name checks a regional landmark with planetary and epochs-old weight to boast of his artistic supremacy. With classic hip hop braggadocio, the lines analogize the MC's abilities with the next-level evolution of the first animal to walk on land. But in his hyper-local brogue, Spek shows how his "good ting" (good thing) is not self-centered, solipsistic, or parochial, but focused on how the local can be globally transformative. He lays claim to timeless and universal excellence via a local footing. Indeed, all transformation, it seems, is local. He thus concludes locally as well, "Sorry lads, no point tryin'"—simultaneously keeping with his critique of our seemingly global, but in fact, dangerously siloed and echo-chambering social media culture and claiming his place as the next evolution, climbing out of the past and into the future.

As I suggest throughout my accounting of Irish hip hop knowledges above, while this lyric is an exceptional example of hip hop braggadocio, it is also emblematic of a core hip hop praxis that seeks to find global, universal, and abstract truths in the granular detail of local, lived experience. Following the hip hop interpellation thesis, I argue that in this lyric we can hear that Spek has heard hip hop's call; the call to find the universal in your own local context. More than simply localizing his boast in the African American oratorical traditions of hip hop and its precursors, Spek is here globalizing a particular wisdom and wordplay that is also his own cultural inheritance.

From the script-flipping Joyce epigraph above ("…I shall try to fly by those nets"), to the legend of the Blarney stone, to the name of the African American MC "Gift of Gab," local wisdom has a way of expressing universal truth—especially the wisdom of au/oral traditions. Indeed, something about the ineffability and slippage of sonic transmission allows for ever-new intersections and networks to emerge. Au/oral networks seem to operate via different structures, dynamics, and valences of knowledge flows than the colonizing logocentrisms and implicit asymmetries of written knowledges (Rollefson 2017, 207-217).

Indeed, in preparing this chapter alongside an essay on hip hop pedagogy, I was working to make a similarly listening-centered argument about the glocal "questing" music of the Oakland-based Puerto Rican MC, Rico Pabón (Rollefson 2018b). As I revisited an old New York classic, Rakim's "In the Ghetto" (1990) to underscore Rico's dialogue with hip hop's ever-unfinished knowledges my ears perked up. I was drawing inspiration from the lines of hip hop wisdom "It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at," but as I let the track spin for the third or fourth time I heard the following lines from the track's final verse anew:

> People in my neighborhood, they know I'm good
> From London to Hollywood, wherever I stood
> *Footprints remain on stage ever since*
> *As I walk the street, I leave fossils and dents* (Rakim 1990)[4]

I messaged Spek right away, copying a link to the Rakim track.

> Griff: Hey Spek, for the record, do you know the lines at 4:20 in the track?
> Spek: I know the tune, but wouldn't have known all the lyrics.
> G: Feckin' crazy tho, right? Footprints as fossils… shit is meta.
> S: I'm basically the Cork Rakim
> S: But I already knew that

[4] Eric B and Rakim. 1990. "In the Ghetto" on *Let the Rhythm Hit 'Em.* MCA. Apropos of this article Paul Gilroy has written cogently on the topic in his 1991 article "It Ain't where you're from, it's where you're at…: The Dialectics of Diasporic Identification" in *Third Text* Vol. 5, Issue 13, 3-16. Listen at (4:20).

S: Spek the God
G: BIG thumbs-up emoji
S: I'm only talking shite
G: small thumbs-up emoji (Spekulative Fiktion 2018)

Did he know the track? Of course he did. The track and its signature "it's where you're at" line is at the forefront of the pantheon of hip hop knowledge. Spek's immediate "talking shite" that he's "Spek the God" in that message exchange is a demonstration of Spek's knowledge of the global culture. But it is also a personal localization of Rakim's Nation of Gods and Earths ("five-percenter") Black Muslim moniker: "Rakim, the God MC." So, knowing his knowledge of the music and culture, did Spek actually model his fossil line on Rakim's consciously? No, but that's a function of this bit of hip hop wisdom seeping into the foundations of the culture. It is a function of that knowledge entering a place where that particular bit of hip hop wisdom finds itself amongst other knowledges, other cultures.

