

Aesthetic Systems Theory: Doing Hip Hop Culture Research Together at CIPHER5

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Abstract: Aesthetic Systems is an original theory to explain how aesthetic resources are made, shared and used in the formation of art works and of collective and individual subjectivities. Aesthetic systems theory has ontological, epistemological and methodological implications for the study of aesthetics, aesthetics education and the cultural studies of music, and argues for community-engaged aesthetics research. The most striking implication of aesthetic systems is the methodological requirement to undertake community-engaged critical dialogical research informed by critical pedagogy, ethnomusicology and the cultural studies traditions. This article is both the story of the intellectual partnership that built CIPHER5, an Edmonton-based hip hop research/study group and an argument for the necessity of community-engaged cartographies of mediation to shed light on the relationship between the formation of subjectivities and aesthetic education. If aesthetic systems form subjectivities, how might music education programs use this knowledge to inquire after the formation of student subjectivities?

Résumé : L'étude culturelle de l'esthétique, ou esthétique culturelle, est issue de la théorie de « l'esthétique du bas », qu'ont élaborée les recherches empiriques relevant de la pratique ethnographique. En pratiquant ensemble l'esthétique culturelle, les chercheurs, les étudiants, les spécialistes de la culture et les jeunes ont l'opportunité de relier de façon productive des communautés discursives séparées. Cet article raconte l'histoire du partenariat intellectuel qui a édifié une esthétique culturelle, avec ce groupe d'étude du hip hop appelé CIPHER5, en même temps qu'il célèbre l'importance des contributions issues d'une production du savoir engagée dans la communauté.

Aesthetic education is involved in the production of subjectivity. From Plato (2000), to Matthew Arnold (1932) to Theodor Adorno (1977, 1991), it has been understood that youth are moulded by cultural education. Plato encouraged art education that would influence the development of youth taste in ways that would support the state. Arnold worried about the loss of high culture with the rise of cultural industries, and Adorno worried popular culture produced by cultural industries threatened to transform

people into empty-headed consumers. These thinkers were all concerned about the relationship between aesthetic education and the formation of a “proper” subjectivity.

From the earliest theorizations of aesthetics and aesthetic education, the production of a “proper” subjectivity was key. Frederick Schiller argues that by learning to understand beauty, the “handmaid of pure intellectual culture” (1954: 11), morality and consciousness develop. From the 1950s to the 1980s, Canadian music education was guided by this humanist philosophy of aesthetic education (Wasiak 2013: 29). It has since been argued that aesthetics has an overly narrow focus on the “musical work” (McCarthy and Goble 2002), does not include a multiplicity of musical practices (Regelski 1996), cannot be inclusive (Bowman 1993), and that “a truly musical experience is not aesthetic in its nature or value” (Elliot 1995: 125). Feeling that aesthetic education was too philosophical, critics have offered an action-based (or “praxial”) music education philosophy that is “thriving in music education circles despite wishful thinking to the contrary by its detractors” (Regelski 2011: 61). Heidi Westerlund however, while recognizing praxialism as a highly relevant approach, has suggested that “a reconstruction of the aesthetic may be possible without losing the important perspective of music as praxis” (2003: 46).

Unlike Westerlund, I do not think it is necessary or advisable to reach back to humanist aesthetics in music education. At the same time, I disagree with Regelski that “aesthetic speculations and abstractions are simply not needed to account for music’s obvious affective appeal and for its manifold paraxial functions” (2011: 72). There is more to music performance than the playing of notes, and it is a history of experiences with these features that led to the creation of aesthetics in the first place. The way forward is a re-theorization of aesthetic theory and this redefinition need not be radical. A suitable aesthetic theory only requires acknowledging something that has been asserted since Plato: that the production of subjectivity and the production of art are intertwined in aesthetic education.

Praxialists argue that performing music is enough for music education, but it seems unlikely that only the performance of notes occurs during the performance of school music. It is necessary to point out here that praxialists forward their argument without recognizing the significance of the school music program as the context of music production. Praxialists treat the context of music performance unproblematically as if the music school is not already a cultural field into which music students are enculturated. While I agree with the praxialist critique of humanist aesthetics, I believe that there are still questions about aesthetic education that need to be answered. My

concern is that ignoring or dismissing aesthetics risks obscuring educational processes, risks an anti-intellectualism in art production and obstructs theoretical pathways to our understanding of the function of symbolic systems in the formation of social groups and individuals.

