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SOCIAL INNOVATION AT THE GRASSROOTS: PATHWAYS  
TOWARDS SOCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH MUSIC FOR  
DISAFFECTED YOUTH AND THOSE AT RISK

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# **SOCIAL INNOVATION AT THE GRASSROOTS: PATHWAYS TOWARDS SOCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH MUSIC FOR DISAFFECTED YOUTH AND THOSE AT RISK.**

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## **Abstract**

This paper documents the ways in which music-based activities and music-based arts programs have been used to offer positive pathways to disaffected young people at risk or in detention in Australia, Britain and the US. Drawing on ethnographic research from 'Playing for Life', an Australian Research Council funded longitudinal comparative project, I outline the ways in which opportunities for social engagement through everyday music activities have been developed in the broader community and even in correctional institutions in Adelaide, South Australia; London; Berlin; Boston, Massachusetts; and Providence, Rhode Island. Documenting examples of how these programs appear to have been effective in facilitating youth agency, I outline how engaging disaffected and disadvantaged youth, especially at risk and incarcerated youth, in music activities and workshops can lead to opportunities for employment and the development of social capital and of socio-economic inclusion.

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The most politically relevant point is surely that music today is also a place of employment, livelihoods and labour markets. This fact is obscured because being creative remains in our collective imaginations as a sort of dream world or utopia, far apart from the real world of making a living (McRobbie 1999:134).

Twenty-seven year old DJ Shep greeted me in his usual frenetic style at the door of his new premises, eager to show me around. His hip hop retail and workshop outlet had just moved to another space above the original basement shop in the heart of Adelaide. The effect was not only a doubling of floor space, but also a new level of sophistication and professionalism. While the graffiti art, skateboarding, breakdancing and rap workshop studios still existed in the basement below our feet, the retail shop above ground was newly refurbished. It was now light, modern and open, stocked with a wide range of hip hop clothes, music and accessories for breakdancing, skating and graffiti art. As we chatted, a diverse selection of customers wandered in, some very young and some clearly way past their teenage years—some to browse, some to accompany children and teenagers, some to obtain the latest coloured spray cans for graf art or to pick up clothes especially ordered in their size. 'Now', said Shep with satisfaction, 'the parents feel cool about coming in and shopping too'. He showed me his new

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flyer advertising the business. Although designed on his computer, it looked professional and slick. The triple-folded A4 sheet advertised specials on local and overseas products such as Adidas (limited edition) sneakers, Poynter and iPath shoes, Stussy t-shirts and bags and Tribal Jeans, and featured several of his friends modelling the clothes and accessories with attitude. Things had clearly changed since my first visit to Da Klinik two years earlier! I looked up. ‘Don’t you ever get accused of somehow selling out, becoming too corporate?’ I asked tentatively. Shep became even more animated. ‘No-one does their job for free! Everyone wants to get paid for what they do’, he exclaimed, ‘and so do we! When people say that to me, I tell ’em—watch out! I’ll get a BMW before you do!’

DJ Shep, the co-founding director of his own South Australian youth hip hop business called Da Klinik, is one of a new breed of micro-entrepreneurs: young, creative, prepared to take risks and eager to exploit their own skills, opportunities, networks and enthusiasm for activities that they love, creating ‘new ways of earning a living in the cultural field’ (McRobbie 2002a:521; also see Leadbeater 1999; Leadbeater and Oakley 1999). He is also, it needs to be said, one of the more successful ones. Shep’s description of his endeavour is echoed in McRobbie’s words cited above. Both highlight the tension between the dreams and the reality of achieving success in the new creative knowledge economy, and as such, serve as a particularly poignant starting point from which to discuss the subject of youth enterprise with all of its attendant themes of desire, ambition and risk. The stories of youth enterprise that I draw on in this chapter highlight the ways many young people produce and consume music and popular culture as tools of committed personal expression and identity making while enlisting commercial enterprise techniques to fulfil their dreams and ambitions. This is not unthinking or even uncritical engagement with globalised corporate capitalism. It is ‘not an abandonment of critique but its implementation’ (Hartley 2005:13), it is an implementation that is frequently passionate but still realistic.