Indeed, in the week following this exchange, I caught another iteration of this "footprint" gem of knowledge in the 2005 track "Southside Revival" by the Filipino-American MC, Geologic (i.e. global thinking), from the Seattle hip hop crew, Blue Scholars:

You say there's no time to study, people look
You got time to take a shit then you got time to read a book
I proceed to leave my footprints embedded on the block
My first-born is learning to walk upon (Blue Scholars 2005)

As it turns out, this bit of hip hop wisdom is indeed a recurring theme in the recorded archive. It is a KoS gem. Far from (mis)appropriating hip hop's African American praxis on "Google," Spek has *stepped in it* in all the right ways. He locates his "effortless chatter"—his *gift of gab*—in his local and regional contexts while demonstrating an *always already* awareness of hip hop's

au/oral codes, performativities, and knowledge formations. He has heard hip hop's call and recognized himself therein.

Of course, this is the point of the hip hop interpellation thesis: just as every culture on Earth has its own local, regional, and national au/oral musical and storytelling traditions, every culture on the globe has its own points of local reference, its own points of regional pride, and its own verbal, musical, and performative expressions of those local, regional, and national stories. But as anthropological studies have shown over and over again, these stories share many of the same archetypes and structures centering around many of the same questions that arise from human experience. One of those timeless questions, of course, is: what do we leave behind? That seems to be the focus of Spek's EP, titled *Effigies* – an EP full of deeply local gems of hip hop wisdom.

"Graspin' at Freedom Through Slang Language and Samplers": A Cautionary Conclusion

Lest we leave it there, like the Celtic Tiger, such local and national pride can (and usually does) easily slip into compliance with the worst of global capitalism's destructive forces. In brief, celebrations of hip hop consciousness—of Knowledge of Self—can quickly become prideful arrogance. On his dystopian "Introduction" to his collaboration with Deviant & Naive Ted, *Slave Labour* (2014), Spek echoes Marxman's core critique from the depths of the global recession—a recession during which Ireland was reminded of its unfinished decolonization and introduced to its new neocolonial masters in global finance.[5] Spek's track is an unvarnished

[5] Thanks to DJ Jus'Me for schooling me on my own premature celebration, my own hubris in this very regard.

critique of Irish hubris during the Celtic Tiger years—or, better, a takedown of the entangled complicities of Irish government, church, and business leadership during those years.

But first, he paints the local Cork reality of post-Tiger austerity. Building from the communal to the personal, he raps:

> Days pass us by like time-lapse traffic signs
> Grey skies fade to night and then back again
> Chest is tight, back hurts, clocks are tickin' backwards
> Graspin' at freedom through slang language and samplers (Spekulativ Fiktion 2014)

Importantly, in the last line above, he implicates himself and his own community—hip hop and its mediatized hope industry. Spek seems to ask: will any of our clever and self-aware performances of knowledge amount to anything? It's a fair question. Are we just flailing at a semblance of freedom that we, ourselves, have created and perpetuated? Are our conscious, self-aware ideas nothing more than musings? Are our tools those of the master—the culture industry and its pre-digested, routinized, difference economy? (Lorde 2007; Erlmann 1996).

In the balance of the bleak and austere track Spek cuts to the quick, implicating church, state, and global capital with his "timeless," Homeric-cum-Yeatsean swag[6]: "Lair of the Minotaur I'm trapped in a Maze / Romantic Ireland's dead and gone and it's rollin' in its grave." Just as he indicts Ireland's leadership ("As fat cats relish / In the aftermaths of fallen Tigers… Drinkin' vintage vino… Sippin' sacrificial blood"), so too does Spek highlight his own complicity ("We're easily blinded by / Bright lights and blatant liars").

The track concludes:

I worry of what is comin' next

[6] In addition to Spek's epic Homeric references ('Minotaur', 'Maze'), the second couplet is a revision of a Yeats original: "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone. It's with O'Leary in the grave." Thanks to Áine Mangaoang for tipping off the Yeats reference here.

