

THE BX CHRONICLES:  
EXPLORING THE COMPLEXITIES OF LIFE IN THE SOUTH BRONX

Jason Cory Mendez

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Approved by

Professor George Noblit

Professor Jim Trier

Professor Cheryl Mason Bolick

Professor James E. Osler II

Professor Allison Anders

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## ABSTRACT

### JASON CORY MENDEZ: THE BX CHRONICLES: EXPLORING THE COMPLEXITIES OF LIFE IN THE SOUTH BRONX (Under the direction of George W. Noblit)

This nontraditional dissertation, which I prefer to label as a manuscript, is a qualitative study that explores the complexities of life in the South Bronx. This manuscript represents my multifaceted journey as a young Puerto Rican man making meaning of life in the South Bronx as well as making meaning of my lived experiences navigating through academia. This journey implicitly employs a theoretical framework of *détournement*, critical race theory, lived experience, and representation in order to construct a counterstory that critiques popular and distorted (stereotypical) representations of life in the South Bronx.

Additionally, this manuscript examines the complexities in the representations of Hip-hop. Along this journey I explored the life of world renowned Hip-hop pioneer, Phase 2. Phase 2's experiences and knowledge concerning interpretations of the origins, shifts, and objectifying of Hip-hop speak to its [Hip-hop's] social origins, evolution, and position in reality. The lived experiences of Phase 2 are mirrored against my own lived experiences in order to create a dialogue that speaks to Hip-hop as culturally lived experiences rather than a set of elements (rapping, break dancing, aerosol art, and dee jaying) to which Hip-hop is often reduced.

## **DEDICATION**

To my children, your mother and I are a testament that nothing is impossible with God and as you begin your search for the master don't ever forget who you are and where you stand in the struggle.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Finding the glow has been a long journey. There are many close friends and family that I must express my utmost gratitude for the support and guidance you have provided me so that I may reach the final level.

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I want to extend a special thank you to True. Without you this journey would have never occurred. Your words have helped me more than you will ever know. One love. I just peeped *City of Violence*. The movie is ill.

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<sup>1</sup> Creek for “Thank you”

Finally, I would like to thank all of my friends who shared in the memories that I wrote about in this journey. To Gilbert, Angel, Ryan, Jose, Espy, Juan, DJ, Joey, David, Nelson, Anthony (Wookie), and Steven; I thank you for all of the good times, much love. To the South Bronx, Hunts Point, Manida, I hold my glass up to the sky and toast to the most high. I am indebted to you.

## PREFACE

*Voice (n): the person or other agency through which something is expressed or revealed (Voice, 2008).*

On September 30, 1946, Hector Juan Perez was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico. When Hector was a young boy his father would give him [Hector] musical lessons in hope that one day he would become a famous saxophonist. Over time Hector lost interest in playing the sax; instead his attention turned to the music coming from his radio. The sounds of *Jibaro*<sup>2</sup> inspired Hector to become a singer. (Lavoe, 2008a)

At the age of 17, Hector pursued his dream of becoming a singer by moving to New York City. During his first week in New York City, Hector was invited to a rehearsal for a newly formed group. During the rehearsal, the lead singer was unable to hit his notes so Hector decided to help him by showing him the correct tune. After hearing Hector sing, the group immediately made Hector their lead singer. (Lavoe, 2008a)

During this time, there were many Latino singers, but none could sing like Hector. In order to separate Hector from the others, a former manager gave him the Spanish nickname “La Voz” which means “the voice.” Soon after, Hector Juan Perez changed his name to Hector Lavoe<sup>3</sup>. Thus, a legend was born. (Lavoe, 2008b)

Hector Lavoe was a voice for a lot of people from Boricuas on the island to Boricuas in the Bronx. He sang songs about his beautiful isla de encanto in *Yo Naci en Puerto Rico*, to his battles against his own demons in *Aguanilé*.

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<sup>2</sup> Traditional Puerto Rican folk or country music

<sup>3</sup> French for “the voice”



Similar to Hector Lavoe, I am a voice. Within this particular story, I am the voice of those who grew up on Manida like Gilbert, Jose, Angel, Juan, Espy, and DJ. I am the voice of those who grew up in the South Bronx like Phase 2, Tej, and Aohnte. I am the voice for those who did not grow up in the South Bronx, but who can relate to what I have written. Ultimately, I am a voice that desires to be heard by those who will come after me.

The youth are the reason I have told this story. The most important question I was asked during my dissertation proposal defense was, “Who is your audience?” It was the night before my dissertation proposal defense and as I went through pictures of the kids from Potentialis that I realized that the kids were my audience. My story is an explanation to them addressing why things are the way they are. The reason why I am ambiguous in naming the “things” is because the “things” can mean anything depending on the world in which they exist.

This is a call to WAKE UP and break the chains of mental slavery. This is a call to WAKE UP and recognize the illusions that surround us. This is a call to WAKE UP and distinguish between hype and reality. This is a call to WAKE UP and differentiate between caricature and self. WAKE UP!

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## INTRODUCTION

*When the Hip-hop masters pronounce the mind to be not attainable or graspable, they mean that the mind is no-mind, that there is no substance or existence or being or subjectness which can be held out as if it were a table or a car or gaseous body or an atomic particle or a logical concept, or something that can be definitively brought down to the intellectually analysable level (Adapted from Suzuki, 1972, p. 22).*

The following manuscript is a journey into a realm of truth. Anyone can take this journey, but not everyone will understand what they experience – “though seeing, many do not see; though hearing, many do not hear or understand” (Matthew 13:13 New International Version).

I wrote this manuscript for a specific audience, the organic intellectual<sup>4</sup>. However, this section uses the language of the traditional intellectual discourse to provide the traditional intellectual a theoretical lens to make what is unattainable or ungraspable somewhat accessible. In this section, I will explicitly discuss the theoretical frameworks that are implicitly interwoven within my manuscript. These include détournement, critical race theory, lived experience, representation, and the concept of the “Hip-hop scholar.”

This journey is a détournement against the dominant and popular representations of Hip-hop. What is détournement?

*Détournement (‘diversion’) [is a] key means of restructuring culture and experience...Détournement proposes a violent excision of elements – painting, architecture, literature, film, urban sites, sounds, gestures, words, signs – from their original contexts, and a consequent restabilization and recontextualization through rupture and realignment (Sussman, 1989, p. 8).*

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<sup>4</sup> “All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 9). See Appendix 1 for further discussion of the “organic intellectual.”

About a year ago, I was introduced to the concept of détournement in a Cultural Studies in Education course I had taken during my doctoral program. Détournement is “an artistic and often political technique where works of art or popular culture such as comics, film, advertisements, etc are reworked or placed in different surroundings, such that something different is implied than what was originally, or the original piece is called into question” (Détournement, 2008). This manuscript calls into question the representation of Hip-hop. Klein defines (2002) a “simple détournement is defined as an image, message or artifact lifted out of its context to create new meaning” (p. 282). An example of détournement is culture jamming.

Culture jamming is a resistance movement against the ideologies represented in media and popular culture<sup>5</sup>. In *No Logo* (2002), Klein defines “culture jamming” as “an X-ray of the subconscious of a campaign, uncovering not an opposite meaning but the deeper truth hiding beneath the layers of advertising euphemisms” (pp. 281-282). This manuscript is not an opposite meaning, but the deeper truth hiding beneath the layers of the distorted (stereotypical) and dominant representations of Hip-hop and the South Bronx. Similar to culture jamming, I used the combination of music, images, and video in my presentation<sup>6</sup> of this manuscript to détourne the distorted representations. However, within the written manuscript I primarily used lived experience as a détournement.

*Technically to me it is just life...not “the so called elements” and so on...just an extension of what we have always done and more...gumbo...at it’s funkiest...all the dope that is dope rolled into a continuous evolving one...(Phase 2, Personal Communication, March 17, 2008).*

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 2 for examples of culture jamming

<sup>6</sup> The presentation can found in the final chapter, “Encore.”

The author of the quote above, Phase 2, defines Hiphop as life. In other words, life is not Hiphop – Hiphop is life. Therefore, Hiphop is a “direct relation to identity” (Mohanty, 1984, p. 334). The lived experiences of Phase 2 and I will act as counter narratives (Delgado, 2000) to what is commonly represented as Hiphop through media and popular culture. By using Delgado’s (2000) notion of counter narratives, the Phase 2’s narrative as well as my own will be a “powerful means for destroying mindset – the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings (Delgado, 2000, p. 65).” In understanding Hiphop from our perspective, our narratives will take you on a journey through our lives growing up in the South Bronx. As a result, distorted representations will be détourned. For example, in the documentary *The Freshest Kids* (2002) there is a segment where a young man describes the Bronx:

*Action: A lot of people think that if you’re New York and you’re from the Bronx that you no good. But we’re from the Bronx and we out here to show everybody that we’re good. That the Bronx just don’t got bums and ghettos, but it got something good to cause we’re the freshest kids out here. (Brenner, 2002)*

Similar to the quote above, my journey challenges the stereotypical representations of the Bronx. The Bronx is more than just bums and ghettos. Consequently, Hiphop is more than set of elements (rapping, break dancing, aerosol art, and dee jaying) to which it is often reduced. The lived experiences of Phase 2 and I are a testament to this.

The meaning made from the lived experience of individuals is not valued in the academic setting unless it framed and analyzed by some jargon filled theoretical framework. I argue that lived experience by itself is a legitimate body of knowledge. According to Mohanty (1990), the academic setting is a site of “domination and struggle” (p. 184). In this manuscript, the South Bronx and Hiphop are defined through the lived experience. The voices I chose to tell and guide this story are not theory, but that of Phase 2 and myself.

*ULTIMATELY... WHAT THIS CONVO IS REALLY ALL ABOUT IS THAT “WE” NEED TO START TO GIVE OURSELVES A BIT MORE CREDIT FOR OUR EXISTENCE THAN WE DO TO OTHERS WHO IN REALITY ONLY HAVE AN EXISTENCE BECAUSE OF US...THE MOVERS SHAKERS MAKERS INVENTORS AND COMMUNITY THAT MAKE THIS HAPPEN (Phase 2, Personal Communication, March 21, 2008).*

These combined voices provide a “space for historically silenced people to construct knowledge” (Mohanty, 1990, p. 184). I am resistant to having theory guide this story, because I do not want to run the “risk of accommodation and assimilation and the consequent depoliticization that occurs within the academy” (Mohanty, 1990, pp. 184-185). However, understand I am using theory in this section to push the traditional intellectual from getting stuck in the marginal issues of structure and appearance so that this story does not get dismissed. This journey is a counter narrative (Delgado, 2000) that challenges “prevailing mindsets which members of the dominant group justify the world as it is” (Delgado, 2000, p. 64).

This manuscript critiques the elitist move to define what is intellectual and what is not. In other words, my project is a resistance or détournement to “the totalizing imperative of age-old ‘legitimate’ and ‘scientific’ bodies of knowledge” (Mohanty, 1984, p. 334). In doing so, this manuscript also critiques the old and new view of the representation of Hip-hop.

According to Hall (Jhally, 1997), the old view of “representation” means to “‘to present,’ ‘to image,’ ‘to depict,’ – to offer a depiction of something else.” This definition of representation represents a meaning which is already there” (Jhally, 1997). In contrast, Hall’s new view defined “representation as constitutive (Jhally, 1997).” In other words, “representation is part of the event and ‘true meaning’ is the meaning people make of it” (Jhally, 1997).

While all meaning is constitutive, I argue that there is a difference in the meanings made in everyday life and those made from this life to another audience. Meanings closer to the initial experience I will call “true meanings” while meanings made from this experience for another audience I will call “illusion.” Clearly, this is a matter of perspective. The current generation may find it difficult to distinguish between true meaning and illusion and may experience my “illusion” as their “true meaning.” Opening this up for youth today is, in essence, my objective. The counter narratives of Phase 2 and I are tools in measuring the “gap of representation” (Jhally, 1997) between reality and illusion.

One of the illusions I *détourne* is that of the “Hiphop scholar.” I define the “Hiphop scholar” as a two-tiered identity. The bottom tier “Hiphop scholar” is an accurate representation as well as committed to advocating for the marginalized and exploited communities from which they emerged. They symbolize a voice for a silenced community. In contrast, the top tier “Hiphop scholar” is under the illusion that they represent the marginalized and exploited community, but they themselves marginalize and exploit the community. They are more focused on the elements of Hiphop than the lived experience. Their language is abstract and foreign to the marginalized and exploited community. The top tiered “Hiphop scholar” has commodified the community into a product that is marketed and distributed. They are more concerned for their own advancement rather than the advancement of the community.

Both tiers identify as “Hiphop scholars,” however my critique is of the latter. How do I distinguish between the two tiers? I define the distinction between the two tiers in where their commitment lies. The commitment of the bottom tiered “Hiphop scholar” is to social change within the marginalized and exploited community. The commitment of the top tiered



“Hiphop scholar” is to academia. Their work is a “theoretical production as end in itself, confined to the consumption of other theorists who speak the same language in which obscurity is regularly mistaken for profundity” (Katrak, 1989, p. 256).

*How can we, within a dominant Eurocentric discourse,  
make our study of postcolonial texts itself a mode of resistance?  
(Katrak, 1989)*

In regards to this manuscript, I have been asked, “Where is your literature review?” “Patwah” can explain why I choose not to include a literature review. Sistern (1985) describes “patwah” as “the refusal of a people to imitate a coloniser and their insistence on creation, their movement from obedience towards revolution” (p. 88). My choosing not to include a review of literature of the work by top tiered “Hiphop scholars” that I call into question is a resistance to giving them power by simply recognizing them within this story.

In an effort to help navigate the traditional intellectual through this journey, I have included theoretical postings at the beginning of certain chapters. These postings will explicitly discuss the theoretical frameworks that are implicitly interwoven within this manuscript.

## ***“THE JOURNEY WITHIN<sup>7</sup>”***

*Phase 2: SO NOT TO BE FUNNY BUT WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU WANT TO DO WITH THIS???*<sup>8</sup>

*Me: What I want to do with this is write sort of like a memoir for myself. Its different in the sense that I want to use my experiences mirrored against your knowledge and experience too help me understand some questions and conflicts I have with being from the South Bronx and now being in this “academic/intellectual” setting where sometimes these two worlds don’t mesh.*

*Phase 2: BRO YOU ARE DOING THE ACADEMIC THING BECAUSE YOU CAN!!! AND YOU SHOULD...IF YOU HAVE DREAMS AND THE ABILITY TO GO FURTHER IN THIS BABYLONIAN FRONTIER. YOU KNOW FOR THE MOST PART STILL A LOT OF THE BASICS IS BEING KEPT FROM OUR PEOPLE...AND THAT WAS BY DESIGN...*

*NIGGAS WANNA BE IN GANGS AND BUGG OUT AND FOLLOW THE WORST EXAMPLES...IT SEEMS THE DEMON IS ALWAYS DEVISING SOME NEW S\*\*T TO KEEP US OFF TRACK....I DON’T EVEN WANNA SAY THAT S\*\*T HERE...FREEDOM OF SPEECH??? YEAH RIGHT....*

*Me: I really feel like i got caught up on this “Hiphop research” tip. It’s important to look at it in terms of power. Who is controlling whom? But I really don’t feel these cats that start these Hiphop courses. These courses seem wack when read the description. I don’t know where they base their facts. From a book? (I am referring to what you said before about facts from books).*

*Phase 2:MOST DEFINITELY BECAUSE IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN WHAT WE MAKE AND MADE IT...WITHOUT QUESTION...BUT EVOLUTION BROUGHT IT TO LIGHT...AND THE MINDLESSNESS IS PUTTING IT ON THE MAP BUT LEAVING THE YOUTH IN THE DARK...AS OF LATE...*

*Me: Life is too fluid and complex to put in a box titled Hiphop. Until you said that I always felt this uneasiness calling my life Hiphop because I never had to do that until now. It’s like what you said a while back about the origin of the term Hiphop. It was*

---

<sup>7</sup>Williams, Bernie. (2003). *The Journey Within*. [CD]. United States: Grp Records.

<sup>8</sup> All of Phase 2’s communication appears exactly as sent via email except asterisks (\*\*) are used in place of profanity. All of the ellipses were done by Phase 2.

*those on the outside who called it that. I really feel you on what you said about Hip-hop being a title for life. I feel like Hip-hop does not define my life but my life defines Hip-hop.*

*Phase 2: BUT STILL WE PUT THE NAME ON IT. THAT WAS THE MC CHANT AS YOU KNOW...AND IT STUCK...APPROPRIATELY...THEY MAY HAVE REFERRED TO IT AS "THAT HIP HOP S\*\*T" BUT WE NAMED IT...CONSCIOUSLY...SO IT'S ALL GOOD...BUT AS WE WERE SAYING IT NEEDS TO BE RECOGNIZED AS AN EXTENSION OF ALL WE EVER WERE EVEN BEFORE OUR CONCEPTION...THROUGH OUR ROOTS...OUR FAMS AND OUR ENVIRONMENTS...*

*Me: To me it's just my life as a young Boricua from Hunts Point. To be honest right now I am not sure myself the direction I am going.*

*Phase 2: TALK ABOUT IT. THE MAIN THING BRO IS TO HAVE A PLAN. I NEVER DID THAT TIL LATE IN LIFE...WHEN S\*\*T GOT EXTRA CRAZY...FRAZIER SAID... "PEOPLE DON'T PLAN TO FAIL...THEY JUST FAIL TO PLAN"...CORNY...BUT REAL AS A MO FO!!!!*

*I REALIZE THAT "THE MASTER" PLAN IS SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T GO DOWN IN OUR HOOD AS EVIDENTLY AS IN THE OTHER HOOD...WE SEEM TO DO S\*\*T BACKWARDS...HAVE KIDS WITH NO PLAN...JUST A PASSION AND BLOOPERS...NOT THE WAY TO GO...AND THE CYCLE WILL CONTINUE ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU JUST GET FRUSSED AND F\*\*KING JADED...LOOKING FOR SOME SATISFACTION IN "LIFE"...SO SINCE YOU AIN'T F\*\*KED UP YA PRO YET...BE SMART...*

*THAT PLAN IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN DO...AND MAYBE HAVE ALTERNATIVE THINGS YOU WISH FOR...BUT BE ON POINT...TIME FLYS LIKE THEM DAMN PIDGEONS...AND NEVER STOPS...LIKE ROACHES IN THE P.J.S*

*ON YOUR MISSION...JUST DO IT...BRO FOR REAL...DON'T LET ANYTHING DETER YOU...BUT DO IT FIRSTLY FOR YOURSELF NOT FOR THEM...FEEL ME??*

*ONE LOVE.....*

*\* \* \* \* \**

I really feel what Phase has been telling me. I agree that I am on a mission; however, I am unsure what that mission is. Perhaps I am on mission for knowledge, truth, and understanding; but of what? I am unclear of my final destination (if a final destination exists).

This is not the beginning of my mission for I have been on this journey for quite some time. However, this is the start of me documenting my experiences in order to make sense of it. The significance of documenting my story results from a feeling of personal responsibility to do something positive if not for future generations then in hopes of informing just one – my own.

*The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it  
(John 1:5 New International Version)*

This therapeutic journey is not to reflect on what those in the dark label as “Hiphop,” but to reflect on what Phase and I and many others identify as the complexities of our life and experiences. In many of our conversations, Phase has reiterated that Hiphop is not about elements, but about life.

*Phase 2: i thought i got into this...technically to me it is just life...not “the so called elements” and so on...just an extension of what we have always done and more...gumbo...at it’s funkiest...all the dope that is dope rolled into a continuous evolving one...*

\* \* \* \* \*

*(Applause)*  
*We feel that we have a responsibility to*  
*Shine the light*  
*Into the darkness...You know*  
*You know there is a lot of darkness out here*  
*We watch it all the time*  
*I’m busy looking at the darkness sayin damn there some darkness over there*  
*(Crowd laughs, someone shouts from the crowd)*  
*Whatever*  
*And we have a responsibility, There’s a focus... know what I’m sayin*  
*(Someone shouts from the crowd, crowd laughs)*  
*Ya be cool*  
*We know that we know how to make some music*  
*And the music ain’t suppose to stand still*

**WE, WE KNOW WHERE THE REAL LIFE DOCUMENTARIES ARE  
OF COURSE PHASE 2 IS A REAL LIFE DOCUMENTARY  
I’M A REAL LIFE DOCUMENTARY**

*Any how  
The statement that they make will determine what everyone else plays shortly  
You dig  
And that's the way it goes, so here we go  
(Black Star, 1998)*

\* \* \* \* \*

This journey mirrors Phase 2's narrative against my own lived experiences in order to create a dialogue that speaks to Hip-hop as culturally lived experiences rather than a set of elements (rapping, B-boying, aerosol art, and deejaying) to which Hip-hop is often reduced. A lot of my inner conflict comes from me trying to make meaning of my experiences through a Hip-hop lens rather than letting my experiences make meaning of Hip-hop. Therefore, this mission both has nothing to do about Hip-hop, and at the same time has everything to do about Hip-hop.

*The God of your understanding, has chosen you and you've agreed  
To be here in this space and time to do something, that only you can do  
Now I won't stand here to try and tell you what it is  
But deep, inside yourself  
As you take time to uncover, and ask yourself some vital questions  
Like - what is it that brings me peace, what is it that brings me joy?  
What do I love doing?  
What am I willing to become highly skilled at doing?  
What part can I play for the betterment of the society?  
And the world in which I want to live?  
When you begin to ask yourself those real questions  
And it doesn't have to be done in a formal way  
It can be done just like we're speaking, right now  
Ask yourself the question  
Look at how you see yourself in just a year from now  
And then go forward  
And if you have children or even if you don't have children  
Now begin to, look at your future beyond  
The space and time that you are  
Now visualize exactly, the way that you desire to live  
Don't be afraid to, dream  
(KRS-One, 2004)*

\* \* \* \* \*

In the first graduate class I attended, my professor, now mentor and good friend Dr. James E. Osler II passed out his *Vision Finder* (Osler, 2002). The *Vision Finder* is a self-assessment he developed to help students gauge what they truly want to do in life so that he [Dr. Osler] can provide the support necessary to accomplish their vision. Creating a place where people can come to pursue their own dreams and interests in the arts was my vision. After spending a lot of time developing my idea with some close friends of mine that shared a similar vision, the Potentialis Centre was born. The name Potentialis derives from the Latin form of the word potential. My vision was to do what Dr. Osler and many others did for me. They gave me the necessary support and guidance to unlock the potential I possess. Their support and guidance is the reason why I was able to succeed in school, develop Potentialis, and now have the opportunity to share with you my story.

My initial dissertation proposal was a study that examined the origins, changes, and commodification of Hiphop culture. However, the night before my proposal defense I became unsettled about the direction I was headed. In preparation for my proposal defense, I went through photos to show during the presentation. While looking through my photos I came across some from a youth summer program in which Potentialis participated. I saw the kids smiling and I remembered the excitement these kids had when we showed up for our afternoon sessions. It was then that I realized why I was unsettled. I was unsettled because in my heart I wanted to write for these kids, but in actuality I was writing for some audience in academia.

Now my dissertation is no longer framed only theoretical frameworks or filled with academic lingo. It is my story. It is my story about the conflict between my life coming from

the South Bronx and my life navigating through academia. My story is still about Hiphop, but not in the way one would assume. After talking to a good friend of mine and contemplating over the story I wanted to share I realized that “‘Hiphop’ was just a title of life.” Hiphop does not define my life, but my life defines Hiphop.

Now that I have set the stage I want to begin the story, but it is difficult. It is difficult because writing is not one of my strengths. It takes time for me to write. In order to effectively formulate my thoughts and express them in text, I have to enter this specific zone. Entering this zone is not an easy process. I go through this ritual to prepare myself. It starts from the time I wake up to the time I sit down to write. Sometimes it works sometimes it does not. It has been a week since I could officially start working this memoir. It has just taken this long to enter my zone. Several factors must intersect at an exact moment to provide an opening for me to enter the zone.

Today is the day when the opening appeared. While I was on the bus, the right thought, emotion, temperament, and song intersected at a moment that made me know I was ready to write. I have to take care of a couple things before I leave. Before I go I sit down at the computer, make myself comfortable, check my email, and read the latest news on the Yankees off-season moves. The last part of the process is the most crucial. I have to select the right song to listen to first on my mp3 player. I slip on my headphones and press play:

*Aheh yeah... yeah whattup?  
Welcome to flight Black Moon, we about to take you on a journey  
Yeah... brothers lookin mad fine everything's lookin smooth  
I'm your captain Buckshot, my co-pilot is DJ Evil Dee  
We have S-W-N-D on deck  
We about to take you about 31,000 feet into the air  
We'll be cruising at a smooth altitude so  
just buckle up, enjoy your flight  
(Black Moon, 1993)*

Now I am ready to leave. Where am I going? I am about to enter this place where the world around me stops and the only thing that exists are my memories, my visions, and my passions. The walls surrounding me disappear and the music that blasts through my headphones begins to naturally fade. I enter this unconscious state “when the spirit takes over the mind and guides the body without thought” (Hitzig, 1985).

*Uncle Ricky, will you read us a bedtime story?  
Please, huh, please?  
All right, you kids get to bed, I'll get the storybook.  
Ya'll Tucked in?  
Yeah  
Here we go...  
Once upon a time,  
Not long ago...  
(Slick Rick, 1988)*

I went back to my first experience with Potentialis...

\* \* \* \* \*

## **The Potentialis Centre**

*(Alarm clock ringing)* I awoke earlier than necessary that morning in order to give myself plenty of time to prepare for a meeting about doing a Potentialis program in a school. As I was getting ready I was still tired due to the lack of sleep from the night before. I was tossing and turning not because I was nervous, but because I was excited. I was excited to finally see what started in the Fall of 2002 as an idea on a sheet of loose leaf paper manifest into a tangible entity two years later. I was finally ready to take the first step in sharing my idea, my passion, and what I felt was my purpose to the public. I was going to let them know Potentialis was the arts, cultural, and enrichment program they needed in order for the kids in their school to excel beyond expectation. I prepared a presentation that pulled my audience into my frame of mind and allowed them to visualize what I envision for their kids.



I arrived at the school early, dressed sharply, prepared, and ready to woo whomever was going to be in that meeting. I entered a large conference room. The room was very boring in appearance. There were no windows, posters, or pictures. The room was just four plain white walls with a big round table in the center encircled by chairs. I selected a spot at the table and started to setup for the presentation. A few minutes later the room began to fill with various individuals. I never really knew who these individuals were except that they were the people that made the decisions concerning educational programs for the students.

I proceeded to share my vision with my only worry being how I was going to contain these people from being overly anxious in getting the ball rolling. However, when I was done speaking instead of receiving encouraging responses and support I heard nothing but a gut wrenching silence. Even though I tried convincing myself that their silence was due to their inability to verbalize their excitement, I knew by their facial expressions that wasn't the case. What felt like an eternity of eerie silence was finally broken when someone said, "Hip hop, I don't know how that is going to go over with teachers, administrators, and especially parents."

*Wisdom shall come out of the mouths of babes and sucklings  
But you blinded by cultural ignorance and steady judging  
But judge not, lest ye may be judged  
For the judgment ye judge ye shall surely be judged, you gets no love  
(KRS-One, 2003)*

I thought to myself if they could only see the looks on the kids' faces we have previously worked with. Would they still be hesitant in letting us come into their spot? But they did see those looks. I thought to myself, "How many more pictures or video clips can I show to illustrate that Potentialis accomplished above and beyond what we intended with our students. I remember the first time we offered a modeling class at a boys and girls club. This

class was open to anyone; however, the entire class consisted of young girls. What these young ladies accomplished blew us away. We thought that we were just teaching modeling skills such as walking a runway and posing for pictures, but what we realized at the end of the program and final performance (a fashion show) was these young ladies gained a self-esteem, confidence, and poise that is completely opposite of the representation of women seen in media and popular culture. This confidence even opened doors for some of the girls to participate as models in fashion shows for local designers. However, these people in the meeting were too consumed with saving face than “trying to hear what I’m kickin in their ear. Neglected, but now, but yo, it gots to be accepted, that what? That life is hectic” (Wu-Tang Clan, 1993).

As you can probably guess nothing ever came from that meeting. Was it a waste of time? If you were to ask me that question back, then I would have without a doubt answered “yes”. But now looking back, I know it was not. This meeting was the first of many experiences of being stigmatized and prohibited to do what I love because people do not understand what it is I represent. These experiences are necessary. I need these experiences to continually remind myself that what I am doing is different, it is disrupting, and changing the way education is viewed. These specific moments of adversity provide the opportunities I need to show the kids with whom I continue to work, that you can accomplish whatever your eyes see.

*See I make moves and tell what’s the truth. That’s why I’m here, to be livin’ proof*  
(Group Home, 1995)

\* \* \* \* \*

A year later, I was still working hard on getting my vision out there. In the Spring of 2005, I finally had the break through I have been waiting for. I received a phone call from a

university that wanted Potentialis to add a cultural arts component to their School of Education's summer youth program. I remember vividly the joy I felt when I received the signed contract. The overwhelming joy did not come from finally generating some revenue (though that was nice), but it came because someone believed, valued, and invested in my vision.

That summer was memorable for Potentialis because of the bond we made with the kids. The summer program we collaborated with mainly focused on academics, specifically math and science. The directors of the program wanted to include an arts component to their program. This summer program was divided into two sessions. The first session was for K to 5<sup>th</sup> grade students and the other sessions was for 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade students.

During the first session, we held courses in art, poetry, and dance. The students worked hard, for four weeks, in preparation for a final performance that was to be held during the summer program's award ceremony. The final performance consisted of three dance routines with poetry readings intermixed between scenes. The students performed on a stage designed and created by the students.

It brings a smile to my face when I think about that particular performance. Every single kid was excited to be involved regardless of the size of their role. One example that comes to mind was a young boy who was our DJ. He only had one line, but that one line meant the world to him. It was the opening scene. With a huge smile on his face he walks on stage toward the DJ table, slips on his headphones, and shouts "let's get this party started!" He took his role to heart despite the fact that he did not have real equipment. He mixed on turntables made out of two boxes, while a thirty second CD track of a DJ cutting played.

After he was done the crowd erupted in laughter and applause. The smile on that young boys face was unforgettable, but it did not stop there.

All of those kids amazed everyone in the auditorium. Even we, who worked with these kids for the past four weeks, were shocked at how great the kids performed. Their poems moved the crowd, their dancing was crisp, and their personalities won over the audience. It was a demanding four weeks, but the joyous expressions on these kids' faces made it all worthwhile. As staff, we were honored to be part of one of the most rewarding times of these kids' lives. However, our elation quickly turned to dismay, when all of a sudden walking to the front of the stage, making her only appearance of the day, was the lead program director.

*[sighs] Look what you made me do, look what I made for you  
Knew if I paid my dues, how will they pay you  
When you first come in the game, they try to play you  
(Jay-Z, 2003)*

\* \* \* \* \*

The second session brought its own set of memories. During this session the students organized a play that revolved around the evolution of music and dance. The play was framed around a conversation between a grandmother, her granddaughter, a grandfather, and his grandson. This nostalgic conversation traced the music and dance of the younger generation to its roots. In between the dialogue scenes students performed choreographed dance numbers that included African, Reggae, Reggaeton, Stepping, and B-boyin. I bet the play would have turned out great, but that play never happened because it was canceled four days prior to show time.

The final week of the program which was designated for rehearsal was interrupted with unplanned "field trips." Based on the program's brochure the parents were told that their

child would participate in various educational field trips. I place *field trips* in quotation marks because these educational and enriching field trips were visits to a shopping center for free drinks and hotdogs. A parent pays nearly \$1300 for four weeks and this is the idea of a field trip. Our frustration for these field trips stemmed from knowing that these kids were being cheated and from not being informed until we arrived that the students were gone for the day.

On the fourth day prior to show, time we arrived at the school ready to rehearse for the show, but the kids had gone on another “exquisite” field trip. I remember vividly the looks of frustration from my people. I had to do something, but I did not know what. I decided to talk to the director about this issue. The lead director approached us in the hallway and we mentioned that we wanted to speak to her about some issues we were having. She led us to this dimly lit enormous conference containing a grand wooden table surrounded by several huge fancy plush chairs. We voiced our complaints to no avail. In a very defensive tone the director told us she was canceling the show and no longer needed our services.

*Why sure! Back before we were born they sold us out  
Yeah J. Jackson we know what you about  
Back when you was running for the presidency and competing  
All rap was dope you love every beat n  
But you took the beat  
You was using us then like you using us now  
And the national urban league and don't know how, You Figure  
The stop the violence movement gave you 600,000 nigga  
Now you quicker to diss our gift with Ms. Tucker  
You better find another you sellout mutha\*\*\*\*@s  
(Krs-One, 2003)*

We regrouped in the auditorium to discuss our plan of action. We knew we couldn't just walk away because these kids looked forward and worked so hard on this show. The next day we spoke with the directors' supervisors to see if the kids could still put on their show. The supervisors notified us that they had to conduct an investigation to see what transpired.

Sadly, this bureaucratic runaround would last weeks. Therefore, the possibility of the kids still putting on their show went down the drain. However, the most discouraging part was learning from the kids that the directors told them we quit because we no longer wanted to work with them.

*Throw ya fist up homie if ya know what's up  
All my comrades puttin in soldier work  
We rollin dirty wit it, fully dedicated  
(Dead Prez, 2000)*

That same day the lead director informed us that we could never speak with the kids. We asked if we could attend their awards ceremony and we were told that if we showed up campus security would be called. Now tell me what I am supposed to do now? Seku and I went to their awards ceremony anyway. We made it as far as the door before security was called. Now keep in mind we arrived dressed in our finest suits and not like we were back on the block with hoodies, jeans, and tims. All we wanted to do was support the kids on their day, but we were treated as if we were trying to incite a riot. We never had the chance to speak with any of the kids that day, but they did see us at the door. Seku and I had to settle for that. We weren't disappointed because we knew it was a victory. Our determination, despite efforts to keep us out, let the kids know we fought to show them love.

From time to time we bump into some of the kids. Its always encouraging seeing the excitement on their faces when they see us. They always lavish us with praise and compliments as they introduce us to their parents. The hardest part is when they bring up that summer and express their own dismay for what went down.

They do not know what really transpired. It always upsets me when I think about how hard these students worked to learn dance routines, memorize scripts, and design costumes. It upsets me even more to know that these kids never had a chance to show the results of their

hard work for their family and friends. What these kids looked forward to the most was the chance to get up on stage and perform. They were cheated out of the experience of receiving accolades for their hard work. Never again!

Every single experience I had with Potentialis up to that point ended negatively. Only equipped with my vision and passion there comes a time when you have to consider if you are the problem. I do not have the formal education and training to run Potentialis. All I have is the desire to do something positive for the next generation.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Yo, I'm comin off with mad rage  
Eighteen, and hittin the real stage  
But don't worry bout me, cause I'm makin it  
And if I can't have it, then I'm takin it  
(Group Home, 1995)*

“Screw it.” That’s what I told Seku when I finally decided to organize a summer program that would be solely run by Potentialis. I am tired of working with people who claim to be for the kids, but their actions speak otherwise. Too many times I have seen kids experience disappointment and heartbreak at the hands of people who would rather save face than exert the extra energy to provide kids with opportunities for personal growth and development.