Observations of the ways in which popular music frequently blends the discourses of art and commerce are not new. Following the early critiques of Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, later studies also interpreted youth street cultures as ‘radical only through their entrepreneurialism’ (Gelder 2005:145). Sarah Thornton, in her work on dance cultures, noted the ways in which raves offered experience and training in entrepreneurial activity, developing social networks ‘crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge’ (Thornton 1995:14). Similarly Reitveld (1993), McRobbie (1999, 2002a) and Luckman noted how contemporary enterprise is encouraged, facilitated and made possible through young people’s effective integration of their creative leisure activities with wider commercial interests. The youth use their social skills, including their networking, their grassroots-acquired business strategies and a wide variety of media forms to accomplish their goals.

At the same time, the efficacy and politics of the concepts of creative industries and the new forms of youth enterprise have been rendered problematic, often by some of their staunchest advocates. Leadbeater, for example, noted that the new knowledge economy does not benefit everyone and that ‘advances in knowledge improve our lives but only at the cost of creating uncertainties, risks and dilemmas’ (1999:123; see also Luckman). Similarly, the structural limitations of race, class, ethnicity and gender mean that some young people are able to develop their dreams and ambitions far more than others—invisible boundaries

prevent many from being able to formulate such dreams in the first place (Fornas 1992; Bloustien 2003; Grossberg 2005). Other critiques of the knowledge economy (Leadbeater and Oakley 1999; McRobbie 1999, 2002a, 2002b; Miller 2004)<sup>1</sup> focus on its tendency to replace one form of marginalisation with another, making the individual who ‘opted for this kind of unstable career choice’ (McRobbie 2002a:521) more vulnerable and open to exploitation for ‘maybe there can be no workplace politics when there is no workplace, i.e. where work is multi-sited’ (2002a:522).

However, while acknowledging these issues, I focus here on some examples where opportunities and possibilities, particularly those of young disadvantaged people, have been imagined, sought out and then realised, even if temporarily. My aim is to explore the meanings of micro-enterprise for its young participants, not only as manifestations of the new economy, but also for its vitally important function of developing a stronger sense of social identity, social cohesion and for self-making (Battaglia 1995) within the contemporary world of blended work and leisure. New forms of independent youth enterprise are certainly risky and potentially exploitative, but they also often bring to the fore new forms of agency, networking, collaboration and trust; aspects that make the risky creation and representation of the self in a shifting world seem more manageable and worthwhile.

### **Self-making in the new creative knowledge economy**

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that music skills and knowledge are often acquired through immersion in the everyday music and musical practices of one’s own social context (DeNora 2000; Green 2001), often rendering the lines between music production and music consumption increasingly indistinguishable. The stories delineated here build on these understandings and highlight the very serious and difficult work that young people bring to their everyday musical activities.<sup>2</sup> These young people are deeply engrossed in acquiring and perfecting new skills, for example, improvisation both instrumentally and linguistically; turntabling, sampling and using new technologies; and sharpening their listening skills and learning to distinguish between different types of notes, styles, melodies, timbres and pitches. For some it means enhancing their body control for breakdancing, inline skating and skateboarding. Graphic design and manual dexterity are used not only for aerosol art on buildings or vehicles, but also for designing skateboards, clothing, badges, websites, posters and flyers to promote bands, gigs and other events. For many young people, these new tasks also involve new business skills: event management, problem solving, team management, marketing, distribution and publicity.

Such activities reveal entrepreneurship that is taken very seriously at the grassroots, effectively blurring the lines between the public and private self. Conflicting benchmarks of success become insignificant, as ‘self-making’ here incorporates both the possibility of financial wealth, and power and self-fulfilment. This is a fascinating demonstration of young people networking, collaborating and achieving—hard at work travelling up the down

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1 Also see Susan Luckman for further discussion on the critique of creative industries and cultural entrepreneurship.

2 These stories were gathered as part of the Playing for Life project.

staircase<sup>3</sup>—with many of the young people expressing an overwhelming sense of optimism despite the inevitable setbacks and failures. Social capital, skills in new media technology, social networking, creative problem solving and performance, underpin a newly empowered, confident and creative sense of self which, in turn, often leads to new livelihoods, employment, funding and career opportunities. Many youth seek out mentors, new networks and creative pathways through established government and non-government organisations with the deliberate aim of developing and fine tuning the skills to develop this capital further. Financial reward, although desirable, is not considered the main motive, as many of the young entrepreneurs still hold onto the romantic and paradoxical distinction between art and commerce, preferring to see themselves as skilled artisans who one day may gain secure employment through their craft. As DJ Shep, whose story introduced this chapter, explained that would mean they do ‘not just do what we love but actually get paid to do what we love, because we still both work night jobs just to run this place’.<sup>4</sup>

