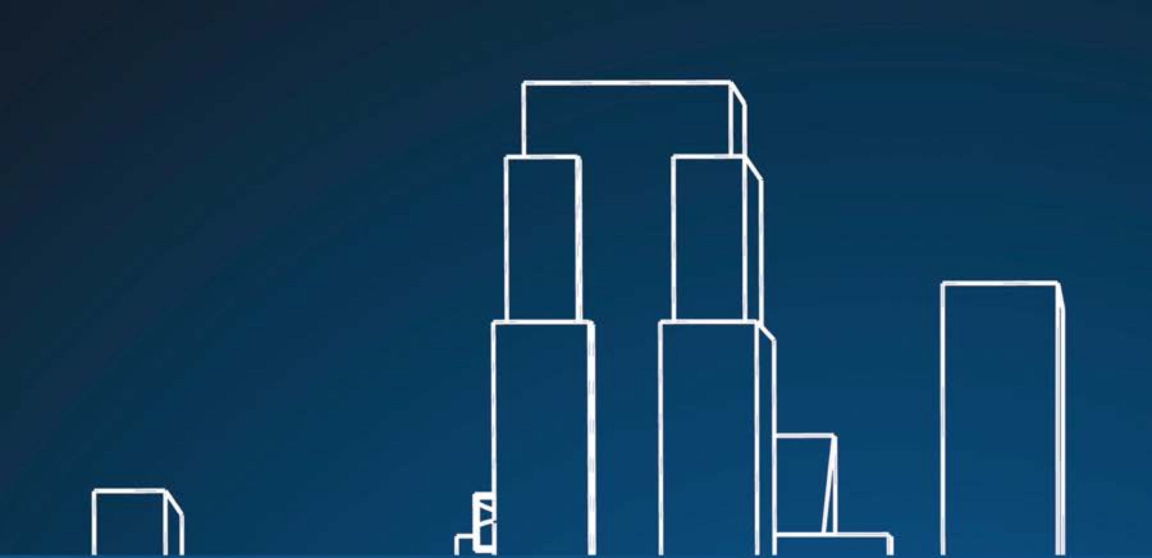

Routledge Studies in Hip-Hop and Religion

UNDERGROUND RAP AS RELIGION

A THEOPOETIC EXAMINATION OF A PROCESS AESTHETIC RELIGION

Jon Ivan Gill

Underground Rap as Religion

A Theopoetic Examination of a Process Aesthetic Religion

Jon Ivan Gill

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2020
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2020 Jon Ivan Gill

The right of Jon Ivan Gill to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Gill, Jon Ivan, author.
Title: Underground rap as religion : a theopoetic examination of a process aesthetic religion / Jon Ivan Gill.
Description: [1.] | New York : Routledge, 2019. | Series: Routledge studies in hip hop and religion | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2019042355 (print) | LCCN 2019042356 (ebook) | ISBN 9781138307797 (hardback) | ISBN 9781315142555 (ebk)
Subjects: LCSH: Rap (Music)—Religious aspects. | Hip-hop—Religious aspects. | Process theology.
Classification: LCC ML3921.8.R36 G55 2019 (print) | LCC ML3921.8.R36 (ebook) | DDC 782.421649—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2019042355
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2019042356

ISBN: 978-1-138-30779-7 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-14255-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

1 Reconstructions of religious identities and racial ideologies in process philosophy and hip-hop culture

Introduction

In this project, I propose that the culture of underground hip-hop and the metaphysic that underlies Whiteheadian process thought are in many ways synonymous due to the intense relationality, focus on universal creativity, and the holding of beauty as paramount that appears in both. It is surprising that more scholarship has not yet been written to bring the two schools of thought into conversation. Within the underground hip-hop ethos rests an understanding of the human self that is not only fluid but also serves as an experienced instance of multiplicity of identity. In other words, there is something about the metaphysic of underground hip-hop that allows all of its participants, regardless of their ethnicity, to nonhierarchically transcend Western notions of race, creating an uncategory within which situates a perpetually transforming conception of identity that allows each participant the possibility to and actuality of reimagining their diverse individuality (which is preserved) amidst the unity of hip-hop culture's collective consciousness (which is constantly negotiated amidst its constituency). When hip-hop pioneer/historian KRS-One makes the statement, "I am not Black, I am hip-hop," he speaks of this process of "creative transformation" of identity, this relinquishing of the singular "thing" in exchange for the Deleuzian notion that the singular understanding of "things" does not exist that takes place within underground hip-hop as it preserves the original temporal accident of the culture. To say that your selfhood is hip-hop is to assert that the self and the idea of identity that comes with it are nothing but a continual event dictated by not only the chosen trajectory of the human actual entity but also the context of other actual entities within which they be/come.[1]

In the current discussion on hip-hop in the academia, many scholars chart a lived ethnography of hip-hop that situates Afro-diasporic[2] people as the pinnacle of hip-hop culture. In other words, said scholarship seems to argue without arguing that hip-hop was created solely by and is primarily the cultural property of Afro-diasporic people, particularly Afro-diasporic people born in the United States. If one is to do a brief scan of the titles in the hip-hop and religion discourse, one will see that a common thread within them is this subtle and overt premise of Afronormativity. Therefore, any other ethnicities that appeal to hip-hop culture/ways of becoming appear in these texts as guests to the culture that may very well be welcome, but are guests nonetheless. Also, academic work on hip-hop culture seems to convey a widespread conception that hip-hop culture and rap are synonymous. It is very important to note that from the outset of this project that my understanding of hip-hop as a scholar and a practitioner is very different. When I use the term "hip-hop culture," it refers to a Whiteheadian society, or a nexus that socially orders the elements of breakdancing (the stylistic urban syncretism of Brazilian to Chinese dance movements religiously known as b-girling or b-boying), graffiti (the urban-influenced use of spray cans and other means of drawing competitively charged pieces of creativity that defy and reinvent art and human personhood), DJing (the use of turntables to manipulate records and their audio content in ways initially unintended by the manufacturer), and MCing (commonly known as rapping) into a unified multiplicity that theoretically engenders a non/difference between all human actual entities that is not hierarchical and separatist/nationalistic but relational and nonessentialist.[3]

The nonessentialism that Roland Faber elucidates in the pages of *God as Poet of the World* can be mapped onto hip-hop culture's original ethos of ethnic becoming/rebecoming and its manifestation in the current underground realm of the culture. While commercial rap can be called an instance of the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness"[4] in its flat equating of hip-hop with rap music, underground hip-hop culture embraces the multiplicity of the elements so that total experience of the culture comes only amidst the networking of the elements. In other words, to an adherent of the philosophy of underground hip-hop, there is no hip-hop with rap alone. Similarly, the same interrelationality displayed by the non/difference of the elements of hip-hop is seen in how underground hip-hop (as a current instance of the original hip-hop ethos of nonseparatist colleagueship) negotiates race. Faber notes that Whitehead demonstrates the idea of non/difference, or the concept of noting divergence in sameness (similar to Heidegger's distinction between "Being itself" and "being-in-the-world"), in his aesthetic/philosophical constructions of God and creativity.[5] The goal of the chapter is to show somewhat systematically (I truly have a nonsystematic way of doing system) how hip-hop is Whiteheadian process thought in its construction of ethnicity as a non/difference in such a way that uses reciprocal relationality to theoretically eliminate race as a Logic of the One, unable to persist in a culture founded and maintained upon holistic flux.

This excursion into underground hip-hop will begin with a first section that examines Whiteheadian relationality and deconstruction/poststructuralism, as well as other process Whiteheadian process thinkers such as Monica A. Coleman, Brian Massumi, and Catherine Keller. The second section will look at underground hip-hop's construing of multiplicity in ethnicity and its creation of postethnic identity. I will conclude with a third section that looks at underground hip-hop's non/philosophy of ethnic identity that I call "multi/race/less/ness" and Whiteheadian and Whiteheadian-derived process thought, placing the two in conversation in ways that I hope reveal how underground hip-hop is indeed a process cultural and aesthetic philosophy/Aesthetic Religion.

Whiteheadian and Whiteheadian-derived relationality

Whitehead

Toward the beginning of *Process and Reality*, Whitehead says, "Philosophy is the self-correction by consciousness of its own initial excess of subjectivity."[6] In light of the tendency of human actual entities to become unaware of the contexts that converge in the event of our processual personhood, Whitehead resets consciousness as not necessarily a desired point of destination. Rather, he refers to consciousness in this passage as something that needs to be deconstructed. Contrary to the stream of Western philosophy in the vain of Descartes to Spinoza, Whitehead wants us to trade the clear idea for the obscure one, or "to recover the totality obscured by the selection."[7] The stages to consciousness which are sublated in the Hegelian dialectic are not totally undone in Whitehead's relational metaphysic, but are indeed acknowledged as still-existing stages that comprise the current position of an actual entity. In anecdotal terms, the man is still the boy. Whitehead shows us relationality at a basic level: the human actual entity. This move of decentering at the minute level, a move which tears through the notion of the Logic of the One that Laurel Schneider uses to denote monotheism and its holistic effects on our understandings of the world,[8] also plays out in important ways in Whiteheadian societies larger than the human actual entity, contexts within this serious experience of and privileging the obscure is paramount to any engaging of said contexts.

