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Art as Method: Complicating Tales of Visual Stenography and Implications for Urban Education and Research

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ART AS METHOD: COMPLICATING TALES OF VISUAL STENOGRAPHY AND

IMPLICATIONS FOR URBAN EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

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DEDICATION

M, Kam, E, Naloni—why I grind like I do. This is for you, Marc, Kamryn, Naloni, and Ethan. Stay bright and be brilliant on purpose. Be the best. Create.

For my foremothers, Mary Irene Waytes, Lillian Marie Lyons, and Gwendolyn Ruby Miller (missing you everyday) and for my mother, Jo Ann Martin, I am a feminist because of you; I enjoy the beauty and complexity of being a woman because of you. You are the measure for this feminine idea and I write this as a gift in appreciation for what you've given me. You have helped define for me what it is to be a woman, and I can honestly say it is your image and example for which I strive. And when I speak of complexity, I know your life has not been easy and far from picture perfect. I absolutely respect your struggle for survival and womanly existence—your Being a constant reminder of proactive faith and the Creator's grace. You must know that it is through your own life that I am first familiar with the power of the Creator and the awesome strength the Creator places in woman. Your life is proof of possibility. I promise you whenever I am shy or insecure it is recognition of the fact that your blood flows through my veins that straightens my back and lifts my chin. You have given me the strength and the courage to raise my child in love, so that as he grows into a man he will recognize the forceful complexity of a woman like you knowing well how to appreciate and love her. So when I tell you to keep a journal, to write down your memories, it's because I want to know your story to get insight into this wonderful legacy you have given me. Your story is the blueprint of femininity. It is such a plan that guides me through life and womanhood. I have It, extraordinary and unique to my bloodline, because of you. My

hope is to return the love and sincerity you've shown me by mirroring the image of the woman you are. I treasure this invaluable gift, this legacy, and write as an endeavor to honor you, for you to Know the depths of your beauty. I love you so much. Your life is a blessing to me. Thank you.

If you find goodness in my work it is from the Creator and I give thanks to the Creator for that. If you find any shortcomings in my work, this is from my own shortcomings and I ask the Creator and you to forgive me for that. Peace.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

"You must love me…"—Jay-Z

I would like to send a shot out to the following sources of Peace, Light, and Love: GreenHouse Studios; Abu Nasara; Wanda Pruett-Butler; Todd Masuda and Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts; my "Dream Team" committee—Dr. Karen Clark-Keys, Michelle Fine, PhD, Anne Galletta, PhD, Dr. Brian Harper, and Dr. Karen Sotiropoulos; participating artists—MiLisa R. Coleman, C. Izzrael Coles, Derick Prosper, and Marquette Williams; Dr. Carmine Stewart; my supportive friends and family; my father's service to this country that aided my studies and his wake up calls to me during the witching hours that kept me grinding; and my Son, whose Love, patience, and maturity extend beyond his years. I sinseriously appreciate the unconditional support you have generously offered me. I am in awe of your unwavering patience and give thanks to the Creator for the blessings you have been. I am indebted. Bless you.

ART AS METHOD: COMPLICATING TALES OF VISUAL STENOGRAPHY AND IMPLICATIONS

FOR URBAN EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

vanessa m. jones

ABSTRACT

How Black artists—othered and positioned at the margins of "civilization" in the United States—construct knowledge, context, and historical memory is informative to urban education research and policy. The exploration of this reflects the wisdom of an African proverb that others will tell the story of the struggle should it not first be told by those who live it. To create reciprocity between participants and the researcher, this study employed participatory methods and critical analysis of data from interview sessions, observation, works of art, journal reflections, and information from existing studies and artist documentaries. The study uncovers an approach to the creative process—a form of visual stenography fusing art, inquiry, and activism while considering the historical, social, and ideological context. Findings suggest art may be employed as a method, an indigenous paradigm countering the threat of being scripted into history and disrupting unequal research hierarchies and social relations.

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INTRODUCTION

"Until the lions tell their tale, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter."

African proverb

As far back as I can remember I've been in love with the arts. From an obsession with Crayola crayons, to contemplation of the foreign works hanging on the walls of the Cleveland Museum of Art, to fascination with the contemporary and more familiar sculptural works of George Segal, Red Grooms, Louise Nevelson, and Augusta Savage, to the escape I found in literary works like those by Kate Chopin, Shakespeare, cummings, and Dickens, I have been trying to understand just what it is about art that transcends time, space, and place to function as a sort of life blood for a young Black child growing up poor in urban environments. Why has art been so important to me? As I contemplated college and having a career, I began to think that art wasn't practical and that I needed to choose a direction that would enable me to advance in life; I needed to make money. I sought out business and environmental science programs, but couldn't stay away from the arts. I chose art education as a major, thinking this a practical solution to my need for a stable career that would also allow me to share my love for the arts with young people that look like me.

What I found when I entered into the classroom was that art wasn't valued or taught as a discipline; it was coveted as a plan period for classroom teachers and break time for students. I quickly learned that my students (from the two different preK-5 and K-8 schools I've worked at) had never had an art teacher, that their art time, coloring ditto sheets, was supervised by long term substitute teachers with no art background. My students were struggling to read and write. Their creativity was critically stifled by scripted curricula through which they need not think, but recall information. When asked an opinion about a work of art, my students had no idea what I was talking about and wanted to be told what to think and say.