In my account of youth enterprise I will introduce several other narratives, such as that of Alicia (aged 24), also from Australia, who with her friend Michelle (23), created a music event management business and independent music label called Patterns in Static. Another story is from Britain, where two young people Tuesday (20), a.k.a. DJ LadyLick,<sup>5</sup> and Rowland, a.k.a. DJ Rowland Samuel (26), are also working on their own respective, as yet fledgling, event management businesses. Thirdly, from Boston, USA, comes the story of Juri (26) who not only performs and produces her own CDs but also has created a not-for-profit enterprise, Genuine Voices, to teach contemporary music skills ‘to youths in juvenile detention centers and other educational and institutional settings across the United States and Worldwide’.<sup>6</sup> In fact, a common thread running through all of these enterprising projects is social and community benefit—an altruistic concern for their local communities underpins the ambition and determination of these micro-entrepreneurs. I will return to this shortly, but firstly I will look more closely at various forms of youth entrepreneurship that we found during our fieldwork.

### **Performing the self in the creative knowledge economy**

To be successful, any enterprise in the music and arts industries incorporates aspects of performance, production and integrated marketing. Even a cursory glance at any of the websites of the young people mentioned above shows that these categories are very much

3 Charles Leadbeater (2002) described attempts to counter the pervasively pessimistic sense of gloom and cynicism resulting from the rapid economic, political, technological, social and environmental changes of the twenty-first century as being like travelling up a down escalator: slow progress and hard work. My use of the related metaphor of a staircase is deliberate, emphasising the treading of an even slower, more difficult and arduous path than Leadbeater perhaps imagined, because of the youth, naivety and overall inexperience of those at the centre of such creative enterprise.

4 Shep had said the same to me in direct communication several times but this particular statement is taken from a recent media interview, posted on the Catapult website <[www.abc.net.au/catapult/stories/s1260352.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/catapult/stories/s1260352.htm)> accessed 12 February 2006. Catapult is the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s online website to disseminate news about creative enterprises, especially of young people. It also aims to serve as a forum and discussion board where young entrepreneurs can communicate and network.

5 In previous publications (see Bloustien 2003) I have used a pseudonym for Tuesday but in this book she preferred her own name and ‘a.k.a’.

6 Taken from her Genuine Voices website: <[www.genuinevoices.org](http://www.genuinevoices.org)> accessed 16 December 2005.

interrelated and, while clearly drawn from the rhetoric of business, in the world of the young entrepreneur they apply equally to the process of self-making, as we shall see from a closer examination of each category.

### *Performance*

The creative knowledge economy is one that relies on artistic performance: the production of something that can be created and performed to others. A major difference between the young entrepreneurs and their older counterparts is the way in which the catalyst for the enterprise is their own engagement and expertise as artists rather than as consumers or producers. In the case of the young people described here, it is their engagement in music performative activities. So for example, Alicia, co-founder of the event management organisation Patterns in Static,<sup>7</sup> was previously a bass guitar player in what was a successful local band, Paper Tiger, and now plays acoustic guitar, keyboard and bass in her new band Aviator Lane. Shep is a keen online skater as well as a rap artist and turntablist, active in the local hip hop scene. Tuesday is an accomplished rapper, also DJing in a range of genre but preferring to play R & B both in live gigs and on her internet radio show on Radio 2m0. Her new, privately produced CD is about to be released in her local networks. Rowland is becoming an accomplished UK garage turntablist. He performs locally in London, also has his own internet radio show and has performed on invitation in Germany. Juri is a classically trained pianist and also a pop singer with several privately produced CDs in circulation. While still in Japan, she performed with various artists including B.B. Mo-Franck, a King Records recording artist. At the age of 18, Juri auditioned and was awarded a scholarship to study at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, MA.<sup>8</sup>

Apart from their own music performances, all of the enterprises created by Shep, Alicia, Rowland, Tuesday and Juri also aim to facilitate the performance of others in their social networks. So for example, in the case of Da Klinik, the performative element consists of workshops and events that demonstrate and teach the skills behind all the elements of hip hop culture: breakdancing, turntabling, inline skating, rapping and aerosol art. Each of the photo and video links on the Da Klinik website show the organisation's crew and associates in action, demonstrating the excitement and the exuberance of their performances at concerts, events and workshops. The 'Playing for Life' website (<[www.playingforlife.org.au](http://www.playingforlife.org.au)>), a direct outcome of our research, contains other clips that young people in four continents have contributed to show their skills in action.