Whitehead also tells us early on in *Process and Reality* that the philosophy of organism rejects any sort of subject–predicate format of reality as the primary means by which we can understand the world. In this abandonment of singular forms of logic that in a sense attempt to perform a Kantian reduction of things to our perception of them, Whitehead advocates for flux as the way to subvert the violence of categorization that accompanies Spinoza-derived subjectivity.[9] Through a Whiteheadian hermeneutic, Spinoza's modes lose the distinctiveness attributed to them and become actualities, not that which points to any ultimate beyond that which can be empirically experienced.[10] In the philosophy of organism, flux is not an illusion; there is no infinite substance from which such a thing could emerge. For Whitehead, Spinoza's modes cannot account for the hereditary novelty of the universe due to their nonrelational nature as emanations and not evolutions or processions of infinite substance. If Whitehead's ontological principle that holds that actual entities are the only reasons is true, then Spinoza's philosophy of modes is unable to adequately explain the change that we perceive in the universe.

More clearly, Whitehead, unlike Spinoza, wants to assert an interconnectivity between actual entities in ways that the modal philosophy (a philosophy that by nature does not allow becoming) makes unavailable to us, namely the sort of interconnectivity that can metaphysically trace the origin of one actual entity to another actual entity. Whitehead says that

> [R]elatively to any actual entity, there is a 'given' world of settled actual entities and a 'real' potentiality, which is the datum for creativeness beyond that standpoint. This datum, which is the primary phase in the process consulting an actual entity, is nothing else but the actual world in its character of a possibility for the process of being felt. This exemplifies the metaphysical principle that every 'being' is a potential for 'becoming.' The actual world is the objective content of each new creation.[11]

Therefore, for Whitehead, relationality is more than just the interconnectedness of actual entities, for if it were just this, then it could be argued that the universe is merely the composition of totally distinct articles of matter, similar to the illusion of the physical world in Spinoza. Relationality in *Process and Reality* is also the fuel by which actual entities progress into subsequent phases of their becoming. The universe and the actual entities it contains are always in process, a becoming that takes place due to the influence of other actual entities. When a human actual entity enacts what Whitehead calls their "real" potentiality,[12] or the very possible possibilities presented by their immediate context, they become something they were not before. This sort of creativity destabilizes the notion of a fixed actual entity, hence Whitehead's use of the term "event" to describe an actual entity is very appropriate. This project in its ever- becoming totality finds its basis in the Whiteheadian doctrine of flux as applying to everything in the universe, including human identity as it is transformed by underground hip-hop.

Massumi

This tension between the dissolution of the subject and the characteristic that distinguishes the actual occasion from others that Whitehead refers to as the atomizing of the extensive continuum[13] appears in the work of Brian Massumi in his activist philosophy. For Massumi, "activist philosophy" could be defined as the affirmation of the subjective and objective stages of the universe as not dichotomies, but as what he calls "duplicities." In other words, the subjective and objective phases are not opposing but are interdependently interrelated to each other in a way similar to the yin and the yang of Eastern philosophies.[14] Activist philosophy does not amplify the distinction between the subjective and objective realms, but functions on the realization that the subjective and objective realms are only different in terms of time: the subject will eventually be an object for another subject, as the object was once a subject and may be a subject in the midst of its objectivity for another actual entity. Massumi advocates for an understanding of subjectivity and objectivity that is continual as opposed to disjunctive.[15]

Massumi illuminates that when Whitehead talks about the object, he is referring to a datum in the status that is prehended by a subsequent occasion that we refer to as the subject. But to say that the object is taken into the experience of an already existing subject would be to utilize a streamlined Logic of the One approach that "clarifies" the very obscurity that Whitehead wants us to hold onto. Massumi illuminates the very important point in Whitehead's relational philosophy, that whatever the "subject" is in its multiplicitous instability is identical to the culmination of the event. What creates the "subject" is the unifying factor of the diverse occurrences that are the event;[16] there is no subject aside from the unique encountering and organizing of datum possibilities in the ongoing event. The "subject" is simply the experient of these convergences of multiplicity.[17]

So, does activist philosophy provide anything that gives the subject its solidity in such a way that we could use this multiplicitous understanding to speak of the "something" that happens when various prehensions converge to create a particular event? From Massumi's construction, retaining the subject as a clear and distinct thing would theoretically undermine the synergy of activist philosophy. Drawing from Whitehead, he says, "Actually, there is no 'the' subject. There is no subject separate from the event. There is only the event as subject to occurring to itself."[18] This philosophical transcendence of the subject–object dichotomy that takes place in activist philosophy has consequences on subjectivity as we know it, and if we are to take it seriously, brings us to the logical conclusion that we can only know the identity of an actual entity/event at its satisfaction in a Whiteheadian sense.[19] Massumi says that "[t]he what of an experience is determined at its culmination."[20] Activist philosophy pushes us to the awareness that there is nothing but the abstract, asserting that to swim in multiplicity of perspectives that have us as opposed to us having them (Stengers) is the only way to live. The only "solid" subjectivity that we can have is "lived abstraction." For Massumi, it is more accurate to assert that the experient subject (if it can even be called that after such a post-reconstruction) is less a static conclusion that defines said experience but a nucleus with a distinct means of orienting an experience that can only be fluid.

I particularly like how Massumi phrases the issue of the problem of subjectivity that Whitehead's philosophy makes evident, for he does so in such a way that creates an unstable yet stable enough lens through which one can see how Whiteheadian notions of flux and underground hip-hop's multi/race/less/ness share the same region. He says, "The question of how the beyond of an occasion's self-enjoyment is effectively included in its constitution is the question of *importance*."[21] In other words, since we have already asserted that the subject is inseparable from its constituents to the point that it is nonexistent without them, one of the main questions that the philosophy of organism implies is the question of how we explain the nature of the obvious transcendence of the subject as superject. Of course, Massumi initially speaks of this "beyond" in terms of the "passing" of an actual entity out of its own series of actual events. But if we understand the passing of each instance of an actual entity as a "perpetual perishing" with potential bursts of energy that can impregnate the event of another separately interconnected actual entity (even while the parent actual entity is still traveling the possibilities of its own trajectory), we can see how the "beyond" of an event of experience perpetually shapes the subjective orientating of the prehending occasion, a shaping that continues until the satisfaction of the occasion, according to Whitehead.

But what is this "beyond" that emerges from the experience of an actual occasion? If we are to hold to Massumi's Whiteheadian/Deleuzian assertion that the only experience we can actually live is abstract, then this "beyond" can be neither subjective nor objective. We have to talk about it in different terms. Massumi calls this "beyond" "*techniques of existence*." *Techniques of existence* are means by which an actual entity takes process as its only object.[22] In the words of the underground rapper Illogic in the masterpiece song "1000 Whispers," "Your time is sure to come because change is the only constant" gets at the sentiment that Massumi expresses.[23] *Techniques of existence* serve the same function as an understanding of the world through the subject/object dichotomy: they make sense of the multiplicity of the world and forecast possible options for an actual entity. The difference is that *techniques of existence*, in their embrace of a universe in process as opposed to a fixed world, acknowledge the fluid nature of subjectivity as not a phase through which entities pass, but the very state of the entities and the universe itself. To exist is to have perpetually perishing identity(ies), hence destabilizing the subject/object dichotomy. Massumi says that from the *technique of existence* that holds process as its only object comes the "poet" of experience that we call the "subject."[24] In other words, techniques of existence magnify processual abstraction in such a way that emergent actual entities capture enjoyment of the moments of fleeting flux, moments that are a coalescence of nonrelated elements that only find relation in the event.[25] Activist philosophy, which asserts that "*to be is to be felt*,"[26] amplifies this feeling for other experient occasions as *techniques of existence*, all the while understanding that abstraction and flux is the nature of the universe. Therefore, some sort of technique is needed to perceive process in freeze frames that are meaningful to us.[27] These techniques of existence are what give actual entities their "beyond," or their ever becoming and simultaneously ever perishing multiplicitous identities (what some would refer to as the "subject" or "subjectivity"). Both Massumi and Whitehead use the language of the "event" as a means to talk about that which the distinct experient perceives.[28]

Keller

To switch conceptual gears slightly, Catherine Keller's rendering of multiplicity and becoming in her text, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*, is extremely interesting and important to a secular/natural theological translation of underground hip-hop that grounds this project. In *Cloud*, Keller invites us into this apophatic mystery that is the name of God, a name that never concretizes in its infinite multiplicity. Keller points out a connection between ecological, political, gender, and economic issues and this ontotheological Logic of the One: when the certainty of the God of Western theism is destabilized with the decentralization of apophatic theology, the certainty of linear and fixed social constructions linked to it (such as race) begin to become just as apophatic and fluid.

For Keller, the name of God symbolizes the ultimate impossibility to name anything; every linguistic signification is faulty, but the symbol of God as the failure to harness the underlying ultimacy of all that is indicates the incompetence of all static structures of systematization.[29] Category is burned to ashes, unable to be reassembled by the best philosophical repairperson when the upsetting character of unknowing sets flame to it.