In response to these concerns, I am developing a theory of aesthetic systems as an attempt to explain how music performance is an educational process that uses aesthetic resources to produce art objects and that through the making, sharing and using of artworks, group and individual subjectivities are produced. Aesthetic Systems Theory (AST) begins with the assumption that there are no uneducated musicians, but many unschooled ones. Through the study of music learning processes (both in and out of formal schools), researchers might access the dense systems of knowledge production that create aesthetics systems. The term “aesthetic systems” can be understood within a local traditional music community, a small and newly developing experimental group or a contemporary global musical movement like hip hop. “Aesthetic Systems” (AS), however, is not synonymous with genre, although genre may be an expression of AS within a capitalist system. AS is also not synonymous with culture. It is instead a theory of how aesthetic resources are used to produce a single system within complex systems we call culture. I propose AST as an approach to the cultural study of music. My formulation of AST emerges from cultural studies, critical pedagogy and the ethico-aesthetics of Felix Guattari.

AST attempts to explain how, through the use of aesthetic resources, group and individual subjectivities are produced. It is therefore necessary to explain what I mean by subjectivities. I follow Felix Guattari who proposed *the production of subjectivity* in contrast to the philosophical and humanities *subject*. The subject, according to Guattari (2008), is treated as if it were a consequence of human nature, itself a consequence of the biological body. Subjectivity, he argues, is not produced through language use the way structuralists asserted, but is instead “manufactured just as energy, electricity, and aluminum are” (2008: 47). Individual subjectivities are produced at the “intersection of determinations of various kinds, not only social but economic, technologic, the media and so on” (Guattari 2008: 48). Instead of aesthetics being used to develop a given subject in the way Schiller imagined, to lead a subject from “baser” nature (sensuous) to “higher” moral and critical nature, Guattari’s notion of the production of subjectivities highlights process. He suggests that there is no reason to assume a subject as *tabula rasa* when it is evident that we are all born into an already existing complex social network through which we are moulded. Like Adorno, who argued that people are produced by culture industries, Guattari acknowledges the influence of group

subjectivity, but unlike Adorno, Guattari argues that, through creativity, individual subjectivities emerge and complexify group subjectivity.

AST is about explaining how group subjectivities are produced through the making, sharing and using of aesthetic resources, and that within these group subjectivities and through the use of aesthetic resources, individual subjectivities *can* form. In traditional societies, this means local practices produce collective subjectivities sometimes called ethnicities, and that individual practices within this larger system leads to individual subjectivities. Global urban capitalist systems transform making, sharing and using into producing, exchanging and consuming. The work of global capitalist entertainment can be understood as producing collective subjectivities through the marketplace of aesthetic products and the art world (Becker 1982). Guattari argues that it is necessary to understand how the introduction of global capitalism, what he calls “Integrated World Capitalism” (IWC) (2008: 53), changes the production of collective subjectivities, and the ways that consumption necessarily follows. If the formation of subjectivities requires aesthetic resources, but these resources are always products of mass consumption, how is any group subjectivity not always bound up with IWC? Guattari suggests the formation of liberated group subjectivities requires a micro-political move against mass production of IWC. This occurs in the localization of the production of subjectivities that Guattari calls “molecular revolutions” (2008: 61). This approach has been incorporated into cultural studies as *mediation* (Grossberg 2010: 191).

Mediation is the point at which aesthetics and language, geographic, educational, political, social, sexual, economic systems intersect in the production of group and individual subjectivities. Understanding mediation requires community-engaged research that is capable of identifying key moments of mediation, or what Guattari calls “singularities.” Singularities are sometimes mapped when members of a community join together in critical dialogue to share narratives of mediation. I have developed a research method for AST that draws upon Paulo Freire’s culture circle (2010). I have used the culture circle method to study hip hop as an aesthetic system, with special attention on the production of Hip Hop Kulture¹ (a collective subjectivity) and hiphoppas (individual subjectivities) in a community-engaged research project called CIPHER5.

A cypher is a hip hop circle most often associated with emcees or b-boys/b-girls but there are DJ cyphers as well.² For emcees, the cypher is a space to deliver freestyles (improvised rhyme over a beat) or to drop writtens (deliver pre-written rhymes) around the circle. But cypher can also refer to stream-of-consciousness delivery in rhyme. This kind of freestyle flow, something I have previously called “epistemological flow” (MacDonald 2012), is often taken as

a sign of mastery of emceeing. Cipher, spelled with an *i*, refers to processes of encryption and decryption. In this sense, a *cipher* is a space where it is possible to deconstruct the production of subjectivity in a knowledge circle. The “five” in Cipher5 refers to knowledge as the fifth element of Hip Hop Kulture after emceeing, graffiti, b-boying/b-girling, and DJing. Cipher5 is a cypher that brings together hiphoppas, students and professional researchers to produce and share knowledge about Hip Hop Kulture. Cipher5 meets every Tuesday night at 7:00 pm at a local community centre. Participants and facilitators organize chairs in a circle (a cipher) and use the sound system, projector and computer for sharing videos, songs and other online content related to Hip Hop Kulture.