My students weren't accustomed to questioning, working through problems using visual elements, and they certainly struggled to express themselves linguistically and visually. And all of this was just within the space of the classroom's walls, aside from the environmental issues my students dealt with as part of their routine for living. If my 8th grade student who is 15-years-old and barely reading on a 3rd grade level can't write 3 opinions, why should I think it's

important for him to know the principles of design and the elements of art? Why is art important in this setting? Is line and pattern really what this child needs to know in order to survive and advance in life? How can this child's ability to draw a still life inform the path he's on in life? I began to think that art wasn't important and that there were other factors in education that needed attention.

Attention needed to be paid to literacy development. But what is literacy really? Reading and writing? Yes. I had decided that my students needed to be able to read and write and that this need was more critical than arts education. But quite honestly, reading and writing sucked the way these subjects were presented in a sterile manner, totally disconnected from the experiences and lives of my students. For me reading is fun when it involves a story to which I can relate. I love to write about my experiences and experiment with the language familiar to me. Understandably, with no connecting skills my students weren't concerned with the foreign materials presented to them. So what allowed me to connect to the lessons when I was a child? How was I able to develop literacy skills beyond "Buffy and Mack"?

I was back to the arts.

What was it about the arts that made my educational experience different from that of my peers and my students? How did my ability to draw a still life inform my life's path? Well, I don't actually draw so well and I can't name the principles and elements off the top of my head. So just what is it about art that has been so critical to my life? Art has allowed me to explore and express my sense of self, experiences, and the world around me. I need to understand why this is important.

My struggle now is articulating a research design that will allow me to explore an approach to art that I feel has relevance to growing up in the urban environment. I want to pinpoint a creative process that I feel has been extremely influential in my life as narrated by other artists who have grown up and work in the urban cities of Cleveland and Providence. As products of the system we are trying to change, the stories of struggles and triumphs within this structure are necessary to discussions of transformation. When we look at the experiences of ourselves and our peers, we stand out as lone stories struggling against the cycle of poverty—we've graduated college, and in constant critical reflection of our environment, are working to change our community—and art is an element that separates us from our peers. What can be learned from our stories of art within the urban environment that can speak to what we do with young people in similar urban contexts?[1]

The purpose of this research was to uncover a particular approach to the

creative process—a process that is telling the story of a particular experience in which

historical, environmental, social, educational, racial, and identity elements form the

context considered throughout the reflective process of creating art products. This

process is a form of visual stenography that fuses art, inquiry, and activism to create a

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[1] jones, v. (2011). Autoethnographic journal entry dated June 2, 2011.

type of social commentary, reporting experiences of (in)justice and resolving to disrupt unequal social relations (Warsame, 2008). Using "artistic talents to fight and struggle against injustice and oppression—by any *medium* necessary" an individual combines artist and activist, resulting in *artivist* (Asante, 2008, p. 203). Artivists' stories can connect audiences to urban contexts and experiences. Stories are created through a process of self-reflection and awareness.

The African proverb that begins this chapter speaks to the wisdom of the threat that others will tell the story of the struggle. It reinforces the importance of telling one's own story. This concept guided my exploration of the process through which young Black artists, othered and positioned at the margins of "civilization" in the United States of America, make connections and find points of recognition to the outside world and narrate their perspectives by using this creative process to tell their own story. Because of the history that has positioned them at the margins, these stories seek to counter the threat of being scripted into someone else's story. As such, the narratives told by Blacks are a tool for socio-political activism and agency. The creative processes that produce these narratives act as important media to explore the relationship between one's life, school, and society (Freedman, 2007). Like a scar that is the physical part of memory, the stories told through art are the proof of what is remembered from experience, and they validate one's existence (Black, 2010). Stories provide historical evidence of Black identity formation, both deeply connected to the creative process (Smallwood, 2007).

Within this *his*tory is evidence of marginalization that also sets the context of stories for contemporary Blacks and is particularly significant to Blacks in conflict with the urban environment (Black, 2010). Here, there is a need to understand the creative processes through which knowledge might be constructed in environments that are toxic in multiple ways to Blacks and their families. The urban environment is toxic because part of this context is the legacy of *his*story that includes social, political, economic, and physical marginalization and the marketing of Black inferiority as well as other factors that restrict freedom and create dependency inherent in modern institutionalized slavery (Burrell, 2010). In addition to the toxicity resulting from the current manifestation of this legacy, the urban environment in Cleveland is toxic because these communities are rarely involved in policy efforts to transform the urban environment and its public institutions. The consequences for the exclusion of these people are toxic because what they know is ignored and not a part of policy development, in particular during the critical stage of problem definition, which could greatly benefit from insiders' perspectives of issues affecting their community.

My primary purpose here was to explore a particular approach to the creative process through a study that probes intersections between the arts (art theory and production), critical theory, and activism at the individual and systemic level. The study proceeded in a participatory manner that allowed for reciprocity between the researcher and participants, deliberately creating openings for shared interpretation (Lather, 1985). For the purpose of conceptualizing the creative process as they narrated it, conducting the study with MiLisa Coleman, Clifton Izzrael Coles, Derick Prosper, and

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Marquette Williams provided perspectives of urban Black artists and graduates of public schools who continue to work within urban communities. Their works confront perceptions of ethnicity, identity, beauty and the human condition with constructed depictions of the crisis of cultural reality. Also evident in their works is a conscious effort to initiate dialogue around this and transform existing (mis)perceptions and realities.