Keller tells us that while the loss of the surety of the idea of God that was destroyed before and after the "death of God" movement attributed to Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Altizer, and countless other thinkers never usually associated with this tradition, such as Frida Kahlo and James Baldwin, may be triumph for some, it is tragedy for others, including herself. Losing that certainty which never existed is devastating.[30] The imagery of the cloud that she poetically appeals to throughout the book serves the purpose of indicating the mysterious nature of that which the term "God" points toward. The destination of the name "God" is not the static destination of the name "God" itself, that which can never be conveyed by verbal language, the letter that kills the life-giving spirit. There is nothing we can do to dis/solve the cloud: our reduction will always leave a remainder. Or several. Interacting with the cloud of theistic uncertainty in language that embraces its own incompleteness can induce a powerful encounter with ultimate instability (God) that never materializes in such a way that it can be categorized satisfactorily.[31]

But can we categorize anything satisfactorily? Continuing on her quest for uncertainty and multiplicity in the cloud in ways that very closely relate to underground hip-hop's transactions of race and ethnicity, Keller goes on to say, per Whitehead, that there is no such thing as an outside knowing. Whitehead's ontological principle tells us that actual entities, or an ever-evolving perspective on that which we refer to as "objects" in a more static sense, are the only reasons for things. In other words, everything that we experience is the result of relations, which can be broken down into more relations ad infinitum. Because the actualization of potentiality results in that which was once potential relating itself to a specific location in the universe and showing up there (e.g. a carpenter who actualizes the potentiality of a table in a kitchen in Lima, Peru), our experience of it is not external, but internal. We cannot make definite statements about it. The cloud of unknowing remains. Keller would assert that many would act as if the cloud was indeed more concrete than it actually is, and in turn indulge into even greater ignorance that the helpful ignorance one enters into by admitting that he just does not know, and in turn searches for more unknowing.[32]

This unknowing that Keller speaks of is this knowing within relation that in many ways evades the categorical knowledge that linear systems crave for and use static dichotomies to express. It may not be as simple as "this or that" when/if this *is* that. She states that unknowing is by no means a way to beat the abstractions of linear theism with a mindless indulgence in the "erotic" nature of the relations themselves.[33] What Keller is calling for is a mindfulness to the interconnections that are too complex and fluid to be systematized. If what many understand to be subjectivity is an experiencing entity standing outside of that which it experiences and observing it, process philosophy asserts that the subject is merely the place where several relations converge. To unknow is to understand that each "knowing" entangles us within the multiplicity of our unseparable relations to the point that we do not know anything for certain.

Keller points toward an example of the apophasis in the rhetoric of Afro-diasporic women in the sixties and seventies who strove to redefine themselves amidst historical gender and ethnic oppression. She holds that in fighting the fixed identities of oppression, there is the tendency to attempt to liberate oneself with another fixed identity. I am not Negro or Colored, but Black. I am a woman. I am Gay.[34] Keller would hold that such categories limit in the same way their predecessors did, as they close fluidity of experience with the door of category. Evolution is frozen into snapshots that become prisons for the entities in the frame. The adventure of becoming is traded for the predictable nature of being. The fallacy of misplaced concreteness has been committed with gender and ethnicity. Keller asks the question, "Are we feminists or womanists or mujeristas; negroes or Blacks or African Americans, homosexuals or lesbians/gays or queers."[35] Keller, in this instance using the social constructions of race and ethnicity, muddles the still waters in such a way that we begin to question how seriously we take the metaphors we use to name ourselves, starting the process toward utilizing such abstractions to further probe the complex multiplicity these categories succeed in failing to exemplify.

In *Cloud of the Impossible*, Keller provides a theological/atheological/apophatic framework that critically grounds/ungrounds how this project works out underground rap's creations of models of God. In the unsaying of the name/category of God, the categories that emerge as a result of the illusion of its knowing become complex relations that factor into a reworking of categories such as race. We will return to a more thorough exegesis of this multiplicity in the third section of the chapter.

Coleman

Monica A. Coleman's uncanny brand of third-wave womanist Whiteheadian process theology with a blend of African and Afro-diasporic traditional religions serves as another point of integration through which to speak of the volatile (un)politics of multiplicity identity which ground the way of life of underground hip-hop. In texts such as *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology*, the edited volume, *Ain't I a Womanist, Too?: Third Wave Womanist Religious Thought*, and *Not Alone: Reflections on Faith and Depression*, Coleman has successfully and compellingly syncretized the Whiteheadian process philosophical metaphysic with key issues that affect communities of color, women of color, those discriminated against due to disabilities, and those with depression. Coleman has become a shining star as of late in cutting-edge discourses on public theology.

Bipolar Faith: A Black Woman's Journey With Depression and Faith showcases Coleman dealing quite intimately with her own adversities after being a victim of rape and subsequent depression. The poetic, biographical writing style of the text easily portrays Whiteheadian sensibilities in its ability to showcase the individual as not a being but a becoming. The actual entity of Coleman's humanity is never a thing that she showcases as static, but that which is always on adventure toward discovering its new identity in each instance. As with Keller, there is a personal lament that the past can no longer be returned to. Further, like any good text/life that embraces process thought, the prose of *Bipolar Faith* implies that even the seemingly fixed parts of our lives were in reality always fluid.

Coleman articulates this very well as she relates her own struggles with wanting to return to the self she was before the violent offense. She starts the chapter entitled "When I Die" with the simple words "I died."[36] This chapter marks the three-year point after she was raped and breaks open the experience to us with a compelling narrative. Nietzsche's narrative of the "death of God" in *The Gay Science* comes to mind in this passage, as Nietzsche tells us how unaware those who maintain the idea of God are unaware that God is dead. After the tragedy of rape, Coleman was indeed the living dead. She was a different person. Church was not the same. Neither was work or school.[37] Regaining the person that she once was became as futile as grasping the wind with hologram hands. The stasis of her personhood had become flux. The difficulty after such a diremption becomes how the actual entity reformats their becoming into something that can abstract concreteness so that continuing life "normally" is possible.

In "When I Die," the already "dead" Coleman applies funeral imagery to her own living death in ways that remind me of Virginia by way of New York rap duo Clipse's song "The Funeral," where the two brothers provocatively narrate their own memorial services amidst a mix of Christian and Afro West Indian obeah religious syncretism.[38] Coleman mentions the travesty (to some) that no one is bringing fried chicken to a repast, nor is anyone crying about her passing. She admits that this is not a reaction to death that she is familiar with. After the rape, Coleman finds her very identity between the decided actuality of the event of this violent infraction upon her and the possibility of the choices available to her that will decide what she will become. This dwelling in possibility can be quite uncomfortable for those accustomed to the simplicity of binary and/or singular categories. Either you're alive or you're dead. Coleman disturbs such a Logic of the One, showing us that it's not so easy existentially.

Whitehead talks about the mourning that both Coleman and Keller magically articulate to us. In Part 6 of *Process and Reality*, Whitehead states that the loss occurring from the fluid nature of things brings with it a deep sense of sorrow.[39] Whitehead's concept of God serves as that mechanism in the universe that redistributes that which was as beneficial data upon which to build the future. This work of redistribution of possibilities the relations of the past make available to utilize in the present is the poetic function that Whitehead attributes to God.[40] Even so, Whitehead, as do Keller and Coleman, takes this loss seriously. Between the loss of the former self and whatever is to become of the human afterwards (maybe to ask for another may be to ask amiss), Coleman makes space for mourning. And for Whitehead, God mourns along with the actual entity in tumultuous flux.[41]

In the chapter of *Bipolar Faith* entitled "No More Auction Block," Coleman deals with the process of reconstructing her own identity, something which she did in part by moving to Claremont to pursue graduate studies. In doing so, she narrates her first entrance to California life, which entails finding a dance studio to work out at and a rape crisis center at which she could volunteer. Within two weeks of her moving to California, physical health complications that surfaced from the demands of both dancing and the call center made it impossible to do either, not to mention the added responsibility of the rigors of graduate school.[42] Several other issues ensued from work to school. Something had to give. What Coleman eventually discovered is that in Nashville, she had interconnections that bound her to life itself. These people and things, this ever-moving organism that she was a part of, is what kept her fragmented identity in the highly intense fluid tension it needed to survive. In the midst of severe diremption, her network of sacred interconnections *were* the subjectivity that formed her personhood. The whole of *Bipolar Faith* articulates and advocates for the purposes of mental health an embrace of the complexities of the fluid self.

Underground hip-hop's de/re/construction of multiplicitous collective identity

To understand the universe of underground (or "alternative") hip-hop and multi/race/less/ness, one must understand the beginnings of hip-hop culture as a whole and the process of how it lost its unity when it was divided it, what divided it, exactly what was divided, the role of race in its commercial state, and the rise of the independent subculture of underground hip-hop, a subculture that I argue perpetuates the endless human becoming of hip-hop's origins. Here, I will chart this history and highlight some of the key socioeconomic elements that contributed to the rise of hip-hop culture and the formation of underground hip-hop culture.

Historical background

Hip-hop has always maintained a multiplicity of artists and enthusiasts. Having its beginnings in the late sixties and early seventies with youth of Puerto Rican, Afro-diasporic U.S., Barbadian, Jamaican, and other descendants, it was a movement of liberation through a syncretism of several different elements from several different cultures. Hip-hop culture is an aesthetic expression fueled by the subtle and overt societal commentary/response of the urban poor in New York City and has in a little over four decades grown to resonate with a global audience, many of whom use this way of life to address similar concerns.[43] My objective is to set up the history of the culture in such a way that this anthropological "Venn diagram" will make the multi/race/less/ness of underground hip-hop culture evident.