My research into the learning processes in Hip Hop Kulture developed from what I perceived to be a lack of cultural studies in music education research. It was as if, on the one hand, music schools had no culture and, on the other, that music cultures in “the street” had no educational strategies. I was interested in showing that aesthetic systems like hip hop produce subjectivities, using learning processes to do so. I hypothesized that if learning practices can be shown to produce subjectivities, then it is possible to respond to praxialists who imply that music schools do not have aesthetic systems. They certainly don’t explain how these systems contribute to the production of student subjectivity. They do not acknowledge that aesthetic education produces subjectivity, and that school music might therefore be a place to produce experimental collective subjectivities that can be of benefit to the local community.

This article illustrates the way in which a community-engaged research practice can highlight the relationship between a music culture and the production of subjectivities. The starting assumption is that youth are already fully engaged in culture, and that in a democracy we do not need to follow the humanist aesthetics approach of instilling culture in our students from positions of power, but instead provide teachers and students with opportunities and capacities to make decisions about their participation in culture and the role it plays in the production of their group and individual subjectivities. Instead of making aesthetic decisions for youth, or obscuring the existence of aesthetics, we might instead develop an approach to art education that is a ‘critical’ study of aesthetic systems. I believe this will lead to the type of music education many profess to want, one devoted to the development of healthy group subjectivities engaged in critical consciousness or, in Paulo Freire’s word, *conscientização* (2000).

Conscientização “can be literally translated as the process used to raise somebody’s awareness” (Cruz 2013: 171). It is, however, richer than this; it

is “the process in which men [and women], not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality” (Freire 1985: 93). *Conscientização* is liberatory. Through critical education, subjects free themselves from an oppressor-oppressed dialectic that Hegel formulated as a master-slave narrative (Blunden 2013: 11-28). They are able to do this, Freire theorizes, because they are capable of identifying social forces Gramsci called hegemony (Mayo 2013: 53-64) and overcoming a built-in fear of freedom (Lake and Dagostino 2013: 101-126). Like Schiller, Freire takes the student to be a humanist subject that is born into oppression. Unlike Schiller, however, Freire was working with actual oppressed indigenous people in Brazil. I am building on Freire’s notion of *conscientização*, a critical consciousness that has to be built through community dialogue. But unlike Freire, I am arguing that *conscientização* is the critical production of group subjectivity.

I will leave whether or not our students are oppressed by universities or the cultural industries to another discussion. In this paper, I will address the way hip hop aesthetic systems produce a hip hop subjectivity. To do this, I will propose a dialogic, community-engaged research method for aesthetic systems research that has been developed with members of the Edmonton hip hop community.³

Multi-Dimensional Cartography of Aesthetic Systems

This article attempts to unfold many levels of aesthetic systems, and will continue by introducing a community-based dialogical research method for aesthetic systems modeled on the dialogical approach used in the famous Keil-Feld dialogues in *Music Grooves* (1994). Keil and Feld use transcribed dialogues as an attempt at producing a transparent and experimental knowledge production technique. This is a form of cartography, a kind of mapping. They built their method on Mikhail M. Bakhtin’s notions of dialogue, heteroglossia and multivocality, and on a secondary literature drawing from a broad list of disciplines (Keil and Feld 1994: 13-14). Although I use this method, I have a different starting point: Paulo Freire’s dialogic education (2005: 87-124). Dialogue is “the encounter between [people], mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (86) and dialogue cannot occur between “those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them” (ibid.). It must be noted that Keil and Feld’s dialogue is between peers. Their exchange is famous because of the risks they took in moving outside of conventional academic method, providing new approaches

but not necessarily accounting for the power differentials between the actors. I am taking a different approach. Following Freire, I am trying to create a cartographic technique within academic literature where those who are authorized to speak (Michael-as-professor), and those who are not (Andre-as-hiphoppa-community-member), can enter into dialogue with readers. This is not without challenges. For one, I realize that my position as a white, male professor, regardless of my personal history, might hide power inequalities even from me, and this might lead to mistakes and assumptions on my part. Power dynamics are difficult to spot. For instance, Keil and Feld do not justify the significance of their dialogue. They are both recognized scholars and experimenters, and as such their dialogic performance may stand uncontextualized as radical scholarship. And, in fact, this scholarly performance earned them a great deal of cultural capital. Andre and I are not Keil and Feld, so I have contextualized our dialogue under the heading *Context*, which is followed by a conversation in the next section. Throughout the dialogue, Andre and I discuss our distinct perspectives and histories, and our motivations for the creation of Cipher5.

The inclusion of dialogue in this article layers information and methodology. This account offers a way of mapping flows between research partners that provides space for histories, subjectivities, methodologies and community. Cipher5 is both a research method and a community activity, and has both research and educational components. Andre and I are learning and sharing different things in different ways. I'm learning about Hip Hop Kulture and research methods and Andre is learning about community organizing and university-community relations. We are learning about each other and ourselves. We are also learning how to navigate institutional structures, power relations, research dynamics and approaches to social knowledge formation. At the same time, we are clear about the educational mission we share: working to create an environment for the development of critical consciousness about Edmonton, one that makes visible the city's social forces, racial divides, economic realities and socio-cultural challenges. Freire used dialogic teaching in culture circles for the production of critical consciousness. Andre and I have found that the longer people sit in the circle, the more critically aware we become about how inseparable we are from our aesthetics.