> The fight for everything when there's nothin' left
> All good things must come to an end
> Empty pockets tell a good time's poorly spent
> The days are passin' quicker
> But the winter seems to last forever
> Cast out in the cold
> We've grown bitter, but become so clever
> Build morale through broken song
> What I keep inside just can't be bought
> I'm a cosmonaut
> Nuttin' but a space for thinkin' commie thoughts

With the last couplet, he performs his gift of gab, spitting his "bitter" and "clever" conclusion—that he's a "cosmonaut" and that communist ideology is the only logical "space" left. Notably, like many tracks in the socially conscious realm of Irish hip hop today, Spek's are notably austere and unadorned, lacking the standard verse-chorus structure, eschewing "hooks," and preferring long, single takes of multiple verses.

I conclude with one such long, breathless track: Kojaque's 2018 "White Noise." Like Spek's 2014 intro to *Slave Labour,* "White Noise" presents a first-person narrative of Ireland's forgotten working class. Like Spek's "Fat cats" Kojaque takes aim at "Smarmy fuckers in the grey suits" whether in government, business, or church. After describing his broken home, his broken dreams, and the daily class profiling based on his post code and accent, Kojaque comes to his close-to-the-edge critique:

> Fuck the plebs the rich are culling off the piss poor
> Peep the news, just in, this public discourse is resource
> Pissing up on the steps of the cathedral
> Sovereign state; they'd rather see my mother bleed out than build a clinic
> You leave abortions to the backstreets
> If we need it we're gonna get it
> Fuck the handouts
> Give tax breaks to smarmy fuckers in the grey suits

As the single-take verse becomes increasingly agitated, indignant, and breathless, flowing across four, eight, and sixteen bar stopping points, Kojaque finally drops his most memorable gem of Irish hip hop knowledge:

> Leave me starving tryna find a source of income
> Can't pull cockles from out the Liffey
> Dollymill strand is too polluted
> I'm just a fish I'm tryna breath air

The verse ends with a sharp and desperate gasp.

A fitting rejoinder to Spek's tetrapod boastfulness, "sweet Molly Malone" might have been able to pull "cockles and mussels alive, alive-o" out of the Liffey to survive the brutal poverty in Victorian Dublin, but not Kojaque. Not today. Indeed, the "cockles" reference plays on an unofficial anthem of Dublin—the story of a poor fishmonger, "Molly Malone." Unlike the romanticized poverty of that beautiful but doomed Irish icon, in Kojaque's post-Tiger reality the Emerald Isle's epic coastlines and rivers of yore have been sacrificed on the altar of global capital. But also unlike the romanticized street urchin, Kojaque refuses to play the role of the poor-but-chaste, romantic martyr—a role all too common in Irish history.

By dropping that gem of knowledge at this critical point in the track, Kojaque simultaneously locates himself in Dublin and finds hip hop in his local experience. Like Spek's tetrapod footprints, like 3rd Eye Surfers' *Filthy Folklore,* like Mankyy's filthy beats, and like ScaryÉire's Celtic Funk, Kojaque's "White Noise" is, at once, a fitting testament to how hip hop has interpellated Irish artists and an evocative example of how Irish artists have interpolated hip hop into their own culture. Further, through its expressions of KoS au/oralities—"crying 'cockles and mussels, alive, alive-o'"—it offers up a gem of knowledge exemplifying how Irish artists have dug down deep and found hip hop where they're at; how hip hop has seeped into

the groundwater of glocal au/oral traditions; how hip hop has left and is leaving its imprint in the local cultural firmament; how au/oral traditions the world over are finding hip hop at the core of their local praxis. Indeed, it is "still the same corroboree, still singing and dancing and telling the same stories."

Acknowledgements

This chapter has benefitted from the contributions of a great many Irish hip hop artists, presenters, and fans—ranging from formal interviews and correspondences to craic (fun) in local clubs and community centers. Foremost among these instructors is the DJ, producer, and radio personality, Stevie G. My thanks to Jus'Me, Spek, Mankyy, Ophelia, GMC, Gatch, Blindboy, Kieran, MissElayneous, Costello, and all the other artists and heads who contributed, directly or indirectly, to this chapter.

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