Hip-hop culture began on the backdrop of the Civil Rights movement and can be said to have emerged from the Black Arts movement, a group of poets, playwrights, actors, visual artists, musicians, etc., committed to the cause of displaying the value and the humanity of Afro-diasporic people. The Black Arts movement was situated in the perspectives of the champions of Black Power and emphasized the value of predominately U.S. Afro-diasporic artistic expression. Such art as self-affirmation emerged from lower-class Afro-diasporic people experiencing abuse from White supremacist governmental and societal regimes, such as the police, the school systems (the privileged going to college while those unable to afford higher education were sent to the Vietnam War), and racial inferiority (the implied axiom that being of European descent was the ultimate blessing and that non-Europeans should strive to become as European as possible to achieve U.S. success). Socioeconomic conditions were so low that the lack of necessities caused internal riots and disturbances in these low-income, lower-class areas, ailments that were addressed through the self-affirmation of the Black Arts movement. The origins of hip-hip culture possess this same ethic of a positive, humane reidentification of the oppressed lower class, the majority of whom were not of European descent.[44]

One of the places that embodied tumultuous racial tension and oppression was the Bronx, New York. This area was known as "America's worst slum" and was the host of drug abusers, single-parent homes, and street gangs. The economic demise of the Bronx was due to the postwar GIs moving to Queens and Long Island in government-arranged housing opportunities, as well as the economic shift to information technology from the manufacturing, garment, and printing industries, which left many workers jobless.

Another element that contributed to the economic downfall in the Bronx was the city construction coordinator Robert Moses's decision to create the Cross-Bronx expressway, a thoroughfare that would join Long Island to Manhattan and New Jersey, a thing that forced many Bronx residents out of their homes. Moses targeted single-family homes and put low-income high rises in their place. Moses also initiated an urban renewal project in 1961, which was an attempt to rid Chinatown, Soho, Greenwich Village, and Little Italy of lower-class families so that high rises and office buildings could stand where these citizens once lived. These people relocated to the Bronx when they were dislocated from their former residences. The Bronx was divided by class at the rise of Co-Op City, a collection of 15,000 subsidized apartments located on the Bronx's northeast side for working- and middle-class families. The northeastern portions of the Bronx were known as the good part of the area. The southern, eastern, and western areas, the areas that were populated with a multiracial group of welfare-ridden and nonworking people, were called the "South Bronx."[45]

Of the many ills of this community, one of the most significant to the identity of the Bronx is the gang problem that thrived within its mainframe. The decay of the family structure due to the impoverished conditions of parents, their drug habits, excessive alcohol, and/or other vices led to children seeking other sources for a sense of the unity that family failed to provide them. Street gangs provided loyalty, respect, and a community that they could access during times of need. The marks of gangs were tattoos, a distinct fashion in clothes that denoted a particular gang, colors, etc. Territory was very important in New York street gang culture, and territories were marked with spray can insignias.[46] An example of this in the popular culture can be seen in the marking of territory in the Manhattan-based movie *West Side Story*, a motion picture set in 1957 and based on a romance brewing between the ex-member of a Polish American street gang and the sister of the leader of a rival Puerto Rican street gang. The claiming of territory was an integral part of street gangs, and is also an important part in the development of the hip-hop culture. Because of the low-income, drug-infested, and impoverished climate during the birth of the hip-hop culture in the late sixties to early seventies, street gangs served as an organization of safety. The youths of the Bronx chose between being harassed daily by those groups who had more numbers or "street credibility" than them and joining a gang that could provide them protection from these perpetual enemies.

The turning point in Bronx street gang activities occurred on December 8, 1971. By this time, the lives that had been lost to racially motivated gang violence had been numerous, and the situation began to spiral out of control. On December 8, hundreds of gang members met to articulate a nonviolent future for the Bronx. Afrika Baambaataa, one of the founding fathers of the hip-hop culture, was present at the meeting. Baambaataa, born Kevin Donovan, was a leader of the powerful Bronx gang the Black Spades and he, among others, laid a foundation that assembled all of the youth of the

Bronx together in terms of music, dance, and visual art. These elements were part of the cultural fabric of many gang members, and Baambaataa orchestrated competition in these activities in place of gang violence. While such a channeling of aggressive energy did not stop the gang epidemic completely, it did curb it significantly. The community began to see the basis of the hip-hop culture, unity displayed through a mutual participation in artistic expression, take root within the lives of youth inseparably attached to the street gang way of life.[47]

The elements of hip-hop

1 Graffiti

One thing that could be said with a great degree of certainty is that the element of graffiti, or the art of stylized writing (many times on private property) with spray cans and markers, was chronologically the first. This is due to gang culture, for the territorial markings, or "tags," were stylized paintings that existed for the purpose of delineating the boundaries of a gang's domain. As early as the late sixties, there are reports of a graffiti artist, or "writer," tagging on walls by the street name of Smiley 149. Smiley 149 was of Puerto Rican descent and was in a Puerto Rican gang called the Savage Nomads, a gang affiliated with the all Puerto Rican Savage Skulls.[48] Others contend that "Cool Earl" and "Cornbread" in Philadelphia were the performers of the first "bombing," or a very rapid tag-and-move operation, before authorities could discover who the culprits were. Two very important pioneers of New York graffiti in terms of the burgeoning hip-hop culture is said to be either one of two individuals, a Greek American young man known as TAKI 183 or another writer by the name of Julio 204. TAKI 183's graffiti name is a derivation of his surname, Panayiotakis, and he distributed his tag while serving as a street messenger, a job that constantly kept him on the subway trains and in the neighborhoods. TAKI's hobby gained so large of an interest that the *New York Times* did an article on him, thus catapulting graffiti art into the scope of popular culture and into the lives of teenagers all around New York City who imitated it.[49] Some say that Julio 204 was actually the first New York graffiti artist, with evidence of him having tags on New York trains before TAKI 183.[50] As graffiti became a staple in hip-hop culture, it progressed from just simply letters and numerals upon private property into an aesthetic world of imagery, creativity, competition, and activism against factors threatening the existence of the underclass. It began as a nonhomocentric intercultural phenomenon and maintained this characteristic as it was carried into the intercultural ghetto that was the Bronx.

2 Breakdancing

Breakdancing, or "b-boying/b-girling," is said by some to have come into the picture during the mid-seventies. However, others hold that it appeared earlier. An eyewitness, Alien Ness, states that "you could take the b-boys back to the outlaw gangs of the sixties [and], seventies. They were the original b-boys, and it was a part of their war dances."[51] The Fab Five, a division of the Puerto Rican Savage Skulls, were graffiti artists as well as b-boys in the early seventies. Burn, another eyewitness, just as Alien Ness, contends that breakdancing was directly related to the street gangs of the area. He says, "Gangs had their dancers, their graffiti writers, and their stick up kids! It all started with the gangs, all over – Bushwick, Bedstuy, East New York, Coney, every block had dance crews and they rocked."[52] Breakdancing, like graffiti, shows the multiethnic dynamic in hip-hop culture present even in its beginning (the infamous Rock Steady Crew, composed of European U.S. citizens, those of Puerto Rican and Afro-diasporic U.S. descent, among others, is an onsite example). As hip-hop formed into a distinctive whole and brought the four elements that existed as separate entities into one organism, this multiverse of expressions automatically became a nonhierarchical multiverse of various skin colors and ethnicities

3 DJing

The elements of DJing and MCing were the recipients of graffiti and breakdancing and helped synthesize them into the unit that would become known as "hip-hop." The birth of DJing as we understand it in the hip-hop culture is attributed to a Jamaican immigrant born Clive Campbell. DJ Kool Herc, or Kool DJ Herc, was his alias, and he began to assemble dance parties. The parties that had existed before and during the hip-hop era consisted of DJs playing records that contained breakdowns (segments of the song that played a bare drum beat for a few measures) that caused the people on the dance floor to exert themselves a great deal. After these short breakdowns ended, the dance floor would return to its former state of relatively low activity. Kool Herc wanted to extend these breakdowns in an attempt to keep the attendees of the parties on the dance floor for longer periods of time. He did this by buying doubles of popular and obscure records that had breakdowns which stimulated those at his parties to dance and playing the same breakdown of the same song in succession with two turntables. Thus, Herc created a "loop" of the song, a feat which kept the dance floor populated, because the parts of the songs which the dancers enjoyed the most were played over and over again until Kool Herc in a sense created an entirely new song from the parts of an existing one. It is here that the term "breakdancer" begins to develop. These dancers were called "b-boys" and "b-girls." The innovative, acrobatic, and extraordinary practice of breakdancing developed here, as dancers began to create their own moves and compete among one another, thus bringing a sense of self-identity to themselves within the growing artistic movement. The Kool Herc parties signify the beginning cohesiveness of the art of the DJ as it collected the art of the b-boy from its fragmented existence in the Bronx and Bronx gang life and incorporated it into the hip-hop culture through the parties, the forum where these dance expressions and competitions took place.[53]

Kool Herc's pioneering of the DJ parties in the Bronx in the mid-seventies came along with an ethic of peace and unity, and violence was not tolerated at these functions. However, this should not be misconstrued to suggest that the gang problems were annihilated, though they were curbed. It did aid in restructuring the identity of gang territory. The city became divided by DJs, with DJ Kool Herc performing in the West Bronx neighborhoods and the East Bronx nightclubs. Afrika Baambaataa performed in the north, and others were the providers of this innovative soundscape and dance opportunity to other areas. Other DJs, such as DJ Breakout, were responsible for offering "shoutouts" to various gang leaders over the P.A. systems, encouraging them to enjoy life peacefully. The rise of hip-hop culture and practices provided an alternative outlet for gang violence, as they converted the bloody defending of territory into a peaceful artistic challenge between different sections of New York City.[54]

4 MCing

Kool Herc would announce certain phrases on the microphone while DJing to persuade his audience to produce their best dance moves. Eventually, he commissioned other people to do this for him, therefore allowing him a more focused approach to creating the musical portrait for those in attendance. When this practice began, the person, known as the MC (which means "move the crowd," "master of ceremonies," etc.) would simply state short motivational sentences or phrases to arouse dancing, and this eventually advanced to the point that MCs began to write their own lyrics. Most of the lyrics were written in the format of a poetic rhyme. The MC began to develop an identity apart from the DJ. Their occupation grew from being just "hype men and women," assisting the musical commander of the party, to actual entities who commanded separate attention. At this point, DJs began to add MCs to their shows, thus forming "crews" who would perform at the parties and engage in battles with crews from other areas of the city. Some of the early MCs and crews made up of MCs were Melle Mel, Busy Bee, The Cold Crush Brothers, and the Funky Four Plus One More (the first hip-hop crew to have a female MC, Sha-Rock).[55] It is from these crews that the art of the MC emerged into the hip-hop culture as an element. The element of the MC was the last element to be discovered, but would serve as a key determining factor in hip-hop culture's longevity.