The importance of the body in action is central to all of these enterprises, whatever the skill. Most of these young entrepreneurs have had little opportunity or success in formal educational settings, yet now they voluntarily fine tune their cognitive and physical skills—putting in the extra practice hours that would have delighted any formal educator. As I have detailed elsewhere (Bloustien 2001, 2003), this is both serious play *and* hard work. Performance is central to these new forms of youth enterprise because it is tied to both social capital (Bourdieu 1984, 1993) and bodily praxis as a mode of knowledge (Moore 1994; Jackson 1998, 2005). The body becomes the locus and primary symbol of simultaneously

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7 Previously at <[www.patternsinstatic.net.au](http://www.patternsinstatic.net.au)> now Alicia's website is to be found at <[www.patternsinstatic.com](http://www.patternsinstatic.com)> and at <[www.aviatorlane.com.au](http://www.aviatorlane.com.au)>

8 See <[www.juripandajones.com](http://www.juripandajones.com)> for more information about Juri.

acquiring, articulating and negotiating understandings of the world, firmly linking image, gesture and style to cultural expression and identity. Wexler, writing over two decades ago, noted that ‘The new social movements ... are the movements of the body, of personal freedom in daily life’ (Wexler 1983, cited in Lesko 1988:127).

He could just have easily been talking about the recent manifestation of youth enterprise, especially where it relates to music practice. Music allows a greater playing with image and identity than any other art form. As Simon Frith noted, it ‘gives us a way of being in the world ... music doesn’t represent values but lives them’ (1996:272). As each new technology develops, new ways of creating, consuming and marketing music produce marked effects on the cultural meanings that emanate from all of its forms, including the perceived authenticity of the performer and consumer of particular music genres.

For these reasons, getting performance ‘right’ becomes essential to the art of self-making and the creation of authenticity. Contemporary practices of engaging with music, particularly through what Taussig described as the ever evolving ‘mimetic machinery’ (1993:20), repeatedly blur the lines of time and space. The music may be someone else’s original composition or lyrics, but when it is performed anew by someone else, as in sampling, the emotions and meanings are transferred, reshaped and re-signified. Music indeed becomes a powerful ‘magical’ vehicle of mimesis.<sup>9</sup> This is why backstage practice is so essential to performance. Lift the lid off any of these youth enterprises and you will see the role of rehearsal, studio space, workshop and mentor—all leading to the perfecting of the skills to construct the ultimate authentic performance.

Under the pseudonym of DJ Lady Lick, Tuesday has been performing in various bars and clubs since she was 15 and has already produced two CDs on independent labels through friends. In her small bedroom in the family council flat, she practises her mixing and turntablism skills for at least two hours every night. Now 20, she is teaching others the skills necessary for DJ performance. Her part-time job in an after-school care centre allows her to teach these skills to young people in her neighbourhood, developing their confidence and expertise. At least once a month she stages gigs at local pubs under the name of her event organisation ‘Emotion’, to offer other local DJs the opportunity to practise and perform and to raise money for various charities.

Her uncle, also a musician, originally used to accompany her to gigs to help with technical matters, speedily mending broken cables and wires and protecting her from unwanted attention from clientele. One pub was particularly rough although, as Tuesday explained stoically, ‘At least it ain’t violent because most of the [clientele] are too stoned.’

In her home as an invited observer, I watched Tuesday practise her DJ skills, while carefully explaining the intricacies of turntablism and mixing. To reach her goals, she has had

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9 The concept of mimesis denotes more than imitation, representation or portrayal. It is a complex innate human strategy by which one takes on the form of the Other in order to gain control. See Gebauer and Wulf 1992 for a detailed cross-cultural history of the concept and also Raymond Williams (1980) for the ways in which the concept has been appropriated into what he terms ‘sympathetic magic’ in advertising. No wonder music is so fundamental to the advertising industry.

to be focused and determined: 'If it takes me three hours or three days I still practise and practise until I get that mix perfect.'<sup>10</sup>