*Buck buck! Buck buck buck!  
It sound like gunshots but it could be the plot  
of a chicken, definition, is what you're missin and  
listen to your children instead of dissin em  
Senator Dole doesn't understand the younga  
Like they be sayin want to, but we be sayin wanna  
They gettin dumber every summer as they walk the road  
Maybe because they cannot understand the code  
(KRS-One, 2003)*

In the summer of 2006, the Potentialis Centre hosted the first annual Arts, Culture, and Enrichment (A.C.E.) Summer Program on the campus of the university I was attending. My team and I developed a 6 week camp that focused on five core content areas: movement, music, visual literacy, linguistic arts, and cultural studies. In movement, students were exposed to B-boyin, playing Capoeira, Stepping, and West African dance. Additionally, the kids were introduced to the music and instruments of each style. During music, the kids produced beats, created percussion instruments, and learned to read music. The visual arts component consisted of photography and videography. During photography, the kids learned about aperture, shutter speeds, lighting, and editing. In videography, the kids learned equipment operation, story boarding, shot angles, and editing. During linguistic arts, students created short stories, essays, poems, and collages that were centered on expressing their identity. Finally, in cultural studies students explored various Latino, African, and Caribbean cultures. In addition to the curriculum, the students went on field trips to museums, newspaper printing press, and universities.

The entire summer was spent putting together a portfolio which the students could showcase for parents, friends, and sponsors. The kids organized a final performance called the Summer Jump-Off. During the Summer Jump-Off, the kids danced, performed a score with the percussion instruments they made, played their videos, displayed their photographs, and would have read their literary work if we had not run out of time. At the end of that summer program each student went home with a portfolio that contained their photography, poetry, short stories, videos and music. The biggest accomplishment was the kids creating a CD. Each student produced their own music and designed the album art.



Some of the best times that summer were spent just hanging out and building tight bonds. The things I will remember will be playing basketball, laughing as the kids pushed each other from a tire swing, the pool and beach trips, throwing water balloons at each other (and at people from the window in the building we held classes), and riding skateboards across campus (as well as the halls of the buildings we were in). Most importantly I will never forget the friendships these kids built with each other. It was incredible to see how prior to the camp none of the kids knew each other, but by the end of summer you would suspect that these kids have known each other for years.

All of these kids have a special place in my heart. It is not only me, but my team shares these same sentiments as well. I remember one day overhearing one of my team members say “I love that kid” when sharing with his friends about Lil’ g, as we referred to one of the students.

Lil’ g was like the little brother who drives you crazy all day, but in your heart of hearts you would not have it any other way. I can fill so many more pages with stories about each kid, but I guess what I am trying to express is that the first A.C.E. Summer Program was a success. It was a success in that we impacted their lives and they impacted ours. After what I have experienced with Potentialis, it was fulfilling to know that these kids left that final day overjoyed and full of pride and not disappointed or heartbroken.

Despite a successful summer, there were some negative experiences that I believe were meant to occur for my own personal growth. For example, prior to the start of the camp I organized numerous fundraisers. One of the fundraisers I was trying to organize was having my friend’s band perform while some B-boys rocked at a local mall. I met with the mall’s entertainment coordinator one morning to discuss the details of the event. I remember the

coordinator asking me what I wanted to do. I told him that I wanted my friend's band to perform. He asked what kind of music. I explained that it was a mixture of Jazz and Hip-hop. He was excited about the idea until I mentioned that some B-boys were going to dance while they played. In a concerned tone, he said that the mall officials really did not want "ethnically oriented dancing." He added that they [mall officials] didn't want break dancing because of the crowd it attracts. *"I sit in disbelief as he crawls underneath the rock cock back the glock, cause I don't trust the Devil I rebel until Babylon is dust"* (KRS-One, 2003). I thought to myself how this guy, who is Black, can support the racist attitudes of these mall officials. I was buggin out because right after he says this he asks me if I would like to participate in the mall's Latin Jazz festival or South American music night. So, what ended up happening? A few weeks later my friend's band did perform at the mall along with as many B-boys I could find.

*(Work it, make it, do it,  
Makes us harder, better, faster, STRONGER!) [played throughout]  
(Work it harder make it better,  
do it faster makes us stronger,  
more than ever, hour after  
hour work is never over ) [played throughout]*

*Th-th-that that don't kill me  
Can only make me stronger  
I need you to hurry up now  
Cause I can't wait much longer  
I know I got to be right now  
(West, 2007).*

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Push**

I consider my experiences with Potentialis comparable to short acts in the Broadway production of my life. The premise of this production is similar to that of the movie *Brown*

*Sugar*, in which the appearance of “Hiphop” acts as a metaphor for larger issues in life.

Hiphop in my story is not about a set of elements, but about the creativity, determination, and passion that comes from growing up in an environment like the South Bronx.

Toward the end of the movie *Higher Learning* (Singleton, 1995), there is a scene in which Lawrence Fishburne’s character, Professor Maurice Phipps, and Omar Epps’ character, Malik Williams, are talking about the tragic events that have transpired on campus and their effect on Malik’s psyche. As Malik leaves Professor Phipps’ office, Phipps, in looking for the author of the quote, stops Malik and says, “Without a struggle, there can be no progress.” Malik turns around and responds, “Frederick Douglas.” During this moment Prof. Phipps becomes proud because he knows now that Malik has obtained a certain level of critical consciousness.

In my experiences with Potentialis, this quote by Frederick Douglas truly resonates with me. When I was first trying to get Potentialis off the ground there were many occasions where I doubted that Potentialis would come to fruition. There were numerous times where I believed the naysayers. I wanted to give up, but like in the movie *A Bronx Tale* (1993) when Calogero was in a jam and he remembered what his father and Sonny always told him.

*You can be anything you want to be. The saddest thing in life is wasted talent. If you’ve got talent and do the wrong thing, nothing happens. But when you do right, good things happen.*

*I kept hearing my father’s voice in my head. Don’t blow it son. Don’t waste your talent son. Then I kept hearing Sonny’s voice. Be careful C. Don’t lose it C. Keep your head C (De Niro, 1993)*

I heard those same caveats coming from family, friends, and mentors. I document this journey to pay homage to those who had the strength to believe when I lacked the faith.

“Yeah that’s right cause I survived mad fights and for my peeps I truly care cause without

some of them I wouldn't be here" (Gang Starr, 1994). Similar to Common (2007), I also do this "for the people and the struggles of the brothas and the folks." This is for those who will come after me and need a voice to help them push through their uncertainties.

*I live my life  
One day at a time  
Hold my head  
So I don't lose my mind  
Sometimes you might fall down  
But you get back up  
Get on your journey  
Yeah, keep on pushin'  
Pushin', pushin', pushin'*

*Done pushed my struggles  
Endured my pride  
I fear no man  
I know wrong from right  
We push until the day we see the light  
And we keep on pushin'  
Pushin', pushin', pushin'*

*I'm vocally unmatched, nobly  
With the flow, slow on the ground  
But mo' public than notary  
Push, in this era of G.W. Bush  
We must load mental ammunition and bust  
Thus, I'm a hold you down, I got you  
One more repetition I'm a spot you  
This is for my blue collar workin', beer guzzlin'  
Bootleg, DVD sellin', keep hustling  
Push, if you represent the struggle then push  
Peep the pieces of the puzzle and push  
Never let 'em place a muzzle just push*

*Keep on, keep on, keep on, keep on  
(Push, push, push, push)  
(Pharoahe Monch, 2006)*

## ***“IF YOUR FROM THE BX<sup>9</sup>...”***

\* \* \* \* \*

*The following chapter is a journey into the South Bronx. This journey is composed of a series of stories from Phase 2 and I about our experiences growing up in the BX (BronX). These counter narratives (Delgado, 2000) support Phase 2’s view that Hiphop is life and not a set of elements (rapping, B-boyin, aerosol art, and dee jaying) to which it is often reduced. The lived experiences of Phase 2 and I are a détournement to the dominant and popular perceptions of Hiphop being limited only to a set of elements). Our experiences are what inspire the elements. Therefore, without the lived experience the elements would not exist. Ironically,. this sets the base for Hiphop’s commodification as well.*

\* \* \* \* \*

I recently decided to purchase an iPod to replace the mp3 player I originally had when I started documenting this journey. But three hundred dollars is a lot of money to spend especially when you and your wife are graduate students. So when I did spend \$300 on an iPod, my wife questioned my decision. I tried to explain that I didn’t just *want* an iPod, but I *needed* one. I knew she would understand when she read this.

My three hundred dollar investment was well worth it. This iPod is more than a music player; it’s like a portable time machine. One minute I can be in North Carolina, in the School of Education sitting at my desk on the corner of Cameron Ave. and South Columbia St. and in a matter of seconds be back in the South Bronx on the corner of Manida St. and Spoffard Ave. My iPod holds about 20,000 songs – imagine the possibilities of places I can go.

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<sup>9</sup> Camp Lo. (1997). Black Nostaljack AKA Come On. On *Uptown Saturday Night* [CD]. United States: Arista. (1999).

I can take these spur of the moment trips whenever the urge arises. More often I take these trips whenever I turn on the TV, watch the news, or listen to the radio. I resonate with Phase when he said *“It seems the demon is always devising some new s\*\*t to keep us off track.”*

*They run their intellectual sources  
Counterfeit wisdom creating the illusion of freedom...  
You’ll find what you sought...was based on the deception you bought  
A perception of naught  
Where the majority remains caught  
(Hill, 2002a)*

This is why my three hundred dollar investment in an iPod was well worth it. When everything that surrounds me seems mentally weak I can slip on my headphones and instantaneously go to a place free from the demon’s traps.

*Sometimes I get discouraged  
I look around and, things are so weak  
People are so weak  
Sometimes,  
Sometimes I feel like crying  
Sometimes my heart gets heavy  
Sometimes I just want to leave and fly  
away [ fly fly fly, like a dove ]  
(Mos Def, 1999).*

\* \* \* \* \*

Where do I go? It seems all I have now are memories. You recreate every moment in your head and while it brings a smile to your face this smile fades when you realize that they are just memories. You play out in your mind some movie of how things would be if it were still the same today, but then you understand that life has moved on and the movie you have scripted, directed and produced is just that – a movie, a dream or whatever you want to call it. Who knows, maybe one day that movie will come into fruition.

The details of my own memories are still vivid and fresh in my mind. Sometimes I think the smells are the best part. On certain days the smell of the air reminds me of back home. Certain scents stimulate certain memories. The smell of the air when it's snowing on a brick winter day or the cool breeze on a hot summer afternoon reminds me of standing in front of Angel's building on a cold night after we had just finishing playing football or sitting on the corner on a hot summer day contemplating what we were going to get into next.

It seems as if it was all a dream, but it wasn't. It was my life, my memories, my experiences, the collection of events that define who I am. Who am I? I am a Puerto Rican. I am a Nuyorican. I am a Boricua; I am not from New York; I am from the Bronx. I am from the South Bronx. And only those who can say they are from the South Bronx understand that it's like being in a world by itself. On the outside it doesn't seem very appealing, but from the inside it's a place that no matter how far you move you never let go of it.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Hunts Point**

*This is the Hunts Point section of the Bronx, my home, a world into itself. You can get to any borough fifteen minutes from here, but they might as well be three thousand miles away. (Quartet begins to sing...On the streets of the Bronx is where I wanna be/standing on the corner singing good ole harmony) It was 1992 and Hip-hop was the sound of the streets. What a time it was. My friends and I would go to Yankee Stadium and watch the Yankees win. That's my building. I lived right there on the second floor, 660 Manida St. There's my corner. The corner of Manida and Spofford. This is where my friends and I would spend most of our time. You would have never known my story until one day...*

*(Adapted from De Niro, 1993)*

*"This story takes place back in the South Bronx"* (Fat Joe, 1993) on the 600 block of Manida in Hunts Point. To be more specific this story begins in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor apartment of 660 Manida St. I lived in a two bedroom apartment in a three story family house. My

grandparents lived on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor; I lived on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor; and my uncle, aunt and cousin lived on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. Most people in my neighborhood lived in these types of houses with their family members.

As I sit here listening to my iPod and writing these memoirs, Eric B. and Rakim's (1987) *Eric B. Is President* begins to play. This takes me back to when Angel's cousin Gabie (short for Gabriel) and I would go back and forth with the lyrics while waiting for "next" on the basketball court at the Hunts Point Playground over on Faile St. and Spoffard Ave.

*Me: I came in the door, I said it before*

*Gabie: I never let the mic magnetize me no more*

*Me: But it's biting me, fighting me, inviting me to rhyme*

*Gabie: I can't hold it back, I'm looking for the line,*

*Me: Taking off my coat, clearing my throat*

*Gabie: My rhyme will be kicking it until I hit my last note*

*Me: My mind'll range to find all kinds of ideas*

*Gabie: Self-esteem makes it seem like a thought took years to build*

*Me: But still say a rhyme after the next one*

*Gabie: Prepared, never scared, I'll just bless one*

*Me: And you know that I'm the soloist*

*Gabie and Me: So Eric B, make 'em clap to this*

Summers in the South Bronx were always a great time to relax and have fun. We were too young to work and stress about money or bills, but old enough to realize our freedom and take full advantage of all the resources we had around us. I can vividly remember those days as if they just happened.



A typical summer day would be waking up around 10:00 am, turning on the TV, and going into the kitchen to make some breakfast. At age 12 there was not much I could cook for breakfast. My options were either cereal or an egg sandwich. The majority of the time I opted for the egg sandwich. An egg sandwich, now that's what I'm talking about. Amongst my friends the egg sandwich was a delicacy. All you had to do was scramble a couple of eggs, sprinkle some salt and pepper, add some ketchup on top, and place it between two slices of bread.

After breakfast, I would throw on my jean shorts, a t-shirt, my sneakers, and put my hat on. Before I went outside I would get my keys and put whatever money I had in my pocket.

\* \* \* \* \*

As a kid, having a set of keys was a big deal. It is like a meaningful stage in becoming a man. I guess it has to do with the responsibility associated with having your own set of keys to the house. You were on your own schedule. You didn't have to wait for someone to come home so you can get in. The worst scenario was when you wanted to get in the house and you would be ringing the doorbell for what seemed like an eternity knowing that someone was upstairs, but just didn't hear it because the radio or TV was too loud. With my own set of keys I could come and go as I pleased.

The other important part of having a set of keys was what you had your keys on. I had an orange plastic key chain that you could hook to one of your belt loops by pushing down the lever. I remember Gilbert had a white one, but my other friends kept their keys on a key ring that they would just stuff in their pocket. I did not trust the "key ring in your pocket deal." God forbid if I lost my keys. The worst thing that could happen to someone with a set

of keys would be to lose them. The trouble that would ensue after a lost set of keys was terrifying...

As I headed out the front door of the house I would grab my book bag and bat while shouting to my grandmother that was I leaving. In my bag was all I needed for the day. It contained my glove, my sweats, my cleats, and a couple of hardballs.

As I got outside I would look up the block to see if anyone was at the corner. The majority of the time most of us didn't get there till about noon. I would walk down the block to Gilbert's house and at the top of my lungs yell, "Aaaa Yo, Gilbert!" My voice would echo throughout the whole block, but the only ones who seemed to hear it were me and Gil. He would look out the window from his third floor apartment and let me know he was going to buzz me in. I would go upstairs and wait in Gil's room until he was ready to go. We would chill for bit and watch some TV or play Sega Genesis. Sometimes Gilbert's mom would make him run to the bodega for some soda, milk, bread, cigarettes, and comida de gato<sup>10</sup>.

Eventually, we would leave and head up the block. We would go into Cheweito's (the corner store) and buy a bag a chips and quarter-water<sup>11</sup>. We would sit on the corner and talk about what happened the previous night in the Yankees game, Knicks game or whatever was going on in sports at that time.

It's kind of funny because this was actually the first time we had spoken to one another other than me yelling for Gilbert to buzz me in. We didn't need to speak when I got to his house. We had done the same thing over and over, day after day, summer after summer, so words were not needed to communicate. We had the routine down pat. And one of us we would never think of changing that for anything.

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<sup>10</sup> Cat food

<sup>11</sup> 25 cent juice

We would sit on the corner, talk, and wait. We would wait for all our peoples to come through. It didn't take long. Jose would pop up around the corner followed by Juan. One of us would go get Angel and Espy from the building across the street. Ryan and DJ, along with his younger brother Steven would come out of the same the building. Soon after, David and Nelson would walk up from down the block. In a matter of minutes we would grow from two to about ten or fifteen. As each one of us got to the corner we would, "give each other a pound, oh I mean shake their hand" (Boogie Down Productions, 1990). Everyday we would all gather at the same time at the same spot, our spot, the corner of Manida St. and Spofford Ave. Everyday we would wait for our entire crew to gather until everyone got there so that we could all walk up to Manida Park, together!

\* \* \* \* \*

The South Bronx I remember is contingent on the specific neighborhood I grew up in. For example, the experiences I had on Manida St. differed from the experiences someone may have had on Coster St., which was only one block over. In terms of appearance, the 600 block of Manida may not be very appealing, but to those of us from here it was our "Isla de Encanto."

The sounds coming from my block were of Spanish music playing with the obscure sound of traffic in the background. Puerto Rican Flags would hang from telephone poles or from people's windows. Women would dance on corners while the men drank Heinekens and played dominoes in front of corner stores. As for us, depending on the time year, we would be playing football, basketball, and especially baseball. However, the way we played football, basketball, and baseball was pure South Bronx.

Football for us was in the street, the sidewalks were out of bounds, the goal lines were from sewer<sup>12</sup> to sewer with a pump<sup>13</sup> being one end zone and a no parking sign being the other. Occasionally, we would go up to Manida Park and play tackle, especially when it snowed. It was fun, but tackle football wasn't always my choice of game. I was small; therefore, I did not want to tackle anyone and especially be tackled. I would rather stick to playing two hand touch in the street.

Each game we played was like the Super Bowl. We kept stats like the number of interceptions someone would have in a game, or the number of touchdown throws or receptions. We would try hard to play just like our favorite players, wearing their jerseys as we made plays up and down the street. For the duration of the game best friends were now sworn enemies. For example, Gilbert was one of my best friends, but during football I never wanted to be on his team. He had such a smug attitude that I always wanted to play against him so I could beat his team badly. The best part of the game was scoring a touchdown and telling the other team to "go take a walk<sup>14</sup>." After the game, we would all hang out in front of Angel's building. Emotions were still high from the game, because even in front of Angel's building we would segregate ourselves by the teams we were on. Eventually, someone would break the ice from the other team and memories of the game disappeared. One by one we would depart the group and go home in anticipation of doing it all again the following day.

During the summers, we would go the Hunts Point Playground and play ball. Though I think the best basketball games we played were on milk crates hanging from a gate. I remember one summer morning being awakened by the sound of someone hammering. I

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<sup>12</sup> Man hole

<sup>13</sup> Fire hydrant

<sup>14</sup> The team scored against had to switch end zones; therefore, had to "take a walk."

went to the window to see who was making this racket so early in the morning. I looked out the window and there was Ryan nailing milk crates to two telephones across the street from one another so we could play a full court game. I give him credit because he spent a lot of time getting everything right. Each crate was exactly the same height as the other and he even made these makeshift backboards out of some wood paneling he had found. The funny part was when someone took the first shot, and the ball went right through backboard and rolled down the street. But we didn't care. We would play all day. Kids from other blocks would come and call next on Ryan's milk crate full court.

Baseball was my personal favorite. During summer nights, I used to be up in my room catching grounders from tossing a sponge ball against the frame of my bed. I couldn't wait for tomorrow to come so we can play some baseball. We would literally play all day long. We played hardball in Manida Park all afternoon and after our games were over we headed to I.S.<sup>15</sup> 74 to play softball until it was too dark to see. We just loved the game. We played it any way we could think of.

When there were not enough of us to play a full game we would play "off the stairs." Off the stairs was when we took a blue rubber ball you could buy for a dollar in the corner store and throw against the steps of someone's stoop. The rules of the game were simple. Where the ball landed determined what was considered a single, double, triple, homerun, or foul. If the ball was caught in the air or on one bounce then you was out. We would play this game for nine innings, but usually the game was cut short because the people who owned the stoop we played off of would tell us that we were going to mess up their steps and to go find somewhere else to play.

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<sup>15</sup> Intermediate School

The other game we would play, which was personally my favorite, was “pitching in.” Pitching in was great because you could play this game with only two people. All you needed for pitching in was a bat, glove, sponge ball, and something to draw with. We would usually play pitching in down a couple of blocks where there were a lot of industrial warehouses. The rules for pitching in were similar to that of off the stairs. You would draw a strike zone on one wall and on the wall across the street you would determine the base runners. For example, if you hit the ball over the first floor ledge then that was a double, over the second floor ledge was a triple, and so on. Like off the stairs, you were out if your ball was caught in the air, caught one bounce, or if you struck out. However, instead of a team having three outs they would only have one.

These games were just as intense and physical as the games we played in the park. I have gotten hurt or close to it in a few games – like the time my cousin Leon drilled me in the back with a wild pitch or the time I was pitching and nearly got hit in the face from a line drive off of Gilbert’s bat.

Today, if you drive through the Bronx you will still see kids playing pitching in. Watching the younger kids play makes me miss those days. I can not go to the Bronx every weekend and play pitching in so instead I have brought pitching in to North Carolina.

In the apartment complex I live in, we have an underground parking garage. One day I took some chalk and drew a strike zone against one of the walls. So now I can play any time I want. Since the garage is underground no one can hear a sound. No matter what the weather is like I have a place I can go and play pitch in (of course without the batter since I am not going to pay for a busted window).

Just like my iPod, I have another avenue to go to when everything around me becomes weak and I just want to escape. The best time to play is late at night. I go down to the garage, play some music through my car, put on my Yankees cap, and pitch like I am taking the mound in Yankee Stadium for game 4 of the American League Championship Series going for the sweep against the Boston Red Sox. It is hard to find people in North Carolina that not only know about pitching in, but also share the same heart for it as I do. That's why I am grateful for Rich, another Boricua from New Jersey. On occasion, Rich and I go out and play pitching in. It is harder in North Carolina to find a place to play, but there are a few executive parks that have some good buildings to play off of. I remember the first time we played; I almost felt a tear drop. The emotions did not come from playing the game, but from the sounds of the game. I love the sound of a sponge ball hitting the side of a building or the sound that comes from hitting a sponge ball right on the sweet spot of the bat. These sounds bring me back to being a 12 year old kid playing pitching in with Gilbert at the blue school<sup>16</sup>. These sounds bring me back to jumping the fence at P.S. 48 so Leon and I can play pitching in. These sounds bring me to "back in the day when things were cool" (Badu, 2006).

"Back in the day when things were cool..." (Badu, 2006). When I think about this line it makes me reminiscent about growing up in the South Bronx and all of the things we did like:

Taking the top of a gallon of milk, filling it with clay or wax, placing a quarter on top and playing skelsies in the street

Making a pea shooter out of a twenty-five cent juice, a balloon, and a rubber band

Playing manhunt over a three block radius (Baretto St, Manida St., Coster St.)

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<sup>16</sup> La Peninsula Community Organization Head Start. The building walls were blue, which gave it its nickname.

Going to a Chinese take-out restaurant, but ordering chicken wings with a side of French fries or Plátano Maduros

Getting a slice at Alfred's Pizzeria

Going to a local Cuchifrito to get half a pollo frito, arroz con gandules, tostones with some ajo to put on top and some flan

Watching Wrestlemania in the back room of the Wedge

Taking the #6 train home from school and riding in between the subway cars as it went over the Whitlock Ave. bridge and into the tunnel at Hunts Point Ave.

Walking to Southern Blvd. to buy some clothes at Jean Star, Dr. Jay's, or Jimmy Jazz

Taking the #19 bus with Gilbert, Angel, DJ, and Jose to watch the Yankees play (only six dollars to get into the bleachers back then)

Getting wet in the pump on a hot summer day

Putting two skateboards together and riding four people

Taking a flattened twenty-five cent juice container and putting it on the back tire fork of your bike so it can sound like a motorcycle

Wrestling outside on the sidewalk on some mattress

Thinking we were going to become sterile if we drank a Tropical Fantasy<sup>17</sup>

Having a turkey and cheese hero from the local deli for lunch on school field trips

Eating some of grandma's Pasteles<sup>18</sup> with some ketchup and hot sauce

Playing diversions<sup>19</sup> with Leon until the sun came up

Having a Batman medallion or one of those three button stop watches hanging from your neck

Having a trench with the fur

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<sup>17</sup> Fifty cent soda

<sup>18</sup> A traditional Puerto Rican dish made from roots (e.g. Yuca) and vegetables (e.g. plantains, potatoes, green bananas) and usually stuffed with beef, chicken, or pork.

<sup>19</sup> A game my cousin Leon and I made up. In order to play one person would wait outside the room while the other person setup booby traps and hid. The person outside would then come into the dark room blind folded while music was playing trying to find the other person by feeling around for them.



Watching Papo, the homeless guy, run up and down the block talking to himself in Spanish

Buying a Coco, rainbow or cherry coquito<sup>20</sup>

Getting a Piragua<sup>21</sup> in your favorite flavor

Having a brown paper bag filled with 10 cent Chico Sticks, a 5 cent pack of Now or Later, Violets, 1 cent Sour Powers and a 10 cent pack of Sunflower seeds.

Mornings at St. Raymond's High School listening to music in the cafeteria as kids beat on lunch tables and free styled

I can go on and on with the many things my friends and I experienced as kids growing up in the South Bronx. These experiences are significant to my childhood. These experiences provide the memories that last a lifetime. This is what Hiphop is and always was; our lived experiences and not a set of elements (rapping, b-boyin, aerosol art, and dee jaying). Now it has become clearer to me when Phase said Hiphop is "life...not 'the so called elements' and so on...just an extension of what we have always done and more...gumbo...at it's funkier...all the dope that is dope rolled into a continuous evolving one."

After doing a quick internet search on "gumbo," I learned that gumbo is "an aromatic soup-stew characteristic of the Creole cuisine of Louisiana, combining African, American Indian, and European elements" (Gumbo, 2008a). After some additional searching, I found a website that discussed Creole cooking and explained that it was:

*Based upon French stews and soups, and is influenced by Spanish, African, Native American, and other Anglo Southern groups. The Spanish brought into the cuisine the use of cooked onions, green peppers, tomatoes, and garlic. African chefs brought with them the skill of spices and introduced okra. Native foodstuffs, such as crawfish, shrimp, oysters, crabs, and pecans found their way into both Cajun and Creole cuisine. From the Choctaw Indians came the use of filé, a powdered herb from sassafras leaves, to thicken gumbo. So often the emergence of a new dish was the*

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<sup>20</sup> Frozen icy

<sup>21</sup> Shaved Ice

*result of creative chefs intermingling their cooking experience and heritage with the tastes of their employers (Gumbo, 2008b).*

The ingredients of my gumbo (life story) is a mixture of family, friends, sports, games, Puerto Rican cultures, Nuyorican cultures, Black cultures, Caribbean cultures, the South Bronx, music, art, a pinch of dance, and a sprinkle of New York. One of the things I learned about making gumbo is that you can never assume the ingredients someone uses to make their own gumbo. I made that mistake with Phase's gumbo. I thought I knew what the ingredients were to his gumbo, but I quickly learned that I was off.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the midst of trying to figure out what exactly I wanted to do with my project, I took a trip one weekend back home to clear my head and arrange my thoughts. What originally was in my mind was doing a project in which I interviewed individuals across three generations of Hip-hop culture in order to explore the similarities and changes that have occurred over the past thirty plus years.

That Saturday night Tej (Phase's nephew) and I met up with Phase in Chinatown. He took us to dinner at a vegetarian restaurant to which he usually goes. It was during dinner that I had an epiphany. While we ate we talked about a variety of topics. Phase shared with us his thoughts on film, race, music, class, art, and politics. Tej and I sat there listening to the intellectual jewels he freely gave to us. I say "freely" because Phase is not the type of man to thrust himself into the limelight. I have known Phase for a while, but never really talked to him on this level. I knew it would be a great honor and privilege to learn from his knowledge and experience. It was then that I realized that all I wanted to focus on for my project was Phase's story...

Webster Ave.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Me: I met a brother out here that I really look up to and admire. Because of his existence many others are able to exist after him, but yet they haven't a clue about him. You can see influence of his style in many people's work...yet the acknowledgement is never there. Because of his abilities and accomplishments he has every right to boast...but doesn't. He remains humble giving jewels to anyone who is willing to listen. In an environment that causes so many to sell out he has upheld his identity.*

*Phase 2: I MET A BROTHER OUT HERE WHO I REALLY AM FOND OF...WHO IN A CERTAIN RESPECT REMINDS ME OF ME...THOUGH HIS APPROACH TO THE ARTS ARE MORE CONCEPTUAL TO HIS SURROUNDINGS. THE "ME" IS HIM BEING A COLLEGE STUDENT AMONGS MANY CAUCASIANS...BUT STILL UPHOLDING HIS IDENTITY AS A BROWNSKINNED BROTHER.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Me: I did want to email you about the dissertation project I am working on. I wanted to give you a breakdown of what I would like to do. I am looking at my own life and experiences (I really feel what you said before that "hip hop" is just a title of life), the things I have done with Potentialis and mirroring that against your life and experiences. This is the conflict I am having that I want to try to decipher. There is life growing up in the South Bronx and there is my life in school. Two different worlds that I exist in and these worlds at times collide. Also this project is intended for the kids I have worked with through Potentialis. I really see you as one of the most intelligent men I ever met with tons of knowledge and experience. You have done a lot which the majority of the younger generations don't know. I would like to pass that story (your story) along to them.*

*I don't know if this is really clear (even as I write this message I am really trying to figure out what I want to do).*

*Phase 2: I FEEL THAT YOU GOTTA JUST BE YOU. DON'T COMPROMISE THAT IN THE SENSE THAT YOU BECOME A "CHARACTER" TO FIT IN...OF PLEASE THAT OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCES EXPECTATIONS...OFTEN I FIND THEY WILL LEARN TO ACCEPT THAT "OTHER" SIDE OF YOU. YOU JUST GOTTA KNOW HOW TO USE THESE THINGS THAT ARE AT YOUR DISPOSAL TO YOUR ADVANTAGE...BUT FAR AS I AM CONCERNED THERE IS BUT SO MUCH COMPROMISING THAT SHOULD BE DONE...YOU ARE WHAT YOU ARE...ALWAYS BE OPEN TO CHANGE FOR THE BETTER...THAT'S ABOUT IT...AND ALSO THANKS MUCH FOR THE ACCOLADES...REALLY I AM HUMBLLED...*

The first email to Phase was a bit intimidating. We had spoken to each other so many times in the past, but now it was a little different because there was another motive, the dissertation. I was not sure how he was going respond to me wanting to know about his life since now this was not just between me and him.

*Phase 2: I'M NOT REALLY ONE TO REFLECT ON MY SO CALLED LIFE STORY...SO...I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH I CAN REFLECT IN THE CONTEXT OF YOUR QUESTIONS...BUT I WILL DO WHAT I CAN...*

*I am mad funny about the whole biography thing when it reaches beyond the culture...but we are from the same seed...so i will in my eccentric and sort of protected mindstate...try to do my best...*

*thing is with me...i can only tentatively (but talk in detail) about how and "where" i came up...if i were face to face...i may tell you some things i don't even like to talk about...but...anyway... bro just talk to me. for real...I LIVE FOR THAT. I DON'T LIKE TO FEEL THAT I AM WASTING AWAY SADLY ENOUGH FOR LOVE AND ADDICTION NATURALLY TO MY CULTURE...*

The first thing I was interested in learning from Phase was the section of the South Bronx in which he grew up. I wanted to know what block he was from and what he did for fun growing up in the South Bronx. I wondered how much of our stories would overlap despite the twenty-five year time difference.

*Me: Tell me about your memories of growing up in the South Bronx?*

*Phase 2: we started out in this life...a lot of my fam as babies with my moms cousins and granny..which I can vaguely remember...but I am closest to my cousins more than anyone...*

*ONE OF MY REMINICENT... "HOOD LEGACIES" IS THAT BEFORE I WAS EVEN THIS TALL...I COULD JUMP...AND THOUGH THERE WERE CATS THAT COULD JUMP HIGHER...I WAS FAR FROM AN AVERAGE JUMPER...AND IT'S A GOOD FEELING THAT ALOT OF HERADS KNOW THAT...*

*Me: What are some of your other memories from the Bronx?*

*Phase 2: BESIDES PLAYING BALL...JUST JADED...FOR REAL BUT F\*\*KED UP....I DON'T SMILE...JUST THINK ABOUT WHO I'D LIKE TO SEE DEAD...AND*

*S\*\*T LIKE THAT...BUT I KNOW I GET LOVE ESPECIALLY ON THE WHOLE  
9...(WEBSTER...)*

I was surprised that he talked about playing ball. I assumed he would talk about aerosol art and the jams. But you know what, if someone wanted to learn more about Hiphop and interviewed me about growing up in the South Bronx my response would be exactly what I wrote above about playing baseball and hanging out with friends. Basketball was a significant part of his [Phase 2] childhood just like baseball was to me. So I became interested in wanting to know more...

*Me: Was playing ball an option in life for you? (Did you want to pursue that?)*

*Phase 2: I DIDN'T PLAN IT...*

*BALL WAS BETTER FOR ME THAN A LOT OF THINGS BECAUSE BESIDES KNOWING THAT I DEFINITELY COULD PLAY...I COULD PLAY MY OWN WAY WITHIN THE RULES...AND BE CREATIVE. AND IT WAS ALL ON ME. NOT ON SOMEONE ELSE. THAT WAS THE BEAUTY OF BALL BESIDES HAVING CERTAIN SKILLS THAT THE TYPICAL CAT DIDN'T HAVE. I WILL NEVER SAY I WAS GOOD ENUFF TO PLAY PRO BALL...BUT PEOPLE USED TO WONDER WHY I DIDN'T TAKE IT TO ANOTHER LEVEL...AND I DEFINITELY WOULD AND COULD COMPETE WITH WHOEVER...AND DIDN'T CARE WHO YOU WERE...I THOUGHT I COULD HOLD MY OWN...AND GET MINE EVEN IF YOU GOT YOURS...*

*Phase 2: "OPTIONS" NEVER EXISTED TO ME. I BASICALLY WENT WITH THE FLOW...LIKE MOST OF US...INTELLIGENT OR NOT. WE ARE DEPRIVED OF THE MAINSTREAM IDEOLOGIES AND REALITIES THAT ARE THE AMERICAN DREAM AND THE AMERICAN "WAY" SO TO SPEAK...THAT IS THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW. SO PEOPLE ARE GONNA DO WHAT THEY ARE GONNA DO...AND I DO NOT NECESSARILY MEAN "BAD". I AM SAYING YOU LIVE YOUR LIFE AS IS...AND DEAL WITH IT FROM DAY TO DAY...NOT NECESSARILY KNOWING HOW OR WHAT TO DO TO GO FURTHER...EVEN MAYBE IF THE SO CALLED OPPORTUNITY DOES DROP IN FRONT OF YOU...(AS FOR ME IN THIS CASE) I DID WHAT I DID...ACCORDING TO WHAT WAS THERE FOR ME TO DO...*

*Me: Where did you hangout?*

*Phase 2: I spent a lot of time on the Webs...but that WASN'T WHERE MOST MY COMING UP WAS...BUT STILL I DIDN'T STAY ON THE BLOCK. I WENT TO THE*

*BEST SCHOOLS...WAS NEVER FEELING THE RULES IN THE SENSE THAT I WAS NEVER RIGHT AND THEY ALWAYS WERE...SO I THOUGHT I WAS DEFINITELY PRETTY FAR AHEAD OF MY GRADE...SCHOOL WAS ALWAYS BEEF AND BULLS\*\*T...*

*Me: What do you mean by beef and B.S.?*

*Phase 2: I REALIZE THESE DAYS THAT MY PEOPLE....MY SO CALLED PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN HATERS...HATING WHO CAN BALL...WHO HAS THE GIRLS...WHO CAN DANCE ETC...*

*Me: How was it for you growing up on Webster?*

*Phase 2: I DIDN'T GET NOTHING BUT LOVE MOSTLY...ON WEBS...BUT ELSEWHERE...DAMN...S\*\*T WAS RETARDED,...BUT THAT'S WHAT THE DEMON HAS OUR FOLKS DOING TO THIS DAY...BE IT ON THE AVE OR THE GANGS...OR IN THE RETARDED MUSIC...WE HATE OURSELVES...REFLECTED IN OUR OWN WHO WE ATTACK AND HATE ON...HOW THE F\*\*K YOU GONNA STEP ON ANOTHER NIGS TOES...WHEN HE IS IN THE SAME BOAT AS YOU??? ANY ONE OF ANY COLOR...BUT THAT IGNORANCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN THERE...*

*GUESS WHEN OUR MOMS AND THEM WERE COMING UP...S\*\*T WAS MAD DIFFERENT...THE NEIGHBORHOODS JUST STARTED TO GET WACK...AT SOME POINT AND INSTEAD OF WELFARE HELPING FOLKS IT WAS F\*\*KING THEM UP AND MAKING THEM DEPENDENT...AND WHEN YOU HAVE THESE FAMS WITH 6 AND MORE KIDS...WHO HAVE NO DIRECTION NO DISCIPLINE AND ARE POOR...THEY ARE GONNA FIND WAYS TO MAKE ENDS MEET...YOU KNOW THAT...*

To help push me along the writing process in documenting my journey I listened to a lot of music. I really believe the music someone listens to tells you a lot about that person. If there were a soundtrack to my life it would be compilation of Latin Jazz, Jazz, Salsa, Hiphop, Freestyle, R&B, Reggae, Spanish Reggae, and Alternative.