Afrika Baambaaataa, the aforementioned leader of the Black Spades, seeking a peaceful alternative to the gang violence occurring on New York streets through the elements of the hip-hop culture, created an organization that philosophically combined all four elements. This organization is known as the Universal Zulu Nation. Baambaataa was a DJ and hosted Zulu Nation Parties just as Kool Herc hosted his own parties. These intercultural gatherings were avenues where all practitioners of the elements could hone their skills in a nonviolent enjoyment of the multidimensional art that they created. Gang leaders and drug dealers would give up their weapons and drugs at these functions and participate in the hip-hop culture. The motto of the Zulu Nation was “Peace, Love, Unity, and Having Fun,” and the organization also promoted education, self-knowledge, anti-racism, and a host of other virtues Baambaataa adapted from the Nation of Islam, the Civil Rights movement, Christianity, and various religious systems. Hip-hop as presented by Baambaataa was a positive syncretism that could be used to instigate a social renewal shown through looking at life through different eyes.[56] The Zulu Nation via the four elements offered the possibility of the oppressed Bronx “subject” defining herself over against the dominant narrative’s caricaturizing within the multiplicities of “activist art,” which are the origins of hip-hop.

Where did we go from here?

Hip-hop was thrust into the general public eye when MCing, or rapping, found itself on recorded media and manufactured by record companies. When rapping began, the idea of making albums was hardly a paramount concern (if a concern at all), for although the art of the MC came into an identity of its own, this individual identity was still practiced along with the element of the DJ. At this stage, hip-hop was more a competitive sport that occurred amidst music than a musical genre. Rap recordings made the MC the predominant voice of the hip-hop culture and spread that understanding to a wider audience. The Sugar Hill Gang is accredited with broadening the audience of rap music commercially with the song, “Rapper’s Delight,” which featured the group rapping over the instrumental of the group Chic’s song, “Good Times.”[57] From this point, many major record labels signed rap artists to record rap albums, and hip-hop’s identity in the realm of popular culture over time was seen to be synonymous with rap music. Breakdancing, graffiti, and DJing made appearances in segments, but were no longer a major part of the commercial composition of hip-hop culture. Rap’s influence increased as the years did, and it progressed from the early eighties into the mid-nineties. By this time, “rap” had become the popular definition of hip-hop, with subtle sketches of other elements far in the background (such as graffiti-inspired album covers or breakdancers showing up in rap videos every once in a while). At this point, the popular picture of hip-hop was portrayed as a virtually Afro-diasporic culture (for most popular rappers were of Afro-diasporic descent). Afronormative rap music had proven to be commercially viable, eventually even at the expense of hip-hop’s early intercultural, early ethic of peace, unity, and having fun. The other elements (along with the alternative practice of MCing) remained multiracial. They also remained where they had always been for the most part: “underground.”[58]

Multi/race/less/ness as underground hip-hop identity in process

The stages of hip-hop in its emergence were stages developed by the ingenuity of people for the purpose of aesthetic enjoyment and a sense of escape from the harsh realities that plagued the Bronx womb that brought it forth unto the world. It was also to reinvent themselves as nonviolent, peaceful humans dealing with negative reactions to socioeconomic oppression. Its creators did not foresee its worldwide appeal. Hip-hop culture was understood to be a unit with several dimensions that were parts of a forming and ever-evolving whole. The Hip-Hop Declaration of Peace describes hip-hop as a "collective consciousness."[59] This collective consciousness includes a recognition of all of these elements. Commercial rap cannot be called hip-hop in an original sense because it does not include the other elements of the culture in its equation. Briefly and generally, the difference between underground hip-hop and commercial rap lies in the fact that the former defines itself in light of all of the elements. Commercial rap takes the label "hip-hop" and refuses to share it with the other elements. The separation of rap from the other elements by commercial record labels destroyed the unintentional intercultural organism that hip-hop was building for the pop culture that was watching it; the glorification of rap and predominately Afro-diasporic rappers promoted by major record labels from rap's induction into the music industry until the present became the common outsider's (and insider's) impression/understanding of hip-hop. I will now discuss how underground hip-hop culture reinterpreted all the morals and aesthetics of original hip-hop in a multi/race/less/way.

I want to assert before I move into this discussion that the idea of "multi/race/less/ness" is not equivalent to "color blindness," or the notion that racial categories do indeed persist but only historically; they are irrelevant in this modern/postmodern era. What I am proposing with the idea of "multi/race/less/ness" is closer to Kerry Ann Rockquemore's concept of "racial transcendence," which indicates a renouncement of the category/social construction of "race."[60] Within an aesthetic Whiteheadian process framework, I shape multi/race/less/ness differently from Rockquemore's racial transcendence, in that I use multi/race/less/ness as an attempt to describe the process of identity that occurs as entities continuous synthesize the multiplicity of ever-occurring omnidirectional experiences into their "subjectivity." The work of multi/race/less/ness does indeed function due to the underlying assumption that the belief in and dependence on racial categories is a very real thing that should be problematized through its more primordial approach. Thinking about race in deconstructive ways may be better served if the commitments to racial language (such as appealing to the categories "White," "Black," "Latino," "Hispanic," "African American," and other labels to critique the categories themselves) used in many instances of critical race theory were broken. It is also important to note that Victor

Anderson, in *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African-American Religious and Cultural Criticism*, while holding on to the language of "Blackness," rigorously and brilliantly articulates the cultural and religious dangers of a "Black" totality of identity that denies cultural criticism and transformation throughout history. I would argue that original hip-hop and underground hip-hop unintentionally "became" a subtle racial transcendence that a Whiteheadian view on process identity describes and translates philosophically. Multi/race/less/ness also has resonance with certain features of Paul Gilroy's idea of the "black Atlantic," particularly its ability to transcend both the social categories of the nation (which enforces "Blackness" as virtually a necessity that the human must ingress) and a non-negotiable as to what form this necessity must take for certain bodies (the prescribed categories of race itself).[61] In the malleable conceptual framework of the foundations of hip-hop and the presently existing underground hip-hop that this monograph speaks of, there exists a realm of ideas in which the impetus of transcendence is not merely "desire," as Gilroy remarks about the sojourns of Quincy Jones and Richard Wright in parts of Europe.[62] Because I am skeptical of the category of "Blackness" even in its deconstructive reformulations because of the historic semiotic power of the symbol, which I hold could possibly (not necessarily) revert to notions of static identities, I utilize multi/race/less/ness as a new symbol that does not linguistically inherit the baggage of a fixed ontological Blackness. Multi/race/less/ness creates perpetually disturbed concepts of identity in underground hip-hop, but also organically evolves into a spaces and places in which this new identity can play, making it not merely a "desire" but also an actuality.

What is multi/race/less/ness?

I am glad you inquired. The question has been burning on the tops of your heads since you started this chapter. The answer is given in four concise parts.

1 Multi

The "multi" portion of "multi/race/less/ness" speaks to the difficulty (and impossibility) to talk about anything in the universe as a singularity. Every entity in the universe is perpetually composed of an infinite number of influences and decisions. To talk about any entity is to talk about not a thing but an event that includes many things. "Multi" avoids Whitehead's "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" by admitting the processual nature of the universe.

2 Race

In the category of "race," we encounter a very constrained confluence of social constructions that are treated as a fixed idea(s) by which we "box" people who look a certain way, are from a certain part of the world, etc. In many ways, this category, while inevitably being a multiplicity, is in direct opposition to the fluid of "multi" in its push to reduce the processual "many" of the universe into a static "one." In "multi/race/less/ness," "race," like "multi," also serves as an admission. "Race" admits an authentic existence of both the category and the effects. This is why I utilize the word and do not turn a blind eye to it. It is not posited to ask the question "Does race exist?" It is poised in the multi/race/less/ness question to ask "How does race exist," and from there excavate the results of its existence.

3 Less

"Less" is about rejecting the category of "race" in favor of a "multi" understanding of self. In such a formulation of identity, the experiencing subject may become concerned with nationality and ethnicity (things that could be argued to be defined more by the individuals and collectives who partake in said nationalities and ethnicities than by outsiders desirous of reducing multiplicity to something more liner and easier for them to understand) as opposed to race. In the "less," "race" is rejected either subtly or overtly through ways of life that defy playing the idea of identity by the rules of the racial categories. To combine the two words, "race/less" is the acting against racial categories by acknowledging their existence and ingressing recalcitrance. I would argue that in regard to the underlying ways of being that compose underground hip-hop, these means of resistance are so much a part of the organism of the culture that they may evade conscious choice in many ways.