### **Extending the self: production and beyond**

Such activities of course stay backstage (Goffman 1956), only becoming entrepreneurial in the new knowledge economy (Kenway, Bullen & Robb 2004) when they become public and involve the production of an artefact. Creativity thus is expressed and made public in a number of forms that both support and disseminate the original performance—through live music events; service and outreach workshops and programs; the creation of CDs, DVDs and videos; graffiti and aerosol artwork; clothing; equipment (e.g., skateboards); IT and website design, creation and maintenance. Again, a quick glance at the websites referenced above reveals a wide range of products created by the young entrepreneurs discussed here. Alicia and Michelle, for example, not only produce and manage live music gigs under the umbrella of Patterns in Static, but also act as an independent record label, producing albums for local and interstate musicians, and creating fan merchandise to promote musicians and artists.

Large badges that enable the fans to show allegiance to their band, or sometimes several bands, and to their music scene, had been popular for a while, but small ones about three centimetres in diameter, had not been seen before in the Adelaide music scene. The girls created, marketed (mainly through their website) and then sold the small badges. Although widely accessible through their website, the produce is deliberately displayed and promoted using quite intimate language: the direct address together with the use of the inclusive first person 'we'.

We love button badges, so it was no surprise when we decided to import a one inch badge machine so we could make our own. Worn on shirts, bags, hats and guitar straps, they're often a topic of conversation and a great way to promote your band, event or organisation. Or if you're an individual who has a few ideas for badges of your own, we can make those too. (<[www.patternsinstatic.com](http://www.patternsinstatic.com)> accessed 12 December 2004)

### **Integrated marketing: publicity, markets and distribution**

The importance of the direct address and the personal voice is fundamental to enterprise in the new creative knowledge economy. I have already noted that every aspect of such youth enterprise is not just about the product but, by extension, about the artist, and therefore very much centred on the self. Every aspect of the promotion and marketing scene is integrated, demonstrating the variety, but interrelationship, of their wares across a range of media. So for example, as can be seen in Figure 1, below, goods and activities displayed on the website are linked to other goods or activities in the business.

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<sup>10</sup> Taken from my fieldwork notes and personal correspondence. Some of Tuesday's story appears in Bloustien (2003).



The young entrepreneurs tend to know their target audiences and markets because they are themselves embedded in the same geographical or experiential community. As noted above, when Alicia and Michelle developed the concept of small promotional badges to be worn at music gigs, the badges were created specifically for the niche market of the local youth culture. The concept works both inclusively and exclusively, for the promotion relies on the customer being part of the same music scene and recognising the names of the various Indie bands listed here:

We've made badges for Deloris, Remake Remodel, Aviator Lane, Popboomerang Records, Midwest Trader, City City City, Bit By Bats, The New Pollutants, I Killed the Prom Queen, Last Years Hero, Paper Tiger, Heligoland, Pharaohs, Chapel Gesture, Kulkie, Stolen Skateboards, FTM and Para//elo, amongst others.

(<[www.patternsinstatic.com](http://www.patternsinstatic.com)>, accessed 12 December 2004. Also see Figure 2 below)



There are no further links to tell potential customers about the bands. If the consumer does not know the bands, then they are not part of the fan circle. However, there is more information to promote the albums themselves on the website and to link the CDs to the live performances and the tours, also arranged by the youth organisation.

The websites not only promote the products and the businesses, but also promote the individual creator. They use the language and format of web logs (blogs) rather than traditional marketing discourse, offering very personal insights into (auto)biography as well as information about events and products. So Rowland's website announces:

Yes it is me – owner of this site putting his profile up for all to see!! Read on and find out more ... I got into Djing by listening to my older brother's rap and soul record collection (as he used to DJ as well in the late 80's/early 90's) and by watching music shows on T.V. during the late 80's/early 90's (e.g. Westwood – Night Network, Behind The Beat, Dance Energy, TOTPS, YO MTV RAPS etc ... Since 96 i have steadily improved and now i am really confident that i can play at any rave anywhere the world! I haven't done anything big yet – just house parties and some low key raves. The biggest thing i did was to do a set in Germany last Setember (for the Payin' Clients Cru) and it was probably the best thing that happened to me so far when it comes to DJing.