*Me: What kind of music did you listen to?*

*Phase 2: LOTS OF SOUL MUSIC...BUT SINCE OUR FOLKS DON'T DISCRIMINATE WE LISTENED TO DIFFERENT STATIONS...I WAS EXPOSED TO PRACTICALLY EVERY SO CALLED GENRE...AND EVIDENTLY THOSE ARE THE SO CALLED ELEMENTS THAT MADE WAY FOR HIP HOP (OUT OF URBAN GUMBO) TO EXIST...*

*Me: What are some examples of the soul music and other genres you listened too?*

*Phase 2: MY LITTLE CLICK AND MY FAM...GREW UP LISTENING TO ANYTHING FROM JOHNNY NASH...TO PRINCE BUSTER...MOST MAINSTREAM ROCK...ONE OF MY FAVES BEING ZEPLIN...CHICAGO...ARETHA...JAMES...WILSON...DISCO...EARTH WIND FIRE...SLOW JAMS...BUT AT THE SAME TIME...LUTHER...SOS...CAMEO... OLD AND NEW MUSIC...FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT AND OUR OWN...ALL THAT MUSIC EVEN BEATLES IS A BASIS FOR WHAT WE CALL HIP HOP...BEING THAT HIP HOP IS A GUMBO THAT YOU WOULDN'T FIND IN A SO CALLED NORMAL OR "CONTROLLED" SETTING. SOUL WASN'T REALLY WHITE OR BLACK IF IT WAS SOULFUL...AND WHAT WAS HOT OR THAT HEROIN DOPE YOU COULDN'T DENY...*

I wondered why he [Phase 2] never mentioned writing in any of his responses to my questions about things he got into growing up in the Bronx. I decided to bring it up myself to see what had to say about it.

*Me: How did you get into writing?*

*Phase 2: just something that intrigued me...my mainest man was doing it...and i just decided and felt it was me...the diff is,...that somehow and evidently i saw all the possibilities to build it...without really thinking about it...*

*Me: What does the name Phase 2 represent?*

*Phase 2: P.H.A.S.E. 2 REGARDLESS TO WHATEVER STORY WAS TOLD BY MYSELF...OR RELAYED BY DEVILS...IT HAD A DEEPER MEANING TO IT...THEN JUST A TYPICAL NAME...AND IT BASICALLY WAS AND INTENSIFIED MEANING AND BEING SOMETHING BEYOND A BEGINNING AND HAVING NO END...BUT TECHNICALLY THAT IS NEVER WHO "I" WAS...IT'S ALWAYS BEEN A STATE OF MIND...AND NOT AN ACTUAL PERSON...BUT IT CAME TO SOMEWHAT SYMBOLIZE AN INDIVIDUAL...BECAUSE OF ALL THE THINGS THAT WERE CONTAINED IN THAT INDIVIDUAL...SO IT STUCK. BUT UNLIKE MOST SO CALLED WRITERS...WE KNOW...I HAVE NEVER EVER BEEN CONTAINED TO JUST THE WRITING CULTURE...*

After reading the email with the response to my question, I remembered talking to Tej about how bugged out I was. Phase 2 has such a significant influence on Hiphop culture. For

example, if you were to Google “Phase 2 hip hop” you will find websites referring to him as the:

*Father of style and is considered by many to be one of the most significant painters of the aerosol art movement. In the early 1970s PHASE 2 was a key figure, helping to pioneer the creation and reinterpretation of new letter forms. Many present day aerosol paintings across the globe are clearly derivative of integrations and embellishments created by PHASE (Phase 2, 2003).*

Another website that I found describes him as:

*Unlike some other pioneers of New York City graffiti, Phase 2 had a prominent role in the South Bronx hip-hop scene in the early 1980s. He also continues to be referenced in hip-hop songs. Phase participated in the legendary hip-hop shows organized by Kool Lady Blue during the summer of 1982 at the enormous Roxy nightclub in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. These shows brought together the top DJ's, MC's, breakers, and graffiti artists from the South Bronx and introduced hip-hop music and culture to the downtown punk and new wave scenes. Phase 2 designed the flyers for these events and often did graffiti pieces live on stage. He was also part of the first "international" hip-hop tour when stars from the Roxy performances toured in England and France in November of that year.*

*Phase 2 was one of the few graffiti artists to be involved in the musical side of hip-hop culture as well. He had a background as a DJ in the very early days of hip-hop, though he never made a name for himself in that role. Phase was also an early b-boy and claims that his dance crew pioneered the uprock (or “battle rock”) style of dance despite claims that it originated in Brooklyn. He was thus actively involved in all of the traditional “four elements” of hip-hop culture (Phase 2, 2008).*

Too much of his appreciation, ( “I GLAD I’M NOT JUST ‘MR GRAFF’...IN YOUR EYES”) I have never looked at Phase as just an aerosol artist. I always viewed him as a good friend with a lot of insight, but this time I wrongly assumed that given the opportunity he would want to express the influence he has on Hip-hop. His response reminded me of something he told me long ago when we were planning a fundraiser for Potentialis. During the fundraiser, Tej and I planned for him to come to North Carolina to do a mural and perhaps speak. He agreed to do the mural, but declined to speak because we wanted to let his art speak for him.



Another big influence on Phase 2 has been movies. Not just any movies, but Kung Fu flicks. I learned this because almost every time I emailed him a question he would respond with his answer and a list of movies that he wanted me to check out...

#### **Email 1**

*PEEP THE MOVIE "EXILED" IF YOU GOOGLE IT WILL COME UP...IT WAS ROCKING...DID I MENTION A BETTER TOMORROW/THE KILLER/HARD BOILED?? ALL OLDER STUFF...KOREAN MOVIE "OLD BOY"...AND "SHIRI"...ALSO "HOLIDAY"....AND "DUELIST"... "BATTLE OF WITS"...IS FUNKY TOO...THAT'S A NEWER ANDY LAU JOINT...AND ALSO "2009 LOST MEMORIES"...KOREAN... "SHADOWLESS SWORD"...THAT IS FUNKY.... SUCKS I SORTA MENTIONED A BUNCH OF FLICKS...ALREADY...BUT PEEP THEM!!! ESPECIALLY OLD BOY!!! GOD OF GAMBLERS...GOD OF COOKERY...JUST A BUGGED STORY...DID YOU SEE SHAOLIN SOCCER OR KUNG FU HUSTLE...THE NEW FLICK...KISS OF THE GOLDEN FLOWER ... WAS PRETTY CRAZY...(THE PLOT...AND THE LAST 30 MINUTES...)*

*ALSO JAPANESE FUTURE SWORDPLAY JEDIKNIGHT JOINT... "SHINOBI" ....*

#### **Email 2**

*Phase 2: i dont know To's stuff off the top...  
didnt i send you a list of flicks?  
he did EXILED.....maybe even A HERO NEVER DIES*

*ANYWAY*

*BEYOND HYPOTHERMIA  
DRAGON SQUAD  
SPL  
DRAGON TIGER GATE  
FULL CONTACT*

*THEY ARE PRETTY GOOD*

#### **Email 3**

*Phase 2: YOU THERES A CRAZY STREAMING SITE WHERE ALL YOU DO IS  
SIGN UP  
CRUNCHYROLL.COM*

*ALL KINDS OF ASIAN CINEMA...  
STAY ALIVE...*

**Email 4**

I once emailed him and asked for a few movies he responded:

*Phase 2: TOO MANY TO MENTION...AND IT DEPENDS...OLD...NEW...ETC...*

*DIFFERENT STORY LINES...NOT ALL KUNG FU....*

*YOU NEED TO CHECK OUT THE HONG KONG CINEMA SITES...*

*THE BLADE  
BLACK SHEEP AFFAIR  
ONE UPON A TIME IN CHINA 1 2 3  
THE HIT MAN  
DRUNKEN MASTER 2  
WING CHUN  
HIT TEAM  
BALLISTIC KISS  
TIGER ON THE BEAT 1 2  
BLOND FURY  
FIRST STRIKE  
GORGEOUS  
PROJECT A  
OPERATION CONDOE  
MAGNIFICENT BUTCHER  
PRODIGAL SON  
LEGENDARY WEAPONS OF KUNG FU  
FISTS OF THE WHITE LOTUS...  
BASTARD SWORDSMAN  
SPL  
FIVE FIGHTERS FROM SHAOLIN  
SUPER POWER  
CRIPPLED AVENGERS  
SHADOWLESS SWORD  
MUSA THE WARRIOR  
ASHES OF TIME  
THE ASSASSIN  
DEADLY MELODY  
LIGHT IN THE WIND (???)  
SUPER NINJAS  
CRYSTAL FIST  
A HARD WAY TO DIE  
KID WITH THE GOLDEN ARM*

*LAST HERO IN CHINA  
MANN...I CAN'T REMEMBER ALL THAT STUFF!!!*

*OH*

*SEVEN SWORDS!!!! IS FLY!!!*

Similar to some of the characters in the Kung Fu flicks, Phase is like a mysterious character that comes and goes at any given time traveling from place to place. It has been about two weeks and I have not heard from him. However, I did get the opportunity to ask him one last important question:

*Me: When people read about you (books, articles, online) do you feel the representation they get is accurate?*

*Phase 2: no way...especially when a\*\*h\*\*\*\*s throw in a slave name to americanize and appropriate it...there's tons more to me than in any one book...no bragging...*

*FIRST OFF SINCE MY LIFE IS ENGULFED IN HIP HOP I LIKE PEOPLE TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT I DID IN IT ESPECIALLY PEOPLE WHO FOLLOW IT. FOR DIFFERENT REASONS. TRUTH IS TRUTH. NOT TO BE FUNNY IT ISNT MY FAULT IF I WAS ABLE TO DO WHAT I DID. I THINK CERTAIN IGNORANT AND NOT SO CONFIDENT OF THEMSELVES TYPE FOLKS GET INTIMIDATED BY IT. I START TO LOOK AT THESE THINGS AS MY EXISTENCE ON THIS (S\*\*T) PLANET AND TECHNICALLY SPEAKING SOME OF THESE THINGS BOIL DOWN TO IT. MAYBE I SHOULDA BEEN A MILLIONAIRE BUT THIS IS WHAT I DID ON EARTH AND IN THIS REALM IT HAS ITS SIGNIF THINK WHEN FOLKS SEE MY WRITINGS ABOUT THE CULTURE AND LIFE IN GENERAL UNLESS THEY ARE REALLY RETARDED THEY WILL BE ABLE TO CALCULATE WHAT I AM ABOUT AND WHERE I STAND AND IT WOULDNT BE HARD TO SEE THE DIFFS BETWEEN MYSELF AND THE TYPE OF JERKS YOU SEE IN THESE MOVIES AND DOCUMENTARIES AND SO ON.*

*AS FAR AS HIP HOP CULTURE IT IS WHAT IT IS DOPE AND WACK. I WOULD JUST LIKE TO SEE MAJOR LABELS BE MORE OPEN TO TRYIN TO BUILD A PLATFORM FOR ALL FORMS OF HIP HOP AND NOT JUST THE WATERED DOWN STUFF OR ONE DIMENSIONAL STUFF THEY MADE POPULAR.*

*YOU CAN'T REALLY CONTROL WHAT PEOPLE THINK EVEN THOUGH ONE CAN DICTATE THE PRODUCT. SO PEOPLE ARE GONNA THINK AS THEY WISH.*

\* \* \* \* \*

The initial intention of my emails was to learn about Hiphop from Phase 2's perspective. However, I was guilty of narrowly thinking of Hiphop in terms of elements (rapping, boyin, aerosol art, and dee jaying) instead of seeing it as life (my life). During a period of about two months, Phase and I went back and forth over email talking about life in the South Bronx, sports, music, and movies. At first, I thought I was collecting background information on Phase 2's life to setup his perspective on Hiphop. What I did not realize was that Phase's life was Hiphop.

As I reflect on Phase's experiences and my own, I understand that central to Hiphop is simplicity, creativity, and innovativeness. However, I am not referring to the artistic forms of expression that comes from the culture (though they do contain these characteristics), but rather the experiences that inspire the artistic forms of expression.

*Me: Why do you think people get all caught up in the elements and just make Hiphop about the MC, DJ, Aerosol artists, and B-boy?*

*Phase 2: WELL TO SOME DEGREE IT IS ALL ABOUT THE THINGS THAT MADE AND MAKE IT FUNKY...THOUGH I DON'T DWELL ON THOSE ELEMENTS PERSAY. THEY ARE ALL FROM OUR ENVIRONMENTS...AND 90% OF IT COMES FROM THOSE FROM IT...*

*TECHNICALLY SPEAKING...THE MUSIC...THE 1-2'S AND THE MIC...ARE REALLY WHAT MADE IT HAPPEN...NOT EVEN THE BBOY...*

*Me: Tell me about the music. What made it so funky?*

*Phase 2: hey man.....what's dope can't be denied....any explanation...if you got soul...you know it...feel me??? REGARDLESS OF THE BULLS\*\*T PEOPLE ARE LOVING NOW...A LOT OF IT IS INSPIRED BY MUCH BETTER MUSIC...*

One contemporary critique of Hiphop music is that it has lost its substance. Anyone can rap, but it is more of the content coupled with the lyrical skill that moved the crowd. For example, I can listen to Nice & Smooth's (1991) song *Sometimes I Rhyme Slow* which goes:

*Sometimes I rhyme slow sometimes I rhyme quick  
I'm sweeter and thicker than a chico stick  
Here's an ice cream cone honey take a lick  
I go to Bay Plaza and catch a flick*

I like this song not only because of the beat or the lyrical flow, but because I can resonate with what Greg Nice has said. I have gone to the corner store to buy a Chico Stick and I have gone to Bay Plaza to catch a flick. Another example that further illustrates my point is Nas' song (2004) *Bridging the Gap*. In this song, Nas (2004) has a verse that goes "I'm a artist from the start, Hip-Hop guided my heart Graffiti on the wall, coulda ended in Spofford<sup>22</sup>, juvenile delinquent." To many this verse may not mean much, but for some, especially those who literally grew up right across the street from Spofford like I did, this verse takes on a deeper meaning because of the connection.

Hiphop speaks from a particular voice that embodies simplicity, creativity, and innovativeness. This voice has its roots from neighborhoods all over the South Bronx, but still can speak to people all over the world. You might not be from the South Bronx, but yet still share some of the same experiences as Phase 2 and I.

The elements are inspired by the lived experience. The music, the movement, the visual art are just the mediums for which many chose to express themselves. All art tells a story. The best storytellers are the ones who are vulnerable and share from the heart. This is why in documenting my journey I...

*Put my heart and soul into this  
I hope you feel me  
From where I am, to wherever you are  
I mean that sincerely  
(Mos Def, 1999)*

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<sup>22</sup> Boys juvenile detention center

## “WHO’S THE MASTER<sup>23</sup>?”

\* \* \* \* \*

*This chapter examines my lived experiences outside of the South Bronx. My lived experiences outside of the South Bronx introduce the concept of the commodified Hip-hop caricature. The commodified Hip-hop caricature is a socially constructed image which seduces one to believe that you must talk, dress, and act in a certain fashion in order to be identified as Hip-hop. Borrowing from Hall (1997), this chapter assesses the gap between accurate and distorted (stereotypical) representations of Hip-hop. This chapter introduces two themes that are central to the manuscript. The first theme is about the concepts of the Matrix and the real. The second theme is about the concepts of the self and the acts. This chapter uses Phase 2’s dialogue to guide and support the development of the themes and topics.*

\* \* \* \* \*

### **The Matrix**

*Morpheus: Let me tell you why you’re here. You’re here because you know something. What you know you can’t explain. But you feel it. You’ve felt it your entire life. That there’s something wrong with the world. You don’t know what it is but it’s there, like a splinter in your mind driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me. Do you know what I’m talking about?*

*Neo: The Matrix?*

*Morpheus: Do you want to know what it is? The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us, even now in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work, when you go to church, when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.*

*Neo: What truth?*

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<sup>23</sup> Hitzig, R. (Producer), & Schultz, M. (Director). (1985). *The Last Dragon* [DVD]. United States: TriStar Pictures.

*Morpheus: That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage, born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison for your mind.... Unfortunately, no one can be told what the Matrix is. You have to see it for yourself. This is your last chance. After this there is no turning back. You take the blue pill, the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes... Remember, all I'm offering is the truth, nothing more.*

*Neo: You did all this?*

*Trinity: Uh-huh.*

*Morpheus: The pill you took is part of a trace program. It's designed to disrupt your input/output carrier signals so we can pinpoint your location.*

*Neo: What does that mean?*

*Cypher: It means buckle your seat belt, Dorothy, 'cause Kansas is going bye-bye.*

*Neo: Did you...*

*Morpheus: Have you ever had a dream, Neo, that you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?*

*Neo: This can't be...*

*Morpheus: Be what? Be real? Welcome to the real world*

*(Silver, 1999)*

\* \* \* \* \*

The scene above, from the film *The Matrix* (Silver, 1999), is a conversation between Morpheus, a legendary computer hacker, and Neo who is by day an average computer programmer and by night, a hacker. During this encounter, Morpheus gives Neo the option to take the blue pill and remain mentally imprisoned within the artificial reality known as the Matrix or take the red pill and understand that the world in which he exists is make-believe. If he chooses to awaken, then he must join the rebellion to free humanity from the bondage of those who construct the Matrix.

In terms of my journey, the South Bronx is the real, and my experience outside of the South Bronx is the Matrix. Within the real, Hiphop is a reflection of life. Within the Matrix, Hiphop is a socially constructed entity which mentally enslaves humanity to believe that you must act, talk, and dress a particular way in order to be part of this entity. The choice is yours. You can take the blue pill and remain in the Matrix pursuing an image that does not exist or you can take the red pill and join the rebellion against those who construct and promote the illusion of being Hiphop.

If you are reading this you must have decided to take the red pill. We will now journey into a realm, the real, in which we will discover truth. A truth that “though seeing, many do not see; though hearing, many do not hear or understand (Matthew 13:13 New International Version).”

\* \* \* \* \*

Once I again I would like to reiterate what Phase 2 has been so adamant about, that Hiphop:

*...is just life...not “the so called elements” and so on...just an extension of what we have always done and more...gumbo...at it's funkier...all the dope that is dope rolled into a continuous evolving one...*

Our gumbo is too complex to be labeled by a single word, “Hiphop.” How could we ever define our lives in terms of something that would not exist if we did not exist? To label our lives “Hiphop” is to confine it to a small box filled with a certain style of music, dance, dress, and speech. Are we not more than that?

\* \* \* \* \*

*It's bigger than..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip..  
It's bigger than..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip-hop  
(Dead Prez, 2000)*



Not once as a kid growing up in the South Bronx did my friends and I ever refer to what we did as “Hip-hop.” To us it was just life, but outside of the South Bronx when I talk about my experiences growing up, my life now becomes labeled “Hip-hop.” Another example, is the time this girl in Florida asked me for some money so she can buy a Crooked? I asked her what a Crooked was, and she told me it was a Hip-hop drink. At the time I did not say anything, but only thought “what is a Hip-hop drink?” You drink it and become Hip-hop.

You can not become Hip-hop because it is not tangible. That’s why it is ridiculous to me when I see slang dictionaries, instructional videos and books on how to “Hip-hop” dance, and especially these clothing stores that sell “Hip-hop” clothing. Today, kids and even adults can walk into a mall and an hour later come out a “Hip-hop” caricature. People of all ages continually pursue a commodified Hip-hop image to become something that does not exist and is unattainable, like chasing the wind.

In terms of my own experience as far as dress or style is concerned, in the South Bronx we had clothing stores like Dr. Jay’s, Jean Star, and Jimmy Jazz that sold clothes and not “Hip-hop” gear. Our style reflected our individualized taste and not an image that was fed to us through the music we listened to or the television we watched. Simply put, “We run styles no styles no run we...represent who ya be” (Da Bush Babees, 1994).

People get it twisted. The individual who embodies the commodified Hip-hop image thinks that without Hip-hop they can not exist, but it is without the individual that Hip-hop does not exist. In the reality show *Run’s House*, there was an episode when Rev. Run takes this group of three young guys to meet his brother, Russell Simmons, to see if he would like to sign them to his new record label. Russell meets the group and tries to gauge what they are about. One of the guys tells Russell something like, “I can’t live if I can’t do music.” Russell

rolls his eyes and sarcastically tells him “Ok, I get it you’re dedicated. You need God in your life.” The young man in this episode is an example of the gassed up mentality people have when they do not understand that the music [or Hip-hop for the sake of my story] does not exist if they do not exist.

\* \* \* \* \*

*“Hip Hop is as diverse as life”  
(Harrison & Rappaport, 2007)*

I came across this quote in a book sitting on a table in my advisor’s office. The book that it came from is some sort of “Hip Hop” curriculum that teaches kids vocabulary words through a “Hip Hop” approach (whatever that they may mean). My focus, however, is on this quote because it sets Hip-hop apart from life as its own separate entity. Making it two separate entities, takes the life out of Hip-hop and reduces Hip-hop to just beats and rhymes. Therefore, Hip-hop is not as diverse as life, Hip-hop is life.

In the back of this book are a set of frequently asked questions that are intended to familiarize people with Hip-Hop. The first question is:

*What is Hip-Hop?*

*Hip-Hop is a cultural movement born in the Bronx, New York in the late 1970’s. At that time different cultural elements converged to form a new and dynamic urban art. Party DJ’s were placing two turntables next to each other to mix and splice songs and were even beginning to manipulate the record by hand (scratching). MC’s (master of ceremonies, i.e. the person with the microphone) would sometimes front for these DJ’s, pumping up a crowd by rapping rhyming lyrics. Athletic dancers invented a new freewheeling dance style called break dancing. And graffiti artists were using spray cans to create enormous works of art on Subway cars and throughout the urban landscape (Harrison and Rappaport, 2006, p. 121).*

This is a common answer given when someone asks, “What is Hip-hop?” However, this answer, like many others, defines it in terms of the elements. Being from the Bronx, I

know that there is more to the Bronx than just MC's, DJ's, parties, "graffiti"<sup>24</sup>, and "break dancing"<sup>25</sup>." Hip-hop was not born in the South Bronx. People like Phase 2 were born in the South Bronx. And because of people like Phase 2, we are able to share in the "extension of what they have always done and more" (Phase 2, Personal Communication, March 15, 2008). The reason why Hip-hop has its roots in the South Bronx is because the people who it extended from are from the South Bronx.

To define Hip-hop in terms of elements is to say that Hip-hop could have well started anywhere else. To talk about Hip-hop is to talk about life. If you want a historical account of Hip-hop then you would talk about the life of those in the South Bronx which would take you further back in time than 1977.

It is kind of funny to think about how the year later 1977 gets coined as the year Hip-hop began, but I hear all the time. "Hip-hop started in the Bronx in 1977," or "Hip-hop started in the Bronx during the late 70s." I pose the question, what happened to 1976 or what happened during the early 70s? Did the culture known as "Hip-hop" not exist prior to 1977? In 1977, did someone one day find a magic lamp buried in the South Bronx and upon dusting it, off accidentally summoned a genie who said, "you shall spin on your backs, spray paint on trains, mix records on two turntables, and tell rhythmic stories on the mic and when people ask what you are doing you shall respond, 'I am doing Hip-hop.'" That's ridiculous. If someone wanted a general historical account of the elements that extend from Hip-hop then the answer I found in the book sitting on the table might suffice; however, if someone really

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<sup>24</sup> "First of all it's not even called graffiti, it's writing. Graffiti is some social term that was developed (for the culture) somewhere in the 70's (Phase 2 et al, 1996, p. 6)."

<sup>25</sup> "When this dance style first came out it was called B-boying, but the public changed it to 'break dancing' to give it a professional name. B-boying is what it is (Brenner, 2002)."

wanted to know what Hiphop was it would be virtually impossible to give an answer because Hiphop is a reflection of lived experiences.

In D.T. Suzuki's (1972) book, *What is Zen?*, he uses the first chapter to address this question. The way in which he does so is the way in which I would address the question of, "What is Hiphop?" The following excerpt is Suzuki's explanation of what is Zen; however, I have replaced "Zen" with "Hiphop."

*You ask, "What is Hiphop?"*

*I answer, "Hiphop is that which makes you ask the question," because the answer is where the question arises. The answer is no other than the question itself."*

*"Do you then mean that I am Hiphop itself?"*

*"Exactly. When you ask what Hiphop is, you are asking who you are, what your self is. It is for this reason that the Hiphop masters often tell you not to ask where the donkey is when you are right on it, or not to seek for another head when yours has been on your shoulders ever since you were born. It is the height of stupidity to ask what your self is when it is this self that makes you ask the question."*

*Now, you know what Hiphop is, for it is Hiphop that tells you what your self is, and that that self is Hiphop. This now saves you from asking such a stupid question (Adapted from Suzuki, 1972, p. 1).*

The Hiphop master is the one that knows that the "true Hiphoppa" does not exist. The people who live it are the ones who are unaware that they even live it. Therefore, he does not need to ask what Hiphop is because that's like asking someone else, "Who am I?" Why do I need someone else to tell me who I am?

\* \* \* \* \*

### **The Last Dragon**

*Sho'nuff: Now when I say, "Who's the master," you say, "Sho'nuff." Who's the master?*

*Leroy: (shakes his head no)*

*(Sho'nuff punches then kicks Leroy)*

*Sho'nuff: I'm going to ask you one more time. Who is the master? Uh, Uh*

*Leroy: (shakes his head no)*

*(Sho'nuff punches Leroy)*

*Sho'nuff: Who's the master? I can't hear you Leroy.*

*(Sho'nuff grabs Leroy by the back of his head and dunks it into a large drum of water.)*

*Eddie: Drown him for Christ sake. Will ya drown him!*

*Sho'nuff: I said who's the master? I can't hear you. Who is the master?*

*(Again, Sho'nuff grabs Leroy by the back of his head and dunks it into a large drum of water.)*

*(Leroy's vision) Teacher: There is one place you have not looked and it is there only there that you shall find the master.*

*(Leroy's vision) Laura: You sure look like a master to me.*

*Sho'nuff: Alright Leroy, who is the one and only master?*

*Leroy: I am.*

*(Sho'nuff throws a punch, but Leroy catches his fist in his hand)*

*Leroy: (laughing) I am*

*(Hitzig, 1985)*

\* \* \* \* \*

While on this journey, I am not asking Phase 2 about Hiphop in order for me to better understand my own life. But yet, if I had not spoken to Phase 2 along this journey, then the awakening of my consciousness may not have occurred. As a result, I have been enlightened and understand that only I know the answers for the questions that I have. My time on this journey has been spent looking for answers to questions which I already know.

*The master said, "why not ask about your own mind or self instead of somebody else's?"*

*"What then is myself?"*

*You have to see what is known as the secret act."*

*What is the secret act?*

*The master opened his eyes and then closed them.*

*Is this the secret act? What has the opening and shutting of the eyes to do with the self? There is nothing secret about it. But suppose there is, what has it to do with the understanding of the self? After raising my eyebrows or coughing or laughing, I do not seem to be any wiser in penetrating into the secrecy of self which is behind the acts. Did the disciple get enlightened by observing the master's "secret act"? It is recorded that he then knew where to look for his self or mind.*

*For ordinary people this understanding is impossible because their questions do not come out of the depth of their being (Suzuki, 1972, p. 2).*

If I gain knowledge about the acts [elements], am I any wiser in understanding the self, which is behind the acts? If someone gives an answer to the question, "What is Hiphop?" then does someone have a clue what Hiphop is about? This someone is caught up in an artificial reality, thinking that it [Hiphop] can be defined outside of the self. The one who is enlightened, the one who has eyes and sees, the one who hears and understands is both the one who knows without knowing and is confused by a question [What is Hiphop?] for an answer that does not exist.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Sellout**

*Neo: Is that...*

*Cypher: The Matrix? Yeah.*

*Neo: Do you always look at it encoded?*

*Cypher: Well you have to. The image translators work for the construct program. But there's way too much information to decode the Matrix. You get used to it. I...I don't even see the code. All I see is blonde, brunette, red-head. Hey, you uh... want a drink?*

*Neo: Sure*

*Cypher: You know, I know what you're thinking, because right now I'm thinking the same thing. Actually, I've been thinking it ever since I got here. Why, oh why didn't I take the blue pill?... Good s\*\*t, huh? Dozer makes it. It's good for two things, degreasing engines and killing brain cells. So, can I ask you something? Did he tell*

*you why he did it? Why you're here. Jee-zus. What a mind job. So you're here to save the world. What do you say to something like that? A little piece of advice. You see an agent, you do what we do. Run. You run your a\*\* off.*

*Neo: Thanks for the drink.*

*Cypher: Sweet dreams.*

*(Restaurant)*

*Agent Smith: Do we have a deal, Mr. Reagan?*

*Cypher: You know, I know this steak doesn't exist. I know that when I put it in my mouth, the Matrix is telling my brain that it is juicy and delicious. After nine years, you know what I realize? Ignorance is bliss.*

*Agent Smith: Then we have a deal?*

*Cypher: I don't want to remember nothing. Nothing. You understand? And I want to be rich. You know, someone important. Like an actor.*

*Agent Smith: Whatever you want, Mr. Reagan.*

*Cypher: Okay. I get my body back into a power plant, re-insert me into the Matrix, I'll get you what you want.*

*(Silver, 1999)*

\* \* \* \* \*

What happens when one who has taken the red pill later on decides that they would have rather taken the blue pill? The seduction of the socially constructed image causes the person to exchange what is real for something that is an illusion. They wish to fall back asleep only to awake in a space where they think they are free, but in reality they are enslaved. Similar to Cypher, this person has turned their back on the rebellion for freedom in exchange for riches. Cypher sold out. What does it mean to sell out? In the case of Cypher, he sold out the secret location of Zion for riches and importance, I asked Phase 2 what he thought selling out is:

*Phase 2: It's something you do when you basically stand for nothing and fall for anything...or stood for something and stand for nothing now...house niggers...yes*

*men...etc...it's deeper than some bulls\*\*t you can do with corny lyrics...more like informing on your comrades type s\*\*t...ABANDONING A CAUSE...FOR SELF...FOR WHATEVER MATERIAL FACTOR IS WEIGHED AGAINST IT...FOR YOUR OWN GAIN...ETC...*

I use to limit my perception of selling out only to the individual who talks about the grandiose lifestyle of flaunting jewelry, money, cars, and girls. Within the Matrix of Hip-hop, everyone is faced with the decision of selling out from the rapper to the “Hip-hop scholar<sup>26</sup>.” In the film the *Matrix*, the agents ensnare Cypher by offering him whatever he wants. Within Babylon [the Matrix], the demons [agents] create an illusion that seems so real that we fall without ever knowing that we fall. What is Babylon?

*Phase 2: HEY BRO...AIN'T NOTHING CHANGED...BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING...CREATING MORE OF A MESS...CONFUSING THE MASSES...BECAUSE WE IS SO IGNORANT. BABYLON IS EVERYWHERE...AND DEVILS ARE ALL COLORS...THOUGH THE ONES WHO CONTROL EVERYTHING SEEM TO BE ALL NEXT OF KIN...I QUOTE SUBDULLAH ABDULLAH...WINK...WINK...*

While in graduate school I fell without even realizing it. I started to think like those in Babylon. I considered Hip-hop to be a set of elements and not the life I was living. I treated Hip-hop as a commodity. I do not remember how I became enlightened, but one day I realized that I was selling out, that I was trying to exist in world full of illusions. I was committed to the “real” Hip-hop by trying to discover the truth about the elements instead of realizing that the truth “has always been what I have done and more...gumbo...at it's funkier...all the dope that is dope rolled into a continuous evolving one (Phase 2, 2008).”

*Me: What kept you from falling into the devils trap?*

*Phase 2: WHO SAID I'M NOT IN IT??? BEING CORRUPTED BY ALL THAT IS AROUND US AND ALL WE ARE “TAUGHT”...IN IT'S BELLY BEING RENEGADE...BEING IN THE G...BEING BROWNSKINNED...BEING INTELLIGENT...AND AWARE...AND OUTSPOKEN...GETS YOU WHAT???*

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<sup>26</sup> I place “Hip-hop scholar” in quotations because this caricature exists only within Babylon.



## The Hiphop Scholar

I do not choose to pursue and maintain the title of “Hiphop scholar.” If anything I am a South Bronx philosopher. However, there was a time when I was getting entangled in the web of the “Hiphop scholar.” I began to look at Hiphop the way everyone around me was. Hiphop became some tangible entity that I could pick up off a shelf, analyze, and put back until the next I needed it. Similar to Hiphop, the “Hiphop scholar” is just another title of life. It is an illusionary position in which one lives in order to fulfill the title. Therefore, the self is dictated by the acts.

The “Hiphop scholars” think they are preserving “real” Hiphop, but in actuality they are perpetuating another commodified image of the true hiphoppa caricature. The “Hiphop scholar” who desires to be associated with the “real Hiphop” critiques the commodified Hiphop caricature unaware that they are guilty of the same thing that they critique. “Hiphop scholars” critique the grandiose lifestyle that measures its reputation by what it “owns<sup>27</sup>,” not knowing that they themselves measure their reputation by their own commodities, the “intellect,” the theories, the publications.