4 Ness

This is simple. The "ness" is merely the act or state of being multi/race/less.

Multi/race/less/ness utilizes Faber's *reconciled non/difference* (which is his read on Whitehead's "poet of the world" passage in Part V of *Process and Reality*) as it holds on to all of the influences that create the identities of the experiencing human entity and refuses to simplify them to one or a few things.[63] In this privileging of the irreducible yet relational parts of the human, multi/race/less/ness gives us a helpful lens through which to look at the multiplicity of human becoming that takes place in underground hip-hop. In a word, multi/race/less/ness is about the understanding that because of infinite change, you can never become "you," and the boldness to think about what that means amidst categories which assert that we must be "this" or "that."

Multi/race/less/ness as a process theory of underground hip-hop personhood

The timeline of underground hip-hop can be said to have begun from several points. Some would argue that its roots lie within the rap influence of avant-garde groups released by major record labels who pushed the artistic envelope, such as Digable Planets, Wu-Tang Clan, Ultramagnetic MCs, etc. Others would consider progressive rap groups of the later nineties, like Black Star, Juggaknots, and others, to be responsible for actually birthing and solidifying what is now known as underground hip-hop culture. Both of these streams are very important. However, my charting of underground hip-hop's history at this point will focus on what I would argue is the primary catalyst that created this community of uncanny people. This cause encompasses all other causes said to be responsible for bringing underground hip-hop to be the recognizable genre and way of life that it is today. This cause is *protest*. When commercial record labels begin to separate rap from hip-hop and greatly compromise its uncanny transformation of how its adherents and practitioners understand their identity for financial reasons, another community formed in *protest* of this behavior. The DJs, breakdancers, graffiti artists, and MCs who comprise underground hip-hop all participate in the creation of an art form that represents authentic expression. This subculture/way of life functions as an underlying opposition to major record labels' homogenizing not only the content but also the bodies of commercial rappers. Therefore, underground hip-hop by its very nature is *protest*. In this protest, the complexity of identity that commercial rap left behind in its ascent to popular culture was regained and increases perpetually.

As a process theory/metaphysic, I would assert that multi/race/less/ness in underground hip-hop is a syncretism of the interrelationality amidst difference in Whitehead, Massumi's activist philosophy, the eternal mystery of unknowingness of identity in Keller, and the perpetual embracing of new personhood in Coleman. As practitioners of and adherents to this anti-structure way of life becoming, we understand ourselves as never arriving at a fixed personal identity, but ever on a journey of self-creation as we integrate future possibilities of that which is in our sphere of influence with our historical personhood. In other words, underground hip-hop personhood is an ever-becoming event that never denies the past but continually builds on it to construct a self that never concretizes. To channel Keller, multi/race/less/ness is the destabilizing of the surety of any fixed identity, even the ones we create in recalcitrance to oppression and refuse to allow revision on.

Underground hip-hop's response to race in a sense promotes a future racial transcendence to be adapted by its followers. Legendary hip-hop rapper KRS-One, in one of his several lectures at Yale, spoke about referring to himself not as a Black man, but as "Hip-Hop." With this statement, he questions if describing himself by his ethnicity is a healthy thing. Instead, he defines himself by a culture and identity that is large enough to sublate all racial and ethnic identities. KRS-One postulates an underground hip-hop ethic where a person is not judged by their differences, but by what connects them to others in the culture. For example, in the underground hip-hop culture, an artist is not referred to as a "White" graffiti artist or a "Black" DJ, but is referred to simply by the craft that they practice (a graffiti artist or a DJ). The infamous underground producer, DJ Krush, who is from Japan, stated that the individual characteristics that one brings to the hip-hop culture is what makes them hip-hop. In other words, underground hip-hop is an organism that by nature creates a theoretical, nonhierarchical space for human entities (events) to be themselves. These differences unite rather than divide people in the matrix of underground hip-hop consciousness and identity.[64]

It would be inaccurate to say that this anti-Euro supremacist way of identifying people in the underground hip-hop culture does away with race. What it can be said to do is displace race as the primary factor of identification, for a multiethnic community of people is in many instances the norm for underground hip-hop. The differences that people are described by in terms of hip-hop artists is their respective crafts, the essence of which links the practitioners back to the larger body of hip-hop, since all elements are understood to be segments that compose a larger unified situation. To explain this complexity shortly, it could be said that in underground hip-hop as a theory,[65] a person's humanity is valued before their race, if they subscribe to racial categories at all. Underground hip-hop defines personhood by interhuman relations and not static separations. This happens through a multi/race/less *reconciled non/difference*. Massumi's notion of relationality as not a thing but a current that runs through all and holds all together is very close to the multi/race/less/ness play of all becoming identity that occurs in underground hip-hop.[66] To be multi/race/less is to trade a static knowing of self for a relational unknowing of personhood that may become that which we could not foresee, similar to Keller's understanding of the relations that compose identity as too complex to simplify with any label.

The underground hip-hop artist/adherent is a cultural outlaw of sorts, in that she or he commits "crimes" against what is considered artistically and socially normal. For example, the influx of non–Afro-diasporic (or human entities considered to be non–Afro-diasporic) rappers in underground hip-hop commits a cultural "felony," for the concept of anything more than a handful of non–Afro-diasporic rappers in hip-hop is thought by many followers of popular rap music to be against the unspoken "Blacks predominately" rule of the genre. Another concrete reference of this cultural "lawbreaking" would be a non–Afro-diasporic graffiti artist maintaining that she or he practices a more authentic version of hip-hop than does an Afro-diasporic rapper signed to a popular label who replicates the whims of his or her marketing consultant on recordings. To many of the pop culture understanding of hip-hop, the non–Afro-diasporic graffiti artist has nothing to do with hip-hop, but the Afro-diasporic commercial rapper is the main representation of it. Along with the possible charge of identity theft, the non–Afro-diasporic graffiti artist might also be accused of cultural theft. Underground hip-hop artists and followers operate in a context that is different from their commercial rap counterparts, and many argue that the commercialization of hip-hop's rap element led to a public misconception that hip-hop culture by nature is "Black" and segregated, returning to racial categories that were organically abandoned, at the most, or sublated, at the least, by the inaugural society of hip-hop culture.[67]

The progression element that is alive in the underground hip-hop culture culminates in the race factors of this intercultural group of people. If my earlier assertion that underground hip-hop culture in its entirety is a protest against the popular rap isolated by multibillion-dollar record companies is accepted, then what logically follows is that underground hip-hop is a progression through regression. It is a progression from a limited view of hip-hop as being loosely defined as "rap" in popular culture to an encompassing of the other elements that were historically integral as a part of the makeup of hip-hop. Commercial rap is a world visually *dominated* by Black people. Underground hip-hop is a multiverse authentically *shared* by all people. The work of the underground hip-hop artist is always one of redefinition. While the self is maintained, the self acquires other influences into it. In other words, a Chinese rapper remains Chinese when entering the hip-hop culture, but incorporates a variety of other cultural expressions into her or his practice of the art form and becoming personhood. Some of these may be the African tradition of the "griot" (or village storyteller), the African American metaphorical battling influence of "the dozens," and the symbolic musical style of antebellum slavery songs.[68] Due to the deep ways that joining the interrelational matrix of the underground can and does affect how participants and adherents perceive themselves and who they are/becoming in the world, can we truly say that the rapper in question is merely Chinese? To conjure Coleman, who you were becoming when you enter the multiverse of underground hip-hop is not the same person you are becoming now. Underground hip-hop's processual relational identity via multi/race/less/ness is a joyous funeral for the perpetual perishing and rebirth of the experiencing entity, interconnections that resist the frozen characterizations of race. To be hip-hop, according to KRS-One, is to be a part of another culture that could not exist without the various cultures of its members, but is transformative in such a way that the differences of personhood brought by members from all over the globe are not conflicts (race/totalizing narratives) but contrasts (ethnicity/multiplicity and perpetual becoming).

This organic abandoning of race in underground hip-hop is totally antithetical to the dominant society's overt and subtle encouragement of compartmentalization (as seen in socioeconomic segregation of races in housing, employment, etc.). Underground hip-hop transcends race through progression, declaring that the world that is presently being created by the people influenced by underground hip-hop should be a world that *processes* toward holistic unity amidst (and preserving) diversity. It holds that the influences of people of all ethnicities become the human existential situation as we know it and should be readily welcomed, valued, respected, and not homogenized as we become in our subjective passing presents (Massumi) that which we encounter.[69] This multi/race/less consciousness is foundational in fueling underground hip-hop's social justice work, which is common to many of its adherents and practitioners. This particular argument will take more shape as the ever unfolding project unfolds a bit more. Underground hip-hop culture is a work *in process* that (un)clearly contrasts the oppressive ways the dominant culture impresses upon our being with the multi/race/less becoming/consciousness that could be the consequent nature of the larger culture, providing it actualize those possibilities. For the underground hip-hopper's worldview, this process of progress never ends. If hip-hop was indeed the hierarchical and Afronormative realm that much of the literature in hip-hop studies implies and overtly states, one of its biggest offensives against racism would be nonexistent.

One example

Some of this may be too abstract (and I dwell in abstractions, and it may be a good idea for you to stop me), so maybe I should provide a "concrete" example of multi/race/less/ness as I close out this particular cypher. It is as follows.