Each is very much an intellect and philosopher in his or her own right, interested in articulating an approach to the creative process and in making connections to education. In-depth explorations of the artists' narratives of a particular approach to the creative process involved storytelling as an opportunity for creative expression and as a method for data collection. As indicated in the opening narrative to this chapter, the origins of my research questions were deeply autobiographical, involving me as researcher and participant. The artists were selected as participants because they exemplify the actualization of the creative drive I strive to embody and share some similar contextual experiences with me. By working with them to examine their experiences, I was better able to unpack and describe experiences for Black urban youth.

The artists participated in the first phase of the research through the stages of data collection and analysis, and early theorizing. The participatory portion of the study was designed to allow for collaborative analysis and theorizing and to inform the next phase of interpretation and writing up, which explored the participatory research with the artists as potentially reflecting the creative process. The study also utilized

videotaped interviews that were progressively carried out in response to emerging data on the creative process and observation of artistic expressions.

Data sources included interview data, participant observation, a study of the artists' works, an exploration of extant literature and theory, and my autoethnographic entries on the creative process unfolding in the research as well as autoethnographic entries by the primary artists.

This research project was designed to study the creative process as it was occurring in the research itself. To achieve this, it involved two iterative turns. The first was the initial study of the creative process as narrated by the primary artists. The second was an additional layer of study, where the artists and I turned the analytical lens on the creative process unfolding within the research. In doing so, we hoped to address the ways in which this process may be employed in research to inform educational policy.

Framework of the Study

The purpose of the study was threefold: 1) to uncover dimensions of a particular approach to the creative process; 2) to theorize the role of this process as it relates to the individuals' experiences of the urban environment and education; and 3) to make connections and consider how stories told through the creative process might influence the research process and contribute to systemic educational change. The research questions were:

1. What do young, Black artists narrate about their experience of life and the urban environment?

2. What is their understanding of the role the creative process plays in their experience of life and the urban environment?

3. How do these narratives speak to dimensions of a particular approach to the creative process and its relation to the urban environment and education?

4. How can stories produced through this process inform how we conduct research of urban education toward systemic change?

Utilizing a critical theory framework, the research was designed to analyze a particular approach to the creative process in terms of power relations and race, conflict with the urban environment, and structural inequalities within this context and within education (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2009; Lather, 1985). In doing so, the study explored a counter-narrative for/of Black experiences by telling the story of this creative process (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009). In this regard, I pursued research as praxis, honoring participant's contribution to knowledge production, and moving beyond member check and into participatory methods and shared theorizing (Lather, 1985). This is also critical to the production of historical memory and storytelling as oral history in Black culture whereby my research contributes to a tradition upholding the necessity of telling our own stories, which is also in line with participatory methods and critical race methodology in particular (Smallwood, 2007; Asante & Shahada, 2007).

Using a framework steeped in critical theory perspectives and a participatory paradigm, the study focused on the creative process of Black artists within the urban contexts of Cleveland, Ohio, a city that has experienced rapid decline of industry and

population over the recent decades and is one of the nation's poorest cities and hardest

hit by the current recession (Jefferson, 1991; US Department of Labor, 2010); and

Providence, Rhode Island, an urban center undergoing rapid demographic changes

(United States Census, 2012; Austin, 2012). This research, grounded in the traditions of

Participatory Action Research (Cammarota and Fine, 2008; Fine et al., 2004; McIntyre,

2000, 2006; Sutton and Kemp, 2006) and artmaking as trouble making (Freedman, 2007),

was informed by my experience living, teaching, and researching as a member of the

Cleveland community over the past ten years.

I also used a grounded theory approach for data collection and analysis with

Coleman, Coles, Prosper, and Williams to flesh out a particular approach to the creative

process. These artists were involved in the research to narrate their creative processes

as well as participate in preliminary data analysis and theorizing. The data was collected

through a series of semi-structured interview sessions with the artists. While the study

was limited to the experiences of Black artists in urban environments that are at times

toxic to their development and survival, the series of interviews involved meaning

making between the artists and me. The study aimed to theorize about the creative

expression process for Blacks in similar urban contexts while making connections to

education as well.

In order to focus on a particular approach to the creative process, in addition to

the interview sessions, I used these sources for data: works of art, autoethnographic

entries, videotaped interview sessions of artists, myself as an artist participant and the

researcher, my own participant observation of the research project, and follow-up

interviews with artists as member checks of my interpretations of their experiences of

the creative process and of the research project. My approach combined the use of

narrative analysis and critical qualitative research that questions the influence of power,

class, and ethnicity with the aim to create change (Merriam, 2002). Through use of first-

person accounts of experiences, I took a "biographical approach [that] attends to the

person in relation to society," with a critical consideration of the spaces in which

participants live (Merriam, 2002, p. 9). Validation was sought through the triangulation

of data sources—interview data, extant theory, artifacts, participant observation, and

autoethnographic text.

Along the same lines as the compositional studies described by Lois Weis and

Michelle Fine (2004), which seek to theorize about the role of method within studies of

injustice while considering the interaction between social political factors and

subsequent key issues in areas like education, I tried to creatively articulate contextual

analysis as a form of visual stenography (Weiss & Fine, 2004; Warsame, 2008). Visual

stenography, coined by Somalian rapper, K'naan, basically is *a way of recording what*

one sees and experiences, and an effort to analyze and theorize around these visual and

experiential cues by interpreting social, historical, and political context and using

imagery to capture spoken and unspoken themes (Warsame, 2008). I employed visual

stenography as an analytical procedure, making creative and informative use of digital

and written media in reporting the findings of this research.