*It's bigger than..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip..  
It's bigger than..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip-hop  
(Dead Prez, 2000)*

\* \* \* \* \*

Over the past few years, there as been a steady increase in the number of people who identify as “Hiphop scholars.” As a result, there has been an influx of Hiphop courses being offered at universities and colleges. The following three Hiphop courses are examples of what is being offered:

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<sup>27</sup> I place “own” within quotations because whatever it is that we own can be taken away. Therefore, do we really own it?

*Hip-Hop LITERACIES, a four credit online (about 1/3 of the class sessions will be via the web), writing and technology intensive course, will examine the written expressions of Hip-Hop culture and deconstruct their meaning and impact. Three distinct literacies can be identified within Hip-Hop: Graffiti, rap music and spoken word poetry (Hip-Hop Literacies, 2006)*

*This course explores the political and aesthetic foundations of hip hop. It traces the musical, corporeal, visual, spoken word, and literary manifestations of hip hop over its thirty-five year presence in the American cultural imaginary. It also investigates specific black cultural practices that have given rise to its various idioms. Hip hop has invigorated the academy, inspiring scholarship rooted in black musical and literary traditions. This course assesses these sharp breaks and flamboyant versionings of hip hop that have occurred within the academy (Hip Hop, 2003)*

*Analyzing the impact hip-hop culture has had on America, students enrolled in “Beats, Rhyme and Culture” study everything from graffiti to current rap music artists. The course covers more than 200 years, looking at slave narratives, the Harlem renaissance, the civil rights movement, the black power/art movement and mainstream music. Students are encouraged to attend performances, art exhibits and other community events that are related to the course material (Beats, Beats, Rhyme and Culture, 2005)*

Courses like these give the impression that Hiphop can be taught. To examine Hiphop is to examine something by its commodified representation. The self is not commofied. To study Hiphop is to study the self. If the self is not the point of reference, then really what is the point of a “Hiphop” course? My life is not a popular culture; therefore, do not treat my experience as well as the experience of others as such. It is important to note that my critique is not with the courses’ content, but with how course labels the content as Hiphop. When I first saw these courses I wondered what Phase would think about a Hiphop course. I sent Phase these course descriptions and asked him what he thought about them.

*Phase 2: my feeling is that they should be giving \$\$\$\$\$\$ positions and real jobs to people like yours truly...who at least does have some history and love for letting folks know reality...spirituality and truth...*

*Too many motha f\*\*\*\*\*s are deemed as “qualified” when all they did was float around it and suck blood...*

These courses teach Hip-hop with the elements as the point of reference. Even if one taught a course like this then what would make them qualified? Phase said something to me a while back that I think is very important. When the elements first started to surface it was done underground by only a few. Those who were doing it kept it exclusive because they did not want everyone copying their style. But now have an abundance of people who think they are experts. You have to ask, “What makes them experts?” The fact that they read some books and articles, listened to some music, saw a couple of movies, and attended a few shows.

I really feel what Phase is saying because he has schooled me on some things I never knew. Things not learned from books and articles, but only from those who have the lived experience. For example, a while back I asked Phase, “Where did the word ‘Hip-hop’ originate from?”

*ooooooooooooooooohhhhh man I’d think you know that!! Hahaha...No disrespect....Well....Funny thing is I found out that James Brown has a song with some crazy phrase like... “Hipitty Hop To The Barber Shop” in some song. We used to think it came from a nursery rhyme...originally...BUT....technically speaking. The official... “how it got into Hip Hop”...story is that Love Bug Starski...was always saying things like “The Hip the Hop...” etc...and so forth using it in his rhymes...*

*So nuff m.c.s started to run it in theirs... (not me!!)...so he coined the terminology...But he didn’t “decide” the culture was going to be named Hip Hop...Now from my experience...the first times I ever heard people calling it Hip Hop...were the people who didn’t know what to call it...(the ones who didn’t really like it..) We’d just say... “I’m going to a Herc party...or a Flash jam...” you know...??*

*You might say... “yo they are rocking in the park” to those bushy’ types...and they’d say... “you mean that Hip Hop s\*\*t”?? We never called it Hip Hop...I feel it was the one word that if you’d say it...that everyone would know what it was...brother man coined it...and then...via word of mouth...and I feel a lot of the flyers...it just “became” Hip Hop...by association with the one word that would connect it undoubtedly.*

*When I was putting it on flyers no one told me to do it all to call it that. i imagine thru the negative people...it was obvious that putting it on a flyer... "THE HIP HOP HOEDOWN"...or whatever the ones who needed to know would know..*

*But the name was...inserted...by Love Bug Starski...*

Many (myself included) have made the mistake to take what we have read out of books as facts when it concerns "Hiphop." A few months ago a friend and I presented at an educational conference. Our presentation was about the connections between Boogie Down Productions (1990) song, *Loves Gonna Get'cha*, and a song written last year by Shoran<sup>28</sup>, an incarcerated youth offender in North Carolina. The point of the presentation was to show the connections between these stories despite almost a twenty year gap. We were hoping to foster a dialogue that would discuss strategies to raise the consciousness of society in order to help prevent our younger generation from heading down troubled paths. However, the discussion turned into a debate of what Hiphop is and the differences between rap and Hiphop.

When I began the presentation, I gave the disclaimer that my interpretations are based upon my experiences from the South Bronx. The reason for me saying so was to point out that Hiphop is not a universal culture. Though there are similarities, there are also distinctions. I gave the example that a lot of the music I listen to is from New York artists and though I like music from other regions, it is the stories told within New York music (especially artists from the South Bronx) that I can resonate with the most. Little did I know that my disclaimer was going to upset some people.

I distinctly remember one man saying that "he was extremely bothered" by my comment. He was bothered because he "has some east coast friends that like west coast music." He also mentioned that a lot of west coast rappers influenced east coast rappers and

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<sup>28</sup> Pseudonym

he “has the books and articles to prove it.” (No disrespect to the West, true indeed I rock it to the East, the East is the seed (Fugees, 1994)).

*Phase 2: I do not “quote” s\*\*t I get outta books as facts...I speak on em as s\*\*t outta books...but it will never be s\*\*t about hip hop from a book...and me saying it’s a fact...I will tell ya that came outta of a book too...and it will probably be something I’m screaming on*

Similar to this guy, I used to take what I read to heart as pure fact instead of interpretation. Yet how could I ever know the truth unless I was there? What is written is just another oral history passed down that may contain truth, but nonetheless has been altered to a certain degree. There must be some caveat attached to the position I take if the position I take is based upon the experience of someone else; especially, if my interaction with the experience has only been through some text<sup>29</sup>. This guy just like the other “Hiphop scholars” I have encountered<sup>30</sup> reminds me of the Jazz dancer that Mr. Freeze talks about:

*It’s like if you go to an audition. If a jazz dancer coming to a B-boy audition, you know just cause he can do those continuous backspins, which the commercial public knows as windmills, you know just cause he can do that doesn’t mean that he’s B-boy. It’s just an idiot that learned to spin on his back. He has no style, no flavor, no feel for it (Brenner, 2002).*

What depth do you have by just knowing the outer fringes? If one talks about B-boy culture, but only reduces it to the moves then they are guilty of the same narrow minded mistake people make when they refer to Hiphop in terms of elements.

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<sup>29</sup> By text I refer not only to written documents, but to film, music, and visual imagery.

<sup>30</sup> I use the term “encounter” to mean personal communication, or I have read something by them, or heard some video or audio recording.

**Tè**

I remember driving in the car one day with Aohnte (Phase 2's son). It is important to the story that you get an idea of what Aohnte looks like. He looks and sounds similar to Ghostface from the Wu-Tang Clan. He is about 6 foot 5 and weighs about 220 pounds. He wears t-shirts with the sleeves shredded, jeans, cowboy boots, and a head wrap made out of a t-shirt.

As I sat in the back seat, I listened to Aohnte have a conversation with the girl driving about growing up in the South Bronx on 169<sup>th</sup> St. and Webster Ave. The girl was from North Carolina so she did not really know about the South Bronx except for what she may have seen in the movies or on TV. During the conversation, Aohnte was telling the girl about a fight he had gotten into, but in the middle of his story he abruptly stopped when this song came on the radio. "Oh snap, that's my song," Aohnte said while turning up the radio loudly. The song was by Barbara Streisand.

Everyone who hears this story laughs because they never expect a guy, described as Aohnte, to be listening to Barbara Streisand. But that was Aohnte. Aohnte has a CD with some of his favorite songs. This CD has a few Hip-hop tracks along side tracks you would never expect like Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton's *Islands in the Stream*, Belinda Carlisle's *Circles in the Sand*, and Simon and Garfunkel's *The Boxer*.

Even I was surprised when I first heard the music Aohnte liked. Within the Babylon, Aohnte is seen as different because he does not fit the Hip-hop caricature to which society is accustomed. In a conversation Aohnte and I had, he described Hip-hop as "a shredded piece of his toe nail." He went on to say that Hip-hop is like him "cutting his big toe, stepping in some mud, his toe gets infected, and he has to have it removed." In other words, Hip-hop is

insignificant to him because he is not defined by Hiphop. He understands that Hiphop is a state of mind influenced by his lived experiences. Now I understand why when I asked Phase 2 about his life, he talked about everything else except writing. The writing does not define him, he defines the writing.

In the conversation Aohnte and I had, he talks about people who say, “I gotta keep Hiphop alive,” as if Hiphop is real. Aohnte and I are both from the South Bronx, and never once thought that we must keep Hiphop alive. Hiphop was never a particular lifestyle for us, it was just life. Life without a title. Why do I need to label the way in which I live? If anything I must revitalize the South Bronx.

\* \* \* \* \*

I must help revitalize the South Bronx because like Cypher some have sold out the location of the real. The Matrix has infiltrated Zion. As a result, it becomes difficult to distinguish between illusion and reality.

*If you from the east coast then act like you from here  
(Ortiz, 2007)*

The only way to act like we are from here is to return to living without being conscious of how we are living. Is that even possible? Can we return to the real after knowing that the Matrix exists? If we try then we already failed because we are then commodifying just another image. We must rebel against Babylon, but how do fight against something that does not exist, a mere figment of our imagination. This fight is not a fight for freedom in which one may think. This fight is a freeing of the mind so we may rise up and rebel against issues that truly have significance.

*It's bigger than..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip..  
It's bigger than..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip-hop  
(Dead Prez, 2000)*

\* \* \* \* \*

The choice is yours. You can take the blue pill and remain in ignorance, remain in Babylon, an artificial reality that only exists because you make it exist. Or you can take the red pill and awaken. Awaken to the real. What is the real? The answer to that questions is like “opening a fortune cookie without a fortune written by a master that does not exist to find a solution to a problem whose answer you already know” (Hitzig, 1985).

If you take the red pill then plan to join the rebellion against the demons that control Babylon. Beware of the enemy. Who is the enemy? The enemy is the one who stands in the way of your progress.

*Phase 2: FRAZIER SAID...WE DON'T PLAN TO FAIL WE SIMPLY FAIL TO PLAN....*

*WE ARE USUALLY OUR OWN WORST ENEMY...IN THE CHOICES THAT WE MAKE...AND HOW WE DEAL WITH THE BULLS\*\*T THAT IS THRUST UPON US...AS SOON AS WE COME OUT OF THE WOMB...IF YOU HAVE THAT BOOK STYLE...THOUGH ONE VERSE IS MISSING FROM THE RHYME...THERE IS ONE RHYME BY WRATHAMATICS...THAT TALKS ABOUT DOOMED FROM THE WOMB...PEEP IT...*

*Now the kamikaze is about to take storm  
Abstracts the nous-merical language born  
Emphatic Asiatic children of the corn  
Born innocent released from the womb is doom  
Subjected exposed to an earthly tomb  
Educated to the evils that a man'll do  
So we do like they do, like they do, like we do  
Morals like florals up on the shelf  
Go for me, go for mine, go for self  
Techniques rotating, as the style ill roll  
Eratical, statical out of control  
(Wrathamatics, Phase 2 et al, 1996, p. 31)*

\* \* \* \* \*

*It's bigger than..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip..  
It's bigger than..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip-hop  
(Dead Prez, 2000)*



### ***“DON’T BELIEVE THE HYPE<sup>31</sup>”***

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*The following chapter further elaborates on the seduction of the commodified Hiphop image. In contrast to the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on Phase 2’s counter narrative. Phase 2’s lived experiences détourné the popular representations and grand narratives of Hiphop. This chapter further expands on Hall’s (1997) concept of measuring the gap of representation.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*What’s on the radio, propaganda, mind control  
And turnin it on is like puttin on a blindfold  
Cuz when you bringin the real you don't get ro-tation  
Unless you take over the station  
And yeah I know it's part of they plans  
To make us think it's all about party and dancin  
And yo it might sound good when you spittin your rap  
But in reality, don’t nobody live like that  
(Dead Prez, 2002)*

“I refuse to be a stereotype in ya box” (Dead Prez, 2002). We all refuse, “all” being those who have the eyes to see and the ears to hear. The majority of the time when Aohnte, Tej, or any of my friends and I talk about current “Hiphop” movies and music we get frustrated. Our frustration does not stem from the content. We have choice to listen or watch. Like Dead Prez (2002), said we “turn off the radio, we turn off that bulls\*\*t.” However, we get frustrated because the music and movies labeled “Hiphop,” which are to suppose reflect our lives, are not really representative of the lives we lead. For example, I love watching movies about the Bronx, but I do not like all movies about the Bronx. Consider the movie

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<sup>31</sup> Public Enemy. (1988). Don't Believe the Hype [Chuck D]. On *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* [CD]. United States: Def Jam. (1995).

*Rumble in the Bronx* (Tung, 1996). It sucked. *Rumble in the Bronx* did not come close to accurately portraying the Bronx. The reason why it did not accurately represent the Bronx is because it was neither filmed in the Bronx nor directed by someone from the Bronx. Instead, the movie was an illusion based on the director's interpretation of life in the Bronx. Life in the Bronx is reduced to ghettos, gangs, and graffiti, in other words, the tangibles or the acts. You then have to ask yourself, "Am I any wiser about the self [which exist] by gaining knowledge from the acts [which do not exist apart from the self]?" The Bronx as a space is lifeless. As a result, you can film a movie about the Bronx without even being from the Bronx.

Now consider the movie *A Bronx Tale* (De Niro, 1993). I love *A Bronx Tale* because it captures the Bronx without trying to recreate the Bronx. *A Bronx Tale* was directed by [Robert De Niro], a Bronx native, who was trying to tell a story about the Bronx using the self rather than the acts.

Another movie about the South Bronx that I really like is *Beat Street* (Belafonte & Picker, 1984). *Beat Street* captures a part of the South Bronx that I can resonate with.

According to a plot writer on the Internet Movie Database, *Beat Street* is the:

*Story of Kenny (Guy Davis), a young hip-hop artist living in the rough slums of the Bronx with his younger brother Lee (Robert Taylor) and their mother Cora. Kenny dreams of making it big as a disk jockey and playing in the most swank of Manhattan nightclubs, The Roxy. Into their lives comes Tracy (Rae Dawn Chong), a composer and assistant choreographer from New York College who inspires him to try an upbeat, lets-put-on-a-show, musical about the wonders of rap music while a romance begins to grow between them despite coming from different neighborhoods and worlds. Meanwhile, Lee is part of a break-dancing gang set on dominating the scene of their street. The rest of their friends include Ramon (Jon Chardiet), a graffiti artist determined to spread his painting to every subway car in the city while dealing with his girlfriend Carmen (Sandra Santaigo). Chollie is a fellow rapper who becomes Kenny's manager after he lands him a gig at a Bronx club as the DJ (Patay, 2008).*

As demonstrated by the plot writer's description, most people who watch this movie will describe with the acts [the elements] as the focal point. However, when I watch this movie, I see Ramon, Kenny, and the rest of their family and friends. I see a movie is not just about a DJ and a writer, but also about growing up in the South Bronx at an age when you are becoming a man. *Beat Street* describes the struggle between pursuing your dreams or playing it safe. This movie is a classic because similar to *A Bronx Tale* it captures a part of the South Bronx without trying to recreate the South Bronx. *Beat Street* shows the life that inspires the passion that inspires the art. In other words, the self that is behind the acts.

I recently lost my *Beat Street* DVD, so I searched online for a replacement. I used Circuit City's website to see how much they were charging for the DVD. What I read shocked me<sup>32</sup>. Circuit City flagged the movie "not for children" because of profanity, rape, sexual abuse, and violence. However, the website also listed the movie as PG and under the genres of "Rock Musical" and "Teen Movie." I had to double check to see if I was looking at the right movie. I was. I looked up other movies to see if the flags were accurate. I could not understand why *Beat Street* was flagged with those descriptors. I have watched *Beat Street* so many times, there is a little bit of cursing, but nowhere in the movie is there a scene with violence, sexual abuse, or rape. Labeling the movie "not for children" is crazy. Tej and I have shown parts of the movie to the kids in the A.C.E. Summer Program as a way to visually expose them to the cultural environment of the South Bronx during the mid 80s.

I am bothered by the tags on the movie *Beat Street* for more reasons than just an unknowing person reading the tags and believing them. More importantly, I am bothered because the inaccurate tags create stereotypes and in turn peoples associates those stereotypes on me. The South Bronx is more than slums, graffiti, and gangs, but you can not blame

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<sup>32</sup> [Beat Street review found on circuitcity.com](#)

people who believe the illusion when the picture that is painted in music and movies reinforces those same stereotypes. Too many people believe the hype. They believe the illusion. Now I understand why I have encountered so many people that are resistant to Potentialis. They honestly think that Potentialis, like *Beat Street*, is not for children because of profanity, rape, sexual abuse, and violence.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Fagazzie<sup>33</sup>**

Deciphering between the real and Babylon is tricky because you can get caught up in the hype. The hype blurs the line between reality and illusion. You can not distinguish between the two unless you ask questions. When you question the real it exposes the self and the self is real. When you question the illusion it becomes transparent. The hype is nonexistent, make-believe, a fagazzie.

For example, consider the movie *Wild Style* (Ahearn, 1983). The movie *Wild Style* gets coined as the classic Hip Hop movie of all time because it supposedly captures the real.

According to an Internet Movie Database plot writer, the movie *Wild Style* is about:

*Zoro, the city's hottest and most elusive graffiti writer. The actual story of the movie concerns the tension between Zoro's passion for his art and his personal life, particularly his strained relationship with fellow artist Rose. But this isn't why one watches Wild Style--this movie is \*the\* classic hip-hop flick, full of great subway shots, breakdancing, freestyle MCing and rare footage of one of the godfathers of hip-hop pulling off an awesome scratch-mix set on a pair of ancient turntables. A must-see for anyone interested in hip-hop music and culture (Leon, 2008).*

I attempted to watch the movie *Wild Style* for the very first time a few months ago. About twenty-five minutes into the eighty-two minute movie I turned it off. I bought into the hype of this “classic hip-hop flick” and found the first twenty-five minutes to disappointing

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<sup>33</sup> A fake

to finish it. The acting was awful, the plot was bad, and I was not really feeling some of the scenes. In particular, I was not feeling the scene when the two main characters won some money and ended up going to a hotel with some girls and alluded to having an orgy.

Regardless of whether or not these sorts of things really happen in the South Bronx, my beef is that *Wild Style* is one of first time that the South Bronx is on the big screen and that's how they choose to represent it. I could probably list some more examples, but I only got through the first twenty-five minutes.

\* \* \* \* \*

A couple of months later Phase 2, Tej, and I were hanging out in Chinatown (the night of my epiphany). I do not remember how we got on the topic, but we started talking movies. I remember asking Phase about the documentary he did. He asked me, "What documentary?" I told him, "You know the documentary that I saw the trailer for on Youtube. The one that your name is listed as the director." Phase recalled what I was referring to and replied, "I never seen it." In a confused manner, Phase said, "I never seen the movie, but I'm the director." Phase then told us this story of how he knows the guy who did movie and that he just used his name. Phase said he never wanted to be in the documentary, but the guy recorded him anyways.

*Phase 2: BRO I JUST ATTEMPTED TO WORK ON A SO CALLED DOCUMENTARY WITH A DEVIL WHO HAPPENS TO BE JAPANESE...AND HE BASICALLY DID THE SAME S\*\*T ALL DEVILS WHO WEAR DISGUISES DO. HE VIOLATED...SO MAYBE HE WILL BE IN A COFFIN SOON... WHO KNOWS...?? BUT IT WILL BE NO FAULT OF MINE BECAUSE WHEN PEOPLE HEAR S\*\*T LIKE THAT THEY GET VEXED AND I'M NOT IN CONTROL.*

*DUDE DID A LOT OF FOUL S\*\*T...AND EVEN THREW ME IN AS A PRODUCER WHEN I NEVER SAW THE S\*\*T AND HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH ANY PRODUCTION. IT'S REALLY F\*\*KED UP...AND YO...THERE MAY WELL BE SOME GOOD STUFF IN IT...BUT RESPECT IS A BIG WORD. YOU CAN'T REP WHAT YOU DON'T RESPECT OR YOU SHOULDN'T BE BECAUSE THEN FOLKS*

*THINK THAT THEY ARE THE ONES TO TURN TO WHEN THERES A NEED TO GET INFO...*

*AND THE TRUE SOURCES GET PLAYED...*

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While we were on the topic of movies I wanted to bring up how I just saw *Wild Style*, but I was hesitant because I did not know how Phase 2 would react to my critique. I thought “this is Phase 2 of course he would be endorsing the movie as a classic just like everyone else,” but I did have questions about the movie. So I mentioned to him that I just saw *Wild Style* and surprisingly he replied, “I never saw it.” A couple of months later during one of our email conversations I understood why he had never seen it.

*Me: Did you watch the Hip Hop Honors show? Do you know who chooses who gets honored? I was wondering about that.*

*Phase 2: NO POST CUZ I NEED TO MAKE IT LESS HOOD AND MORE OFFICIAL...AND THE SPELL CHECK...*

*BUT YOU CAN SEND THIS TO THE RIGHT FOLKS...*

*AND YO BRO I DON'T LIKE TO F\*\*K WITH YOU...BUT CHECK SOME OF THESE NIGGAS*

*BECAUSE A COMMON FRIENEMY CAN'T BE A FRIEND TOO...*

*SOME REALITY BROUGHT ABOUT FROM ANOTHER CONVERSATION...TO A FRIEND...JUST SO THE WORLD OR YOUR WORLD WILL KNOW THE TRUTH...*

*MATTERS ON SPIT<sup>34</sup>...*

*He can get away with the bulls\*\*t in “no no yawl” But come on. This is a dude who knows he never got nor will he ever get support from me...yet he keeps affiliating me not only with his writings of hip hop...or so called hip hop...but WILD STYLE?? Pow!!!*

*I wasn't feeling him in the 80's and I'm feeling him less then i wasn't feeling him*

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<sup>34</sup> Pseudonym. SPIT was a character in *Beat Street* who gained notoriety from taggin his name across the work of other writers. SPIT was never a writer, but desired to be a part of the culture. By itself his work was wack, but when he used the work of others as a platform then he began to get noticed.

*then...figure that. What I see him as is everything that is wrong with the culture...hyping the whole gang thing up...the whole minstrel show that was wildstyle in that fools were doing things in that movie that they would never do...but who would know that??? Is it written in the movie dialogue??? (sic)*

*I don't know if I ever explained why I'm not feeling dude...but here is some insider history...so that you understand who some of these people really are.*

*SPIT had asked me to help him write his script. That never happened. Thus the inclusion of my name in wild style credits is totally unnecessary and minus justification.*

*He told me I need to meet his partner CYHPER<sup>35</sup>...who wrote SPIN...Spin was a famous writer from Brooklyn who I actually know. So i was a bit set back...CYPHER??? That isn't Spins other name...So CYPHER was already perpetrating from day one...which says a lot about him and his character and sincerity...if you asked me...But since he did "this and that in hip hop"...we sorta let that slide...*

*But think about it.... (VH1 hip hop "awards"...is a fiasco!!!)*

*Back to wild style...which I even hate to type out. SO bro...I ain't gotta make up stories. I let these d\*\*k heads write their own scripts and I simply relay them back.*

*Now in the case of wild style...overstand that all this s\*\*t is my life...s\*\*t I live day to day...not just "hip hop" because that is only a title of a life...feel me??? Now here SPIT is filming a movie based on our reality. Bro you know john wayne isn't a cowboy...but you also know that the west is real...and subliminally you are gonna absorb all those things you see around john wayne in that movie from a standpoint of some type of reality. Unless "indians" are flying...how much of that are you going to absorb as unreal???*

*It's subliminal mind manipulation. Especially if a whole lot of the s\*\*t is made up inexplicably. Now SPIT was on his set tossing in s\*\*t he thought was cool that just wasn't real...or positive...but he wasn't giving a f\*\*k. AND I WAS. "SPIT we don't have 12 year olds in clubs rolling dice"...His reaction to my reaction was "aw come on man"...SO instead of telling me to go f\*\*k off...he just stopped calling me.*

*Is that integrity?? Dedication?? Sincerity to the culture...or respect for it...and people who you supposedly respect for being in it and having some valid and recognized experience in it??*

*CYPHER was never the hip hop cat that I was...and he wasn't from the Bronx either...frequenting the spots on the regular and seeing the culture from the ground*

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<sup>35</sup> Pseudonym. The name Cypher is used to reflect the character in *The Matrix* who sold out the location of Zion for riches.

*up where it was actually birthed. Which does have its significance.*

*But I already got the picture. MY WAY (SPIT'S WAY) OR THE HIGHWAY. And to me it was like...whatever. But it doesn't end there...*

*So there was that club THE DIXIE... (and honestly bro in my heart I feel that movie is mad mad corny)...I think I had to meet someone else there...and SPIT sees me...and says... "hey a I got a great idea/part for you in the movie....You work security at the door...and zoro gets searched and drops his cans"... "from the old to the new...get it" ???*

*I just smirked at that !@#\$\$%^&!! bro. No thanks...whatever...and MIKE from the crash crew was there and he said to me... "seems to me that should be the other way around"....*

*I never sleep on a snake when they shed their skin...so it's hard to forget lame a\*\* s\*\*t like that.*

*you'd think the buck stopped there...*

*But ...years later...I can only imagine...maybe with CYPHER name being PHADE in that movie ...maybe people were wondering what that was all about...or why I wasn't down...i have no idea...but then a story surfaces in the east village eye newspaper...that SPIT orchestrated...*

*"Explaining" my absence in the movie. PHASE WAS ORIGINALLY PICKED FOR "THE PART" BUT HE OPTED OUT AND CYPHER WAS FORCED INTO THE ROLE. Bro does that sound like what happened...from what I am telling you happened on my dead granny???*

*SO how am I to ever "think" that SPIT is a true trooper??? How can anyone believe that he is if this is how he got down?? Is that just a PHASE TWO STORY?? That motha f\*\*\*a ain't been real to Hip Hop from day uno bro. He is just another person in my eyes that has blasphemized (sic?) and distorted the history...and shown a high disrespect for reality...*

*But because he made a movie that went around the globe people want to put him on a pedestal as if Hip Hop would be dead without him or that he discover us. Naw bro...I ain't dumb...and Though I like to use words like "ain't" i know better...hahahaha....*

*Hip Hop in the "bigger" picture of it's breakdown...is really not much more than a continuation of shit folks here have been doing from day one. Dancing...entertaining...art...music...it's just that the world and the nation have been exposed to it...and not only because of wild style...or whatever. It isn't like people do not travel...and that no one ever saw a thing before any of that. I am not going to say...none of it did anything at all...that would be fooling myself...but "responsible*



*for our existence”...stop the exaggerated hype.*

*For one...if this culture was weak...it wouldn't be doing what it's doing. What maybe people elsewhere do not see is that the majority of the folks over here doing or living hip hop are not living it from being exposed to movies and books about it. Hip Hop IS this place. It is our neighborhood or environments our life. Just like all the s\*\*t before it without the title...and we'd be doing it in some way shape or form sans SPIT and the whole lot of them. BEFORE ANYTHING I EVER WROTE!!! BECAUSE IT WAS WRITTEN IN LIGHT OF THE DEPTH DOPENESS AND DYNAMICS OF WHAT HIP HOP...WAS IS AND HAD BECOME...*

*We never felt the need to write about it...even though a ME is in a better position to do it. But these cats are “educated” thus held up on a pedestal as to their analysis of us...*

*Bro it's all standard bulls\*\*t that even a\*\*h\*\*\*s in the culture follow or cater to. So basically you have it and you can run go tell the world also that folks like AGENT H<sup>36</sup> would have never ever had a bboy crew if I didn't practically put a gun to his head and insist. Because I respected him and believed in him. But he didn't want to do it because he had some old problems with the little devil lady blue and rock steady. Now a days AGENT H forgets that I am the one who brought the idea to his attention and he refused for a long time at first...he doesn't even mention me...and you see this negro all up in the freshest kids...AGENT H...who?? The f\*\*ked up thing about when people don't come real...is they leave others to have to continue to defend a truth that they could have told by them in the first place.*

*I did my little things here and there on earth. I wasn't shakespeare...or darwin...or even denzell...But I did what I did. And being denied that...Oh yeah...I get a little vexed...in that case. In the case of history and truth...whether or not it involves me or not...the truth is vital to people overstanding the entire picture and or taking whatever road they want to take from their knowing it. Having it all twisted doesn't help. Where does knowing your past as a lie give anyone a fair shake?? I will never be a part of the machine that twists turns upsets and blasphemizes reality...*

*That is where I stand infinitely...*

*Peace....*

*oh also me sounding off...dropping history and my experience...lots of people think I just do and did bubble letters and that was that...but I talk and write mad s\*\*t...that fake cats pretend they didn't hear or wish I didn't...*

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<sup>36</sup> Pseudonym. AGENT HM is supposed to reflect one of the agents that work in the Matrix from the movie *The Matrix*.

## Double-Edged Sword

*What a lot of the world doesn't understand is that a lot of what they see and hear is not true. But once something's written or publicized it becomes real whether it's bulls\*\*t or not and that's exactly what happened. A lot of what's been written about this art form, is bulls\*\*t. (Phase 2 et al, 1996, p.94)*

The quote above, by Vulcan<sup>37</sup>, quote is in reference to Aerosol Culture, but you can apply it to everything I have been discussing. Like Neo listening to Morpheus, when you hear someone speak from the real, their words are like a scalpel because it separates what is undistinguishable to the eye, the real from the illusion. The following dialogue with Phase 2 is a scalpel because it separates the truth from the hype.

*When some deny it, defy it, I swing bolos  
Then they clear the lane, I go solo  
The meaning of all of that  
Some media is the wack  
As you believe it's true  
It blows me through the roof  
Suckers, liars, get me a shovel  
Some writers I know are damn devils  
For them I say, "Don't believe the hype"  
(Public Enemy, 1988)*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Me: What do you think Nas meant by Hiphop is dead?*

*Phase 2: I SORTA FEEL...WHAT NAS (AT LEAST SHOULD HAVE) MEANT...IS THAT THERE'S NO DIVERSITY IN HIP HOP...AND IT'S ALL THE SAME...SURE HE SORTA GOT ON PEOPLES CASES...WHICH TO SOME DEGREE...IT'S NOT SO COOL...I FEEL IT'S MORE THE INDUSTRY...THAN IT IS ALL OF THE ARTISTS..*

*YOU GOTTA ASK YOURSELF...HOW THE F\*\*K IS A GENRE...COME TO A POINT WHERE 90% OF THE RAPPERS/MCS...RHYMES ARE INFANTILE...WHEN IT'S WHOLE EXISTENCE WAS PLATFORMED ON BEING INNOVATIVE AND FRESH...AND DEFINITELY LYRICALLY INCLINED...ESPECIALLY AFTER THE LIKES OF KANE AND RAKIM...*

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<sup>37</sup> Aerosol Artist

*I DIDN'T MIND HOT BOYS ONCE I DIDN'T EXPECT THEM TO BE...ON THAT LEVEL...AND I FEEL SOME OF THESE GUYS CAN'T DO IT ON THAT LEVEL...AND UNLESS IT'S PROVEN NO ONE CAN SAY THEY ALL ARE NOT DEDICATED TO WHAT THEY DO. WAS HAMMER??? WE ARE STAUNCH CRITICS BECAUSE WE HAVE HEARD AND SEEN THE BEST COME AND GO...AND WE THE ONES WHO ARE INTO THE SCIENCE OF LYRICS AND THE "BEST"...EXPECT ALOT MORE THAN...LAFFY TAFFY... (WHICH I CAN'T GET WITH EVER... YET MY CONCLUSIONS WERE...YOU DON'T EXPECT WHAT ISN'T NAS TO BE NAS OR JAY...*

*BUT AGAIN I REPEAT...IT'S THE INDUSTRY...CATERING TO WHAT APPARENTLY SEEMS TO BE A MARKET...THAT NOURISHES ITSELF OFF OF DEVITALIZED NON MIND INDULGENT MUSIC. THE EAST COAST CONSUMER HAS BECOME A FOLLOWER AND NOT A LEADER...AND PEOPLE ARE GOING TO LIKE WHAT THEY LIKE...(WHY???? I DON'T OVERSTAND IT...WHAT'S CORNY IS CORNY...BUT...OH WELL...) I HEAR STUFF IN FAT BEATS THAT I CANNOT SEE ROCKING AND BEING CONSUMED... IF IT WERE PLAYED ON THE RADIO...THE STATES...AT LEAST ON THE EAST...HAS FOR A LONG TIME BEEN POISONED BY THIS "DO IT THIS WAY" APPROACH TO MUSIC...WHICH STAGNATES THE CREATIVITY OF THE CULTURE...ALL OF THE MUSIC) AND THE ARTISTS ABILITY TO EVOLVE...*

*THEY SEEM TO NOT CARE THAT ALL OF OUR MUSIC EMERGED TO THE SURFACE VIA IT'S EVOLUTION...*

*STANDARDS HAVE BEEN SET WHICH OUR 3RD 4TH AND 5TH EYES HAVE FIGURED OUT...AND THAT IS WHAT PEOPLE LIKE US WEIGH THE CURRENT CROP OF NONSENSE AND MINDLESS MUSIC AGAINST...*

*I AIN'T TRYING TO BE SCHOLASTIC... (NOT USING "AIN'T" ... 😊 ...FO SHO....) JUST FEELING IT...*

*ONE LOVE...*

*PEEP THE MOVIE "EXILED" IF YOU GOOGLE IT WILL COME UP...IT WAS ROCKING*

*DID I MENTION A BETTER TOMORROW/THE KILLER/HARD BOILED?? ALL OLDER STUFF...*

*KOREAN MOVIE "OLD BOY"...AND "SHIRI"...ALSO "HOLIDAY"....AND "DUELIST"  
"BATTLE OF WITS"...IS FUNKY TOO...THAT'S A NEWER ANDY LAU JOINT...AND ALSO  
"2009 LOST MEMORIES"...KOREAN...*

*SHADOWLESS SWORD...THAT IS FUNKY....*

*SHUCKS I SORTA MENTIONED A BUNCH OF FLICKS...ALREADY...BUT PEEP THEM!!! ESPECIALLY OLD BOY!!! GOD OF GAMBLERS...GOD OF COOKERY...JUST A BUGGED STORY...*

*DID YOU SEE SHAOLIN SOCCER OR KUNG FU HUSTLE...*

*THE NEW FLICK...KISS OF THE GOLDEN FLOWER ...WAS PRETTY CRAZY...  
(THE PLOT...AND THE LAST 30 MINUTES...)*

*ALSO JAPANESE FUTURE SWORDPLAY JEDIKNIGHT JOINT...SHINOBI...*

*\* \* \* \* \**

*Phase 2: HERE'S A LITTLE NOTE I SENT A FRIEND YESTERDAY OR SO...  
YOU KNOW I CAN RELATE TO PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN THE HYPE BUT NOT  
AFTER THEY ARE BEING INFORMED THAT HYPE IS INDEED WHAT IT IS...*

*WE DO NOT EXIST BECAUSE “THE AGENTS”<sup>38</sup> DID THEIR THINGS. WE EXIST  
BECAUSE WITHIN THE STRUGGLE AND OUR RESPECTIVE CULTURES....WE  
ARE SIMPLY BAD A\*\*.....!!!*

*ACTUALLY I'M GLAD YOU MADE A COMMENT...BECAUSE I WAS  
WONDERING WHY YOU DIDN'T...THOUGH I CANT LIE I DIDN'T EXPECT TO  
HEAR WHAT I'D CALL A DEFENSE...FOR THE CONTINGENT WHO I POINTED  
TO.*

*BECAUSE IN SPITE OF WHO WILL EVER AGREE WITH ME...(JUST LIKE  
CALLING WRITING “GRAFFITI” WHICH FOR FACT I KNOW WE NEVER  
ORIGINALLY CALLED IT THAT) I STICK TO MY GUNS BECAUSE OF MY  
KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE IN THE TRENCHES SIDE BY SIDE WITH THE  
ENEMY.*

*PAPPY SAYS: F\*\*K EM FOR LIFE. BUT...*

*I CATCH WHERE YOU ARE COMING FROM...BUT NOT NECESSARILY IN MY  
CASE...“I DONT HAVE A SO CALLED CAREER THANKS TO THEM”. I WAS  
TRAVELING BEFORE ANYONE GAVE A S\*\*T ABOUT ANYTHING THEY DID  
AND I WAS DOING GALLERIES AT LEAST A DECADE BEFORE THEIR BOOKS.  
NO KIDS IN MY FAMILY NOR PEOPLE WHO I ROLL WITH WERE INSPIRED OR  
EDUCATED FROM ANYTHING THAT THEY EVER WROTE.*

*AND THIS WAS GOING INTERGLOBAL BEFORE THEM. THE FACT IS THAT  
EVEN IF YOU HAVE SOME POINTS HIP HOP NEITHER BEGINS NOT ENDS*

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<sup>38</sup> Pseudonym

WITH THEM JUST AS BROWNSKINNED PEOPLES CULTURE DIDN'T BEGIN WHEN WE BECAME NEGROES. IF YOU ARE GOING TO WRITE "HISTORY" ALL A\*\* BACKWARDS AND AT THE SAME TIME NOT CARE..PERSONALLY SOMEONE LIKE MYSELF LIVING IT LOVING IT AND DYING FOR IT ISN'T GOING TO PAT YOU ON THE BACK BECAUSE OF YOUR "EFFORTS".