Dialogic Research: Context

A significant step in the development of aesthetic systems theory was my reading of Paulo Freire's *Education for Critical Consciousness* (2010). Freire was

working in literacy education with indigenous communities in Brazil when he came to recognize that he was stuck in an impossible situation. On the one hand, Brazil's industrialization meant increased opportunities for many indigenous Brazilians. On the other hand, participation in industrialization required being literate in Portuguese. Literacy education, in this case, contributed to an ongoing history of colonialism. Instead of choosing between teaching literacy or not, he developed a model of politically informed literacy education called critical pedagogy. Freire's principle was that you can teach something in a way that empowers learners. His hope was that critical pedagogy would allow learners to develop Portuguese literacy while seeing it as a cultural technology that is different from, but no better than, their own cultural technologies. When I was reading this, I saw similarities between the industrialization of Brazil and the globalization of cultural production. I asked myself whether I, as a music professor, could develop a pedagogical practice that acknowledges the global music industry while also respecting the locality of culture. I wanted a critical pedagogy of music to follow in Freire's footsteps. I leaned heavily on Freire's assertion that "the starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people" (2010: 95).

I created a university course about hip hop culture, and with in-class support from Andre Hamilton, an Edmonton hip hop cultural specialist, we began to discuss how to do ethical research on local hip hop. We read Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012). Being in the classroom together revealed many shared interests, but we were also very different from one another. I grew up white in Cape Breton with Scottish Gaelic ancestry, while Andre grew up black in Edmonton with Jamaican ancestry. And yet there were similarities: we both grew up in Canada in small indie music markets that underwent exciting developments in the 1990s.

During the course, Andre introduced me to KRS-ONE's *The Gospel of Hip Hop* (2009), which I read over the semester. On the last day of class, Andre suggested keeping our conversation going. Andre came up with the idea of CIPHER5 as a knowledge circle that could use *The Gospel of Hip Hop* as a central text. Over the next two years, we meet weekly with a growing number of hiphoppas and music student researchers. Over this time, I began to develop AST as a way of explaining the relationship between the production of subjectivity and the production of hip hop. *The Gospel of Hip Hop* led to the creation of the Temple of Hip Hop (TOHH) in New York City, and the creation of chapters across the United States and a few elsewhere in the world. In Edmonton, CIPHER5 led to a hip hop symposium in the spring of 2014 at which members of the TOHH were invited to give presentations. Following

the symposium, Cipher5 was nominated to become the Temple of Hip Hop Canada, with Andre, my co-facilitator, named as its director. The following conversation between me and Andre took place soon after Cipher5 was acknowledged by TOHH NYC as TOHH Canada. We felt that we needed to explore the way Cipher5 had come into being, the way our work had become a focal point for our community energy and how, through a series of events, we were now part of a growing global hip hop network. Andre and I met at my SoundCulturesLab at MacEwan University on February 10 and 13 2012, and set up a recording device that was monitored by research assistants (RA) Diana Pearson and Roya Yazdanmehr, who later transcribed the conversation. I selected a section of the transcription for this paper. Sometimes Andre or I would begin to address the RAs to bring them up-to-date in the conversation, or to explain something that they didn't know. I wanted the RAs present for precisely this reason: so that we could create a reflective process. The transcription follows, edited slightly to read as I had originally intended: a conversation between me and Andre. The RAs were not addressed directly but the self-histories were given for their benefit, and ultimately for the benefit of readers. It was interesting for me to discover new things about Andre's history, and ultimately an alternative history of Cipher5, during this conversation. When I began the dialogue, I thought that my description covered both of us, but it turned out not to be so. Andre presented another version. Neither version is incorrect, and both are accurate. The dialogic exchange provided access to the multiplicities of mediation.

Dialogic Exchange

Andre: The Cipher has always been something of a natural formation in hip hop culture. When I go back to the early-to-mid-80s when I was just basically a kid, 10, 11, 12 years old, [that's when] hip hop really began for me. Don't get me wrong—Hip Hop Kulture had been around for ten years before I discovered it. They said it started the year I was born.

I had some catching up to do, Edmonton being so displaced from New York, it took until '83 to come to fruition here. But breakdancing started after the Michael Jackson incident. Seeing that Michael Jackson had trained with a Los Angeles breakdancer and getting him up-to-speed on the hip new dancing that was started in America. What happened was on one of the Motown specials in 1983, when he debuted the *Thriller* album, he did a moonwalk across the stage and it just ROCKED the world! This one move ... it delivered *the culture* to Edmonton.