Limitations

The study was limited to the experiences of Black artists in Cleveland and Providence, urban environments that are at times toxic to the artists' development and survival. The study was limited to these urban contexts and is not generalizable to urban populations as a whole. Lastly, it was limited to this specific research and the phenomenological narratives of its participants.

Delimitations

The generalizability of the study is extended to industrial cities in decline and the Rust Belt as well as urban centers with rapidly changing demographics. This study yielded information about urban Black artists' particular approaches to the creative process. The case study of the artists was supported by the experiences of myself and a broader study of documentaries and artifacts from other contemporary artists. The study was strengthened by its ability to complicate an individual's experiences filled with complexities of growing up, developing, and resisting in often oppressive urban environments and to consider a variety of elements or variables that may be critical to understanding the individual's experiences. The study offers rich, in-depth accounts about members of a marginalized group of Americans. This study has potential to influence educational practices as well as how we conduct research within urban environments. Additionally, it has the potential to advance the knowledge base of critical and participatory educational research in particular and, more generally, the broader research agenda in systemic educational change.

Rationale for Research

In efforts to "fix" education locally, I witness how the real issues and people affected by these issues are ignored. In sweeping the elements of Black experiences under the rug, attention is no longer directed at the people in the communities and the issues that affect them—the focus is on "urban communities," ignoring history, racism, and the structural issues that recreate their position in society whereas Blacks overwhelmingly live in poverty. The significance of my work to education is showing the critical role of arts and the creative process.

The creative process reminds us of these real issues. Black artists situated in urban environments tell stories of the issues they face in schools and in their neighborhoods, stories that uncover the dimensions of real issues affecting their education. A teaching artivist explains that, "kids go to school and are taught how to desensitize themselves to the details of what they experience, [school's] shutting them down. Art is expression; it's opening people up" (Black, 2010). The artivist goes on to discuss how among those who teach Blacks, many are people who are unaware and cannot relate to the stories of the urban experience (Black, 2010). The problems with educating urban youth are compounded by this disconnection that could be bridged by telling stories. There is a need to specifically identify and define the processes of creativity that create connections.

The current context in urban education demands attention to the processes of creativity, and shapes the purpose of my study. In this research I attended to the creative process and the power of stories to construct context, historical memory, and

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identity. I attended to the potential of this constructed knowledge to influence

educational policy, making an argument for creative expression as a form of socio-

political activism. My goal was to define a particular approach to the creative process

and develop a theory of this process. In this manner, my work adds missing theorizing

about the connections between art, critical theory, and participatory methods. It has

the potential to contribute to the body of participatory action research (PAR) literature

that aims to interrupt the normal flow of things by reorienting power in the constituents

of education using art as the means.

Definition of Terminology

It is important to discuss key terminology used in the study. A definition of

terminology lends itself to greater clarity in the study design. In this section, I elaborate

on the meaning I gave to key terminology, informed by the literature and by the writing

and works of Black artists living in urban environments.

First, I understood the phrase *a particular approach to the creative process* as a

form of knowledge construction whereby an artist goes through a process of self

reflection and awareness combined with social awareness and interaction (Freedman,

2007). In many respects, this process forces one to confront and deconstruct one's

experience—placing Westernized thinking in perspective—and look sociologically and

historically at the formation of perceptions and identity (Thorsén, 2004; Gomez, 1998).

Thus making connections and finding points of recognition in the outside world through

this process, the artist creatively translates the lessons learned from life.

Visual stenography is a reflective and analytical process fusing art, inquiry, and activism, that reports experiences of (in)justice as a sort of social commentary in efforts to ameliorate unequal social relations (Warsame, 2008). Visual stenography produces such artifacts that are a creative form of contextual analysis and literally involves recording what one sees and theorizing around these visual and experiential cues by interpreting social, historical, and political context and using imagery to capture spoken and unspoken themes (Warsame, 2008).

The word *transformation* literally means to change the structure of something through action. Through transformational art education as such, "change" becomes enlightenment, understanding, knowledge, and appreciation. "Structure" implicates the individual, school, community, and our world. "Action" is art making, experiencing, creating, and expressing, which as conveyed by Kerry Freedman (2007), troubles the system, creating change in the way we think and act. This sort of education leads to activism while allowing artists to understand the relationship between their lives, school, and society. This presents the opportunity to change society, change perceptions about cultural existence, and stimulate ideas and actions to shape the world (Freedman, 2007).

I explored the emergence of *activism* within the arts in my discussion of the following: 1) an approach to the creative process that utilizes the transformative power in artmaking—the power and importance of storytelling in reconstructing knowledge (Freedman, 2007; Solórzano & Yosso, 2009)—and is dependent on the situated agency of self—the personal responsibility to tell the story from the perspective of the oppressed (Ares, 2010; Smallwood, 2007); 2) the energy exchange that results from

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creation and expression—the literal action involved in the process of creating; and 3) an

approach to actively transforming education and teaching in urban environments to

include artmaking as a means for personal and social reform (Freedman, 2007).

Within this particular approach to the creative process and activism, I also

looked at the individual's *engagement* as willing participation and involvement in these

activities. This engagement results in artifacts that narrate and evidence individual

attention to constructing realities. These *constructed realities* are rooted with the

situated knowledge individuals possess concerning their lived experiences,

environments, and identities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009).