MAYBE THE ONES WHO WERE NEVER ABLE TO GET OUT IN THE STREETS WERE EXPOSED TO THE CULTURE VIA THE MULTICOLORED DEVILS OF THE UNIVERSE BUT NO MATTER THAT EXPOSURE IS NEITHER THE BEGINNING OR THE ENDING OR THE EPITOME OF HIP HOPS BEING SEEN AND HEARD. WOULD WE NOT BE ROCKING IN OUR HOODS IF NOT FOR THEM??

IF ANYTHING THAT SAME EXPOSURE HAS GIVEN THE WORLD AND TOO MANY HERE A TOTAL MISCONCEPTION OF THE CULTURES ROOTS ORIGINS REALITY SPIRITUALITY AND SUBSTANCE THAT ONCE WAS.

SURE THEY SHOULD GET "SOME PROPS" ...BUT SORRY PERSONALLY I FOR SURE DON'T OWE THEM S\*\*T AND I DON'T SEE WHERE ANYONE IN THE USA SHOULD BE PAYING AS MUCH OR MORE HOMAGE TO THEIR HALF\*\*\*ED REPORTING THAN THEY SHOULD TO THE STREET KNOWLEDGE OR EXISTENCE OF A KOOL HERC OR A RIFF 170.

WE RELY TOO MUCH ON THOSE PEOPLE TO TELL OUR STORY.

KIDS CAN GO TO THE LIBRARY AND GET A TWISTED VERSION OF REALITY?? NAW I CANNOT BE THANKFULL FOR THAT BECAUSE REAL CATS LIKE MYSELF NOW HAVE TO SPEND A LIFETIME CORRECTING IT!! OVERSTAND THAT THIS IS SOMETHING IN OUR SOUL THAT WE LIVED AND DIDN'T TRIP TO GO AND WRITE A BOOK ABOUT AND MOST AT THOSE TIMES DIDN'T EVEN SEE SUCH THINGS AS A POSSIBILITY...

AS FAR AS SHOWING STYLE WARS IN ANY SCHOOL I DREAD THE THOUGHT BECAUSE ONCE AGAIN BESIDES THE MANIPULATIVE STEREOTYPICAL BULLS\*\*T IT'S A MISCONSTRUCTION OF THE CULTURE AS A WHOLE AND IS A PERIOD OF TIME THAT SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN PASSED OFF TO CONSTITUTE THE ENTIRE CULTURES EXISTENCE. "EVERYTHING HAPPENED IN THE 80'S" IS WHAT AGENT C<sup>39</sup> CLAIMED. OVERSTANDING THAT (AND I'VE NEVER BEEN MR. NOSTALGIA OR MR REMEMBER THE OLD SCHOOL) IT'S EASY TO REALIZE THAT THIS GUY HAS HIS OWN WAY OF SEEING THINGS. SUCH IS NOT THE WAY TO RECORD HISTORY...

REFERENCING THE WRONG REFERENCES ONLY PERPETUATE THE SAME MISCONSTRUCTIONS THAT CURRENTLY MAKE UP THE DELAPIDATED STATE OF AEROSOL CULTURE. SURE IT IS WHAT IT IS. (F\*\*KED UP IN MY

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<sup>39</sup> Pseudonym

EYES). MIND YOU THAT FROM THE TIME I WAS A TEEN I NEVER SAUGHT TO MAKE LOOT OR SO CALLED FAME FROM BEING DOWN WITH MY CULTURE. IT'S NOT SO MUCH THAT I KNOW I'VE DONE A WHOLE LOT IN HIP HOP...DEFINITELY WAY WAY MORE THAN THE FAKE ICONS (WRITERS) 99% WHO HAVE NEVER BEEN DOWN WITH HIP HOP NOR GAVE A RAT A\*\* ABOUT IT BEFORE IT BLEW UP TO A DEGREE OR AEROSOL "BECAME" A PART OF IT.

THERE IS HARDLY A SO CALLED WRITER PIONEER OUT HERE WHO ATTENDED THE REAL PARTIES BEING THROWN AND THEY ARE OLD ENOUGH TO HAVE WITNESSED IT. WHAT A LOT OF THE HOOPLA PARTIAL FLICKS AND SO ON HAVE DONE WAS CREATE PLATFORMS FOR SO MANY FAKERS TO PLAY THE S\*\*T OUT OF THIS CULTURE. THAT'S MOST OF WHAT I GRASP. BECAUSE IF PEOPLE DIDN'T KNOW S\*\*T ACCORDING TO THE DEVIL...IT BEATS HAVING A MISCONSTRUED VERSION OF REALITY.

WE ARE THE SO CALLED HATERS BECAUSE WE TELL THE TRUTH?? THAT S\*\*T IS HILARIOUS... (NOT QUITE)...

AND I'M NOT BLASTING OFF. I'M JUST GIVING YOU A VIEW TO A KILL FROM THIS PERSPECTIVE. AND IT SHOULDN'T BE ACCOUNTED AS AN "OPINION"...BECAUSE I'M LIVING IT AND SEEING IT AND I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE.

LIKE I SAID YOU MAKE A CERTAIN POINT. BUT WHAT I'M GIVING YOU IS THE POINTS WITHIN THAT POINT THAT YOU OVERLOOK. IT'S BEEN MORE THAN WATERED DOWN. LIES ARE LIES. UNTRUTHS ARE UNTRUTHS. INACCURACIES ARE JUST THAT. IS THAT WHAT A PERSON WANTS OR NEEDS WHEN THEY SEEK REALITY??

OR DO YOU THINK THESE PEOPLE (WHO I HAVE MET AND KNOW ALL I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT TO STATE MY CASE) ARE REALLY SOOOOOOOOO SINCERE IN WHAT THEY HAVE BEEN DOING? HOW MANY MOVIES HAS SPIT EVER DONE IN HIS LIFE??? DO YOU SEE COPPOLA ONLY BASKING IN THE LIGHT OF ONE MOVIE?? SPIT HAS ONLY SUCKED THE BLOOD OF THIS FROM DAY ONE.

ANY TIME YOU OPEN A HIP HOP BOOK AND THE FIRST PAGES START WITH GANGS...YOU ARE DEALING WITH B. S. BECAUSE GANGS ARE GANGS AND HIP HOP IS HIP HOP. AND EVEN WHEN BAM WAS IN A GANG HE NEVER MENTIONED THAT COINCIDING. DANCE CULTURE AND GANGS ARE A MYTH THAT SEEMS EVERY MO FO AND THEIR MOMS WHO NEVER HAD ANY LIGHT ARE THE ONLY ONES WHO SEEM TO BE TELLING STORIES ABOUT IT...OR THE FOOLS THAT EAT IT UP...

AND TRUST ME. I'D CONTEND WITH ANY OF THEM. LIKE I GIVE A FLYING.

*IT'S NONSENSE. PERIOD END OF STORY. BUT YOUR SPITS AND FAKES ARE THE PERPETRAITORS OF SUCH MYTH.*

*DO YOU REALLY THINK WITHOUT THESE PEOPLE HIP HOP WOULD BE DEAD OR NON EXISTENT??*

*IF THE PRICE FOR CULTURAL INTERGLOBAL DIFUSION IS THIS GUMBO OF HIP HOP MISUNDERSTOOD...I VOTE FOR IT HAVING STAYED IN THE HOOD.*

*AND BESIDES THERE BEING NO WAY ON EARTH THAT "NO ONE" WOULD KNOW ABOUT HIP HOP IF NOT FOR THEM...I DON'T THINK EVEN 10% OF THE WRITING COMMUNITY OR EVEN THE HIP HOP COMMUNITY OF ARTISTS ARE GETTING "PAID" FROM THIS. SO I REPEAT I'M NOT EVER GONNA BE HIP HOP HORRAYING ANY OF THESE FOLKS.....*

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Aerosol Culture**

*Phase 2: Firstly let's let truth be told and set the record straight about our beginnings. Writing and the Aerosol Art movement as we know and see it today, its elements, its how's and its whys began and birthed in NYC. All by it's lonesome.*

*It was never influenced by or started as a result of any other so called writer movements or so called writers anywhere else on the planet Earth.*

*If we didn't do it here it wouldn't exist as you are witnessing it in the 21st century. If it has a founding father or fathers or anyone to pay homage to for this culture, they, without a doubt come from New York.*

*Period, finito, end of story. So kill all the lies, myth, noise and the nonsense!!!*

*Well suffice to the claims that everyone does it for fame, I've been saying these words from day one: I never wrote for "fame". You weren't gonna be an Ali from this. To me it's not realistic. But still, it's like...what??? Was I supposed to think that I was nobody "before"??*

*People should speak for themselves about wanting fame.*

*I'm not trying to disrespect or toot my own horn but I was always doing my thing. For example, I danced. I could draw. I played b ball. I was under 6'tall just before my 15th birthday dunking on above regulation rims. The school system deemed me to be smarter than average. I'm not ego tripping and I don't concoct stories. I'm just trying to make a point.*

*I didn't need my name on a subway car to tell me that I was a bit nice.*

*The bottom line on this culture was like anything that you really get busy with. You and everyone else can tell if you do your do and when you do it because it's right there in your face. Then the fame comes with the territory.*

*The name of the game was getting up. Certain things go hand in hand. If you were knocking cats out like Tyson was who wouldn't know you??*

*I liked the fact that I was doing my thing and everyone didn't really know me personally but they knew it was there and respected it.*

*The anonymity didn't last forever but the side of being anonymous was more fun than being recognized on a person to person level though the latter has its gratifying moments.*

*I basically started doing it because someone I rolled with on the daily was down with it. I felt a connection to it and a desire to do it and followed up on it. I'd say subconsciously I could see that this thing was ours/mine and that made it more appealing.*

*Though we never had fear to do what we were doing, when you sum it up we risked our lives to do this. We were defiant and a bit wild and crazy but our tenacity and creativity shone through it to make for something we came to appreciate more and more that eventually became larger than us.*

*Writings being so much in public view was a factor in it's being seen but just like hip hops evolution, writings evolution and visual ability to have a "voice" even without words is what brought it to the forefront of the world and our general populations' attention.*

*Primarily one thing that was cool and interesting was that so many guys created and developed their signature and name to suit them and be original and independent.*

*That was part of what you wanted to establish. You could easily see some type of a personality or flavor in the signatures of a "Superkool" 223 or a Jec Star \*, Cay 161 or LEE 163d!.. Slim one, Kool Kito, King Of Kools, Dino Nod, Tye 24.*

*Some of these names seemed resounding and the signatures were in their own way no less then dignified and quite amazing.*

*To think that one took the time to construct the signature to suit them and be slick and stylized tells you that there was a bit more to it then just tossing it up on a wall. You acknowledged their efforts and part of that made you want to know who they were.*

*Writing had guidelines rules and regulations. Do's and don'ts. Respect the name. No*



*writing over one another. Start nothing there'll be nothing. Don't mess with me I won't mess with you. Give everyone their space to rock accordingly. So we had ethics.*

*No one could specifically dictate how to rock and render your efforts unless they were doing this, inventing this or really in tune with it and were seeing this from the bigger picture of its possibilities.*

*When some one picked up on something I did be it a letter style or a phrase like "NO COMP" or "DO IT" I'd just come up with something else.*

*Like with the signature there was a natural desire to have something that would signify it as mine and sort of a trademark you could differentiate from everything else out there.*

*Though I may not have always known exactly what I could do I didn't see limits, so I just kept on creating things.*

*I seem to have always connected to the things that I could elaborate and innovate off of. Dancing. Drawing. Balling. You could always flip it how you wanted to. Long before I wrote I realized that I didn't like the way I was taught to do it and once I realized I didn't have to do it that way it gave me a wider and more imaginative view of rendering it.*

*It just so happened that lot's of things I did were appreciated to the degree that lots of writers wanted to have it and do it, so it started to become part of the basis of a format. Not too many of us can say that and it's kind of bugged out.*

*Somehow some of us I realized that there were no real boundaries and naturally just continued to expand it.*

*You have to think what if there was no Super Kool or Riff 170??? Would there be the master pieces on trains, top to bottoms, fat caps, ill designs, certain funky styles or what have you???*

*You have to assume that the basic face of writing would be different.*

*What you see these days was basically blueprinted in the 70's and run with into the 80's up till now. The technical aspects are different but there's no way that you could have any of this without firstly the signature and the style formations and piecing approaches that were done then. Just the whole concept of writing using spray paint, compounded with the approach to piecing, this is what made aerosol culture. WRITING.*

*We weren't trained or taught to do this. Going to school and applying what you learned drawing or whatever is a whole different can of beans.*

*In the late 80's you had major developments that came out of the West coast with guys like Slic and Hex that changed the whole approach to the writing technique and that has also become a staple in the culture. Almost like a second blueprint that has also been adapted globally.*

*I think it's birth and demise on the subways in NYC as well as there being no subways existing on the West Coast are essential to it's growth in and out of that initial environment.*

*Change is essential for growth. Time to move on and take it to the next level. I don't miss seeing it on subways. That was then and this is now.*

*This is something it all started out with and little magic markers. And evidently progressed and developed into something way out of control and much bigger than that.*

*It's a crazy occurrence. We're a part of something that is not only a part of New York history...but a part of the world. And we didn't force it down anyone's throat like what I was given in school or in my society. It has something that has attracted people to it and thus they feel an urge to be a part of it or do it.*

*Instead of trying to deal with the culture the authorities chose to wipe it out. Just think...they tried to kill it but it just wouldn't die.*

*No one really looked at it like they were just breaking the law. It was a defiant way to tell the ones who were telling you that you were less than zero or irrelevant...and to kiss their a\*\*es...just the opposite*

*In a certain respect writing on subways was a way of saying our society lacked and if those writing on subways in the society felt respected by it they'd have never went to that extent. You can't blame that generation for such an attitude.*

*You can't escape it and pretend it's not something bigger then the block. This came out of struggle. It's a life thing and just as it was then it's a sign of the times now.*

*Anyone who can't see that doesn't want to see it. A lot of the same feelings are here today but get expressed in a different fashion. The streets have become what the subways were. And just like the world at large our society is still off track and in disarray.*

*In the sense that if it (society) were addressing the real issues and taking care of business and giving the youth and young adults better things to do and more outlets to do them in, there's a strong possibility that they (the youth) would think twice before doing some things that they basically are not supposed to do. A lot of these so called negatives are created by a lack of positives that should be in existence just like*

*protest doesn't develop on its own.*

*Beyond the vapors...*

*Having a vision beyond the basics did a lot to build the culture. It's always been my approach to it. I see it (writing) as a science, looking at the letter, symbolism and written language as a physical object and seeing it beyond the barriers of speak.*

*I'm not into doing it on some nostalgia tip and trying to live off of what I did eons ago. I take pride in having an ability to flip it in some way shape or form that's on another level incomparable to the past and still be appreciated.*

*If it's not going to be painting which I don't claim to be my main forte these days, it's definitely going to be with innovating and creating.*

*Apparently those are things from the mind that technique cannot constitute. It's like everyone may know or can learn addition but we are not all mathematicians.*

*I'm going to show a certain mastery in the math of my approach to style and symbolism in some medium in whatever forum I can work it into because that's what I do.*

*There's different levels of this once you look beyond the can. I appreciate all of it but I guess it's just that on a big scale level my approach is more experimental just as it was in the past.*

*Writing has always been more technical but if your not doing the basics or doing it on those higher levels you're not going to see that.*

*Not all but any writers especially worldwide are not really in tune to or don't want to be in tune to their history the essence or the magnitude of their culture thus they feed into the nonsense that has been surrounding it from the minimal labels to the weak often ludicrous debates thrust upon it.*

*So much bulls\*\*t has been written that it's taken the realness out of context that writers as well as those outside the culture trying to get educated cannot see the reality of this cultures entirety.*

*I grew up in an atmosphere where we recognized that we were being denied and robbed of knowledge of culture and knowledge of self. Overstanding that I've intensified my natural instinct to look into things even further.*

*People need to see beyond the rhetoric, myths, conceptions and negative hype that so much so called truth is based on and that applies to so much including our culture. I lived it so the b.s. they write isn't going to fool me.*

*Unfortunately too many people after the fact don't realize the true essence of the culture it's foundations and the heart of those who made it happen and stood by it almost religiously.*

*They seem to want to accept some but not all of what this is about. Or get gassed on the gas and cannot accept the truth. Regardless to the fact that it's bigger than us certain things will always be what it is. Once that changes it will have a shallow significance because you can't buy flavor and soul is something you don't find on the street and history is done no matter what you try to do to alter it.*

*Certain things cannot be duplicated and those who participated in at in it's formative years or did it in the most significant ways will forever be forged in it like no one else after the fact. So rock now and respect who you are for the sake of the present. Still in all it basically makes a whole.*

*We created an art form that came up from our supposedly insignificant neighborhood existences and now it's everywhere on Earth. Do we really need a critic to tell us that there must be some substance to it??*

*It's been 17 or so years since the fall of the subway movement. Yet the culture is as big as ever on walls and on subways and even galleries from here to Croatia.*

*That's in itself is saying more than just a little something.*

*Aerosol culture has shook up the world. You can't deny it.*

*The fact is that there are a lot of positive things about writing once you stop to think negative. Sure there's crap out there. There's stuff we wish never existed. But you can't stop that. Just like your 9/11 s\*\*t happens. It isn't a perfect world or a perfect society. The results and causes and effects are going to bring the worst and best out of people with reason even if the effects are unreasonable.*

*Those are the rules of the world that are always broken.*

*Through the "negativity" of it being on subways there was within that whole something of beauty that you could only know if you lived it. Each generation experienced different things but a certain flavor has always remained.*

*We didn't do it to be on TV. or a book or a fake movie done by a fake "that's all they have as their claim to fame in 20 years" poser playing Columbus. It's crazy when you see people who are supposed to know this culture so adamantly supporting them.*

*We'd still be here regardless to all of that. Period. We created there hype!!! It's not the other way around. I'll give credit where it's due...but people tend to forget that ultimately if it wasn't for us creating this and keeping it alive in the first place they'd have no forum to exploit and play a role as if they are someone to respect.*

*No one I know here in NYC “learned” about aerosol and Hip Hop from those movies or books. If you did you must have been locked down in your house. We experienced it all around us and in through us. You have to understand that matters here. Real heads do it because you are born into it you feel it or you birthed it. I don’t see where we should be paying homage to anyone but ourselves for this culture. F\*\*k a movie and whoever made it. How are you an icon or significant to the culture via publicity outside of the forum? Some folks would be next to nothing if not for that kind of hype.*

*People outside and in have been inexcusably irresponsible to this culture ignoring the fact that it’s really because of it (writing) that we are recognized. It seems better to hype and dramatize it then to just tell it like it was.*

*When this was underground you couldn’t say you did this or that because it all spoke for itself. And it’s all you had and technically all that really matters. If you were bombing everyone knew it. Now you can go here and there or overseas or be in a publication and act like you are the main factor when you are just small potatoes.*

*Everyone wants to be a star or claim street or Hip Hop credibility when they never really were down nor experienced it. I went the whole 9 because i felt it and just did it. You have to live it to be it and represent it to claim it. Just because you write or were in a movie or a book doesn't make you Hip Hop or a true writer just like being able to spin on your head doesn't necessarily make you a b boy.*

*For the true hardcore it's deeper and more spiritual than that. Words like legend, old school and pioneer are a joke these days.*

*At this point you better come up with a different definition and title for the bonified ones who truly rocked made a difference or who built this.*

*Mainly my position always been to give people and writers insight into the cultures dynamics. Now a days with people vying for titles and fame as opposed to keeping reality right I realize that if I don't tell certain aspects of the story most likely the cultures reality as well as the things I did would go untold.*

*To say the least, I’m more than just familiar with this. I support the facts, history and the next level aspects of it. That’s why I’m so outspoken about what’s been put out there. So note if you see any quotes of mine supporting junk about NYC scribbling or whatever stupidity you want to call it, let it be known that I didn't contribute anything to it.*

*You couldn’t pay me to do that. The labeling alone is too infantile for me to connect myself with.*

*Some shiesty party hijacked my words from a significant publication to support their weak ass ideologies and the individuals that they rep.*

*What people really need to know seems to be kept away from them. Because a lot of the facts are still underground and with the ones out there who are no longer in the culture or the few who stay real to it but don't want the notoriety like some of the fake cats.*

*Bottom line is, above ground it's aerosol culture that birthed and exposed us to society and the world.*

*If you don't respect it, one can respect your work but YOU can't be respected no matter what you did in it.*

*But whatever. I can go on and on but I'll leave it here. Ultimately there's a major component to this that's about way more than just writing your name.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## **B'boy Culture**

*Phase 2: I love dancing period. I had wanted to get some of my extended family together to form a group...but with that (breaking being phased out by the moral party majority) it never came to be. Being involved with and around the b'boys in the 80's prompted me to want to do what I couldn't do in our scene by the late 70's. NYC Breakers happened because I saw an opportunity and I insisted to do it. Nobody was really feeling at first but me. With my perseverance and a gig I got with the Merv Griffin show, it all jump started and the rest is history*

*We can say that for us music is life and for what it's worth dance is in our respective cultures. (Meaning people from "our" environments) We just continued a tradition that our moms, pops and fore family did. You almost feel that you have to do it. And then there are those of us who feel like we are dying to not do it and do it well. It becomes your blood even more at that stage.*

*From the Lindy Hop and Jitterbug and so on to the Boogaloo and Afro Twist to Latin Hustle and freestyle, amongst the many doing it you always had those who were taking it all to a different level.*

*You can always go back ages to our connections from there and the beat of those drums. From slave ships to migration to the Caribbean to South America...Cuba...Puerto Rico and so on, we are world wide nation wide and here in the Big Apple and we dance and that is basically what you still see today.*

*But there's always a vantage point that you have to link directly to the here and now. Basically it "starts" again (or shall I say continues) with the ones who rocked and as well built the foundations of what we are seeing now. (East and West as well) Here*

*they are the primary ones who's older brothers and sisters rocked to Mother Popcorn and Karate Boogaloo at a sweet sixteen house party. They got to watch the sly slick and wicked cats in their alpaca sweaters and gators looking suave booging with the fly girls and then cooling out to a slow jam.*

*You wanted to be like them. From those off the record lessons we were nurturing our mental and physical for that day when we'd be in a house party doing the do. There were those of us who evidently realized the room in between the basics for some extra curricular activity. Flashing back to those one or two older cats who did it their way and how it clicked in your mind like second nature, once your day came there'd be no turning back. When you are on more so then the next one working a sweat, you can feel it and you start to notice that everyone else does too. That coming of age would go from house parties to the neighborhood rec room, and subsequently to the gyms and clubs.*

*Turnout time at the P.T.*

*When all these things (the extreme dancing of our era) were formulating back in the day we didn't call what we did breaking in the sense that it was a dance. It was just slang. One of the main terminologies was to "go off" or going off" and to "turn out". "Rocking" was just another terminology meaning "to get down". It wasn't a dance either. To "break" was a definition of most things normal in their extreme. If your moms was breaking on you she wouldn't be dancing shed be hollering above level and we didn't "break dance" either. That's someone else's terminology. We "broke" when it came time to flip the script on the floor beyond the norm or "broke" on someone on or off the floor.*

*"Breaking" preceded the terminology b'boy, the b'boy and break beat culture. Breaking in its initial hey day came out of dance basics and freestyle dancing. One can say when more and more floor moves came into plays the whole criteria changed and became more regimental. Technically at some point it went from Breaking to B'boying (which it was not always called) where as so many more elements have been added it's become something from the breaking foundation but of another respective chemistry.*

*Actually you can say people like The Nicolas Brothers or Jimmy Slide, broke but they just used different terminologies to define the next level. In their era they took dancing and the style they did...to another boundary.*

*When breaking blew up in the 80's I was trying to relay to breakers I knew, that the public hoopla shouldn't be allowed to effect their decisions to dance. That dancing was like breathing something that you just did until you couldn't do it any longer, but barely no one heard. that but no one heard. By the late 80's the next generation let the overexposure mentally play it all out. But in Europe they were still getting busier and in 91' one B'boy came here totally turned one night at the Island Club on Canal St. and gave NYC a wake up call that seemed to rejuvenate the whole movement here.*

*There are certain things we created just out of the love of dancing and the nature of having to do “it” differently. A lot of what we do is underground and stayed among us for there was never really a need or demand for the technicals behind what we know is our history. No one ever really asked...so certain things were hinted but never told. Off the record we called ourselves Electrified Movement but on the record there were no organized crews back then. We’d go to parties and bug out and get noticed. And it was obvious that we had something that others didn’t when a girl would comment. “I’ve never seen anyone dance like yawl”.*

*Whether cats want to admit it or not we set all type of fires off From the Bronx and beyond. We had the whole room loads of folks around the way doing our moves and even the most well known cats were emulating it. And we know it spread out because we never stayed put. We really didn’t pay much mind to what the basics were and anything out of the ordinary was par for the course. We used to do a dance called The Chicken Wing that the whole Bx and Harlem got from us.*

*Most of us knew how to do more than just go off. You couldn’t be wilding out on the ladies unless they wanted to bring it to you. Back then you had to know how to finesse. Double up with a girl, slow it down and if you were really nice then you’d go out there and break.*

*Then there was a time I was hanging out in upper Manhattan. There were a few guys we had in our studio who rocked in clubs like the Footsteps and Casablanca. They didn’t dance anything like us. But when I saw what they were doing which you could say was the “new dance” but from the downtown scene I knew I had to pick up on it. All the moves were up top. Baby shuffles, paired up sequentials where you and your buddy would rock opposite moves. My man Stitch used to do the Dracula and he and his man Cat did a crazy dance off a Manu Dibango track “Senga”...I’m told the word means dance.*

*We had our own styles but to me outside of our styles the “uptown” basics would get mashed with this stuff. I picked up on it added my own flavor to it and our crew flipped it on the downtown scene with that added twist. Then along with our crazy repertoire as always I was inspired to create totally different dances.*

*From little knee bends downtown I thought up to do a full abrupt squat, the same squat drops that are still on the scene today. From the partner sequences, I just came up with skipping by my partner and pushing him down to a squat. Sometimes swinging my leg over his head and doing another squat. We’d go back and forth with it off certain tracks where the drums were accentuated.*

*I had another idea that none of us had ever seen any dancers from anywhere else doing, which was a five to six step motion where we pretended to have knives in our hands (ala West Side Story) and swing in left to right motions like we were fighting. We’d then kick out bend down or squat drop, come back up and body nod or shake*



*the head in an aggressive like motion.*

*That was like a trademark dance of ours. I call it Battle Rocking but we never really bothered to name it. Then it was back to freestyling and doing the dance of the month. In our area it died with everything else because there was nothing subtle about it. When I saw kids still breaking years later it was one form they were calling Up Rocking. The first thing I thought and I've told people like Frosty Freeze and Sisco Kid this, that if any of our guys saw that, they'd automatically say of that particular dance "it's ours" no matter what added twist was put to it. If there was a dance movement in our time before what we did I can respect that by any name but style wise it wasn't anything like that and I've been saying and even writing that for the longest.*

*That's one of our contributions to that movement.*

***JUST LIKE MOVES WE WERE DOING AROUND THE WAY...AND AROUND THE CITY PEOPLE PICKED UP ON (UP) BATTLE ROCKING AND RAN WITH IT. PERIOD END OF STORY. FORGET WHAT YOU HEARD.***

*Evidently all of what we b'boys of the beginning thought to have left way behind, regenerating our selves for The Hustle, Freak Spank, Patty Duke, more free style, rap and scratch, another generation took under their wings and continued it elaborating on topping, rocking, and hitting the floor as did another generation after them merging it all together.*

*A lot of dances come out and we never know who started them, we just do them. But in this case we moved around town and were so addicted into rocking that we always knew what we brought to the table because it was that personal and we saw it disperse even amongst the most known dancers and b'boys who were getting shout outs doing some of our moves.*

*I've even said modestly from the very first time that I was interviewed that we started a lot of s\*\*t. Peep Steven Hagers book "Hip Hop" and it's there.*

*A lot of us never really considered ourselves as "b'boys" because basically that was a title reserved for Kool Hercs boys. He coined the phrase. But definitively speaking if B'boys are to be seen as the breakers of that primary era that's when or why we relate to ourselves as original b'boys because technically we were and our influences were all over. I acknowledge everyone who was noticed from all around the scene. Little Johnny, Sa sa, Clark Kent, El Dorado Mike, The Twins, James Bond, Amazing Bo Bo...Mr. Bubble, Doris and Janis to name a select few.*

*We owe props to the undercover cats who set if off from square one and definitely had significant influences even if there names were not on the D.J.s lips:*

*Scotty Bop, Timbo Rock, Russ Russ, Sweet Duke, Dice 198 (Electrified Movement)*

*there's no question that when they were in a jam everyone knew it. You had cats like Sisco Kid and Robby Rob, Big Glen, Walter from the Plaza Tunnel in the very "beginning" who came out with the leg drop you see latter day b'boys go into foot work with. Brooklyn Brian with his shuffle spins and hat rock. Infinity D. Say what you may. If you don't know (even those of you who were somewhere but not everywhere) now you know. Being around next level cats and even the cats you love to hate because they are mad corny charters, bring out the best in you.*

*Breaking came to have a lot more significance in the 80's and beyond then it did in it's primary stages and in it's main arenas. If anything partying was more about dancing than it was about breaking.*

*The 70'S first wave of brothas as well as sistas are what made it (that particular scene and breaking) all happen. There was a spirit and passion behind it that obviously survived through the years spread through out the nation and caught on even interglobally and has been taken to phenomenal levels beyond anyone's imagination.*

*That same spirit is what Hip Hop emerged from and out of. The ones who do it different are the ones who are going to make a difference. You can't let anyone dictate what you feel. Most likely you are going to know if it's correct in time just by the way everyone else feeds off of it. I've seen moves in the 90's that so called pros were not feeling that I knew were fly and they are now staples in the culture. Like the skater influenced freezes. I feel that when you love this and you are really clear headed not too egotistical and on top of your game you can feel what's hot that's what the elite the top notch and leaders of the pack are made of.*

*And so it seems that dance will always be with coming and going in some way, shape or form and that burning desire to boogie is only fueled by the sweat we generate as we get down to the rhythms and grooves.*

*Thus what we as an ongoing generational collective have exhibited via the magnetism behind our creativity is that our presence and appeal is of such a magnitude that even ignored it booms like an ocean sized drum. Not to be denied....*

*The spirit, the heart, the soul, the need and existence of the get down.....extreme....*

*DANCE OR DIE....*

*BIG UP TO THE FIVE BOROUGHES AND ALL WHO LOVE AND REPRESENT HIP HOP 360\*PEACE LOVE UNITY POSITIVITY. DEDICATED TO ALL THE DANCE FIENDS AND TRUE B'BOYS N GIRLS ON EARTH AND THE SOLAR SYSTEM. B BOY JUNIOR I SEE YUH!!! JAPAN AND KOREA! MILAN SEAN!! KMEL!! AIR UP THERE IN THE HOUSE!*

## **“BABYLON YOUR THRONE GONE DOWN<sup>40</sup>”**

\* \* \* \* \*

*Based upon the lived experiences of Phase 2 and I, the following chapter explores strategies to deconstruct or détourne the popular and distorted (stereotypical) representations of Hiphop. Additionally, this chapter examines the exploitation and implications that are a result of being duped by the illusions (hype) of the socially constructed identity of Hiphop. The chapter concludes with final comments from Phase 2 as well as my final détournement of the socially constructed Hiphop caricatures and representations.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Said, I hear the words of the higher man say  
“Babylon your throne gone down, gone down  
Babylon your throne gone down”  
(Marley, 1973)*

In order to take down Babylon, one must first experience Babylon. Otherwise, the illusion will never be exposed for what it is, an illusion. In the movie *The Matrix* (Silver, 1999), Neo had to enter the Matrix in order to disrupt it. However, it is important to note that, like Neo, it is vital to have the supportive team that he had. Neo’s team knew his exact location at all times and was able to help him navigate through the Matrix and pull him out of the Matrix whenever the attacks from the agents became too unbearable. If we do not have this team then we run the risk of being lost within the Matrix.