1 The Get Down

The Get Down is a Netflix series that aired between 2016 and 2017. Created by Baz Luhrman and Stephen Adly Guirgis, the series focuses on five young men in the Bronx in the late seventies who find the burgeoning hip-hop culture as they navigate the perils of urban socioeconomic, political, and racial hardships together. Justice Smith plays the star character, Ezekiel Figueroa, also known as "Zeke," or "Books" (due to his intellectual ability, a thing he conveys via the medium of rap). Three of the young men are brothers in a family by the last name of Kipling, with Jaden Smith playing Marcus, or "Dizee," Kipling, and a graffiti artist writing under the name "Rumi 411." The two other Kiplings, Miles, or "Boo-Boo," Kipling and Ronald, or "Ra," Kipling, are played by Tremaine Brown and Skylan Brooks, respectively. Miles is a genius with figuring out how all types of machines function, and Ronald has the type of personality, maturity, and foresight that many would attribute to someone twice his age. Shameik Moore plays the character Curtis, or "Shaolin Fantastic," who was both a street hustler and a DJ under the tutelage of the legendary DJ Grandmaster Flash of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. All five of these young men become encapsulated in hip-hop culture, which at this point in history had permeated and transformed the Bronx into a world full of battles in all of the elements, parties where the DJs would "get down" and the b-girls and b-boys would express themselves, quasi-religious philosophies such as the teachings of Baambaataa (who, along with Grandmaster Flash, is a character in the series) and the Universal Zulu Nation, and multiethnic networks within the culture that in many ways sublated and transcended racial hierarchies. The five become known as "The Get Down Brothers."[70]

What is so beautiful about *The Get Down's* display of hip-hop culture is that the writers portray these five "brothers" to not really fully understand the complexity of what they've entered into. Shaolin Fantastic knows the most about this new way of life, as he is the one who ushers the rest into this alternative consciousness of graffiti, DJing, "breaking," and MCing. But he is still learning the ways of the culture from Grandmaster Flash (who is portrayed as a sort of sensei to Shaolin). From the first episode of the series, this thing that they are doing is not clearly defined, even by those who have been doing it for a while. As they progress within this infinite and indefinite realm of creativity, their very understandings of how they view themselves become wrapped up within this unknowing. And as a part of that ever-evolving process, they transform out of static understandings of the self. It may be hard to pinpoint where Zeke ends and "Books" begins, as the wanderlust of creativity always seeks that next thing that personhood could become. It is in these moments that hip-hop culture inevitably provides a vehicle for racial transcendence. If a human entity perpetually becomes other than what she was before via her encounter with or the creation of hip-hop works of art, then it would follow that hip-hoppers who understand the world as perpetual becoming (whether they are conscious or unconscious of this) would have difficulty with categorizing anything as static, including that which we might refer to as "human personhood." The essence of hip-hop in its original form and the category of race do not have a harmonious but tumultuous relationality, a relationality that the hip-hop collective consciousness prehends in its actualization of a culture not founded on human ossification, but the activist art of experiencing ever-evolving interconnections as perpetual self-discovery/creation.[71] Much of the literature in hip-hop studies is rooted in said ossification and is challenged by *The Get Down*, which in many ways gives a historically accurate rendering of the conceptual texture of how hip-hop responds to racial hierarchies of any kind, among other things.

There are so many multiplicitous interconnections to talk about in *The Get Down*. I kinda become excited thinking about it, as it in many ways is a mirror of how the beginning of my own journey in the realm of underground hip-hop in the mid-to-late nineties started. One of the most important interconnections treated in the series is that of violent street life and the alternative universe of hip-hop. In the gestating stages of the culture, as aforementioned, being a gangster or a drug dealer while investing in the ever-evolving organism of breakin' graffiti, DJin', and MCin' was common.

Shaolin Fantastic, a DJ/street hustler, represents many people in the Bronx in the late seventies who desired to become more than what their socioeconomic context and associated stereotypes indicated they could be. Similar to Coleman's narration of a friend asking her what she does about depression, "Shao" silently asks himself a similar question throughout the series.[72] His question could be stated as "How do I redefine and liberate myself amidst the predicament I was born into that requires me to live a street life that is dangerous to myself and those in my community?" DJing and graffiti were the answers. In these two elements, he finds not himself, but his becoming. In hip-hop, he transcends all elements of his context that would fight to define him as simply an abandoned orphan who turned to the streets because he had no choice. In the series, Shao remains intertwined in both hip-hop and the streets, the latter by necessity and the former by choice.[73] This oscillation between an old self and an ever-becoming new self that Shao embodies is central to how hip-hop's original impetus moves omnidirectionally in ways opposite to a static understanding of personhood that powers racism and homocentrism.

The multi/race/less element of the culture's beginnings comes out clearly in Afrika Baambaataa's statement in the last episode of Season 2 of the *Get Down*. Baambaataa traveled through this transcendence of race himself as a former gang member in a context where some of the gang disputes were based on humans in the Bronx looking at each other through the lens of race. Baambaataa emerges from his gang tenure with the intent to bring all together, not as a homogenous entity, but as non/difference, with hip-hop serving as a conceptual space where b-boys and b-girls, DJs, graffiti artists, and MCs of various backgrounds could begin and continue life-transformative interconnections. Hip-hop's philosophical fabric, constructed by founders such as Grandmaster Flash and Kool DJ Herc but articulated as principles by Baambaataa, was constructed on this multiplicity; a unity amidst diversity.[74] In a meeting between The Get Down Brothers and Baambaataa, Bam says that the "get down," or the drum breaks or bridges of the records (of all genres) that the dancers would crave were composed of every culture in the world. To quote Baambaataa's character in the episode, "The 'get down' ain't got no prejudice. If the ingredients are right, don't matter where it come from."[75] Endless multiplicity is the foundation of the origins of hip-hop, and the turntable at the hands of a process DJ serves as the medium where Massumi's activist philosophy, which resists division and the hierarchies that ensue, occurs.[76]

This last episode of the series that I feel ended way too soon (I was craving a third season) is very important in what it symbolizes. In this episode, The Get Down Brothers, in an attempt to escape a contract they unwittingly signed with Shao's crime boss to record a rap record with a live band (what "Rapper's Delight" was a year later, since this particular part of *The Get Down* is supposed to be happening in 1978), involve the entire Bronx scene in putting a stop to this "blasphemy," according to Grandmaster

Flash's character.[77] This, of course, is representative of the hijacking of the art form by major record labels and the "underground" resistance. This is not a resistance to commercialization by the originators and practitioners (since these entrepreneurs were making money from the craft), but to commodification by outsiders who can only understand it as a product and not a way of life. In the aforementioned meeting between The Get Down Brothers and Baambaataa, Rah says that we have to protect our music from those who would want to take it.[78] This "our" is not referring to so-called "Black" music or so-called "White" music, or "insert any racial label here" music. He is speaking of a community, a multi/race/less society/organism that boasts of members with origins from all over the world. There is no hierarchy, but interconnections amidst all of the adherents and practitioners of the elements. Subscribing to this nonhomocentric metaphysic and way of life grants you total access to its way of seeing the world.

As a practitioner and adherent of underground hip-hop for most of my life, I will assert that the current landscape in many ways resembles that of what is seen in *The Get Down*. All of the elements are practiced in synergy, competition in the elements and the proverbial "sharpening of the sword" in battle is encouraged, and many of us define ourselves by our nationality, which is hip-hop, and not our race, which is given by a bloody colonial and postcolonial history. This is not to assert that underground hip-hop is a paradise where race does not exist. But I do assert that underground hip-hop in many instances prehends the original energy of the Bronx origins, and in so doing reenacts and reacts to the opportunity to be a part of a culture created by all cultures and privileges none. Some of us (including myself) claim to live in that realm of racial transcendence provided by hip-hop.

Conclusion

I felt it was necessary to create a lens through which the reader could view the following chapters. Without it, the examples, references, and histories I access throughout the text might seem very out of place, since much of the discussion in hip-hop studies has never addressed (or admitted) the historical difficulties with a solely Afronormative/Afrocentric/Afro-original understanding of the culture. What I am saying is nothing different than that which has been said by respected legends of the art form/way of life, such as Kool G Rap[79] and Buckshot of Black Moon,[80] among others. The Afronormativity that occurs in much of the literature in the field should not be expected in my work, and multi/race/less/ness is my elongated reason why. This chapter also serves a means by which seasoned scholars writing in hip-hop studies can hopefully benefit as they build on the already outstanding bodies of work that they have already done. To be clear, I do not minimize the indelible contribution of the Afro diaspora to the beginning and continuance of hip-hop culture. Without it, hip-hop would not look, smell, feel, and taste the way it does. On the contrary, I celebrate our contributions as one giant step forward among many other equally giant steps that I think the founders are (and would be) pleased to see are celebrated in the multiverse of underground hip-hop as we progress toward a *non/different* diverse unity. Multi/race/less/ness as a process concept of perpetual identity attempts to syncretize the insights of Whitehead, Massumi, Keller, and Coleman and underground hip-hop's grappling with personhood in ways that not only illustrate the complexity of human becoming but also show how the underlying activity of hip-hop's original multiplicity deeply troubles racial categories.