There is considerable theorizing around general *identity* as a product of social

interaction (Mead, 1934) and social categorization (Tajfel, 1982). More particularly in

terms of racial identity (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990) and ethnic and/or religious identity

(Deaux, 2006; Moje & Martinex, 2007; Sirin & Fine, 2008), there is recognition of

identity as fluidic in nature yet also socially constructed and historically bound, which

my work acknowledged and explored within the context of artists' experiences.

In my work I referenced *Black experiences* in such a way as not to essentialize,

but to place these multifaceted experiences within the context of the phenomenon of

the colonial encounter. While Robin D. G. Kelley speaks to hybridity (1997) and Patricia

Hill Collins talks about intersectionality (1998), I looked at these experiences also as

dynamic, fluid, and ongoing within a contemporary context very much influenced by the

historical colonial encounter.

The *colonial encounter* describes the interaction of European ethnocentrism with people of African descent. This transformation began to take place with the very first colonial encounter during the 1400's as the first Europeans exploited the west coastal communities of Africa (Smallwood, 2007). These foreign traders defined the physical space and people based on the colonizers' market needs. In so doing, European standards deemed Africa's land and people of African descent as inferior, though functional for the Euro Atlantic trade, which led to the enslavement of humans (Smallwood, 2007). Even before the prohibition of this physical control of humans, Europeans extended control over other areas of African life. For colonialism to be successful, Europeans needed to control the thinking of the colonized people, in addition to controlling the land, economics, and governance (Smallwood, 2007). The colonial encounter progresses and defines standards for people of African descent in every way imaginable, from physical beauty and spirituality, to education and achievement (Kirkland, 2010) and child rearing, and even for civilization itself.

Today, we live in a neo-colonial society dominated and defined by the offspring of European colonialism, *Westernization* (Chen, 1996). Through Western standards, all "others" problematically become sub-standard. People of African descent, though generations removed from the continent, struggle with their definition and experience as a sub-standard existence. This dilemma is evident in stories of Black experiences told as artists contemplate and analyze their observations and experiences and produce an art product, in essence a thesis.

This key terminology was used in the study and supported the framework on which the study was designed. As the study progressed, these terms yielded additional insight. Also, new expressions of meaning emerged as multiple methods attended to the topic.

In summary, this study explored a particular approach to the creative process and its use as a form of knowledge construction and political action and as impacting both individuals and systems. Through this study, understanding the space of urban educational policy helps to inform policy makers of authentic issues from the perspective of those who live in a particular context. A key part of the research context is that those central to the setting of urban education have been socially and politically marginalized, positioned at the outer edges of decision-making and thus self-determination.

The wider impact is possibly felt as artists use the creative process to generate knowledge concerning conditions encountered in their schools and neighborhoods, which has catalytic potential for action (Lather, 1985) at the systemic level. These actions build upon each other and have the potential to produce change in how school districts carry out education and how our cities support Black communities. The intent of this study was to more fully understand the creative process in relation to this context and to consider its potential in research and in facilitating systemic educational change.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The nature of the phenomenon of Black artists' experiences of life and urban environments, grounded in a reality in flux, is complex and therefore difficult to research and understand (Boote & Beile, 2005). Boote and Beile (2005) argue a literature review paints the background for the context of a study, so I began my investigation into the creative process with a review of extant literature. In this chapter, I analyze connections between the arts, critical theory, and activism for change initiatives in the context of urban educational settings.

The next sections illustrate how a particular approach to the creative process emerges from the intersection of these streams of literature. First, critical theory is used as a starting point from which to unpack experiential knowledge of Black experiences within the urban environment and to address how knowledge is constructed within and about this context, forming a counter-narrative not only to majoritarian stories but also to traditional research. Then existing studies of the creative process are examined in search of analysis that goes beyond its influence on

academic achievement and probes into deeper relationships and functions within the

urban environment and school system, often unresponsive to the urban inhabitant and

filled with suppressive experiences. Continuing in this respect, the work of a few

contemporary artists and how art is employed within educational transformation efforts

is analyzed. The chapter concludes with a summary of Lowenfeld's stages of artistic

development as related to artists' creative processes. Through a review of this

literature, I hope to show where space exists for the exploration of the creative process

and its potential to inform educational policy in the urban context.

Critical Theory and Crafting a Methodology of Resistance

Critical theory is presented as an account of the researched lives, challenging the

traditional view of construction and validation of knowledge (Lather, 1986). Research,

guided by social science, is still dominated by theories of dead, European males, though

some of them challenge the political structuring of social science. This challenge to

traditional research is an influence to feminist and critical theorists who seek to change

social space by critiquing and redistributing power. Looking at "social science [as] a

regime of power that helps maintain social order by normalizing subjects into categories

designed by political authorities," Foucault analyzes social space in terms of power and

institutional structures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 148). Historically in this regard,

research has been a tool for imperialism. However, drawing on Foucault's theory,

critical theorists challenge the notion of *normal* as well as traditional research

paradigms in relation to the study of "the other" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Solórzano &

Yosso, 2009; Lather, 1986). Lather (1986) explores the methodological implications of

critical theory and how researchers can involve subjects in research and defines "research as praxis" in the context of social science research.