The hype of the Matrix blurs your senses enough so that you are unaware of how deep you are in the Matrix. The hype got to me for I was deep in the Matrix and did not even know it. I was on the verge of being lost within the Matrix, but at the right time the call came

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<sup>40</sup> Marley, Bob. (1973). Rastaman Chant. On *Burnin’* [CD]. Jamaica: Island. (2004).

through. The call awakened what was falling asleep and led me to clearly see the illusion that I was engulfed in.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **The Awakening**

Earlier, I told a story about an educational conference where a good friend and I had presented. Our presentation was about the connections between the stories told through two songs that were written nearly twenty years apart. The two songs that were used were Boogie Down Productions' (1990) *Loves Gonna Get'cha*<sup>41</sup> and Shoran<sup>42</sup>'s *Struggle*<sup>43</sup>. Shoran's *Struggle*, was part of my friend's dissertation (Anders, 2007) in which she collected educational narratives from incarcerated youths. Shoran was one of those youths. During an interview with Shoran, my friend recorded him reciting a song he had written. When she played the song for me it reminded me of a song that my cousin Leon and I use to listen to all the time, Boogie Down Productions' (1990) *Loves Gonna Get'cha*.

The objective of the presentation was to show that over the past twenty years there is a reoccurring story of limited opportunities in marginalized neighborhoods. As a result, many choose a path of selling drugs in order to provide for themselves and their families. However, very little is being done despite the messages in these songs. The presentation reflected what happens in society. Society is not paying attention and neither were the people who attended the presentation. No one cared for Shoran's story. Just like in society, the message got lost in the act. Everyone just wanted to talk about the music, the materialism, origins of Hip-hop, the

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<sup>41</sup> See Appendix 3 for lyrics

<sup>42</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>43</sup> See Appendix 4 for lyrics

difference between Hiphop and rap, blah, blah, blah. Meanwhile, a young man's plea for help and warning to younger generations was missed. The self was lost in the act.

It seems as if the knowledge of the acts [elements of Hiphop] is more valuable than the knowledge of self [what inspires the elements]. The majority of people in that room that spoke seemed to do so with the intentions to show that they were "down," they knew the most about Hiphop, they were a true Hiphoppa, an expert, a "Hiphop scholar". The competition has people buggin'. This is what happens when people get caught up in the hype.

The hype blurs peoples' vision from seeing the self that is behind the acts. There was one comment that will always stand out to me. In referencing cultural theorist, Stuart Hall's theory of representation, one gentleman made the critique that unless we engage with the image then we could never have an intellectual conversation about Hiphop.

*It's bigger than..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip..  
It's bigger than..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip..hop..hip-hop  
(Dead Prez, 2000)*

This presentation was not about Hiphop. It was about the self. Shoran's life is not an image to engage with and analyze. This is a real story about a real young man who is currently locked up in a real prison and having to deal with real issues like the death of his brother, grandmother, and life after prison.

That is when the call came in. I realized that I was deep in the Matrix. In that exact moment I came to the realization that Hiphop did not belong here. Keep in mind that by Hiphop I am not referring to the acts [elements], but the self. How can the self, which is real, exist in an artificial reality?

I left the presentation broken hearted because like Cypher I was bringing the real [Zion] to Babylon [Matrix]. What I have learned from my experience in the Matrix is that

you can not bring what is not attainable to those who think it is attainable. The knowledge of the acts is attainable, but knowledge of the self is not attainable. This is why one can read books and articles or watch movies and feel as if they have become enlightened about Hip-hop, but I ask “what has one truly become enlightened of?”

*When the Hip-hop masters pronounce the mind to be not attainable or graspable, they mean that the mind is no-mind, that there is no substance or existence or being or subjectness which can be held out as if it were a table or a car or gaseous body or an atomic particle or a logical concept, or something that can be definitively brought down to the intellectually analysable level (Adapted from Suzuki, 1972, p. 22).*

I fell into the trap of bringing the self down to the intellectually analyzable level. The real can navigate through Babylon, but can not exist within Babylon. To exist within Babylon is to be a part of Babylon. The longer you navigate through Babylon the more you become entangled in its webs. You must rejuvenate the mind in the real; otherwise, you begin to believe the illusion to be true.

One can not be part of both the real and Babylon because they are conflicting worlds. The real exists in order to increase knowledge of self, while Babylon exists to hype up the hype. In other words, continually perpetuate the illusions that keep the hype’s non-existence in existence. Beware of the trap of Babylon. The trap of Babylon is to construct an illusion that causes one to focus on the hype, issues insignificant to the self. Sometimes the only way to become conscious of the traps is to have been ensnared by them.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Me: Sometimes it’s hard to see the traps the demons’ set that get us to sell ourselves short. After seeing a lot of cats conforming to the ways of the demons, what kept you from falling in that particular trap?*

*Phase 2: I AM JUST WHO I AM...AND THOUGH I AIN’T PERFECT AND I FAIL IN CERTAIN AREAS...I HAVE NEVER BEEN FAKE...IT JUST MAKES NO SENSE TO ME. I DON’T THINK IT WAS ONLY ABOUT LOOKING UP TO THE REALEST PEOPLE THAT EVER LIVED...BUT AT THE SAME TIME...IF ALL YOU WERE*

*TAUGHT WERE LIES...HOW COULD YOU BE A PART OF THAT??? THAT IS WHY I CANNOT RESPECT POOR CATS...THE SO CALLED DISENFRANCHISED... (HOWEVER ITS SPELLED).....ESPECIALLY BROWN SKINNED CATS...THE SO CALLED NIGGERS... WHO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO TELL THIS TALE PROPERLY WHO LIE LIE LIE...WHEN THEY HAVE BEEN VICTIMIZED STEREO TYPED...HATED...AND THE WHOLE NINE...ON TOP OF ALL THE OTHER S\*\*T...OTHER PEOPLE OF COLOR AND POOR PEOPLE GO THROUGH...AND HAD THEIR HISTORY DISTORTED...*

\* \* \* \* \*

Similar to Phase, I will not respect those whose existence is based off perpetuating an illusion. Those in the real are drawn to what comes from the self. A title of life is not coined by the one living the life, but by the one on the outside who does not understand the life beyond the acts. For example, someone who labels him or herself as “Hiphop” based merely on a set of elements, does not realize that Hiphop lives according to the self. Meaning that Hiphop does not define one’s life, one’s life defines Hiphop. Therefore, Hiphop’s existence rests on the existence of the person.

*Phase 2: technically to me it is just life...not “the so called elements” and so on...just an extension of what we have always done and more...gumbo...at it’s funkiest...all the dope that is dope rolled into a continuous evolving one...*

Babylon’s commodified image of Hiphop [“the so called elements”] causes people to believe that one can become Hiphop if they live a particular lifestyle. How can you become something that already exists within the self? If you become something that was not originally there from the beginning, then you have to ask yourself “how real is that?”

*Phase 2: IN THE MILLENIUM EVERYBODY AND THEIR MOMS IS HIP HOP.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*If you from the BX...  
(Camp Lo, 1997)*

Everyone has their own real. Neo's real was the desert of the real, Zion. My real is the South Bronx. I am part of a South Bronx community. I am not part of a Hiphop community. Understand that without the South Bronx community, the so called Hiphop community would not exist. The South Bronx always has a special place in the heart of those from the South Bronx. Like Camp Lo<sup>44</sup>, those from the South Bronx will always rep the South Bronx. We are protective of our real.

One must be protective of their real. Similar to *The Matrix (1990)*, everyone's real is being infiltrated by the agents of Babylon. The agents of Babylon desire to come into the real in order to commodify it and make it attainable to anyone who desires to attain it. These agents come in various forms, but one thing is for sure they always come with hype. The hype is the smoke screen that allows the agents to enter the real, our communities, undetected.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Devils in the Midst**

*Phase 2: MY NIGGER AND SPIC COMMENT WAS SARCASM...SURELY I KNOW THAT THERE ARE DEVILS IN THE MIDSTS OF THE SO CALLED COMMUNITY. THEY ARE THE A\*\*ES WHO UPHOLD AND STAND BY THE MEDIA DEVILS. THE ONES WHO STAND FOR NOTHING AND NEVER HAVE A WORD TO SAY ON REAL ISSUES. AND FUNNY THING IS MOST OF THOSE MOTHAS F\*\*\*AS ARE EITHER LIMITED AS FAR AS TALENT AND BRAINS OR REALLY DON'T HAVE MUCH TALENT. JUST SOME CORNY A\*\* FAME.*

*AND IN THE SENSE OF THE WORD "DEVIL"...BRO I KNOW NO DOUBT THAT A DEVIL IS A DEVIL IN ANY FORM...SHAPE SIZE OR COLOR...I DON'T DISCRIMINATE. FAKE IS FAKE. FLAKE IS FLAKE. HALFA\*\*ED IS WHAT IT IS. PARTIALLY BE WHAT IT BE. AND I WILL FOREVER CALL IT AS I SEE IT.*

*AND IN DOCUMENTING THE CULTURE WOULD IT HAVE MEANT IT NEVER HAPPENED IF NOT SO?? WE NEVER PUT IT IN BOOKS OR WENT OUT OF THE WAY TO "RECORD" IT OR GO PUBLIC WITH IT. BUT THERE IS*

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<sup>44</sup> Geechi Suede and Sonny Cheba make up the South Bronx group Camp Lo.



*DEFINITELY DOCUMENTATION. BESIDES THE POINT.*

*IN ANOTHER LIGHT FOR SURE...THERE'S PLENTY OF S\*\*T THAT THE SO  
CALLED DOCUMENTATORS DIDN'T RECORD DON'T KNOW NEVER WILL  
KNOW AND NEVER WOULD HAVE KNOWN IF NOT FOR THE ULTIMATE  
REASON THAT THIS S\*\*T EXISTS....US!!!*

*AND THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO LIVED THIS NOT  
JUST THE CELEBS...*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Intelligent fools  
PhD's in illusion  
Masters of mass confusion  
Bachelors in past illusion  
(Hill, 2000b)*

The devils that take credit for our existence come in various disguises. For example, take the “Hip-hop scholar.” Similar to the celebrity who gains their fame off of our existence the “Hip-hop scholar” receives their accolades off of our existence. The “Hip-hop scholar” lectures and writes according to a self that is not their own. How would you define my career as an artist if all I have ever done is take pictures of someone else’s paintings?

The “Hip-hop scholar” does not stop there. The “Hip-hop scholar” develops and teaches courses on Hip-hop perpetuating the illusion that the knowledge of Hip-hop can be attained. If one teaches apart from the self then what are they really teaching? Is Hip-hop not more than a set of elements? By reducing Hip-hop to a set of elements then anyone can order a book from amazon.com or rent a movie from Netflix and become a “Hip-hop expert.”

What’s surprising to me is when I see someone from the real teaching these courses. But then again I am not really surprised because the hype seduces one into keeping the illusion into existence.

*Click Click Flash Flash frosted flakes on the frames  
it's addictive when you know the world is screaming your name  
(Camp Lo, 2007)*

The courses that the “Hip-hop scholar” teaches tend to focus on the acts or what others perceive as the elements of Hip-hop. But even if the course does focus on the acts, unless that person was there or contributed first hand you have to question their account or interpretation.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Phase 2: AND TO THE PSEUDO INTELLECTUAL SCHOLARS AUTHORITIES  
AND SO ON...*

*SURE IF PEOPLE WANNA...MAYBE THEY CAN PAT EM ON THE BACK...BUT  
F\*\*K RIDING THEIR D\*\*KS! COLUMBUS REALLY WASN'T MUCH BUT A  
MYTH TOO. DIED HIS A\*\* IN A CELL. DISCOVERED WHAT???*

*ULTIMATELY... WHAT THIS CONVO IS REALLY ALL ABOUT IS THAT “WE”  
NEED TO START TO GIVE OURSELVES A BIT MORE CREDIT FOR OUR  
EXISTENCE THAN WE DO TO OTHERS WHO IN REALITY ONLY HAVE AN  
EXISTENCE BECAUSE OF US...THE MOVERS SHAKERS MAKERS INVENTORS  
AND COMMUNITY THAT MAKE THIS HAPPEN.*

*OUR PEOPLE DO NOT NEED CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUSSES BRAINWASHING  
THEM CUZ UNLIKE YOURSELF ALOT OF THEM CANNOT SEPARATE MYTH  
FROM REALITY BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT THE GUMPTION OR INSTINCT TO  
QUESTION SO CALLED AUTHORITY...*

*YOU KNOW THE LINE I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE ABOUT  
BELIEVING HALF OF WHAT YOU SEE...ETC??? WELL I DON'T SOAK UP TOO  
MUCH OF THE NEWS EITHER...BUT AT THE SAME TIME I ALWAYS QUESTION  
STUFF. AT THE SAME TIME THE “NEWS” AINT WHAT IT USED TO BE.*

*AND A LOT OF REALITY WAS THROWN IN YA FACE BACK IN THE DAY  
ENOUGH TO LET A BRO KNOW HOW MUCH OF SOME OF WHAT PEOPLE  
WERE BEING TOLD WAS BULLS\*\*T. I IMAGINE THAT ALSO IS PART OF WHY I  
HAVE A MIND OF MY OWN. I LEARNED AT AN EARLY AGE THAT ALOT OF  
“OUR TRUTH IS LIE” AND WHO LIES TO TELL THE TRUTH.*

*I DONT BOW DOWN TO THESE DEMONS...BECAUSE THEY ARENT WORTHY  
OF IT. I'M NOT SAYING YOU DO. YOU KNOW THAT ALOT OF TV IS  
SUBLIMINAL EDUCATION...COWBOYS AND INDIANS...TARZAN IN THE*

*JUNGLE...ETC...ETC... WE KNOW THEY ARE ACTORS BUT THEY ARE ACTING OUT THINGS THAT DO EXIST WHICH BEGIN TO UNCONSCIOUSLY BECOME AN EDUCATION TO REALITY. NATIVES ARE SAVAGES WHO SCALP PEOPLE. AFRICANS ARE SPEARCHUCKING BUFFOONS...CHINESE THIS...GERMANS THAT AND SO ON.*

*EVEN IN A DOCUMENTARY IF YOU GET AN A\*\* TO BE AN A\*\*...HE CAN GIVE YOU AN IDEA THAT ALL THE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN WHAT HE DOES ARE A\*\*ES. AND ALOT OF PEOPLE DO NOT READ INTO THAT BECAUSE THEY COULDNT HAVE A CLUE JUST AS WE DIDNT GROWING UP ON JOHN MOTHAF\*\*KING WAYNE. FEEL ME??*

\* \* \* \* \*

**¡Ya Basta!**

¡Ya Basta!<sup>45</sup> How long will you go around holding on to the illusion? When will you begin to question the world in which you exist to see whether or not it is real or an illusion? What if you do exist in an illusion? Then everything you see and hear around you (the hype) is fagazzie. The demons flood your mind with hype because it is the only way to keep the illusion in existence. The illusion deceives you to think that without its existence you do not exist. The illusion dissipates once you realize it is an illusion. Therefore, the power Babylon has is limited to the power you allow it to have. Do you refuse to be a stereotype in their [Babylon] box? If you refuse then you live not according to the titles and labels of life. The self is defined by the self and nothing more. So, I ask:

*You would rather have a Lexus, some justice, a dream or some substance?  
A beamer, a necklace or freedom?  
Still a nigga like me don't playa hate, I just stay awake  
This real hip hop, and it don't stop until we get the po-po off the block  
(Dead Prez, 2000)*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Phase 2: THERE WAS A TIME THAT WHEN PO PO FRONTED THAT S\*\*T WOULD BE ON THE "NEWS". NOW IT SEEMS LIKE YOU WONT HAVE A JOB*

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<sup>45</sup> Spanish for "enough is enough."

*F\*\*KING AROUND ON A NOTE LIKE THAT. WHEN THAT KID WENT BALLISTIC IN VIRGINNY...JOURNALIST ACT AS IF SUN WAS ILLER THAN MANSON IN HIS SO CALLED RANTINGS. REALLY...LET'S BE REALISTIC. AND WERE THEY REALLY RANTINGS??? IF YOU ARE A F\*\*K UP SO TO SPEAK...THE MEDIA DEVILS ARE GONNA PLAY IT TO THE HILT NO MATTER HOW INTELLIGENT OR LOGICAL YOU MAY HAVE A POINT...*

*BUT AGAIN JOHN Q ASKS NOT TOO MANY QUESTIONS. YOU HAVE CATS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PLANET TRYING TO TELL ME THAT AGENT H<sup>46</sup> HAS MY STORY MORE DOWN PAT THAN I DO. THIS IS THE DAMAGE THAT THEIR SO CALLED DOCUMENTING HAS CREATED.*

*EXPERIENCE LOSES OUT TO A BOOK WRITTEN BY A MO FO WHO LIVED IN THE BACKGROUND...WAY THE F\*\*K IN IT.*

*I DON'T WANT TO BORE YOU...BRO...CUZ EVEN I DON'T KNOW I'M GONNA GO ON LIKE THIS...*

*CERTAIN THINGS LIKE "LIE WARS"...IS GOING TO HAVE DIFFERENT MEANING TO DIFFERENT HEADS. BUT ONE POINT IS THAT WHEN YOU TRY TO TELL FOLKS THAT CERTAIN S\*\*T IN IT IS REALLY PARTIAL...THEY GONNA TRY TO TELL YOU DIFFERENT?? THAT'S A BIT RETARDED.*

*I DON'T PATRONIZE...BUT TO A DEGREE HOWEVER YOU GET THIS MAY BE A GOOD THING...BUT NOPE...AGAIN IT GOES BACK TO TRUTH. NOT TO BE FUNNY THIS AIN'T THE NEWS. THIS IS OUR NEWS. F\*\*K ALL THE REPORTERS IF THEY AIN'T DOING THEIR JOB CORRECTLY.*

*YOU GET THE RESPECT... (NOT THAT YOU NEED IT) BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT I TOTALLY OVERSTAND YOU.*

*I JUST HOPE YOU CAN SEE WHERE I'M COMING FROM...BECAUSE WITHOUT A DOUBT MORE OF US NEED TO REALLY SEE S\*\*T FOR WHAT IT IS...*

*WITH S\*\*T LIKE SLAVERY THERE'S ENOUGH STUFF OUT THERE TO LET YOU FIGURE THE TRUTH OUT...WE HAVEN'T GOTTEN TO THAT POINT YET...WE WERE DOING THAT WITH OUR ZINE "IGT" AND WE WILL TRY TO CONTINUE TO DO IT IN SOME WAY...*

*YOU ALSO HAVE TO REALIZE THAT A LOT OF FOLKS REALLY DEPEND ON ALL THAT S\*\*T THAT'S SUPPOSED TO BE THE LAST WORD...*

*ANYWAY...LET ME LET YOUR HEAD REST...*

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<sup>46</sup> Pseudonym

*HOPE YOU SEE THE LIGHT...WE DON'T DO THIS FOR FUN...WE ARE  
NATURALLY BRAIN DAMAGED BY OUR ADDICTION AND LOVE FOR WHAT  
WE DO...*

\* \* \* \* \*

*“Babies with flies on they cheeks, it’s hard to go to sleep  
(Wu-Tang Clan, 2000)”*

I cannot go back to sleep. I refuse to close my eyes. How can one take the blue pill after they have taken the red? How deep into the Matrix are you entangled that you would choose ignorance over truth? Some do and they do it without even realizing that it has been done. It is highly attractive to have your name referenced in the hype, but at what cost? Some of the devils we need to be cautious about are the ones within our own family. Like Cypher, they trade the real for the riches of Babylon.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Is Real Fake?**

*Phase 2: THERE ARE STANDARDS IN ALL WALKS OF LIFE THAT BASICALLY  
CREATE AN ATMOSPHER TO BE RESPECTED OR HERALDED AND VISA  
VERSA. IT’S NOT NECESSARILY WHAT YOU DO BUT HOW YOU DO IT. WHAT  
ONE DOES AND HOW ONE DOES IT. “FAMILY” IS BUT A WORD IF  
INDIVIDUALS DO NOT RESPECT THE TRUE MEANING OF FAMILY.*

*MANY PEOPLE CALL THEMSELVES WRITERS BUT BASED ON WHAT?? IS  
REAL FAKE?? MINUS A STANDARD WHAT YOU HAVE IS A CULTURE THAT  
LACKS A SOLID BASE FOR IT’S BASIS. “EVERYONE IS DOWN EVEN IF THEY  
ARE NOT REALLY DOWN”. SOUL SINGERS WITH NO SOUL. BALLERS WHO  
REALLY CAN’T BALL BUT ARE JUST IN THE GAME WITH A TITLE.  
CARPENTERS WHO TALK THE TALK BUT CAN’T EVEN MAKE A TABLE THAT  
STANDS UP.*

*STANDARDS ARE WHAT MAKE FOR EXCELLENCE. SURE I AM ELITIST BUT  
I’M NOT GASSED TO THE DEGREE THAT I THINK I’M THE BEST OR EVEN A  
“KING” I’M A VISIONARY. AMONGST OTHER THINGS. I’M ONE WHO  
BELIEVES THAT WHEN SOMETHING IS BROKEN THAT YOU FIX IT OR AT  
LEAST TRY TO. ALL MEN MAY HAVE BEEN CREATED EQUAL...BUT ALL MEN  
ARE NOT EQUAL. AND EQUALITY CAN BE “JUDGED” ON THE BASIS OF*

*HOW ONE RESPECTS HIMSELF...OTHERS AND THAT WOULD ALSO FALL INTO THE BORDERS OF TRUTH AND LIE.*

*FAKERS SHOULD NEVER BE RESPECTED. FALSE PROPHETS. FALSE TEACHERS. FALSE SO CALLED PREACHERS. THEY ARE THE FILTH THAT POISONS THE MINDS AND SOULS OF THE MASSES. THAT MAKE US BELEIVE THAT THEY ARE ABOVE US. THAT BLIND US INTO THE ABYSS OF IGNORANCE THAT EMBRACES NATIONS AND HORDES AS IF TO BE A MOTHER TO LEAD WHEN IT TRULY MISGUIDES.*

*THUS A CULTURE OF MAGNIFICENCE IS IN A DISARRAY. WHERE THE MINIONS ARE QUICK TO ADHERE TO OUTSIDERS AND DEVILS WHO WRITE BOOKS AND MOVIES AND QUICKER TO DISMISS THE OBSERVANCE AND EXPERIENCE OF THEIR OWN WHO LOVE IT NATURALLY.*

*ART MAY BE IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER...BUT I'M A FIRM BELIEVER THAT BEINGS POSSESS THE ABILITY TO OVERSTAND CERTAIN THINGS LIKE HOW PROGRESSION CAN MAKE FOR SOMETHING TO BECOME EVEN BETTER. IT'S AS SIMPLE AS OVERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF EVOLUTION. HOW A BUSTED A\*\* STYLE (CHECK OUT THE ORIGINAL WU TANG W...) CAN BE WORKED ON TO LOOK BETTER.*

*ITS BEYOND OPINION ESPECIALLY WHEN ONE BECOMES THE FABRIC OF WHAT THEY DO. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN IT AT THIS MOMENT OR REALLY WANT TO TRY TO THOUGH I FEEL I CAN. BASICALLY IT BOILS DOWN TO POSSESSING THAT 6TH 7TH AND 8TH SENSE THAT SEPARATES WHAT ONE LIKES FROM WHAT ONE CAN OVERSTAND ROCKS.*

*WHEN IT COMES TO SUCH...I'M BEYOND BELIEVEING IN "OPINIONS". LIKE WHEN ONE CUTS NORMALLY YOU BLEED. THAT IS WHERE I'M COMING FROM. NOT TO BE BRASH...OR POP S\*\*T...BUT THE AGENTS<sup>47</sup>...ARE NOT OWED A THING BY ME. THEY DIDN'T MAKE ME AND IT ISN'T NECESSARILY VIA THEIR EXISTENCE THAT I PHYSICALLY DO WHAT I DO... (FOR SURE) OR AM ABLE TO CONTINUE IT.*

*WE CREATED IT...JUST LIKE THE GENERATIONS BEFORE US...DANCED...AND CREATED. THEY/WE JUST STUCK A LABEL ON IT...AND A WHOLE LOTTA DEVILS OF ALL COLORS CAPITOLIZED ON IT AND CALLED THEMSELVES OUR SAVIORS. I'M NOT SAYING THAT YOU BUY IT BUT I DON'T. AND I NEVER WILL OR WILL I EVER PAY HOMAGE TO THESE FOOLS. THEY ARE NEITHER INSPIRATIONAL OR VITAL AS TO WHAT GOES ON AND EXISTS HERE AND INTERGLOBAL DOESN'T MAKE FOR OUR EXISTENCE. EVERYBODY FOR SURE ISN'T TRAVELING OR GETTING LOOK BEHIND THEIR BOOKS AND MOVIES.*

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<sup>47</sup> Pseudonym

*IF ANYTHING THEY ARE THE ONES PROSPERING THE MOST AND THEY ARE AS WELL PARTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SCURGE OF MISCONSTRUCTIONS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF OUR REALITY. ON TOP OF THAT ALOT OF SO CALLED PIONEERS ARE JUST AS BAD AS THEM WHILE THEY NEVER SPEAK UP AND KISS ALOT OF A\*\* TO JUST BE COMPLACENTLY IN LITTLE POSITIONS. IF THE REBELS AND DEFENDERS OF TRUTH BEFORE US WERE LIKE THEM...WE'D STILL BE PICKING COTTON.*

*SO...ULTIMATELY MY TAKE ON ALL OF THIS IS IF WE AS A SO CALLED CULTURE ARE NOT TRYING TO ROCK TO THE BEST OF OUR ABILITY...THEN THE CULTURE WILL ALWAYS BE LACKING AND OPEN TO EVERY AND ANYTHING PASSING OFF AS THE CULTURE. I'M NOT A WRITER. AND I'M NOT A GRAFFITI ARTIST AND WHATEVER I WAS IGNORANT ENOUGH TO ACCEPT IN THE PAST IS LONG GONE JUST AS WHEN I WAS A "NEGRO". ITS ABOUT EDUCATING SELF AND BEING ON TOP OF SELF AS OPPOSED TO ALLOWING SOMEONE ELSE TO DICTATE IT.*

*IF YOU LOOK AT THINGS I DON'T THINK THE "CULTURE" WILL FADE AWAY...IT WILL JUST BECOME BASELESS...AND TASTELESS...AND OR TRANSFORM INTO SOME OTHER LOW LEVEL BULLS\*\*T...ON THE CONTINUUM...IF IT DOES FADE...(IT'S BEEN AROUND A LIFETIME BRO) I DON'T THINK ITS DEMISE IS AROUND THE CORNER.*

*THE TRICKY THING IS CATCHING THE REAL HEADS WHO HAVE REALLY HAVE INFLUENCE AND OR ARE THE FOUNDERS...AND AS WELL...WATCHING WHAT BULLS\*\*T THE HEADS WHO HAVE LEGITIMACY SAY...(EXAMPLE AGENT Z POPPED A FALICY TRYING TO CLAIM THAT THE DJ IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE AEROSOLIST BEING INSPIRED TO PAINT!! )...THE GANG FACTOR...BULLS\*\*T...ETC...YOU MAY HAVE TO SIMPLY EDIT MO FO'S WHO THINK JUST BECAUSE THEY HAVE CRED THAT ANYTHING THEY SAY GOES...*

*WELL IT'S TRUE ABOUT NOT KNOWING YOUR PAST. IF CATS KNEW HOW DOPE THEIR ISH IS...THEY'D SEE HOW MUCH DOPER THEY COULD BE...OR IF THEY RECOGNIZED AND REALIZED IT...AS THEIRS THEY'D BE ABLE TO APPLY IT AND BE THAT MUCH STRONGER...BUT YEP THEM HEDGEHOGS HAVE THEM FEINDING FOR FLAVORLESS FLAVOR.*

*I THINK HISTORICALLY "WE" HAVE ALWAYS LET "THEM" DICTATE WHO WE ARE. IN THE 60'S AND 70'S "NEGROES" WERE NOT TRYING TO HEAR THAT...THEUS WE "BECAME" BLACK FOLKS...NOW WE HAVE ULTIMATELY TRANSFORMED OURSELVES INTO NIGGAS...AFTER SO MUCH BEING AGAINST BEING NIGGERS. AIN'T THAT SOME FUNNY S\*\*T??*

*WE NEED TO GET BACK TO THE ZINES...AND OTHER FORMS OF INFO THAT ARE GONNA MAKE INTELLIGENT HEADS THINK...ASK QUESTIONS...AND*

*REJECT THE BULLS\*\*T...AND ASSERTING IN OURSELVES THAT WE ARE THE  
KEEPERS OVERSEERS OVERSTANDERS AND ORCHESTRATORS OF OUR OWN  
CASTLES...AND DO NOT NECESSARILY NEED THE 1 2 AND 3 CENTS OF  
MASSA AND OTHER SO CALLED AUTHORITIES TO AUTHENTICATE AND  
APPROPRIATE WHAT WE DO TO MAKE IT ACCEPTABLE AND LEGITAMATE  
TO US AND THE MASSES AT LARGE.*

*FOR LACK OF A SUPER INTELLIGENT PHRASE TO SUM UP MY FEELINGS.  
F\*\*K ALL OF THEM.*

*I'LL NEVER BUY INTO WHAT THEY ARE SELLING AND I KNOW THAT IS  
EXACTLY WHERE YOU ARE COMING FROM.*

*YOU EVEN HAVE SUB<sup>48</sup> TALKING ABOUT HOW OUR AEROSOL MOVEMENT  
“BEGAN” IN PHILLY... I LOVE SUB BUT LIKE HE SAID PEOPLE NEED TO  
STICK TO WHAT THEY KNOW,...AND I'M ABOUT TO TRY MY BEST TO CHECK  
HIM ON THAT NOTE...BECAUSE YOU KNOW “HIS STORY” HAS A TENDENCY  
TO BECOME “THE STORY” THE MORE THAT IT IS TOLD...AND THEN TO  
CORRECT IT BECOMES A REAL CRAZY JOB TO DO...*

*THAT WAS PART OF THE MESSAGE OF THOSE WHO DIED TO SET ME FREE.  
IT'S WAY BEYOND HIP HOP OR A CAN OF PAINT. IT'S ABOUT LIFE IN THE  
FRAMEWORK OF IT ALL...*

*RESPECT IS ULTIMATE. WITHOUT IT THERE WILL NEVER BE ANY  
PEACE...ALL IT TAKES IS TO LOOK AROUND PAST AND PRESENT AND SEE  
HOW EVIDENT THAT IS...*

*ONE LOVE...*

\* \* \* \* \*

## **I'm Out**

*I give a damn 'bout your car but then that would be  
(Andre 3000, 2007).*

To reiterate my point on the power of Babylon, the power that Babylon has is limited only to the power that I allow it to have. The more I continue to talk about the illusions of Babylon the more I am responsible for keeping them in existence. For example, take Babylon's socially constructed Hip-hop caricature. Whether I support it or critique it by

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<sup>48</sup> Pseudonym



merely talking about it I continue to keep the illusion into existence as if it was real. That's why it is finished.

*Sometimes I don't want to be bothered  
Sometimes I just want a quiet life, with  
Me and my babies, me and my lady  
Sometimes I don't want to get into no war  
[all people to be free, to be free...]  
Sometimes I don't wanna be a soldier  
Sometimes I just wanna be a man, but  
My umi said shine your light on the world  
Shine your light for the world to see  
My abi said shine your light on the world  
Shine your light for the world to see  
(Mos Def, 1999)*

My journey is not finished, but this chapter in my journey has come to an end. I no longer wish to step out of the self in order to examine the self so that Babylon can reduce the self to only what Babylon can grasp, the intellectually analyzable level; the tangibles; the acts. However, I understand that without this chapter in my journey I may not have been enlightened. I needed the experiences of Babylon in order to understand the fullness of the real.

*We must realize that there is besides the realm of the thinkables and understandable another of unthinkable and ununderstandables. Though they are not exclusive of each other – in which case would cease to be itself – they are to be kept in thought as separate. When we are thus mindful of this separation or distinction which is in reality no distinction, we can understand how the two contradictory realms enter into each other in the most thorough-going manner of interfusion. This is called the understanding of the ununderstandables, and it is this understanding that makes one master of oneself in whatever situation one may find oneself (Suzuki, 1972, p. 17)*

As move forward in my journey, I understand that Babylon will continue to exist whether I acknowledge it or not. I originally thought that my journey was to destroy Babylon, but now I understand that it is to bring Babylon's throne down. In other words, the one who sits upon a throne is a ruler. By bringing the throne of Babylon down, I am saying

that the illusions of Babylon no longer dictate my existence. As a result, I begin to disrupt Babylon [Matrix].

All contain the potential within the self to disrupt Babylon [Matrix]. Note that my intentions are not to discover that potential in someone other than myself. How can I discover something which already exists within you? I am not about to take credit for your enlightenment. Understand that only you can “emancipate yourselves from mental slavery; None but ourselves can free our minds (Marley, 1980).”

Respect to the ones who died that gave us the truth that has the power to free our minds. This is bigger than Hiphop or any other title. This is about life. Not just ours, but also the life beyond our own.

The choice is yours and yours only. “You take the blue pill, the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes... Remember, all I’m offering is the truth, nothing more (Silver, 1999).

One Love...

\* \* \* \* \*

*I learned something from this experience. I learned that the greatest gift of all, the saddest thing in life is wasted talent and the choices that you make will shape your life forever. But you can ask anybody from my neighborhood and they will just tell you this is another Bronx tale. (melody plays... On the streets of the Bronx is where I wanna be/on the corner of Manida and Spofford singing good ole harmony)*  
(De Niro, 1993)

## *ENCORE<sup>49</sup>*

*[crowd roars]*

*Now can I get an encore, do you want more  
Cookin raw with the South Bronx boy  
So for one last time I need y'all to roar*

*Now what the hell are you waitin for  
After me, there shall be no more  
So for one last time, nigga make some noise*

*[Verse One]*

*Who you know fresher than J? Riddle me that  
The rest of y'all know where I'm lyrically at  
Can't none of y'all mirror me back  
Back to take over the globe, now break bread  
your man J cracked the can open again  
Who you gon' find dooper than him with no pen  
just draw off inspiration  
Soon you gon' see you can't replace him  
with cheap imitations for THESE GENERATIONS  
(Adapted from Jay-Z, 2003)*

\* \* \* \* \*

I had always planned to add this final chapter. My intention with this chapter was to describe the presentation I prepared for my manuscript defense. The presentation was an elaborate performance that captured what I have learned along my journey. However, that has changed. I will still describe my presentation, but I will also tell the story of one last unexpected battle between Babylon [Matrix] and myself.

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<sup>49</sup> Jay-Z. (2003). *Encore*. On *The Black Album* [CD]. United States. Def Jam.

**March 17, 2008**

I awoke earlier than necessary that morning. I was unable to sleep due to the anxiety of my defense later that afternoon. I was nervous for two reasons. One being I did not want to mess up during my presentation. My defense was not going to be a traditional presentation. Instead of a PowerPoint presentation, I had prepared a performance that captured what I have learned along my journey. I had planned to perform some live songs and play prerecorded tracks accompanied by some videos I produced.

The other cause of my nervousness was that my work was no longer in my hands, but in the hands of my committee. I documented my journey in hopes of reaching a particular audience, the youth. I felt as if I accomplished that goal, but now my work was in the hands of those that I was not sure would understand what I set out to accomplish.