(<nforms.co.uk/iant/full\_profile.php?userID=21>, style, emphasis, spelling and language in the original)

What young entrepreneurs lack in sophistication, they tend to make up for in their originality in marketing and distribution. Their products are often promoted scattergun style—through their websites, word of mouth and through online lists, group emails, SMS messages and letterbox flyers. It can be very effective. It is through this approach that Rowland received invitations to perform in Germany; Tuesday was offered the opportunity to perform in Spain; and Shep increasingly gains many of his educational and corporate clients. Far from seeing such marketing tactics as amateurish, many of his corporate clients who subcontract Da Klinik to present workshops to schools, clubs, regional or remote communities and youth (detention) centres, recognise the fresh appeal of the more youthful language and discourse, such as:

DJ LESSONS WITH DJ STAEN 1 are every SAT, call da klinik to make a booking with the current 3 times AUSTRALIAN CHAMP!..... BREAKIN CLASSES MON, WED, FRI & SAT..... HIP HOP DANCE THURS & FRI..... peace..... sHEp. ('latest news 11.3.06', <www.daklinik.com>, accessed 13 March 2006. Style, emphasis, spelling and language in the original)

### **Risk and counter-risk: trust, networks and mentors**

It is important to keep in mind that the production and marketing of these events and artefacts is inherently risky and, of course, this is one of the main criticisms that has been levied against the new creative economy: it devolves responsibility and liability onto the young individual, masks rising unemployment, increases insecurity for those who do have jobs and increases the proportion of casual workers in the workforce (see again Bourdieu 1998; McRobbie 2002a). Because most artefacts in the new creative knowledge economy tend to be ephemeral, any organisation involved has to 'deal with the risks that accompany products

with a truncated life cycle' (Rifkin 2000:24). Young entrepreneurs tend to be inexperienced and untrained in conventional marketing philosophies and practice. They also deal with a transient customer and fan base and sell products that have a short shelf life. However, they are also necessarily thinking outside conventional business models to take those risks. Sometimes the risks require a relatively small investment of capital, such as Alicia's imported 1-inch badge machine, but at other times the risks are bigger. Shep and his business partner Jeff recently decided to invest all of their assets so that Da Klinik could co-fund a South Australian DJ championship show starring Mix Master Mike, 'the Turntablist for the Beastie Boys, 3 time world DMC champion and global hip hop legend' in August 2005. It was 'a massive gamble', Shep admitted:

We did all the publicity and promotion, used our contacts, printed the forms, got the front cover of *Onion* magazine, designed and distributed flyers. We could have lost the lot but we had about 900 people attend. The proceeds paid for our new shop. (personal communication)

Young entrepreneurs attempt to counter the very real risk factors involved in their businesses through three main methods: collaboration, networking and mentorship. So for example in the case of Da Klinik, the business team, now larger than the original two founding members, refer to themselves as the 'Da Klinik (Hip Hop) Crew', complementing each other's skills by applying the usual way of working together in a music performance to the world of business: As Shep explained with wry humour:

I realised early on that I was the visionary—the ideas man and Jeff has the business skills that I don't have [laughs] like he can spell and add up. He is also the realist when I get too excited: 'No Shep we can't buy a Ferrari and put the Da Klinik logo all over it!' (personal communication)

Another friend, Simon, designs the flyers and the website, and the business subcontracts other well-known DJs and music and aerosol artists from the local hip hop scene as tutors. This means they can competitively tender to run events and large workshops in Adelaide and interstate for both government and private organisations, sell and promote locally made hip hop clothes, videos, CDs and other accessories as well as import prestigious items that 'are only issued to few outlets, old school stuff. The hard-to-get stuff that kids on e-bay will pay a fortune for' (Shep, personal communication).

To maintain its autonomy, Da Klinik has followed an independent business model (Moe & Wilkie 1997; Shuman 1998), deliberately choosing not to apply for non-profit status and thereby inevitably making themselves ineligible for government arts funding. This also reflects their collective disenchantment with governmental and educational bodies after several initial unsuccessful requests for financial support or attempts at more systemic collaboration. 'I gave up on the government long ago', mused Shep, explaining to me how, despite their clear progress and success, all the staff have to hold down day and night jobs to survive.