The othering within traditional research poses a distorted frame through which social scientists study Black experiences in America. However, potential exists to more accurately inquire into the experience of those of African descent. Referencing the creative expression of music, Ghanaian scholar Ephraim Amu proposes that "instead of always borrowing methods from the 'study of the Other'…[the African and Diasporic experience] is now more often studied with endogenous and relevant methods" (Thorsén, 2004, p. 200-201). To further emphasize this need, Kwabena Nketia concludes that Western and African researchers "may be studying the same musical cultures, observing the same events, and using the same teachers and respondents, though they may not always be asking the same questions or seeking solutions on the same problems" (Thorsén, 2004, p. 202). This difference in perspective creates space to explore the overlooked problems that are felt deeply by some members of Black communities situated in contemporary urban environments and are expressed creatively by artists who contemplate this context; their work creates counter-stories of Black experiences.

There is a need to understand how these stories told by artists can contextualize and inform what we do in education. Along the same lines as the compositional studies described by Lois Weis and Michelle Fine (2004), which position the relationship and interaction between social political factors, lived experiences, and subsequent key issues in areas like education within theory and method, artists take a particular

approach to expressing their experiences and environment, an approach that seems to describe the intersection between critical theory, art, and activism, making connections to self identity, personal history, and historical memory. Weis and Fine (2004) describe a theory for conducting critical theoretical research on social (in)justice, situating analyses of inequity, power, and privilege within social structures in relation to individual experience of these conditions, called compositional studies. Authors outline the following three analytical steps:

1. Contextual—locating narratives in relation to historical and structural conditions—how individuals make sense of this is linked to their efforts to conceptualize and change this context;

2. Relational—reliance on categories of social identity while refusing essentialism but complicating analysis of how such categories manifest within "institutional life…[and] how individuals make sense of, resist, embrace, and embody social categories, and…how they situate 'others'"; and

3. Individual variation and modal forms—use of categories that are "fluid sites for meaning-making" while complicating "textured variations" within group identities, looking for outliers or those at "radical margins" in relation to modality (Weis & Fine, 2004, p. xvii-xviii).

Figure 1. Root's Odyssey, Romare Bearden, 1977. This figure illustrates the concept of positive and negative space in composition.

Throughout these steps there is study of negative and positive space within the composition and the relationship and interdependence of these individual, contextual, and relational elements (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), by giving attention to the in-between. There is space to explore how these analytical steps relate to what artists do. In art, negative space is the area between and around the subject, which makes up the positive space. This negative space can also provide useful information that helps define the subject's background or contextual information and is important to define the artist's and the viewer's relationship with the subject.

For example, in Bearden's work (see Figure 1), the figure's profile dominates the composition and overlooks several other objects that form the negative space. The

figure's context is created by a symbol of America that forms part of his body and a

slave ship bearing human cargo and flanked by doves while sailing toward a central

African continent against a bright sun and reveals a complex socio-historical relationship

to Black and African identity, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, Pan-Africanism, and

reconciliation through a return to Africa.

Understanding the artist's and the viewer's relationship with the subject guides

one's interpretation of the subject and cognitive and emotional responses to it, creating

connections to the work of art. Weis and Fine use these elements to illustrate the

metaphor of research produced through their theory of method as a work of art. In this

metaphor the visual elements of space and point of view represent parts of the research

design—subject, perspective, and background or context; the subject is what is studied,

the perspective shows how it is studied or the angle from which the subject is viewed,

and the background or context provides relevant information related to the subject.

However, with compositional studies, it appears that the methods used for a critical

theoretical inquiry actually oscillated between these elements producing a focus on

their relationship and interaction, the in between space or grey space (see Figure 2).

The Weis and Fine study does not define or explore the process through which artists

perform such analysis and compose their work, central to my study, which would

potentially strengthen the metaphor of research as a work of art as well as the

methodology of compositional studies.

Weis and Fine further liken their theory of the compositional studies method to

the creative process by making a comparison to political art movements, like the works

of the various artists mentioned in this chapter who create purposefully similar to

Asante's use of artivism as "the struggle against social injustice and oppression—by any

medium necessary" (Asante, M. K., 2008, p. 203). Weis and Fine note that, "Like the

Black arts movement in the 1960s and 1970s then, we intentionally and self-consciously

politicize our artistic/compositional metaphor, arguing that our ethnographic

compositions sit at the nexus of structural forces and individual lives and agency" (p. xix).

Structural forces and individual lives intersect and this intersection is the focus of

compositional studies. The theory is so rich with visual references and calls for deeper

probing into this metaphor. Connecting webs between institutional structures, relations,

and people's lives are presented as critical to understanding everyday realities and to

changing social relations. This perspective is similar to explorations of African American

identity development deeply related to social experiences (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990).