*Though seeing, many do not see; though hearing, many do not hear or understand.  
(Matthew 13:13 New International Version)*

Throughout my journey, I had a few unofficial committee members that helped in the development of my thoughts and ideas. Throughout the writing process I would send them chapters as I finished them. They would then respond with comments. For example, they would share points that they liked and points I needed to expand on in order to fully verbally paint the picture I was trying to paint. Their feedback was very beneficial because these unofficial committee members were friends of mine who understood the audience (the youth) I was speaking to and more importantly related to the lived experiences I shared. These unofficial committee members are the ones who gave me the most encouraging and supportive feedback along my journey. For example, after I gave Tej a copy of my draft he called me the next day saying that he had stayed up the entire night reading because he could

not put it down. Another example was Aohnte. He would constantly email and send me text messages quoting sections that I had written which truly resonated with his own experiences. I cannot forget Rich, who during practices for my presentation, would whelm up with emotion from the lyrics I had written and the videos I had produced. Ultimately, it was the confirmation from my unofficial committee that truly validates my work.

### **8:15 am**

I left to get a haircut. While driving to the barbershop I listened to music that would calm my anxiousness as well as boost my energy up for the performance.

*Sometimes we find peace in beats and breaks  
(Common, 2007)*

After my haircut I decided to visit my mentor and friend, Dr. James E. Osler II. I knew talking with him would get me better prepared for my defense.

### **9:00 am**

I sat down in Dr. Osler office and expressed my nervousness. I told him that my work was for the people, but I am not sure that those whose hands my work was in would understand that. Dr. Osler started to tell me this story about Barack Obama. Dr. Osler told me that when Barack was back in Chicago doing work during the early stages of his career he began to doubt his mission. As Barack contemplated quitting, he looked out a window and saw some young Black boys throwing rocks at a building. Barack then understand that if he quit then who would speak on behalf of these boys. Dr. Osler explained that Barack was a voice for a silenced community and that I was voice for a silenced community. He encouraged me that my committee would clearly see that my work was for the people. I left

Dr. Osler's office feeling empowered. As I walked out the building I raised my arms and said to myself "I'm Ready."

**3:00 pm**

I walked up to the podium and looked out into the audience. The room was filled with family, friends, and my committee members. I took a deep breath and began reading my preface<sup>50</sup>:

*Me: Voice (n): the person or other agency through which something is expressed or revealed (Voice, 2008).*

*On September 30, 1946, Hector Juan Perez was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico. When Hector was a young boy his father would give him [Hector] musical lessons in hope that one day he would become a famous saxophonist. Over time Hector lost interest in playing the sax; instead his attention turned to the music coming from his radio. The sounds of Jibaro<sup>51</sup> inspired Hector to become a singer. (Lavoe, 2008a)*

*At the age of 17, Hector pursued his dream of becoming a singer by moving to New York City. During his first week in New York City, Hector was invited to a rehearsal for a newly formed group. During the rehearsal, the lead singer was unable to hit his notes so Hector decided to help him by showing him the correct tune. After hearing Hector sing, the group immediately made Hector their lead singer. (Lavoe, 2008a)*

*During this time, there were many Latino singers, but none could sing like Hector. In order to separate Hector from the others, a former manager gave him the Spanish nickname "La Voz" which means "the voice." Soon after, Hector Juan Perez changed his name to Hector Lavoe<sup>52</sup>. Thus, a legend was born. (Lavoe, 2008b)*

*Hector Lavoe was a voice for a lot of people from Boricuas on the island to Boricuas in the Bronx. He sang songs about his beautiful isla de encanto in Yo Naci en Puerto Rico, to his battles against his own demons in Aguanile.*

*Similar to Hector Lavoe, I am a voice. Within this particular story, I am the voice of those who grew up on Manida like Gilbert, Jose, Angel, Juan, Espy, and DJ. I am the voice of those who grew up in the South Bronx like Phase 2, Tej, and Aohnte. I am the voice for those*

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<sup>50</sup> I have reproduced my preface in this chapter for the convenience of the reader.

<sup>51</sup> Traditional Puerto Rican folk or country music

<sup>52</sup> French for "the voice"

*who did not grow up in the South Bronx, but who can relate to what I have written. Ultimately, I am a voice that desires to be heard by those who will come after me.*

*The youth are the reason I have told this story. The most important question I was asked during my dissertation proposal defense was, “Who is your audience?” It was the night before my dissertation proposal defense and as I went through pictures of the kids from Potentialis that I realized that the kids were my audience. My story is an explanation to them addressing why things are the way they are. The reason why I am ambiguous in naming the “things” is because the “things” can mean anything depending on the world in which they exist.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Instead of reading the final paragraph, I showed a short video clip that contained an audio recording of me reading the last paragraph. However, instead of reading the phrase “wake up” I spliced in scenes from Spike Lee’s films *Do the Right Thing* and *School Daze*.

*Video clip: (alarm clock ringing) Waaaake up. Wake up, wake up wake up. Up you wake, up you wake, up wake, up you waaaake. (Lee, 1989)*

*Me: This is a call to wake up and break the chains of mental slavery. This is a call to*

*Video clip: (Laurence Fishburne screams) WAKE UP! (Lee, 1988)*

*Me: and recognize the illusions that surround us. This is a call to*

*Video clip: (Laurence Fishburne screams) WAKE UP! (Lee, 1988)*

*Me: and distinguish between hype and reality. This is a call to*

*Video clip: (Laurence Fishburne screams) WAKE UP! (Lee, 1988)*

*Me: and differentiate between caricature and self.*

*Video clip: (Laurence Fishburne screams) Please wake up. (alarm clock rings) (Lee, 1988)*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Me: A lot of you have seen me with my earplugs in. You probably assumed that I was listening to music, and I was, but in actuality it was more than that. You see I have been traveling. I have been able to take long trips in the matter of seconds. For example, a trip to the Bronx, which would normally take 9 hours has been reduced to a simple click on my iPod. My travels have taken me to the past, present, and future. My project (I hold up the*

*manuscript) has been me documenting my journey and the things I had learned along the way. I initially embarked on this journey thinking that I would come to a better understanding of Hip-hop. And I have. However, what I learned was bigger than Hip-hop. I was not alone on this journey. I took this journey with a friend of mine. His name, Phase 2.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Video clip: (scene from Beat Street)*

*Ramon: Yo man not to high on that cloud alright you're gonna go over that Phase 2 up there.*

*Lee: Aw, c'mon I ain't stupid.*

*Tracy: What's Phase 2?*

*Ramon: Phase 2 is the guy who practically invented the idea of burners. Before that everything was just his little tag. Oh, tag is your name and this...that's a burner. (Belafonte & Picker, 1984)*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Me: That is typical of how Phase 2 is recognized. "Phase 2 the Aerosol artist." My journey and conversations with Phase 2 brought me to understand the man behind the art. As a result, I understood myself more clearly. Phase 2 is a mysterious character, like a teacher from a Wushu flick (Kung-fu movie). That is how I saw our relationship along this journey. I was the student and he was the teacher. I thought I was going gain insight on Hip-hop.*

*This journey was an inner conflict between me, an young Puerto Rican man from the South Bronx and now a young Puerto Rican man from the South Bronx in academia. Phase 2 once told me "ON YOUR MISSION...JUST DO IT...BRO FOR REAL...DON'T LET ANYTHING DETER YOU...BUT DO IT FIRSTLY FOR YOURSELF NOT FOR THEM...FEEL ME??ONE LOVE"*

*I really feel what Phase has been telling me. I agree that I am on a mission; however, I am unsure what that mission is. Perhaps I am on mission for knowledge, truth, and understanding; but of what? I am unclear of my final destination (if a final destination exists).*

*This is not the beginning of my mission for I have been on this journey for quite some time. However, this is the start of me documenting my experiences in order to make sense of them. The significance of documenting my story results from a feeling of personal responsibility to do something positive if not for future generations then in hopes of informing just one – my own.*

*"The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it (John 1:5 New International Version)."*



*This therapeutic journey was not to reflect on what those in the dark label as “Hiphop,” but to reflect on what Phase and I and many others identify as the complexities of our life and experiences. In many of our conversations, Phase has reiterated that Hiphop is not about elements, but about life.*

*In the words of Phase 2 “i thought i got into this...technically to me it is just life...not “the so called elements” and so on...just an extension of what we have always done and more...gumbo...at it’s funkiest...all the dope that is dope rolled into a continuous evolving one”*

*And that is what this presentation is about. It’s about Phase’s 2 life and more importantly my life. This journey mirrors Phase 2’s narrative against my own lived experiences in order to create a dialogue that speaks to Hiphop as culturally lived experiences rather than a set of elements (rapping, B-boyin, aerosol art, and dee jaying) to which Hiphop is often reduced. A lot of my inner conflict comes from me trying to make meaning of my experiences through a Hiphop lens rather than letting my experiences make meaning of Hiphop. Therefore, this mission both has nothing to do about Hiphop, and at the same time has everything to do about Hiphop.*

*And that is what you will experience. What I learned in examining my own life as a well as the life of Phase 2, but in an artistic expression.*

*Before we start. Introduce Tej. Since Phase 2 could not be here today I am going to have Tej, one of my best friends as well as Phase 2’s nephew stand in his place.*

[Me]  
So for the sake of time  
Let me rap this up in the form of a rhyme  
I am going to start my story from where it all began  
Now understand  
Many places I lived  
Up and down the east coast roam  
But there is only one place that I call home  
The South Bronx  
I only have eyes for you

\* \* \* \* \*

What preceded next was a video clip that consisted of a prerecorded audio track of me reading the section I wrote in which I adapted a scene from the movie *A Bronx Tale* to fit my story and pictures that visually showed what I was describing.

*(Video Song playing during video is The Flamingos (1959) I Only Have Eyes for You. While the video begins I sit down and remove my button down shirt. I now am wearing a Tito Puente shirt).*

*This is the Hunts Point section of the Bronx, my home, a world into itself. You can get to any borough fifteen minutes from here, but they might as well be three thousand miles away. (Quartet begins to sing...On the streets of the Bronx is where I wanna be/standing on the corner singing good ole harmony) It was 1992 and Hiphop was the sound of the streets. What a time it was. My friends and I would go to Yankee Stadium and watch the Yankees win. That's my building. I lived right there on the second floor, 660 Manida St. There's my corner. The corner of Manida and Spofford. This is where my friends and I would spend most of our time. You would have never known my story until one day... (Adapted from De Niro, 1993)*

\* \* \* \* \*

*(Video fades to black. Instrumental of The Fugees (1996) Zealots begins to play. Tej walks up the podium).*

*[Tej]*

*Another MC loses soul tonight, whoa  
I pray that you beg to Jesus Christ, why  
O lord, father don't let them bury we, whoa*

*The basics are kept from my people by design  
Incline your mind, get a spine, you might find  
Freedom of speech  
Seems the demons always devising a plan  
And you believing  
Evolution being brought to light and put on a map  
Our mindlessness is leaving the youth in the dark  
As we live on a fine line  
If only I can rewind time  
And let my light shine  
And let my rhymes sparkle in the dark  
If you only see your way  
To be your own master*

*[Me]*

*Please, nobodies that broke not to pay attention  
Listen to the metaphors that we mention  
The message is simple  
Stop the music (instrumental stops)  
I spit it without the instrumental  
"understand I got the gift of speech  
And it's a blessin,*

*So listen to the lesson I preach  
I talk sense condensed into the form of a poem  
Full of knowledge from my toes to the top of my dome  
I'm kinda young--but my tongue speaks maturity (Special Ed, 1989)"  
See my rhymes...  
See my rhymes...  
[snap fingers]*

*(Instrumental plays again starting with the following interlude by Lauryn Hill from the original Zealots song)*

*See my rhymes are the type of fly rhymes  
That can only get down with my crew  
And if you try to take lines or bite rhymes  
We'll show you how the refugees do  
(The Fugees, 1996)*

*[Me]  
Behold  
Listen to how the stories unfold  
It's about going further  
In this Babylon frontier  
The devils got us in a scramble  
Following the worst examples  
Take this to heart  
The worst thing we can do  
Is leave the youth in the dark  
Hip-hop wasn't born in the park  
Hospitals in the Bronx is where it had its start  
It's was an extension  
Of all we ever were even  
Before our conception  
That's why  
Hip-hop does not define my life  
My life defines Hip-hop  
Once again stop (instrumental stops)  
Phase once told me that I am doing the academic thing because I can  
People don't plan to fail  
They just fail to plan  
Let me put it in terms you will understand  
Me without a plan  
Is like an mc without a mic in his hand  
Like a B-boy without a freeze  
Like a DJ without some needles  
McCartney without the Beatles  
The cause without the people*

*Can ya really feel me?  
Because like Lauryn said*

*(The following verse by Lauryn Hill from the original Zealots song plays)*

*And even after all my logic and my theory,  
I add a muthaf\*\*ka so you ignint niggas hear me  
(The Fugees, 1996)  
(Music fades off)*

*Me: Phase 2 constantly refers to our life as Gumbo. Gumbo is based upon French stews and soups, and is influenced by Spanish, African, Native American, and other Anglo Southern groups. The Spanish brought into the cuisine the use of cooked onions, green peppers, tomatoes, and garlic. African chefs brought with them the skill of spices and introduced okra. Native foodstuffs, such as crawfish, shrimp, oysters, crabs, and pecans found their way into both Cajun and Creole cuisine. From the Choctaw Indians came the use of filé, a powdered herb from sassafras leaves, to thicken gumbo. So often the emergence of a new dish was the result of creative chefs intermingling their cooking experience and heritage with the tastes of their employers (Gumbo, 2008b). I am going to take you on a trip to the South Bronx and give you a taste of our Gumbo.*

*\* \* \* \* \**

*(Video starts with clip from the documentary The Freshest Kids while the instrumental from Nas' (2006) song Can't Forget About You plays low in the background.)*

*Action: A lot of people think that if you're New York and you're from the Bronx that you no good. But we're from the Bronx and we out here to show everybody that we're good. That the Bronx just don't got bums and ghettos, but it got something good to cause we're the freshest kids out here. (Brenner, 2002)*

*(Audio clip plays while a subway map of the Bronx appears) This ain't New York this the Bronx. (Belafonte & Picker, 1984)*

*(A prerecorded track begins to play louder as descriptive video clips and images accompany the lyrics written by Tej and myself.)*

*If Your From the BX<sup>53</sup>*

*[Tej]*

*It comes a day in my life  
When I wanna sit back relax  
And think about my life story  
I remember playing ball on Webster with Ski and Lee  
Yeah, that's another Bronx story*

---

<sup>53</sup> The instrumental used is from the Nas' (2006) song *Can't Forget About You*

*I was far from an average jumper  
It felt good  
When cats would give me dap in the hood  
Never tooted my own horn  
Even though I should  
My recollection was misunderstood*

*[Me]  
So take a ride on this nostalgic trip  
The BX is memorable  
Like Posada and Jeter's flip  
The memories are unforgettable  
From my block to your block  
Wow, I need a moment ya'll  
See I almost felt a tear drop*

*[Chorus]  
These streets hold my deepest days  
This hood taught me golden ways  
Made me (truly this is what made me)  
Break me (not a things gonna break me)  
These streets hold my deepest days  
This hood taught me golden ways  
Made me (truly this is what made me)  
Break me (not a things gonna break me)  
Oh, I'm that history, I'm that block  
I'm that lifestyle, I'm that that spot  
I'm that kid by the number spot  
That's my past that made me hot  
Here's my lifelong anthem  
Can't forget about you (Can't forget about you)*

*[Tej]  
Growing up hearing cats like Johnny Nash, Prince Buster,  
mainstream rock like da Beatles*

*[Me]  
Can't forget about pea shooters, skelsie tops,  
quarter waters, ditty bops*

*[Tej]  
Can't forget about Zeppelin, Chicago, Aretha,  
James Brown, and mad fly at the fever*

*[Me]  
Can't forget about coquitos and piraguas  
Playing basketball on crates, pitching in for hours*

*[Tej]  
Earth, Wind, and Fire*

*Some slow jams*  
*Luther, Cameo*  
*Some old jams*  
*[Me]*  
*Before fun passes and metro cards*  
*Before Jeter and A-rod*  
*[Tej]*  
*It's the basis of this culture we can Hip-hop*  
*Gumbo at the funkier we can't stop*  
*[Me]*  
*Can't forget about Hunts Point, Whitlock, Sound View*  
*Before 718 when it was 212*  
*Can't forget about Jimmy Jazz, Dr. Jay's, Jean Star*  
*It's the things that we remember that make us who we are*  
*[Tej]*  
*Yeah, Soul wasn't black or white it was just soulful*  
*So don't dwell on the elements*  
*Just look at my environment*  
*It made me*  
  
*[Chorus]*  
*These streets hold my deepest days*  
*This hood taught me golden ways*  
*Made me (truly this is what made me)*  
*Break me (not a things gonna break me)*  
*These streets hold my deepest days*  
*This hood taught me golden ways*  
*Made me (truly this is what made me)*  
*Break me (not a things gonna break me)*  
*Oh, I'm that history, I'm that block*  
*I'm that lifestyle, I'm that spot*  
*I'm that kid by the number spot*  
*That's my past that made me hot*  
*Here's my lifelong anthem*  
*Can't forget about you (Can't forget about you)*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Me: The initial intention of my emails was to learn about Hip-hop from Phase 2's perspective. However, I was guilty of narrowly thinking of Hip-hop in terms of elements (rapping, boyin, aerosol art, and dee jaying) instead of seeing it as life (my life). During a period of about two months, Phase and I went back and forth over email talking about life in the South Bronx, sports, music, and movies. At first, I thought I was collecting background information on Phase 2's life to setup his perspective on Hip-hop. What I did not realize was that Phase's life was Hip-hop.*

*As I reflect on Phase 2's experiences and my own, I understand that central to Hip-hop is simplicity, creativity, and innovativeness. However, I am not referring to the artistic forms of expression that comes from the culture (though they do contain these characteristics), but rather the experiences that inspire the artistic forms of expression.*

*Hip-hop speaks from a particular voice that embodies simplicity, creativity, and innovativeness. This voice has its roots from neighborhoods all over the South Bronx, but still can speak to people all over the world. You might not be from the South Bronx, but yet still share some of the same experiences as Phase 2 and I.*

*The elements are inspired by the lived experience. The music, the movement, the visual art are just the mediums for which many chose to express themselves. All art tells a story. The best storytellers are the ones who are vulnerable and share from the heart. This is why in documenting my journey, In the words of Mos Def "I Put my heart and soul into this, I hope you feel me, From where I am, to wherever you are, I mean that sincerely (Mos Def, 1999)."*

*My journey is similar to the movie the matrix. My interactions with Phase 2 remind me of the interactions between Morpheus and Neo.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*(A video clip from the movie The Matrix plays)*

*Morpheus: This is your last chance. After this, there is no going back. You take the blue pill and the story ends. You wake in your bed and you believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill and you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes. Remember that all I am offering is the truth. Nothing more.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Me: In this scene Morpheus gives Neo the option to take the blue pill and remain mentally imprisoned within the artificial reality known as the Matrix or take the red pill and understand that the world in which he exists is make-believe. If he chooses to awaken, then he must join the rebellion to free humanity from the bondage of those who construct the Matrix.*

*In terms of my journey, the South Bronx is the real, and my experience outside of the South Bronx is the Matrix. Within the real, Hip-hop is a reflection of life. Within the Matrix, Hip-hop is a socially constructed entity which mentally enslaves humanity to believe that you must act, talk, and dress a particular way in order to be part of this entity. The choice is yours. You can take the blue pill and remain in the Matrix pursuing an image that does not exist or you can take the red pill and join the rebellion against those who construct and promote the illusion of being Hip-hop.*

*We will now journey into a realm, the real, in which we will discover truth. A truth that "though seeing, many do not see; though hearing, many do not hear or understand*

*Once I again I would like to reiterate what Phase 2 has been so adamant about, that Hip-hop “is just life...not “the so called elements” and so on...just an extension of what we have always done and more...gumbo...at it’s funkier...all the dope that is dope rolled into a continuous evolving one...*

*Our gumbo is too complex to be labeled by a single word, “Hip-hop.” How could we ever define our lives in terms of something that would not exist if we did not exist? To label our lives “Hip-hop” is to confine it to a small box filled with a certain style of music, dance, dress, and speech. Are we not more than that?*

*One day I saw this book in my advisor’s office that was supposed to use some Hip-hop approach to teach the S.A.T.’s. The book sparked my interest so I picked it up and opened it. I came across this quote “Hip Hop is as diverse as life” (Harrison and Rappaport, 2006). Wrong, Hip-hop is life. In the back of this book they give a definition for Hip-hop it reads:*

*Hip-Hop is a cultural movement born in the Bronx, New York in the late 1970’s. At that time different cultural elements converged to form a new and dynamic urban art. Party DJ’s were placing two turntables next to each other to mix and splice songs and were even beginning to manipulate the record by hand (scratching). MC’s (master of ceremonies, i.e. the person with the microphone) would sometimes front for these DJ’s, pumping up a crowd by rapping rhyming lyrics. Athletic dancers invented a new freewheeling dance style called break dancing. And graffiti artists were using spray cans to create enormous works of art on Subway cars and throughout the urban landscape (Harrison and Rappaport, 2006, p. 121).*

*This is a common answer given when someone asks, “What is Hip-hop?” However, this answer, like many others, defines it in terms of the elements. Being from the Bronx, I know that there is more to the Bronx than just MC’s, DJ’s, parties, “graffiti,” and “break dancing.” Hip-hop was not born in the South Bronx. People like Phase 2 were born in the South Bronx. And because of people like Phase 2, we are able to share in the “extension of what they have always done and more.” The reason why Hip-hop has its roots in the South Bronx is because the people who it extended from are from the South Bronx. To define Hip-hop in terms of elements is to say that Hip-hop could have well started anywhere else. To talk about Hip-hop is to talk about life. If you want a historical account of Hip-hop then you would talk about the life of those in the South Bronx which would take you further back in time than 1977.*

*It is kind of funny to think about how the year later 1977 gets coined as the year Hip-hop began, but I hear all the time. “Hip-hop started in the Bronx in 1977” or “Hip-hop started in the Bronx during the late 70s.” I pose the question, what happened to 1976 or what happened during the early 70s? Did the culture known as “Hip-hop” not exist prior to 1977? In 1977, did someone one day find a magic lamp buried in the South Bronx and upon dusting it, off accidentally summoned a genie who said, “you shall spin on your backs, spray paint on trains, mix records on two turntables, and tell rhythmic stories on the mic and when people ask what you are doing you shall respond, ‘I am doing Hip-hop.’” That’s ridiculous. If*



*someone wanted a general historical account of the elements that extend from Hiphop then the answer I read in the book I found might suffice; however, if someone really wanted to know what Hiphop was it would be virtually impossible to give an answer because Hiphop is a reflection of lived experiences. I want to read to you an excerpt from book that describes Zen. The way the book describes Zen is how I would describe Hiphop. So as I read, instead of saying Zen, I will use the word to Hiphop.*

*You ask, "What is Hiphop?"*

*I answer, "Hiphop is that which makes you ask the question," because the answer is where the question arises. The answer is no other than the question itself."*

*"Do you then mean that I am Hiphop itself?"*

*"Exactly. When you ask what Hiphop is, you are asking who you are, what your self is. It is for this reason that the Hiphop masters often tell you not to ask where the donkey is when you are right on it, or not to seek for another head when yours has been on your shoulders ever since you were born. It is the height of stupidity to ask what your self is when it is this self that makes you ask the question."*

*Now, you know what Hiphop is, for it is Hiphop that tells you what your self is, and that that self is Hiphop. This now saves you from asking such a stupid question*

*(Adapted from Suzuki, 1972).*

*The Hiphop master is the one that knows that the "true Hiphoppa" does not exist. The true hiphoppa is caricature. On my journey I struggled to find the master. I wanted to know who they were, where are they located, how would they answer my questions. Along my journey Phase 2 gave me subtle clues where I could find the master. However, there was just one place I was not looking*

\* \* \* \* \*

*(A video clip from the movie The Last Dragon plays)*

*Teacher: (hands Leroy a fortune cookie) Here, it contains everything you need to find your way to the golden glow.*

*(In confusion, Leroy opens the fortune cookie only to find that it does not contain a fortune.)*

*Teacher: (laughs) Think Leroy. You have just opened a fortune cookie without a fortune, written by a master who does not exist, to find a solution to a problem whose answer you already know.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Me: Asking someone about Hiphop is like asking someone else, "Who am I?" Why do I need someone else to tell me who I am? I am going to read another excerpt from the book on Zen.*

*The master said, “why not ask about your own mind or self instead of somebody else’s?”*

*“What then is myself?”*

*You have to see what is known as the secret act.”*

*What is the secret act?*

*The master opened his eyes and then closed them.*

*Is this the secret act? What has the opening and shutting of the eyes to do with the self? There is nothing secret about it. But suppose there is, what has it to do with the understanding of the self? After raising my eyebrows or coughing or laughing, I do not seem to be any wiser in penetrating into the secrecy of self which is behind the acts. Did the disciple get enlightened by observing the master’s “secret act”? It is recorded that he then knew where to look for his self or mind.*

*For ordinary people this understanding is impossible because their questions do not come out of the depth of their being (Suzuki, 1972, p. 2).*

*If I gain knowledge about the acts [elements], am I any wiser in understanding the self, which is behind the acts? I have wrestled with this inner conflict of who is the master. Who knows my self better than anyone? I do. Now I understand that I am the master.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*(Video clip from the movie the Last Dragon plays)*

*Sho’nuff: Now when I say, “Who’s the master,” you say, “Sho’nuff.” Who’s the master?*

*Leroy: (shakes his head no)*

*(Sho’nuff punches then kicks Leroy)*

*Sho’nuff: I’m going to ask you one more time. Who is the master? Uh, Uh*

*Leroy: (shakes his head no)*

*(Sho’nuff punches Leroy)*

*Sho’nuff: Who’s the master? I can’t hear you Leroy.*

*(Sho’nuff grabs Leroy by the back of his head and dunks it into a large drum of water.)*

*Eddie: Drown him for Christ sake. Will ya drown him!*

*Sho’nuff: I said who’s the master? I can’t hear you. Who is the master?*

*(Again, Sho'nuff grabs Leroy by the back of his head and dunks it into a large drum of water.)*

*(Leroy's vision) Teacher: There is one place you have not looked and it is there only there that you shall find the master.*

*(Leroy's vision) Laura: You sure look like a master to me.*

*Sho'nuff: Alright Leroy, who is the one and only master?*

*Leroy: I am.*

*(Sho'nuff throws a punch, but Leroy catches his fist in his hand)*

*Leroy: (laughing) I am (Leroy begins to glow)*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Me: In my conversations with Phase 2 he talks about the hype. Let me read something to you that describes the hype:*

*What's on the radio, propaganda, mind control  
And turnin it on is like puttin on a blindfold  
Cuz when you bringin the real you don't get ro-tation  
Unless you take over the station  
And yeah I know it's part of they plans  
To make us think it's all about party and dancin  
And yo it might sound good when you spittin your rap  
But in reality, don't nobody live like that (Dead Prez, 2002)*

*The hype is a misperception of reality. The hype misguides you into being consumed with issues that are insignificant. The hype causes one to mentally fall asleep. I refuse to go to sleep. I can't fall asleep.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*(A prerecorded track begins to play as various video clips and images accompany the lyrics written by Tej and myself.)*

*I Can't Go to Sleep<sup>54</sup>*

*[Tej]*

*Don't believe the hype  
These demons in disguise  
Tryin' to take our culture*

---

<sup>54</sup> The instrumental used is from the Wu- Tang Clan's (2000) song *I Can't Go to Sleep*

*Feeding us these lies  
And you wonder why  
We struggle to survive  
Looking to the sky  
Asking Father why  
Until they took our souls  
That's what the demons do  
Twisting our reality stereotypical  
Misconception of our culture at a whole  
I can't go to sleep oh God I'm getting' cold  
Hold up, Hold Up, Hold Up  
Aw Man, I can't go to sleep  
I can't shut my eyes  
Let the truth be told  
I did it from my heart  
This is the art of war  
Coming from the slums  
The Bronx raised me  
How can I turn my back and run  
Did it for the fun  
Never had gun  
What it my momma never I had son  
Would I be the one?*

*[Chorus]*

*Don't kill your brother, let's love each other  
Don't get mad... cause it ain't that bad  
Just be who you are... you've come so far  
It's in your hands, just be a man  
Get the jelly out your spine!  
Cobwebs, out of your mind*

*[Me]*

*I can't go to sleep, I can't shut my eyes  
I can't catch my breath, going down a sea of lies  
Somewhere a soldier dies, somewhere a mother cries  
Around the corner, another devil in disguise  
To many Illusions, confusing lies  
I can't go to sleep, I can't shut my eyes  
Help me rise from the slumber, I'm out numbered  
It's storming, the clouds forming, the rains pouring, 50 shots wit no warning  
Tell me what do I do when it's just me wit no crew  
Tell me what do I do when the hype got me frustrated wit hate  
Occupies my mind no time to meditate  
You tell me how do I fight  
Wit love or hate*

*How can I win?  
What do I do grab  
The pen or the pin.  
To Zion I shout,  
Babylon's bars to keep us in or keep us out  
Mentally sick  
What do I pick  
Truth or lies  
I can't go to sleep, I can't shut my eyes  
I choose to spit knowledge  
I choose to pay homage  
I choose freedom instead of false promise  
I choose mental wealth  
I choose knowledge of self  
I choose my little dunnies  
I can't go to sleep,  
I can't shut em son*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Me: In the words of Phase 2 "I'LL NEVER BUY INTO WHAT THEY ARE SELLING AND I KNOW THAT IS EXACTLY WHERE YOU ARE COMING FROM. THAT WAS PART OF THE MESSAGE OF THOSE WHO DIED TO SET ME FREE. IT'S WAY BEYOND HIP HOP OR A CAN OF PAINT. IT'S ABOUT LIFE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF IT ALL... RESPECT IS ULTIMATE. WITHOUT IT THERE WILL NEVER BE ANY PEACE...ALL IT TAKES IS TO LOOK AROUND PAST AND PRESENT AND SEE HOW EVIDENT THAT IS... ONE LOVE...*

*In closing I will read the final section from my journey. It's called "I'm Out."*

*To reiterate my point on the power of Babylon, the power that Babylon has is limited only to the power that I allow it to have. The more I continue to talk about the illusions of Babylon the more I am responsible for keeping them in existence. For example, take Babylon's socially constructed Hip-hop caricature. Whether I support it or critique it by merely talking about it I continue to keep the illusion into existence as if it was real. That's why it is finished.*

*My journey is not finished, but this chapter in my journey has come to an end. I no longer wish to step out of the self in order to examine the self so that Babylon can reduce the self to only what Babylon can grasp, the intellectually analyzable level; the tangibles; the acts. However, I understand that without this chapter in my journey I may not have been enlightened. I needed the experiences of Babylon in order to understand the fullness of the real.*

*As move forward in my journey, I understand that Babylon will continue to exist whether I acknowledge it or not. I originally thought that my journey was to destroy Babylon, but now I*

*understand that it is to bring Babylon's throne down. In other words, the one who sits upon a throne is a ruler. By bringing the throne of Babylon down, I am saying that the illusions of Babylon no longer dictate my existence. As a result, I begin to disrupt Babylon [Matrix]. All contain the potential within the self to disrupt Babylon [Matrix]. Note that my intentions are not to discover that potential in someone other than myself. How can I discover something which already exists within you? I am not about to take credit for your enlightenment. Understand that only you can "emancipate yourselves from mental slavery; None but ourselves can free our minds (Marley, 1980)."*

*Respect to the ones who died that gave us the truth that has the power to free our minds. This is bigger than Hip-hop or any other title. This is about life. Not just ours, but also the life beyond our own.*

*The choice is yours and yours only. "You take the blue pill, the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes... Remember, all I'm offering is the truth, nothing more (Silver, 1999). One Love...*

\* \* \* \* \*

*(The lights fade out and an audio track begins to play. The audio track is a recording of me reading the final scene from the movie A Bronx Tale over the Bells And String Orchestra (1993) song The Streets of the Bronx).*

*I learned something from this experience. I learned that the greatest gift of all, the saddest thing in life is wasted talent and the choices that you make will shape your life forever. But you can ask anybody from my neighborhood and they will just tell you this is another Bronx tale. (De Niro, 1993)*

\* \* \* \* \*

*(Lights fade back in as I walk back up the podium.)*

*Me: The meaning of Hector Lavoe's song Aguanilé is simple: it refers to the ritual of cleaning oneself of bad spirits and cleaning your home of bad spirits. Agua means to clean and Ile means your home. Your home can mean your own body or your actual home. (Aguanilé, 2007)*

*(I hold up my manuscript) This was the first thing I wrote about Hip-hop. Even before I started writing I knew it was going to be last. You see, when I first decided to pursue a PhD it was because I wanted to help underrepresented groups, specifically Puerto Ricans, achieve on this level. I understood the difficulties in pursuing a PhD due to the politics in playing this game. However, the hype got me to deter from my mission. Now I am going to return to what I originally intended. This final part of my presentation is cleansing, a renewing, my Aguanilé.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*(A video clip of Pedro Pietri Puerto Rican Obituary begins to play. As it plays Rich and Tej walk up to the front.)*

*They worked  
They were always on time  
They were never late  
They never spoke back  
when they were insulted  
They worked  
They never took days off  
that were not on the calendar  
They never went on strike  
without permission  
They worked  
ten days a week  
and were only paid for five  
They worked  
They worked  
They worked  
and they died  
(Santiago, 1995, p. 117)*

*(Archived video clips and images of Puerto Ricans in New York begin to show while the instrumental from Hector Lavoe's Aguanilé plays. While the instrumental plays Tej played the drum, Rich played the bell, and I recited lyrics while playing the Güiro<sup>55</sup>).*

*La Casa De Mi Corazon<sup>56</sup>*

*[Me]  
Yo Nací en Nueva York  
En el Bronx  
Mi isla del encanto  
Sin palmas, coquíes, ni playas bellas  
El lugar de cuchifritos, piraguas y coquitos  
La Gran migración nos se para pero  
La sangrees más fuerte que las aguas de la Gran migración  
Y es por eso que nuestros  
Corazones latirán como  
Uno para siempre*

*[Chorus]*

---

<sup>55</sup> A traditional Puerto Rican percussion instrument.

<sup>56</sup> See Appendix 5 for the English translation.