All of a sudden, every mall was having big breakdance competitions, especially Londonderry [a mall in North Edmonton] for some reason. It was always at Londonderry or some Northside mall where they would have these huge competitions, I mean 2000 kids trying to get in. If you weren't there three hours before the competition would start, you would never ever be able to see any performers. But naturally, cyphers would start forming around breakdancers. Even if people started spontaneously dancing, the cypher was always present. So it was a physical formation that seemed to be inherent with the culture, right from the start.

Cipher5 ... you have to understand that when I started my journey into Hip Hop Kulture, and studying it, I didn't see any academic value. It was only after I met you, Michael, that I saw any academic value to what I was doing. But I *had* realized that I was a teacher. I had a certain kind of privilege, I had the support of my mother, and this is significant because I found myself in a situation where I knew I needed to be an emcee. And in order to be an emcee, I needed to teach myself a lot of stuff ... quick. So I knew that I needed to become a musician, I needed to become an engineer, my own booking agent and manager, I had to conceptualize something fresh, new and relevant and I had to become a master of the English language. I had to do it pretty fast because I wanted it bad. So there were these areas that I needed to master, not just be proficient at—to be awesome at—in order to excel as an emcee, as a “HipHopicist.” There was no community of hip hop businessmen, hip hop producers, lyricists, DJs, there was no community. All I could do was look at what was coming out of New York in the mid-'80s and match it. I had to sit down for a couple months and really get my head around, “How am I going to pull this off?” So I had to teach myself English, okay? Good English. So I started by reading the dictionary and studying the rhyming dictionary that I found at a Cole's bookshop—like a gift from God—one day! I'm like, “A rhyming dictionary!?” I couldn't believe it ... I'm like, “Yeahhhh,” you know? It was just my bible; I read it for all of grade 8 and half of grade 9. I really became fascinated with people who were masters of the English language. So I found myself really drawn to law shows, and watching lawyers, studying lawyers in court, and how they just mesmerized judges and crowds. I found myself reciting and kind of performing music that was already coming out. So I was really good at listening to a verse and being able to just like, press pause, and memorize stuff really fast, which made me really good in school. All the memorization that was going on with all the hip hop songs I was trying to learn made me really good at cramming for tests, and is actually probably the reason I got through school the way I did.

A cypher in my basement became a safe haven, a school, a research laboratory, sometimes it felt like a prison. It became a lot of things, and my mother let me just do my thing. My father was an internationally recognized reggae musician who was touring around with Peter Tosh and Bob Marley, so that was a mixed blessing because she understood the need to just let me go downstairs and do my music and to be left to just do my thing. But it was a mixed blessing because after a certain amount of time being a musician, she really pushed the whole “Plan B” thing, which didn’t help me much. It distracted me and made me doubt myself, you know? But there was a five-year period where I just stayed downstairs and taught myself how to master the English language, and how to produce music that was relevant, exciting and new. How to manage myself, how to compose, how to arrange, how to sell my music to local DJs, how to be able to call big corporate record companies and hustle phone calls until I was talking to A&R directors from all kinds of different labels. It taught me a lot of things, and how to manage myself, how to create this persona called Point Blank at the time.

This was completely solo. My younger brother was watching closely, but never claimed to be a hip hop artist. This was happening, just myself in the basement. What had happened was when I decided to announce that I was an emcee, I announced it to a girl who happened to have a locker next to me in grade 10. I’m just like, “You know what? I’m an emcee!” and she’s like, “really?” And I’m like, “Yeah. I’m an emcee. Straight up!” I made this proclamation to her because she had a locker right next to me. Her name was Nicki Rodney. What had happened is, two weeks after I made that proclamation, I get this phone call from Nicki Rodney and she says, “You said you’re an emcee, right?” And I was like, “Yeah,” and a man took the phone and he says “Listen, I’m Bailey and I’m bringing Ice T and the Rhyme Syndicate to Edmonton. Would you like to be their opening act and tour with them?” I was stunned. I mean, I actually whited out . . . one of those defining moments in your life when you just see white. I accepted, but I had no real idea of what I was accepting ’cause I’d never really seen that many hip hop shows anyways at that point. I didn’t know what was expected of me; I didn’t know what I was getting myself into. But I had three months to make it happen.

After I successfully rocked that show, something happened . . . my peers all over the city, you know, 3500 kids just like me, saw me doing it. And what that did for them is made them realize, “I can do it too!” which ignited a fire that just raged. So what ended up happening is, on a weekly basis—every weekend—I would have five, ten, fifteen kids from God knows where, some of them would even come from other towns to ask if I would teach them. Or, “How can I do this? How do you do this? How do you do that? How did

you do this-that-and-the-next?” And that was a responsibility I took extremely seriously, to educate my generation on how to do what I was doing so that I wasn’t alone, because it was a lonely life. It was just me doing it, and sure, I got off on it because I was the only one opening for every hip hop act that ever came through Alberta for close to a decade.