Flat Space   Positive & Negative   Grey Space
                                                  (the in Between)
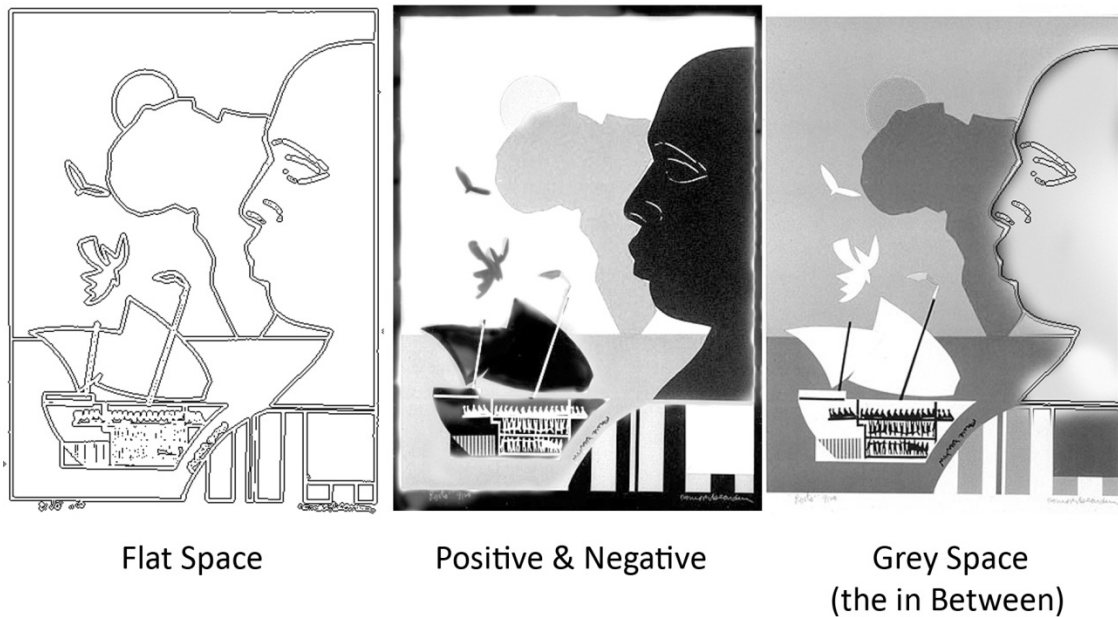
Figure 2. Oscillation and grey space. This figure illustrates positive, negative, and grey space and how grey space or "the in between" is the focus of compositional studies.

The counter-story is used as a method to elicit these experiences that are not often told and as "a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009, p. 138). Majoritarian stories depict context and relations in such a way that favors white domination, while counter-stories present alternative perspectives from those silenced within majoritarian stories that reveal the nuances of social (in)justice resulting from Eurocentricity. In regards to contemporary context, Kwabena Nketia notes that the African dilemma is described within the frame of the colonial encounter and the need for "some kind of restoration of [African] identity" because this resulting environment created "the legacy of European things" and with it the problem of how to re-contextualize the traditional African setting threatened by the legacy of the institution of slavery within modernity. So with the notion of analyzing context, "the term *contemporary* we use only as an analytical tool, because the process [of re-establishing African identity] will eventually bridge the gap" between traditional African culture pre-European imperialism and the present (Thorsén, 2004, p. 207, with my italics). While this formulation for analysis of context utilizing the relationship of history and the present speaks volumes to Black experiences in post-colonial, post-slavery America, there is a need to understand processes toward restorative identities and how creative processes support restoration as well as reconciliation with mainstream identity (Thorsén, 2004; Chen, 1996). Storytelling provides more than a window into this process.

When considering the diaspora as a permanently displaced collective sharing common ethnic identity, stories are critical to preserving the cultural memory of the

collective—with displacement and colonial encounter as disruptive elements to the collective's previous condition. In *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*, Stephanie Smallwood makes an argument for the importance of stories in understanding the historical and social constructions of Black identity, how self-making through stories creates subjectivity toward the construction of race (2007). She asserts that stories are part of the 'cultural tools' displaced people needed to make sense of their new condition and to connect to their old world; without these tools, migrants are subject to a sort of shattered self. Blacks face the threat of this sort of shattered self today, and there is a need to expose how artists embrace storytelling as a means of preservation. "Oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation" (Richard Delgado, 1989 quoted in Solórzano & Yosso, 2009, p. 139). Through such an approach, the margins of society transform into sites of resistance.

Critical race methodology creates space to explore problems posed by conducting research into theories that aim to help us better understand those who are at the margins of society (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009). Solórzano and Yosso (2009) ask, "What are the experiences and responses of those whose stories are often distorted and silenced" and offer a means to uncover this data (p. 142). Critical race methodology is a theoretically grounded approach that positions prominently throughout all aspects of the research process race and the intersection of race, class, and gender. It challenges traditional research that tries to explain the experiences of people of color and offers transformative solutions to oppression. Critical race methodology focuses on

the experiences of students of color with respect to social context and uses interdisciplinary knowledge of ethnic and women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and law to understand these experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009).

To unearth data using critical race methodolgy, sources are approached with *theoretical sensitivity*—being aware of the subtleties of meaning—and participants are engaged in the analysis of data in order to utilize their cultural intuition. Multiple methods, sometimes unconventional and creative, are used to elicit knowledge with those traditionally excluded from academia. This is critical because when the origins of race are examined, "critical race methodology finds that racism is often well disguised in the rhetoric of shared 'normative' values and 'neutral' social scientific and educational principles and practices" (Matsuda et al., 1993 quoted in Solórzano & Yosso, 2009, p. 134). Regardless of the ethnicity of the storyteller, majoritarian stories tend to be seen as natural and are often not challenged. However, critical race methodology presents ways to challenge such racist rhetoric.

The counter-story is a tool to combat silencing. "Critical race methodology pushes us to humanize quantitative data and to recognize silenced voices in qualitative data" (p. 144). How is this approach to contextualizing the experiences of people who are too often overlooked conceptually similar to a particular approach to the creative process, and how do artists address and interact with majoritarian stories so unnatural to their own experience? The next section turns to extant literature on the arts to explore how artists reconcile their experiences with that told in majoritarian stories.