Shep had originally sought help from established arts organisations to get his project off the ground. As in all of the projects described here, the young people used their social networks to obtain financial (seeding funding or grants) or in-kind resources and mentorship

from adults and established figures in their communities when first launching their projects. For some, the original connections came through outreach educational programs and community-based organisations such as WAC, and later AKArts<sup>11</sup> in London for Rowland and Tuesday. For Alicia, Michelle and Shep in Australia, it was been through the Adelaide youth arts organisation Carclew.<sup>12</sup>

In Boston, Juri has adopted a different model: while holding down several part-time jobs, her main enterprise is Genuine Voices. Its slogan ‘We can touch lives, we can make a change through music’ reflects the philosophy of the Music Therapy Department, Berklee College of Music from which she originally gained support in the form of mentoring, grants and financial aid. Juri’s project offers a segue into the final section of this chapter—social entrepreneurship—the desire by young people to move beyond the commercial venture to aid the wider community.

### **Social entrepreneurship: still ‘mixing pop and politics’**

All of the youth entrepreneurs outlined in this chapter seek to engage with and improve their communities through their music and art. This aim stems from the participants’ personal belief and experience in the role and power of music to be a pathway to greater self-esteem and a sense of agency. Apart from the work mentioned above, Da Klinik is also now frequently subcontracted by other organisations and communities to run regular hip hop workshops for young people in juvenile detention centres and remote communities. The fees are small, only covering their travel expenses and the cost of hiring artists as tutors. Tuesday and Rowland voluntarily tutor other disadvantaged young people in their community in music and new media skills. Juri runs several other programs that have evolved from her original vision for Genuine Voices, including one at Boston Metro Youth Service Center’s Detention Unit, which serves young offenders who have been committed to the centre while they await their court date or further placement in the justice system. Her volunteer tutors are mainly music students. The young offenders range in age from 11 to 20 years and are at the centre for up to one year.

This is grassroots politics, but wider political and social issues go neither unnoticed nor unspoken. Using their music lyrics, their event publicity and their website forums as vehicles of protest, the young entrepreneurs often raise social issues that include racism, poverty, corporate greed, homelessness and the environment. Alicia’s latest struggle is against ‘the incorporation by the professional music industry’, which she battles under the umbrella of an organisation called ‘Really good in theory’. The ‘home made’ press release is headed:

#### ADELAIDE MUSIC UNITED AGAINST PROFESSIONALISM

What’s really good in theory? – a chance to celebrate and unite Adelaide’s rock’n’roll cottage industrialists. ... What’s really good in theory is a corner shop for the local music neighbourhood, where everyone knows everyone, you look after each other’s kids, and

11 AKArts, brainchild of Alexis Johnson, a young entrepreneur herself, is a privately run organisation that teaches young people leadership and event management skills in the arts, particularly through new communication media. Alexis works with a range of young people in London, liaising with several other major arts and educational organisations.

12 <[www.carclew.com.au](http://www.carclew.com.au)>

nah, we can't sell you the ice-cream scoop, but you can borrow it for the weekend. It's that kind of spirit – spiked with the necessary rock'n'roll bravado & art school affectation. That's really good in theory.<sup>13</sup>

Sometimes political awareness comes unexpectedly, as seen in an weblog posted on Da Klinik's website a few years ago. Under the heading 'M1 Protest: Police, Protesters, a Camera and Me!' Shep wrote:

It was the morning after the finals of the Australian titles street comp [in Melbourne] and we had spent the night celebrating the fact that we like to skate. Myself [Shep], Dj David L and Pimp master AGE stepped out of our hotel room and were confronted with over 30 police just chilling there ... we realized that we had been lucky enough to stumble across the Melbourne leg of the M1 PROTEST. Oh what a feeling I felt, knowing that for the rest of the day I would join thousands of other fellow run-a-mucks and cause destruction against global corporations. There were people of all walks of life there to show there concern for the cause. People where dressed in costumes and there was even a DJ on the back of a truck pumping out phat beats turning the streets into a dance party at like 11 in the morning. So have a look through the pic's and have a watch of the movies and make sure if you ever get a chance to participate in a M1 PROTEST do so for it is great for the SOUL! (Da Klinik archive, accessed 20 December 2005, spelling in original).

Yes there are very real concerns about exploitation and high risk, the depoliticisation of the workplace and inequality in the new creative economy. And yet, I would argue, it is also necessary to recognise that there is still a great deal to be celebrated in the ways young people are using the new creative knowledge economy to their own advantage—particularly for those who would have great difficulty filling traditional roles in the workforce. They are travelling up the down staircase, often slowly and painfully, but gaining new forms of access, opportunities and agency along the way.

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13 See <[www.junkcentral.com](http://www.junkcentral.com)> for more information about RGIT and other related projects.

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