*Aguanilé, Aguanilé may may,  
Aguanilé, Aguanilé may may.  
Eh Aguanilé...Aguanilé..  
Aguanilé...Aguanilé*

*[Me]*

*El Bronx, la casa de mi corazón  
El Bronx, que me dami bendición*

*[Chorus]*

*[Me]*

*Si vas a el Bronx  
Vete a la casa de Chema  
Tocando  
Tocando bomba y...jugando plena*

*[Chorus]*

*[Me]*

*Boricua, No te olvides quien tu eres  
Donde te paras y de a donde tu eres  
Nuestros corazones laten  
Fuerte para siempre  
Comos deben para aquellos derrotados  
Que son nuestra jente  
Que no se pueden  
Levantar por si mismos  
Con una mano ayudare mis hermanos  
Con La otra ago un puño para libertad*

*[Chorus]*

*[Me]*

*Los llevare hacia el agua que vive  
Esa agua simboliza Aguanilé*

*[Chorus]*

*[Me]*

*El Bronx, la casa de mi corazón  
El Bronx, que me dami bendición*

*[Chorus]*



*[Me]*  
*Mi lengua es la pluma de un escritor hábil*  
*Mi voz es la voz de jente que nunca paran*  
*El sonido de los tambores es como un latido de corazón que nunca para*  
*Las mentiras nos rodean, las mentiras nos engana, las mentiras nos rompe*  
*Pero nos seguimos levantando*  
*Continuamos parandonoe fuerte*  
*Nuestra banderanos da fuerza*  
*Rojo simboliza nuestra sangre del pasado, presente y futuro.*  
*Blanco simboliza la pureza de la verdad que supera el temor y el engaño*  
*Azul simboliza el agua y esa agua simboliza*

*[Chorus]*

*La agua también simboliza las lágrimas*  
*Lágrimas de felicidad*

*[Chorus]*

*Por eso le doy las gracias a Puerto Rico*  
*Le doy las gracias al Bronx*  
*Le doy las gracias a Héctor*

*[Chorus]*

*Le doy las gracias a Pedro Albizo*  
*Le doy las gracias a Flaco*  
*Le doy las gracias a Lemon*  
*Le doy las gracias a mi familia*

*[Chorus]*

*Les doy las gracias a mis amigos*  
*Le doy las gracias a mi esposa*  
*Les doy las gracias a mis hijos*

*[Chorus]*

*El Bronx, la casa de mi corazón*  
*El Bronx, que me dami bendición*

\*

\*

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\*

\*

\*

**4:00 pm**

I breathed a sigh of relief as I finished the performance. I could not believe I got through the entire performance without a slip up, especially during the *La Casa De Mi Corazon* piece because speaking in Spanish is not a strength of mine. Now I was ready for my committee to ask questions. The performance built up my energy and confidence to engage with any question that came my way. Typically how it works is that I field some questions from my committee, they ask me to leave the room so they can deliberate, and then I am brought back into the room so we can discuss their suggestions for edits and revisions.

At this time, my advisor asked my family and friends if they can wait in the hall while the committee asked me questions. My committee and I moved to a smaller table in the front of the classroom. My advisor then proceeded to explain, exactly how I described above, how the rest of the time will be spent. However, one committee member was not use to this format and asked if the committee can deliberate first then bring me back in for questions. The committee agreed to the suggestion and I was asked to step outside while they deliberated.

**4:20 pm**

My advisor came out of the classroom and asked me to rejoin the committee at the table. Once I stepped into the classroom, I had this gut feeling that something was not right. I sat down and my advisor began to speak. Placing his hand over my manuscript, he said “this does not fit the requirement for a dissertation.” My heart sunk because this just took an unexpected turn for the worse. As my committee began to speak, I sat there silently trying to understand what went wrong. After numerous rewrite suggestions from my committee, I

thought to myself that I lost. Babylon [the matrix] won. The only way I was going to get out here [graduate] was to sellout. I had to take my nontraditional manuscript and rewrite it to fit a more traditional format.

I sat calmly at the table trying to figure out what was the problem or maybe who was the problem. I looked at my advisor and thought to myself “you read each chapter as I finished them, if my manuscript was bad then why did you let me get to this point.” But then I saw my paperwork on the table, paperwork that my advisor got. I then remembered our conversations during my journey and realized that he played a very supportive and encouraging role in this journey. He was ready to sign off on my paper work and congratulate me. This was not about him.

I went around the table and continued this deductive reasoning process in my head. I looked to my right and there was my good friend who I had just spoken to the night before about my manuscript. She had a few questions and suggestions, but nothing that would get in the way of my progress. I looked to my left and there was another friend who I had constantly conferred with during this journey. Again, during our conversations along the way he had a few questions and suggestions, but nothing that would get in the way of my progress. I looked directly in front of me and there sat someone who has been nothing but supportive ever since the time I was trying to get into this program. Then there was one. I thought to myself, “Could it be you?” This committee member’s comments confirmed my assumption.

The comments were about playing the academic/intellectual game, the hoops I had to jump through in order to achieve this degree, and writing to appeal to the academic reader who might read my manuscript. The one comment that particularly stood out was about me

serving two masters, my intended audience and the institution. This particular comment sparked an inner conflict because my journey has been the search for the master. Meanwhile, I am being told that ultimately I serve two masters. I said to myself, “No one serves two masters; it’s either one or the other.” Ultimately, I felt that I was being asked to place my commitment for my community aside for the sake of being acknowledged as a traditional intellectual. This attempt to assimilate to the identity of the traditional intellectual is one that I will never conform to.

I sat there constantly reminding myself that I cannot sellout, but I knew I was going to have to in order to get past this stumbling block. The meeting adjourned and everyone left except for my advisor and I. My advisor was the one who was upset. I was not angry, bitter, embarrassed, or upset because I knew this had nothing to do with me or the quality of my work. I was in shock because I put my heart and soul into this work and it seemed as if that was not enough. I felt confused and defeated. I felt defeated because the degree was never intended for me, but for my audience, the youth. My pursuit of this degree was not for the prestige or the title of doctor because like Hiphop the PhD does not define me. I define the PhD. This degree is for the opportunities that will now open for those who will come after me.

*[sighs]*  
*Look what you made me do, look what I made for you*  
*Knew if I paid my dues, how will they pay you*  
*When you first come in the game, they try to play you*  
*Then you drop a couple of hits, look how they wave to you*  
*As fate would have it, J's status appears*  
*to be at an all-time high, perfect time to say goodbye*  
*I came back like Jordan, wearin the 4-5*  
*It ain't to play games witchu*  
*It's to aim at you, probably maim you*  
*If I owe you I'm blowin you to smithereens*

*And I need you to remember one thing (one thing)  
I came, I saw, I conquered  
(Adapted from Jay-Z, 2003)*

**10:00 pm**

Later that night I went to my advisor's office to think about what transpired and what I was going to do next. For some reason the comment about serving two masters stuck in my head. As I was thinking about the comment, I remembered the video clip from the movie *The Last Dragon* that I showed during my performance. The clip was the fight scene between Leroy and Sho'nuff. Sho'nuff thought that he was the master while Leroy had not yet realized that he was truly the master. It was not until Leroy remembered significant lived experiences in his life that he embraced the fact the he was the master.

*(Leroy's vision) Teacher: There is one place you have not looked and it is there only there that you shall find the master.*

*(Leroy's vision) Laura: You sure look like a master to me.*

## **The Glow**

I grabbed the DVD and put it into my advisor's computer and turned the speaker volume up as loud as possible. I watched the scene and everything became clear. Similar to Leroy, I remembered my own significant lived experiences:

*(My vision) Phase 2: On your mission...Just do it...Bro for real...Don't let anything deter you...But do it firstly for yourself not for them...feel me?? One Love.....*

*(My vision) Rich: Keep doing what you're doing. This is helping the people. Love you*

*(My vision) Tej: If you only see your way, to be your own master*

*(My vision) Dr. Osler: Excellent writing, insightful, therapeutic, and a call out to the masses (especially in academia) to wake up! Self-publish this in book and e-book format as soon as you graduate. This is your duty in further fulfilling your purpose and destiny...*

*(My vision) Wife: You sure look like a master to me.*

As I watched the clip, I could hear the music from the movie playing as if it were part of my life's soundtrack.

*Take life one day at a time  
That's what a wise man said to me.  
He said, "Life, in all it's complexity  
Is the ultimate test for you and me."  
(David, 1985)*

I realized that I underestimated Babylon [the Matrix]. I was deceived by the illusions of Babylon [the Matrix] give it [Babylon] more power than I should. The illusions duped me to think that I really was not the master and ultimately Babylon [the Matrix] was in control. The hype caused me to feel defeated because I was not validated by my official committee. I had forgotten that I was already validated. I had forgotten who I was and where I stood in this struggle.

*When you walk hold your head up high  
For the masters watching you from the sky  
I know not what trouble lies ahead  
Before you fight, use your head.  
(David, 1985)*

I realized that I was not in a struggle with a committee member, but with what that committee member represented. This struggle was between the ideology of the traditional intellectual and the organic intellectual<sup>57</sup>. That committee member represented the traditional intellectual who is lost within the hype of the institution. The institution dupes one to believe that you must act, talk, look, and write a particular way in order to be deemed a legitimate intellectual.

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<sup>57</sup> Please note that though I side with organic intellectual I do not identify as one for it is just another title of life

*It's time to leave my nest where you were born  
This journey you must make alone.  
(Spread your wings and fly)  
There's a power deep inside you, an inner strength  
You'll find in time of need.  
(The Glow)  
(David, 1985)*

I remembered to whom I wanted to dedicate this manuscript. I wanted to dedicate this manuscript to the children that my wife and I plan to have. I wanted them to know that daddy never sold it, even when his back was pushed up against the wall. I am not changing anything to what I wrote along this journey and anything I do add or edit will be on my own terms because if I change anything for the sake of passing then ultimately I failed.

*Like the seasons, love will come and go  
If it's right, you'll automatically know.  
The world of mystery exists only in your head.  
When you become one with yourself  
The wall will fall  
(David, 1985)*

Truly, the power of Babylon [the Matrix] is only limited to the power I allow it to have. I do not have to play by Babylon's rules to win the game (winning is an illusion in it self). Babylon [The Matrix] does not dictate my existence. I possess the power of change. With no one around; no family; no friends; no Phase 2; no advisors; it took this final test for me to understand that I have the power, the inner strength, the glow.

*The journey now before you is the final test  
You've learned your lesson well.  
(I can teach you no more)  
There's a power deep inside you, an inner strength  
You'll find in time of need.  
(The Glow)  
(David, 1985)*

I needed this final test to find the solution to the problem whose answer I knew all along.

Who is the master? I am.

*You are the Last Dragon  
You possess the power of the Glow  
(David, 1985)*

*(Fade to black)*

\* \* \* \* \*

### *THE GLOW*

*Now all the masters knows that you need the glow,  
You need the glow, the glow to grow.*

*If you love to live, you live to love,  
Hah, you got to move to the upper level.*

*Cos When you got the glow, there ain't no stopping,  
what you want to do.*

*To reach that upper level,  
your mind, body and soul must be one.*

*It's a sacrifice, it takes hard work,  
It's a way of life.*

*When you got the glow, you feel the one,  
(You feel the one)  
When you got the glow, Your body's gold,  
(Your body's gold)  
So don't let go, of the power of elevation.  
(Power)*

*(Talk about that glow)*

*Shine on,*

*Get the glow, Get the glow, Get the glow, grow.*

*Everybody knows that you need the glow,  
You need the glow, the glow to grow.*

*And if you love to live, you live the life the way you love,*



*The love you take the gift.*

*Cos when you got the glow, you see it on your face,  
You feel it in your head, people understand,*

*That you've got the glow, and they're beware,  
Cos the power's there when you got the glow.*

*(shine on)*

*Well, when you reach that upper level, Your mind body and soul will be one.*

*Hah!*

*It's a sacrifice, it takes hard work,  
It's a way of life.*

*When you got the glow, you feel the one,  
When you got the glow, Your body's gold,  
So don't let go, of the power of elevation.*

*(Talk about the glow, the glow)*

*Cos when you got the glow, when you got the glow,  
(When you got the glow)  
Everybody know and I'm friend and foe,*

*They'll all beware, they'll all beware,  
(When you got the glow)  
Cos they know that you got the fire there.*

*When you got the glow, when you got the glow,  
(When you got the glow)  
They'll all beware, they'll all beware.*

*Cos they know, they know, they know, they know, they know  
(When you got the glow)  
They know you got the glow, the glow to grow.*

*The glow.  
(Hutch, 1985)*

## Appendix 1:

This section was written in the future tense. I assumed that the reader would have skipped to this appendix prior to reading the text after it was referenced in the beginning of the introduction.

### **The Story**

My research was a qualitative study focusing on Phase 2's experiences and knowledge concerning interpretations of the origins, shifts, and objectifying of Hip-hop Culture. My case study uses the sole participant's narrative as a counterstory to the dominant representations of Hip-hop. As a qualitative researcher I understand that reality is socially constructed; therefore, my reasoning for employing a qualitative approach is to understand the complexities in its [Hip-hop] social origins, evolution, and position in reality from the interpretation of the participant.

Unless we engage with the image then we could never have an intellectual conversation about Hip-hop. Phase 2 does not use the language of Stuart Hall, but yet he is one of the most intellectual men I have ever met. The elitist move to define what is intellectual and what is not is central in why my story is told through my voice and not theory. The primary reason why my story takes the literary form it does is because that was the only way for the voice (my voice) of self (my self) to freely speak. Instead of theory, I want the participant's narrative to drive my study's themes and patterns. The theories and concepts discussed below will guide my analysis of the data.

## **Theorizing Moves**

A Cultural Studies framework was used to structure my study. In Jhally's (1997) film, *Representation and the Media*, Stuart Hall defines Cultural Studies as "stepping out of the water to see how the water shapes our existence." In my case, I investigated issues of representation (Hall, 1997) and Hip-hop as a manifestation of the production of culture.

### **Detournement**

The popular culture references that I used throughout my story can be articulated through the concept of detournement. In Elisabeth Sussman's (1989) work to introduce the reader to Detournement:

*Detournement ('diversion') was [a] key means of restructuring culture and experience...Detournement proposes a violent excision of elements – painting, architecture, literature, film, urban sites, sounds, gestures, words, signs – from their original contexts, and a consequent restabilization and recontextualization through rupture and realignment (p. 8).*

Using the Situationists' critical art of detournement, I have drawn upon various theories and concepts to guide the mixture of texts used to critique the representations of Hip-hop as well as the construction of dialogue. I "reuse the preexisting artistic elements listed within Sussman's description in a new ensemble." Detournement provided me with an opportunity to revisit "elements of the cultural past," remove them from their original context and construct new meanings (Debord and Wolman, 1956).

### **Representation**

In my study, one of my aims was to examine Phase 2's thoughts concerning the representation of Hip-hop. I will draw upon Hall's (1997) work on representation to help with this. According to Hall (1997), "representation is an essential part of the process by which

meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture” (p. 15). In Stuart Hall’s lecture on representation, he defines the old view of representation as “the way in which meaning is given to the things depicted (Jhally, 1997).” In contrast, Hall’s new view defined “representation as constitutive (Jhally, 1997).” In other words, “representation is part of the event and ‘true meaning’ is the meaning people make of it” (Jhally, 1997). I believe that the meaning given through Hiphop’s media representation is a distortion of its ‘true meaning’; therefore, my study measured the gap of representation between the ‘true meaning’ and the media representation (Jhally, 1997).

In Jhally’s (1997) film, Hall poses an important question, “do events in the world have one, essential, fixed, or true meaning against which distortion can be measured?” In order to answer such a question Hall conceptualizes representation through three approaches: reflective, intentional, and constructivist. These approaches will help me explain “how [Hiphop’s] representation of meaning through language works (p. 24).” Furthermore each approach is “an attempt to answer the questions, ‘where do meanings come from?’ and how can we tell the “true” meaning of a word or image?” (p. 24).”

While all meaning is constitutive, I argue that there is a difference in the meanings made in everyday life and those made from this life to another audience. Meanings closer to the initial experience I will call “true meanings” while meanings made from this experience for another audience I will call “illusion.” Clearly, this is a matter of perspective. The current generation may find it difficult to distinguish between true meaning and illusion and may experience my “illusion” as their “true meaning.” Opening this up for youth today is, in essence, my project.

## **The Spectacle**

Debord's (1995) concept of the spectacle is useful in articulating that which is represented as Hip-hop in the media by artists and journalists. For example, in Debord's (1995) chapter Commodity as Spectacle, he writes:

*The commodity can only be understood in its undistorted essence when it becomes the universal category of society as a whole. Only in this context does the reification produced by commodity relations assume decisive importance both for the objective evolution of society and for the stance adopted by towards it. Only then does the commodity become crucial for the subjugation of men's conscious to the forms in which this reification finds expression...As labor is progressively rationalized and mechanized man's lack of will is reinforced by the way in which his activity becomes less and less active and more and more contemplative (p. 25).*

Debord's notion of Commodity as Spectacle (Debord, 1995), assisted my analysis of the commodification of Hip-hop. It is my interpretation that Hip-hop has been reified and transformed into a commodity. I believe Debord would define this as Hip-hop's usefulness being exchanged for profitability. Additionally, the concept of the spectacle helped me analyze the roles of the people (emcees, b-boys, aerosol artists, dee-jays) affected by commodification and how they "become less and less active and more and more contemplative (p. 25)." In this way, Hip-hop moved from its origins in the South Bronx to the media extravaganza it is now.

## **Reification**

Discussing Commodity as Spectacle brings me to the concept of reification. I think Bewes' (2002) Reification helps me to further elaborate the commodification of Hip-hop. Bewes (2002) describes reification as "the moment that a process or relation is generalized into abstraction, and thereby turned into a 'thing' (p. 3)." He adds, "this double movement of abstraction and crystallization is one that is inherent in all representation – all art and all

politics – and it suggests the loss of an original whole or integrity (Bewes, 2002, p. 4).” In my study, the concept of reification would guide my argument that Hip-hop has been exploited and branded for the sole purpose of producing profit. The consequent loss of integrity is much of what the dialogue reveals.

### **Counter Narratives**

Another aim of my study is to utilize Delgado’s notion of counter narratives (Delgado, 2000) as employed within Critical Race Theory. According to Delgado (2000), “the dominant group creates its own stories. The stories or narratives told by the ingroup remind it of its identity in relation to outgroups, and provide it with a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural (p. 60).” My study will use Phase’s story as a “powerful means for destroying mindset – the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place (Delgado, 2000, p. 61).” Phase 2’s story may critique the popular representations of Hip-hop fixed by dominant ideology<sup>58</sup>. Delgado (2000) states, “there is no single true, or all encompassing, description. The same holds true of events (p. 61).” Therefore, Phase 2’s narrative will be a counter story to popular interpretations of Hip-hop origins.

### **Organic Intellectuals**

“All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 9). My experience discussing Hip-hop Culture in a “traditional” intellectual setting indicates that Hip-hop does not seem to be considered as a

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<sup>58</sup> Delgado (2000) defines Ideology as “the received wisdom which makes current social arrangements seem natural and fair. Those in power sleep well at night – their conduct does not seem to them like oppression (p. 61).”

discourse with much educative value. The impression given is that Hiphop is either placed in a defensive position or not considered a legitimate intellectual discourse. In Nas' (2006a) *Hip Hop is Dead*, he states in one of his verses that "*most intellectuals will only half listen.*"

When thinking about this statement a question of validity arises as well as a question of who is an intellectual.

In my study, I argue that "traditional" intellectuals such as news anchors, journalists, and scholars have the power to circulate distorted representations of Hiphop, but do not have the historical context to construct accurate representations. I used Gramsci's (1971) work on "the intellectuals" to support my claim.

In Gramsci's (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, he describes two types of intellectuals, the traditional and the organic. He describes the "traditional" intellectuals as: professional intellectuals, literary, scientific and so on, whose position in the interstices of society has a certain inter-class aura about it but derives ultimately from past and present class relations and conceals an attachment to various historical class formations (p. 3).

In contrast, Gramsci (1971) describes the "organic" intellectuals as: the thinking and organizing element of a particular fundamental social class. These organic intellectuals are distinguished less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong (p. 3).

In my study, I primarily focused on the "organic" intellectual, Phase 2. Gramsci's (1971) concept of the organic intellectual describes Phase 2's positionality in Hiphop in the communities from which was generated and in which it is still cultivated. I will use the concept of "organic" intellectuals to support the significance of Phase 2's narrative as well as

to support the claim that Hip-hop should be considered a legitimate and valued discourse in the same manner as dominant intellectual discourses. Remembering of course, that distinguishing “true” from “illusion” is one of the historic functions of organic intellectuals.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Design**

I conducted a qualitative study which examines the life of world renowned Hip-hop pioneer, Phase 2. I mirrored Phase 2’s narrative against my own lived experiences in order to create a dialogue that speaks to Hip-hop as culturally lived experiences rather than a set of elements (rapping, break dancing, aerosol art, and dee jaying) to which Hip-hop is often reduced. The initial phase of my research was designed to interrogate Hip-hop as a public pedagogy, as a cultural art form, and as a site of racial dialogue. During my study, I examined Hip-hop as a “culture” and lived experience as it emerged in the South Bronx in the 1970s. The goal within this particular research is to analyze Hip-hop culture and to conceptualize it as a public pedagogy. Additionally, rather than theory, I wanted Phase 2’s narrative to drive my study’s themes and patterns. This led to a set of themes: real, self, the matrix, etc. The theories and concepts I have discussed earlier guided my analysis of the data towards discovering the themes in Phase 2’s narrative.

### **Research Sites and Participant(s)**

The sole participant of my research is Phase 2. Phase 2 is a close friend of mine whom I have talked to in the past about questions I have had concerning Hip-hop’s roots. Phase 2 has also contributed to the development of curriculum and logos for the Potentialis



Centre. Phase 2's knowledge, experience, and expertise will allow me to "learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of my research" (Glesne, 2006, p. 34.).

### **Data Collection**

My data collection was essentially an ongoing conversation with Phase 2 over email. All emails used within the story were kept in their original form as sent by Phase 2. All electronic data was stored on a portable storage device. The portable storage device (flash drive) was securely stored in a locked drawer in my advisor's office. The electronic data stored on the flash drive was encrypted as well.

### **Sample Interview Questions**

I initially started with a set of interview questions, then followed the lines of thought Phase 2 expressed. Since the questions were open-ended, I anticipated revisiting each question repeatedly. The communication between Phase 2 and I was limited to email because as an artist he travels extensively and email is his preferred mode of contact. The following were the initial interview questions:

Tell me about life in the South Bronx

Tell me about your first memories of Hiphop

Tell me about your feelings toward Hiphop today

Did Hiphop have an influence in your life? If so, tell me about it.

Tell me about the images used to represent Hiphop

These questions led to the dialogue that I presented in the body of the study.

## **Coding**

Coding was an essential part of my data analysis that allowed me to identify salient themes and patterns. According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996), “in practice, coding can be thought of as a range of approaches that aid the organization, retrieval, and interpretation of data” (p. 27). The three approaches to coding that I employed in my study were in vivo coding, sociologically constructed coding, and open coding.

The initial approach I employed during data analysis was open coding. Open coding is identified as an ‘open’ process because it “allows me to engage in exploration of my data without making any prior assumptions about what I might discover” (Kerlin, 2002). After employing open coding, I moved to more selective approaches, in vivo coding and sociologically constructed coding. In vivo coding “refers to the codes that derive from the terms and the language used by social actors in the field, or in the course of the interviews” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 32). In vivo coding allowed me to inductively engage with Phase 2’s narrative. On the other hand, sociologically constructed coding will allow me “to identify themes, patterns, events, and actions that are of my interest and that provide a means of organizing data sets (p. 32).” Since I am invested in the research, my positionality was evident in my data analysis as I identified themes and patterns that reflect my own lived experiences. This is the reason the results are presented as a dialogue.

## **Validity**

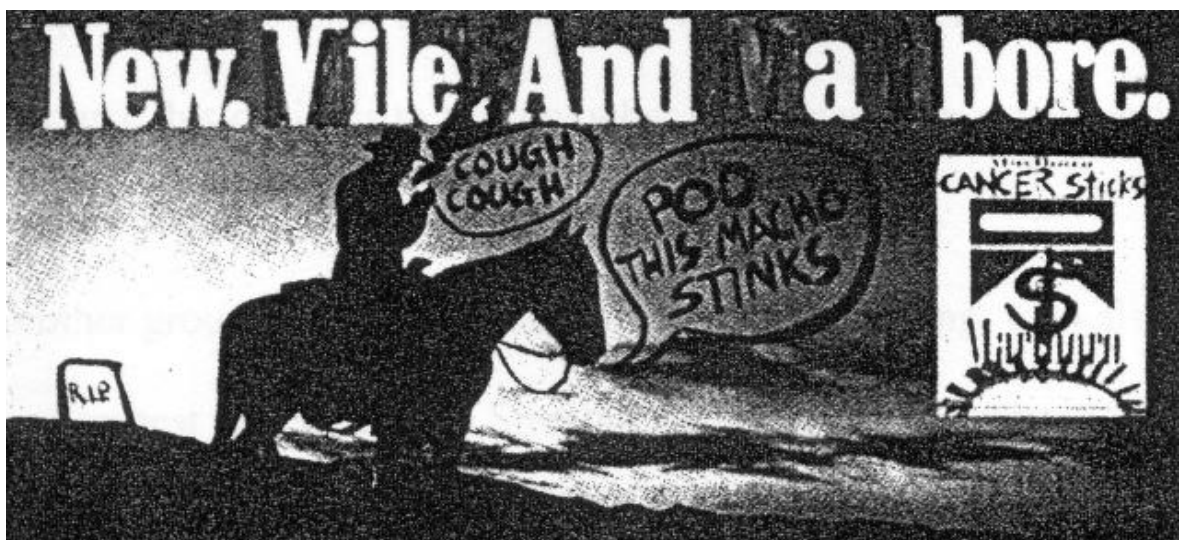
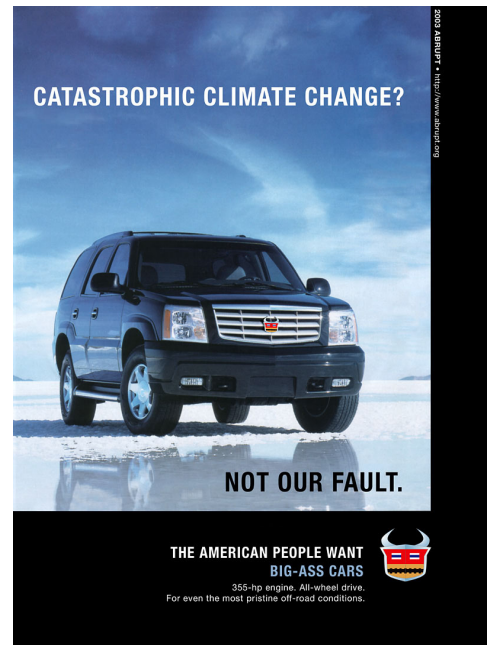
In Glesne (2006), she states that validity is an issue we should consider “during research design as well in the midst of data collection” (p. 35). She lists several verification procedures one can employ to address the issue of research validity. The procedure I used

was member checking. Glesne (2006) describes member checking as “sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with research participants to make sure you are representing them and their ideas accurately” (p. 36). Phase 2 helped me verify the trustworthiness of my data collection and analysis.

### **The Text**

It was apparent to my dissertation committee that my study could either be a more analytic study or a more narrative, dialogic study. I pushed to pursue the latter. I can now say this was the louder option. Theory was used, but blurred in dialogue. Each chapter was a unique challenge, raising new uncertainties for me. These challenges though drove me more into Phase’s words and ideas – and into my own experience. The result is unconventional – but to me powerful. Phase is a theorist worthy of engagement and this study allowed me to do so intellectually and personally.

Appendix 2:



### Appendix 3:

#### *Love's Gonna Get'cha (Material Love)*<sup>59</sup>

Ya know that's why man I be telling you all  
the time man, you know LOVE,  
that word love is a very serious thing, and  
if you don't watch out I tell ya  
that (Love's gonna get you) because a lot of  
people out here say "I love my  
car" or "I love my chain" or or "I'm I'm  
just in love with that girl over  
there" so far all the people out there that  
fall in love with material items  
we gonna bump the beat a lil' something like this

I'm in junior high with a b plus grade,  
at the end of the day I don't hit the arcade,  
I walk from school to my moms apartment,  
I got to tell the suckas everyday "don't start it",  
cause where I'm at if your soft your lost,  
to say on course means to roll with force,  
a boy named Rob is chillin in a Benz,  
in front of my building with the rest of his friends,  
I give him a pound, oh I mean I shake his hand,  
he's the neighborhood drug dealer, my man,  
I go upstairs and hug my mother,  
kiss my sister, and punch my brother,  
I sit down on my bed to watch some TV,  
(machine gun fire) do my ears deceive me,  
Nope, that's the fourth time this week,  
another fast brother shot dead in the street,  
the very next day while I'm off to class,  
my moms goes to work cold busting her a\*\*,  
my sisters cute but she got no gear,  
I got three pairs of pants and with my brother I share,  
see there in school see I'm made a fool,  
with one and a half pair of pants you ain't cool,  
but there's no dollars for nothing else,  
I got beans, rice, and bread on my shelf,  
every day I see my mother struggling,  
now its time I've got to do something,  
I look for work I get dissed like a jerk,  
I do odd jobs and come home like a slob,  
so here comes Rob he's cold and shivery,  
he gives me two hundred for a quick delivery,  
I do it once, I do it twice,

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<sup>59</sup> Boogie Down Productions. (1990). *Love's Gonna Get'cha (Material Love)* [KRS-One]. On *Edutainment* [CD]. New York: Jive Records.

now there's steak with the beans and rice,  
my mother's nervous but she knows the deal,  
my sister's gear now has sex appeal,  
my brothers my partner and we're getting paper,  
three months later we run our own caper,  
my family's happy everything is new,  
now tell me what the f\*\*k am I supposed to do,

### CHORUS

that's why, (loves gonna get you)  
(loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get you)  
you fall in love with your chain,  
you fall in love with your car,  
loves gonna sneak right up and snuff you from behind,  
so I want you to check the story out as we go down the line,  
(loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get you)

money's flowing, everything is fine,  
got myself an uzi and my brother a nine,  
business is boomin' everything is cool,  
I pull about a g a week f\*\*k school,  
a year goes by and I begin to grow,  
not in height but juice and cash flow,  
I pick up my feet and begin to watch TV,  
cause now I got other people working for me,  
I got a 55 inch television you know,  
and every once in awhile I hear just say no,  
or the other commercial I love,  
is when they say, this is your brain on drugs,  
I pick up my remote control and just turn,  
cause with that bulls\*\*t I'm not concerned,  
see me and my brother jump in the BM,  
driving around our territory again,  
I stop at the light like a superstar,  
and automatic weapons cold sprayed my car,  
I hit the accelerator scared as f\*\*k,  
and drove one block to find my brother was hit,  
he wasn't dead but the blood was pouring,  
and all I could think about was war and,  
later I found that it was Rob and his crew,  
now tell me what the f\*\*k am I supposed to do,

ya know that's why, (loves gonna get you)  
(loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get  
you)(love loves gonna get you)  
(loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get you)  
(love loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get you)  
that word love is very very serious(loves gonna get you)  
very addictive

my brothers out of it, but I'm still in it,  
on top of that I'm in it to win it,  
I can't believe that Rob would diss me,  
that faggot, that punk, he's soft a sissy,  
I'm driving around now with three of my guys,  
the war is on and I'm on the rise,  
we rolled right up to his favorite hang out,  
said hello and then the bullets rang out,  
some fired back so we took cover,  
and all I could think about was my brother,  
Rob jumped up and began to run,  
busting shots hoping to hit someone,  
so I just stopped, and let off three shots,  
two hit him and one hit a cop,  
I threw the gun down and began to shout,  
come on I got him it's time to break out,  
but as we ran there were the boys in blue,  
pointing their guns at my four man crew,  
they shot down one, they shot down two,  
now tell me what the f\*\*k am I supposed to do,

(loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get you)  
(love loves gonna get you)  
(loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get you)  
(love loves gonna get you)  
(loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get you),  
(loves gonna get you)  
(loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get you)(loves gonna get you)  
(love loves gonna get you)

ya know a lot of people believe that that  
word Love is real soft, but when  
you use it in your vocabulary like your  
addicted to it it sneaks right up  
and takes you right out. out. out. out. out.  
So, for future reference remember it's  
alright to like or want a material  
item, but when you fall in love with it and  
you start scheming and carrying  
on for it, just remember, it's gonna get'cha

#### Appendix 4:

##### *Struggle*<sup>60</sup>

Sunny days turn to rain, freedom change to chains  
Praying hope for brighter days trying hard to maintain  
So many rich fantasies, trap dreams, and murder  
So many snake friends into these schemes and burglars  
Looking death in the face, with no traces of fear  
Don't care to live another day cause ain't no happiness here  
Only lust and the greed, and jealousy is the rule,  
My soul and mine grew up with evil  
And the money's the rule  
It ain't guaranteed to live if I ain't clutching my tool  
It's just a game how to play and if I slip I lose  
All cemeteries and prisons overcrowded with fools  
Niggas that won't stop to listen, they have points to prove  
Prayer pray a little faith to the man above  
Wish he'd bless me with his grace  
And have some mercy on thugs  
Now I think about the goals that I wanted to make  
My father struggled down this road that I decided to take

Hard times got me blind, I'm dying, but still I'm trying cause I know one day it will be ok  
Hard times got me blind, I strive to stay alive but I know one day it'll be ok  
Hard times got me blind and I'm dying but still I'm trying cause I know one day it'll be ok  
Hard times got me blind, I strive to stay alive but I know one day it'll be ok

With all the crimes and felonies and fatherless families  
It was hard for a young Black man to achieve without a father's advice  
To show him wrong from right  
To teach him how to be a man, and how to make it in life  
So I took to the streets, it was the closest to home  
I went out all alone to make it on my own  
And I see the money's easy to get, taking dollars and cents  
Cause it'll help my mama out with the rent  
But I grew up too quick on the set with the thugs, only men that showed me love  
And taught me how to be tough  
Taught me the rules of the game,  
How to shoot and name  
But could nev'r thug teach me how to be a real man  
So I was blind to the fast  
My only knowledge was crack  
I had dreams of being in college now it's bricks in the trap

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<sup>60</sup> Anders, Allison. (2007). Revisiting the Panopticon: Educational Narratives from Incarcerated Youth. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.



Appendix 5:

*The Home of my Heart*

I was born in New York  
In the Bronx  
My enchanted island  
No palm trees, coquíes, or beautiful beaches  
The place of cuchifritos, piraguas, and coquitos  
The great migration separated us but  
Blood is stronger than the waters of the great migration  
And this is why our hearts will beat forever as one

[Chorus]

The Bronx, the home of my heart  
The Bronx, that gives me my blessing

[Chorus]

If you go to the Bronx  
Go to Chema's house  
Playing the Bomba and singing Plena

[Chorus]

Boricua, don't forget who you are  
Where you stand and where you are from  
Our hearts beat forever strong  
As they should for the beaten  
Who are our people  
Who cannot rise on their own  
With one hand I will help my brothers and sisters  
With the other I make a fist for liberty

[Chorus]

I will lead them to water  
Toward the living waters  
That water symbolizes Aguanilé

[Chorus]

The Bronx, the home of my heart  
The Bronx, that gives me my blessing

[Chorus]

My tongue is the pen of a skillful writer  
My voice is the voice of a people who never stop  
The sound of the drums is like a heartbeat that never stops beating  
Lies surround us, lies deceive us, lies break us  
But we continue to rise up  
We continue to stand strong  
Our flag gives us strength  
Red symbolizes the bloodlines of those past, present, and future  
White symbolizes a purity of truth that overcomes fear and deception  
Blue symbolizes water and that water symbolizes

[Chorus]

The water also symbolizes the tears  
The tears of joy

[Chorus]

So I thank Puerto Rico  
I thank the Bronx  
I thank Hector

[Chorus]

I thank Pedro Albizu  
I thank Flaco  
I thank Lemon  
I thank my family

[Chorus]

I thank my friends  
I thank my wife  
I thank my children

[Chorus]

The Bronx, the home of my heart  
The Bronx, that gives me my blessing

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