So what ended up happening, I became a teacher. I was teaching my peers on all aspects of what I was doing. 182nd street [where I lived] was kind of a shady street, because we had six Edmonton housing project complexes all on this 3-kilometre circular loop. With project living comes project thinking and lots of trouble. So I found myself grabbing kids who had creative potential, who were disciplined in school or in some other area of their lives. Maybe they were pursuing athletics or doing something besides sitting around, and I would pull them into my basement and give them opportunity. In addition, I had a lot of people approach me about . . . “apprenticeship”—I’m gonna call it that for the sake of this conversation—but I really had to intuitively filter out who needed to be there and who didn’t. I feel good about the choices I made, because the people I took on went on to do some pretty great things.

So CIPHER5 was a natural part of Hip Hop Kulture, and it also came from a need to transcend our conditions on 182nd street, and it came from my own sense of responsibility to my peers and to the community. I’ve always felt a tremendous sense of responsibility to push us forward, and when I say us, I mean *earth*, and in my way, in a way I could. So I spent just as much time teaching as I did working on my own projects. So it was possible for me to take care of my own interests and still take care of my responsibility to my generation. So, this is where CIPHER5 started.

Michael: There is something that I think needs to be clarified. You say CIPHER5 started in your basement many years ago and that contradicts what I say about CIPHER5 being started by us in our joint classroom experiment. And we’ve talked about this, that CIPHER5 is both a practice and a thing. The group that we call CIPHER5 is like the institutionalization—even though it’s in a coffee shop—of what you were doing in your basement. We get together in a circle, a cypher, we read parts of the book collectively, we listen to music, discuss lyrics, sometimes write our own. We discuss graffiti, we talk about what’s been released recently and talk to younger members about our experiences hearing something for the first time and doing something for the first time. We also learn from younger members what they think is hip and the kinds of techniques they are learning now, and how. Like how they are learning through YouTube and how they are exchanging beats with people all over the world.

Andre: Yeah, and this is a continuation. So, I was very pleased to see what Marlin [Politic Live] had been doing over the years because I kinda went off to do other things and Marlin really kinda carried the torch for a bit, y'know Marlin and Touch carried the 182 torch and kept that mentorship of others and this cycle of giving continued, so we're always very, very proud of his accomplishments. Then I saw Marlin was involved in a couple of research projects with *See Magazine* and doing some academic work.

He approached me about a research project that a professor was doing and that there was actually a Hip Hop Kulture class that was gonna be happening at the U of A and this was, I was, was I in Vancouver at the time? I don't know where I was, I just remember being extremely excited that this was taking place and fascinated with who this teacher was. So, finally Marlin put us in touch and we were just going back and forth mutually expressing our interests of meeting, but it was three or four months that went by until we could actually get in the same room.

Michael, you invited me to come and just chill out and watch your class, so I went and I just ... I became fascinated, because here's this guy teaching hip hop at U of A and that was ... that was monumental for me. It was monumental because I felt like our culture had finally made it somewhere other than a radio station or a MuchMusic control room; that we were being seen for something, for our ingenuity, the genius of it, the intelligence, rather than just as a moneymaker. It was this de-commodification to me, and don't get me wrong, there's intellectual exploitation that happens with all things, but in the moment it was different, it was a different kind of commodification, somethin' I was okay with, y'know.

Towards the end of that semester when it all came together there was obviously a feeling of accomplishment and celebration but more importantly, a bond happened of camaraderie between both of us, a brotherhood you might want to call it. After one of the last classes, we had probably the most significant walk that I've had as an adult. From the U of A education building to HUB mall, and what happened on this walk was both of us, maybe saddened a bit by the end of this project, but knowing this was really just a beginning, determined that this needed to continue, that Hip Hop Kulture and education needed to move forward, and that we needed to figure out a way to come together on a regular basis and push this thing forward. But we're dealing with undefined things, y'know. It's like blind taste testing. You know you got somethin', you just don't know what it is, so you gotta taste it and figure it out.

Around this time, 2012, I had been flirting with an organization called the Temple of Hip Hop. A couple years earlier, on Facebook, I decided I would

start a Temple of Hip Hop Canada page and then just walked away from it because life had taken me in other directions. Later, I was reading a book called *The Gospel of Hip Hop*, written by KRS-One, who is also a performer with Boogie Down Productions, and he had basically taken the path of hip hop and turned it into a spiritual teaching, and it was from this starting point that we decided to start a book club. To come together each week to discover what was in these pages, what this book was saying. What was happening by doing that was we were creating a hip hop academic community.