Notes

1 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, corrected edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald Sherburne (New York: The Free P, 1978), 29.
2 "Afro-diasporic" refers to all of African descent, regardless of their geographical location. Influenced by Timothy Drew, or Noble Dru Ali, the founder of the Moorish Science Temple of America (a U.S.-bred sect of Islam used mostly in service of the liberation of the descendants of U.S. slaves from mental and physical colonization), and other scholars, the author of this work steers clear from terms such as "Black," "White," "Latino," "Hispanic," etc., due to (1) the origins of these terms in the vocabulary of the colonizers and not the colonized and (2) The inability of these terms to connect those labeled by them to their original lands.
3 Roland Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox P, 2008), 42.
4 This is Whitehead's term for locating the focal point of a thing in its being (fixed nature) as opposed to its becoming (flux). In other words, for the intents and purposes of this discussion, the assertion that "race" is a function of typecasting individuals based on societal standards, thus reducing their humanity to a set category, would be to commit the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness."
5 Faber, 325, 145.
6 Whitehead, 15.
7 Ibid.
8 Laurel Schneider, *Beyond Monotheism: A Theology of Multiplicity* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1–6.
9 Whitehead, 7.
10 Ibid, 81.
11 Ibid, 65.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid, 67.
14 Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts* (Cambridge: MIT P, 2011), 8.
15 Ibid.
16 Whitehead, 161.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid, 84.
20 Massumi, 9.
21 Ibid, 14 (emphasis in original).
22 Ibid.
23 Illogic, "1000 Whispers," *Float* (Weightless Recordings, 2003), CD.
24 Massumi, 24.
25 Ibid, 21.

26 Ibid, 20.
27 Ibid, 19.
28 Ibid, 61.
29 Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (New York: Columbia UP, 2013), 4.
30 Ibid, 15–16.
31 Ibid, 17.
32 Ibid, 21.
33 Here, Keller's use of the word "erotic" is drawn from her rendering of the Hebrew *yada*, which refers to an erotic love, love which does not fit in the neat categories of analysis. She is not dealing with sexual matters, but exegetes this term in such a way that the use of *yada* in regard to a visceral justice for the poor in the Hebrew Bible connects with her understanding of multiplicity and relation as an unknowing that requires us to thoughtfully acknowledge the nuances of inter-relationality and does not require us to fully understand them.
34 Keller, 32.
35 Ibid, 33.
36 Coleman, Monica, Bipolar Faith: A Black Woman's Journey With Depression and Faith (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 219.
37 Ibid.
38 Clipse, "The Funeral," (East West Records, 1998), Vinyl.
39 Whitehead, 349.
40 Ibid, 346, 347.
41 Ibid, 351.
42 Monica A. Coleman, *Bipolar Faith: A Black Woman's Journey with Depression and Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress P, 2016), 245–46.
43 Emmett G. Price, *Hip-Hop Culture* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 1.
44 Ibid, 4–6.
45 Ibid, 4–7.
46 Ibid, 8–9.
47 Ibid, 9–11.
48 Ibid, 8.
49 Price, 187.
50 Ibid, 30.
51 Charlie Ahearn, and Jim Fricke. *Yes Ya'll* (Cambridge: Experience Music Project, 2002), 8–9.
52 Ibid.
53 Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (London: Picador, 2005), 79–80.
54 Ibid.
55 Price, 36.
56 Price, 13.
57 Although The Sugar Hill Gang were the first to bring rap to a larger audience through a rap record, they were not the first to record a rap record. Many hip-hop historians cite The Fatback Band's "Fatback" as the inaugural instance of rap on a record.
58 Cheryl L. Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2002), 79–88.
59 Price, 209.
60 Zoe A.Y. Weinberg, "Raceless Like Me." Raceless Like Me, Magazine, *The Harvard Crimson*, 12 Oct. 2011, www.thecrimson.com/article/2011/10/13/scrutiny-raceless-students/.
61 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993), 18–19.

62 Ibid.
63 Faber, 126.
64 Patrick Neate, *Where You're At: Notes from the Frontline of a Hip-Hop Planet* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004), 98–99.
65 When I mention the "theory" of underground hip-hop culture, I am speaking of the ethos of original hip-hop that I see prehended and enacted in present-day underground hip-hop culture/religion. Under that ethos would be the Zulu Nation's metaphysic of peace, love, unity, and having fun, a society (in the Whiteheadian sense of a nexus with social order) not constructed and dominated by the assigning of more or less rights to hip-hop based on race, and the necessity of the four elements, to name a few.
66 Massumi, 35.
67 Bakari Kitwana, *Why White Kids Love Hip-Hop*: *Wankstas, Wannabees, Wiggers, and the New Reality of Race in America* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2005), 149–51.
68 Imani Perry, *Prophets of The Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip-Hop* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004), 58–66.
69 Massumi, 9.
70 "Seek Those Who Fan You," *The Get Down*, season 1, episode 1, 12 Aug. 2016. *Netflix*, www.netflix.com/watch/80025604?
71 Massumi.
72 Coleman, 259.
73 "Only from Exile Can We Come Home," *The Get Down*, season 2, episode 5, 7 Apr. 2017. *Netflix*, www.netflix.com/watch/80025613?
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Massumi, 12.
77 "Only from Exile Can We Come Home," *The Get Down*, season 2, episode 5.
78 Ibid.
79 Vladimir Lyubovny, "Kool G Rap to Jamar: Rap Is for All Races, Vlad TV," *Youtube.com*, 20 Nov. 2013, youtu.be/GU249n-53YA.
80 Vladimir Lyubovny, "Buckshot to Lord Jamar: How is Rap a Black Thing? Vlad TV," *Youtube.com*, 20 Nov. 2013, youtu.be/GU249n-53YA.

Bibliography

Ahearn, Charlie, and Jim Fricke. *Yes Ya'll*. Cambridge: Experience Music Project, 2002.

Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*. New York: St Martin's P, 2005.

Clipse. "The Funeral." EastWest Records. 1998. Vinyl.

Coleman, Monica. *Bipolar Faith: A Black Woman's Journey with Depression and Faith*. Minneapolis: Fortress P, 2016.

Faber, Roland. *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox P, 2008.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.

Illogic. "1000 Whispers." *Celestial Clockwork*. Weightless Records. 2003.

Keller, Catherine. *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*. New York: Columbia UP, 2013.

Keyes, Cheryl L. *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2002.

Kitwana, Bakari. *Why White Kids Love Hip-Hop*: *Wankstas, Wannabees, Wiggers, and the New Reality of Race in America*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2005.

Lyubovny, Vladimir. "Buckshot to Lord Jamar: How is Rap a Black Thing? Vlad TV," *Youtube.com*, 20 Nov. 2013, youtu.be/GU249n-53YA.

———. "Kool G Rap to Jamar: Rap Is for All Races. Vlad TV," *Youtube.com*, 20 Nov. 2013, youtu.be/GU249n-53YA.

Massumi, Brian. *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*. Cambridge: The MIT P, 2011.

Neate, Patrick. *Where You're At: Notes from the Frontline of a Hip-Hop Planet*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2004.

"Only from Exile Can We Come Home." *The Get Down*, season 2, episode 5. 7 Apr. 2017. *Netflix*, www.netflix.com/watch/80025613?

Perry, Imani. *Prophets of The Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip-Hop*. Durham: Duke UP, 2004.

Price, Emmett G. *Hip-Hop Culture*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006.

Schneider, Laurel. *Beyond Multiplicity: A Theology of Multiplicity*. New York: Routledge. 2008.

"Seek Those Who Fan You." *The Get Down,* season 1, episode 1. 12 Aug. 2016. *Netflix,* www.netflix.com/watch/80025604?

Weinberg, Zoe A.Y. "Raceless Like Me." Raceless Like Me | Magazine | *The Harvard Crimson*, 12 Oct. 2011, www.thecrimson.com/article/2011/10/13/scrutiny-raceless-students/.

Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality*. Corrected edition. Edited by David Ray Griffin and Donald Sherburne. New York: The Free P, 1978.

Supplemental 1

It was almost 20 years ago now. That space was amazing. I understood it before, but it really became crystal unclear that day at Northeastern University. My friend Rusty parked the car and we raced out of it as the sounds of kicks and snares and bass contrasted in the speakers were heard in the distance. They lured us. Where the hell is it coming from? We kept walking down the empty halls of the university and seemed to travel farther from the sonic utopia each step. Damn! What the fuck! We toss and turned down this floor and that floor until finally we hit it. There was only 200 feet between us and the auditorium where life was born again. I ran to the door, drunk in the sounds of what could be notes and staccato vocals smashed on top of each other. My heart beat to overloading capacity as I opened the door. There it was. There I was. I was home. But I'd never been there before like this. The room was packed. In its middle were two circles of physical artists spinning on the floor as the rhythms inspired them to create holograms for us all to walk through. In the corner by the stage were pen players, scribbling hard to decipher symbols on blank white sheets. It looked like the paradise you might see if you understood what the colored hieroglyphs outside of your train really were not. On the stage was a humanoid (at least he may have been) turning records into tilt-a-whirls, defying centrifugal force in ways that sounded like music. All around the room were collections of humans talking on beat off of the top of their heads. Someone told me that they were "cyphering." I started doing it too. What was it? It was hip-hop. It was a "next universe," a world within a world. It is the epitome of authenticity/the maintenance of multiplicity. We all were one yet many. There was no race there. We took spaceships beyond that. In it, I was saved. How dare I call it my mom's Jesus. This is what Tunnel Rats meant when they sung the chorus

> *"I'm talking about a place called 'hip-hop'*
> *Whatever happened to that place called 'hip-hop'*
> *I never seen you in that place called 'hip-hop'*
> *So the lies that you speak need to stop"*
> *I went there. And I never left.*[1]

Note

[1] LPG, "A Place Called Hip-Hop," *Earthworm* (Brainstorm Recordings, 1994), CD.