

Chapter 10

“To Be as Real as Possible”: The Actor–Network of *Status YO!* and the Production of HipHop Authenticity

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ABSTRACT

*In this chapter an effort is made to describe the film production network of the German “HipHop film” *Status YO!* (Till Hastreiter, 2004) and the related attribution and production of “authenticity”. However, film production will neither be considered a process in which human entities are the sole manufacturers of a stable cultural artifact. Nor will film production be reduced to the classical triad of preproduction, shooting and postproduction. Rather, from an ANT perspective, the production of a film is a continuous process of translation, inscriptions and negotiations that exceed postproduction. Additionally, a multitude of heterogeneous actors are involved in this processual production of the film and authenticity respectively, such as academic writing, audience responses, film critical reception, historical and cultural discourses, and also other films.*

INTRODUCTION

“Authenticity” – sometimes termed “credibility” or “realness” – is a central concept in HipHop culture as well as an assessment criterion for performances and media products of any kind related to HipHop culture (cf. Klein & Friedrich, 2003, p. 7): “Questions of authenticity permeate virtually every realm of hip-hop and hip-hop scholarship” (Ochmann, 2013, p. 423). Authenticity has basically been approached from three different perspectives or by implying three distinctive theoretical a priori: It has firstly been considered a result of a receptive process, a mode of evaluation based on subjective or rather arbitrary sets of rules or shared cultural practices and knowledge. This applies to such approaches, which act on the assumption that it is the audience who finally confers authenticity (cf. Klein & Friedrich, 2003, p. 11) whereby the audience can be an informed peer-group, practitioners, followers, press reception, scholars or critical discourse respectively (cf. Ochmann, 2013, p. 423). Secondly, authenticity has been

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conceptualized as a result of a certain mode of production: This can be a certain strategy of staging or performativity (cf. Klein & Friedrich, 2003) or the production of cultural artifacts. A third approach describes and analyzes such cultural artifact's modes of representation or their aesthetic and narrative qualities with regard to authenticity (cf. Spöhrer, 2012; Lund, 2008). In any case, a conceptualization of authenticity as an intrinsic or essentialist quality has been abandoned in most instances in favor of a dynamic, processual and discursive construct (cf. Ochmann, 2013, pp. 424-426; cf. Harrison 2009). Traditionally, the process of “producing meaning” demands for an interaction and interrelation of both “senders” and “receivers” and thus classically speaking requires the consideration of both producers and audience as well as the “medium” mediating between the two. Actor-Network Theory's “indeterministic heuristic” (Schüttpelz, 2008, p. 239) offers a solution to the problem of locating the “source” in either producers or receivers of authenticity or the central function of the medium as a mediator. It consequently abandons all kinds of hierarchy implied in such a “sender-receiver model” (cf. Wieser, 2012, pp. 102-110) and treats them non-hierarchically in this respect. In addition to this, it avoids constructing the production of meaning (or authenticity respectively) as a monodirectional canal-like construction (cf. Wieser, 2012, pp. 103). Producers can be receivers as well as receivers can equally take the position of producers, whereby the function of a “producer” is not restricted to human beings exclusively. Rather, by introducing the term “actors” in “networks” Actor-Network Theory needs to be considered a “flat” approach by which heterogeneous elements are related to each other, no matter whether they are (from a traditional perspective) incommensurable or incompatible. Discourses, academic writing, humans, non-human entities such as animals, ideas, technical things or cultural artifacts can *act* as contributors to and mediators of the production of authenticity alike. Authenticity then is a result of networking, a specific type of relation and mutual translation.

In the following chapter, I will make an effort to describe the production of authenticity in relation to the German film *Status YO!* (G, Till Hastreiter, 2004) as a production network, a collective sociotechnical process, encompassing a whole range of diverse actors, whose common agenda was “to become as real as possible” (cf. Deitering, 2004).

In 2004 Till Hastreiter's Film *Status YO!* was released and marketed as “the first German HipHop film ever to be made” and in the course of its production, reception and marketing it was attributed with the label “authentic” (cf. Anders & Rüsel, 2004). Although from an academic and film historical perspective considering the film “the first German HipHop film” this is not entirely correct, since films with the label *New German-Turkish Cinema* reworked global discourses of HipHop-culture as early as 1998,¹ Hastreiter's production network used this label as one of many strategies of authentication of his film among the German HipHop culture and the popcultural discourse. Originality in HipHop culture is discursively stabilized as connected to authenticity, a concept that proved to be successful with *Wild Style* (USA, Charlie Ahearn., 1982), a film that became known on a global scale as the “first HipHop film” ever and at the same time remains a measure for authenticity of all following medial and everyday practices of global HipHop culture (cf. Klein & Friedrich, 2003, pp. 19-22). As I will show, the appropriation, translation and reworking of *Wild Style*, as well as certain aesthetic, narrative and cinematic motifs of HipHop films's history became central and significant actors in the process of producing authenticity in relation to *Status YO!*.

However, approaching the production of authenticity and the production of the film demands for the consideration of further significant actors such as cultural discourses of HipHop, audience and critical reception and press reviews of the film as well as media performances by Hastreiter and his film crew.

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