Michael: And what was important for me about that transition is we went from a classroom environment where I was the teacher, to the basement of that bookstore where you were the teacher. That was a big deal for me.

Andre: Well that was a big deal for me, because you taught me how to run that class by going to your class. If I didn't go to your class I wouldn't have been able to pull that circle off. I mean it when I say I learnt a tremendous amount in that semester, I did. It was about how to engage students in discussion about stuff I don't know, and that's what was important to see you as a professor Michael, is that you didn't necessarily ... like you knew what you were talking about, but there was so much you admitted that you don't know. Like, "I don't know where we're going with this but we're going to find out on the way," and this kind of walking with confidence with a blindfold was amazing to me. Because it reminded me of what I was doing in my own early times, and that was only, that was a short period of not knowing before I taught myself, and I was a confident emcee and hip hop practitioner, but when I saw you there it was like, "Holy," it was *that* space. That space worked so much, so much possibility, it really reignited something for me and allowed me to go in that circle and try and facilitate with confidence because I mean, when you got a couple PhDs sittin' there grillin' you about stuff and, y'know it's intimidating, y'know that. But I became comfortable with the content and we just started to go places and explore, and I mean, I just started to learn from you and hopefully you learned something too during those early times of Cipher5.

What was important to us in Cipher5, number one, was getting some clear definition on what Hip Hop Kulture was so that we could move forward and explore, getting some ideas together and really just going into depth in what KRS-ONE was talking about. It's a fascinating book that inspires a lot of very intense discussion. But we got to a point of resolution with the book and this was probably the most important transition for Cipher5, in my opinion, because we came to a point where we had run this cycle, we had run through the book, we've had those big discussions and we needed to figure out where

to go next and what was the next step for CIPHER5. And I think we came to a conclusion that we had to be a working circle. We had to go back to the basement; I use my basement as a model for the next phase of CIPHER5. We now get together, discuss issues in hip hop like whiteness and blackness, or global industries and local talent, postcolonialism, and we listen to hip hop, watch documentaries, and make hip hop. When I say make hip hop: write songs, listen to songs, write graffiti, have DJs in the room, invite b-boys and b-girls. Have all elements represented and together on a regular basis to create a normality of our culture.

Conclusions

The goal for AST is to explain the production of group subjectivities through the making, sharing and using of aesthetic resources, as well as explain the role social and environmental processes play in *mediation* (Grossberg 2010: 191), or in the production of individual subjectivities. AST has the potential to contribute to popular music studies and cultural studies by contextualizing the existing documentation of subcultures, communities of practice, fan culture etc., as examples of the use of aesthetic resources in the formation of group subjectivities. These many examples do not in themselves explain the formation of collective subjectivities, nor the formation of individual subjectivity (*mediation*). Further, global changes in production processes raise questions about their impacts on the production of collective and individual subjectivities. Guattari argues that it is necessary to understand, for instance, how the introduction of global capitalism (IWC) (2008: 53), transforms the production of collective subjectivities located in consumption practices. There are a number of implications and further research questions for cultural studies of music, and for the music education theory and practice that flow from this perspective. AST can shed light on the role music media plays in teaching and learning musical aesthetics, and how music fans and musicians are produced collectively. This approach helps to contribute a theoretical explanation for creativity, not as the product of a genius, but as the functioning of *mediation*. In this sense, *mediation/creativity* is no different from living or becoming an individual. And in this sense it is possible to consider Freire's *conscientização* as an informed *mediation*, and therefore education as the preparation for intelligent self-production, or self-design. I am currently exploring *creativity/mediation/self-design* as a critical pedagogy of music, where community creativity, liberation and critical thought can be understood as expressions of each other.

But there are also contradictions within Guattari's work that AST will help address. Guattari suggests that the formation of liberated group subjectivities requires a micro-political movement against mass production of IWC. But then he also says that the formation of subjectivities occurs through aesthetic resources that are simultaneously products of IWC. So is the production of group subjectivities, outside of IWC, currently possible? Guattari holds out hope that the localization of the production of subjectivities, a process he calls "molecular revolutions" (2008: 61), is possible, however it is unclear how this can occur in any societies that do not exclusively rely on the local production of their aesthetic resources. Further, it is unclear whether Guattari's concerns for the production of liberated subjectivities emerge from his analysis or are ideological. For example, does the mass production of aesthetic resources and the subsequent global collective subjectivities that follow necessarily have harmful consequences? If so, then there is no way hip hop and hiphoppas could be examples of liberated group subjectivities. An evaluation process is needed in order to determine whether people who identify with mass-produced aesthetic resources can simultaneously generate and exhibit liberated group subjectivities. I have suggested a dialogical process borrowed from Paulo Freire that led to the production of the transcript included in this article.

Andre describes a complex environment from which he developed a notion of creativity and selfhood that includes the built environment of the city, the social environment of his community, the economic environment of his family and the technological environment. He also describes affective territories that are more difficult to discuss theoretically, but are easy to recognize when reading his story. It is easy to feel the excitement, frustration, hope and fear in his story. These affective, emotional and sensual territories contribute to the mediation process and need to be included and accounted for. The production of the individual hiphoppa subjectivity seems to be liberatory even though hip hop is a mass-produced collective subjectivity widely distributed by IWC. Through Andre's story, it is possible to begin to identify the forces that contribute to the formation of "hiphoppa," and the creativity he exerts to distinguish his formulation of hiphoppa within the global collective subjectivity of hip hop.

Unlike the Keil-Feld discussions where knowledge production was an end in itself, Cipher5 has a context and a consequence that emerged from Hip Hop Kulture. In *The Gospel of Hip Hop*, the production of hip hop collective subjectivities is articulated in the oft-repeated phrase: I am hip hop. As Andre attested in our discussion, the practice of hip hop elements produces both hip hop (the culture/kulture) and hiphoppas (the people who practice it). There is no distinction between making hip hop and being hip hop. That hip hop is a

distinct aesthetic system that produces hiphoppas is captured in the semiotic play between “culture” and “kulture.” KRS-ONE wrote that “true hiphoppas spell the full name of our culture with a k to signify our cultural uniqueness and our right to define ourselves ... Even beyond the right to define ourselves, Hip Hop Kulture is ... HipHop reality” (2009: 108). His statement connects directly with Grossberg’s description of mediation as the self-production of reality (2010: 191) and Guattari’s (2008) discussion of the molecular revolution of creative group subjectivities. If music making, sharing and using produces cultural music works while simultaneously producing members of the culture, then it is fair to ask what kinds of subjectivities university music courses and culture are producing.

AST provides a starting point for an analysis of the production of subjectivity within formal music education. I have created the SoundCultureLab at MacEwan University to study the relationship between music production and the production of subjectivity, and its impact on music communities, cultures and music education. From the work that has led to the development of AST and the culture circle method, I have come to see a need for cross-cultural methods of aesthetic analysis in the hopes of identifying bridges or pathways to new forms of university music education. For instance, a current project at the lab is a study of hip hop music theory and aesthetic judgment. The study pairs a group of university-trained composers together with a collection of hip hop producers to share and compare methods of compositional practice. We are investigating the processes of learning, how they occur, the role of technology and how one knows and learns what is “good” and “bad” within a given cultural system. The goal of the study is to theorize the relationship between collective aesthetic subjectivities, individual subjectivities and creativity. We hope that these outcomes will result in better insights into other ways of evaluating musical skills so that we might alter entrance requirements to better support and reflect the diverse musicians in our community. The hiphoppas I work with in Edmonton possess significant musical capacities, but the MacEwan music department does not have entrance requirements and curriculum developed in a way that recognizes such musicians. It is my hope, and the hope of students working in my lab, that a better understanding of different ways of conceptualizing the production of musical subjectivities may lead to expanding what the department recognizes as capable musicians. Moreover, it is my hope that as a faculty, we might come to understand our role in the production of new collective subjectivities as a method of contributing new and perhaps healthier ways of being together and being ourselves. 🍀

Notes

I would like to thank the members of CIPHER5 for their contribution to this article. There have been too many discussions with too many people to name everyone but special thanks goes to Chris Cusino (aka DJ Dice) and Don Welsh (ID) who have contributed a great deal of support for this research. Big thanks to Diana Pearson who read every version of this paper and provided substantial feedback along the way. Thanks to Andre Hamilton for all of the sharing and growing over the last few years. Finally, thanks to MacEwan University Research Office, especially Meghan Abbott, and the research support I have received from the MacEwan University Faculty of Fine Arts and Communications.

1. Spelling *culture* as *kulture* makes a distinction between the general category of contemporary culture as the field of mass cultural production (culture industry) and Hip Hop Kulture as an autonomous ethico-aesthetic movement to regain the anthropological understanding of culture as the lifeways of a community.

2. Emcee is the MC or master of ceremonies most often associated with rapping. B-boy and b-Girls are break-boys/girls, sometimes called breakdancers. I choose to use the full spelling (emcee), following in KRS-ONE's spelling of the term in *The Gospel of Hip Hop*. DJs, or disk jockeys, improvise with records.

3. Angela Impey noted the value of *Participatory Action Research* for ethnomusicology: "Through the application of participatory research methodologies, the process of documentation could begin to stimulate dialogue and exchange between Khula residents, and could provide a platform for people to address issues of identity, meaning and community building. The development of a narrative for eco- and cultural tourist consumption would therefore be linked with an initiative that sought to actively recover the communities' histories, identities and traditional knowledge systems, and operate as a process upon which other kinds of community interventions could be explored." (2002, 13; see also Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Fine and Torre, 2008; Noffke and Somekh, 2009).

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