26

Fusing Art and Activism

Some stories told through creative expression reveal counter-narratives of often overlooked experiences from the perspectives of those who live at the margins of society. As members of a displaced nation within a nation, Blacks grapple with double-consciousness, their relationship to place and the context of America in terms of belonging (Woodard, 1999; DuBois, 1994). Historically and presently, the lawful and actual embrace of Black people as members of American society creates an enigma of Black citizenship (Woodard, 1999). While this may seem extreme, this statement manifests in the experiences of the intersection of class and race expressed through creative works.

For example, performing artists in turn of the century America were aware of their unique opportunity to critique American society and make comments on Black Experiences, using art as a medium to create a more accurate representation of Black folk. No longer are they performing, they are now "staging race," the combination of artist and activist, channeling experiential themes in minstrelsy through creative expression, allowing them to make bold, controversial, and political statements to a wide audience without censorship or pertinent backlash (Sotiropoulos, 2006, p.162). Through use of first-person accounts of Black experiences, artists biographically narrate a critical consideration of the spaces in which they live (Merriam, 2002). The aim of their work is to create change in "our social context and ourselves," so their analysis is also a form of critical qualitative research that mirrors artivism (Merriam, 2002, pp.9-10; Asante, 2008). Artivists use their creativity to combat injustices by producing works

reflecting oppressive social realities and ideas for transforming them. All of the artists

mentioned in this chapter can be considered artivists because of their approach to the

creative process and how they work through political connotations in widely different

forms.

In her work entitled *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century*

America, Karen Sotiropoulos considers the critical work of artists and compares and

contrasts various minstrel shows in sequence, exploring the evolution of Black

performances in relation to how they tell stories of Black experiences. These

performers sought to represent themselves differently in form, envisioning their work as

opera though it was sold as a "coon" show (Sotiropoulos, 2006). Their efforts reflect a

determination to define themselves and evidence of resisting the dominant narrative,

which was evident to Black audiences at the time in a way forming a collective

revisioning of Black experiences, while being invisible to White audiences. Sotiropoulos

uses *In Dahomey*, the first Black production on Broadway in 1902, as one example of

how Black performers critique current events, pointing out how producer William

Marion Cook restructured statements from a former, less successful comedy and

presented them in the Broadway production. Producer and performer Bert Williams'

personal experiences translate creatively as the muse for this musical and how it is

named, following the artist's visit to White City at the 1893 Chicago Fair, where

Dahomean natives are put on display in what becomes a popular attraction as a sort of

human zoo (Sotiropoulos, 2006). The artists' awareness of their social environment and

story of their experience are told through organized symbols similar to Lowenfeld's

exploration of the way a child expresses awareness of their physical environment, which is discussed later (Lowenfeld, 1947). The artists employ satire to explore the discussions of emigration among the poorest of Blacks in rural areas—"those with the fewest options in America"—and make references to popular literature, social Darwinism, and the relationship between emigration, colonization, and missionaries (Sotiropoulos, 2006, p. 137).

Another example of how these artists tell stories of Black experiences while trying to change popular discourse on Blacks is in the adaptation of the song "Evah Niggah Is a King" to a less derogatory arrangement of lyrics. Artists changed the word 'niggah' in the song's title and chorus to 'dahkey', reflecting their "desire to limit the worst of language used in 'coon' songs" (Sotiropoulos, 2006, p. 147). The production's success further lies in the dialogue created, encouraging the audience to contemplate the subtle and not-so subtle issues presented in the production without forcing the opinions of the performers. *In Dahomey* presents not only an ambivalent, mixed view of Africa, similar to that of Blacks in America, but at the same time, a Black identity of which people of African descent can be proud. "The company both questioned western imperialism and focused on representing Africans in a more positive light—themes that would emerge more fully in their 1906 production, *Abyssinia*" (Sotiropoulos, 2006, p. 148). Also based on actual events, *Abyssinia* focuses particularly on Blacks' relationship with Africa. To avoid placing humor in limbo, mocking both African and American Blacks, stereotypical views are addressed comically. The production is aptly titled with the native name for Ethiopia, as its 1896 victory over Italy is a symbol of Black self-

determination and African resistance to imperialism at the turn of the century and well into mid-century (Meriwether, 2002).

Similar to African struggles for independence of European colonialism, Black American movements to fight for citizenship and equal rights have existed since the abolishment of slavery. Though America has its first Black President, the fabric of the country still suffers from the racism that was woven into its foundation by the founding fathers. Blacks continue to be defined by others, and scramble to wear the mark of *citizen* and feel *equal*. These aspects of socially constructed identity are at odds with how one views one's self and contribute to what Du Bois terms a double consciousness (Du Bois, 1994). Is the real struggle about citizenship and equal rights? Perhaps the struggle lies in the ability to find grounding in knowing oneself, which could serve as armor when one's social identity is under attack with experiences and perceptions of substandard citizenship and inequality—the gap between how one views oneself as citizen and equal versus how one is positioned within society. Black people frequently do not utilize a collective process to reconcile with their experiences and environment and often allow others to tell these stories for them. Perhaps the struggle is telling stories of Black experiences and realities from the perspective of those who live this. Like the stories of Black experiences and realities told from the insider's perspectives by performing artists in the early 1900's, this is mostly achieved through the continued narratives told within the Hip Hop culture, serving as evidence of the agency of stories and artists in defining identities and issues affecting communities (Pride, 2007).

For example, artists explore the themes of freedom, home, and identity from the perspective of Black experiences in America, engaging in a creative form of sociopolitical activism that exposes these perceptions of governmental policies in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Cain & Barthelemy, 2008; CNN, 2006; McGruder, 2007; Tippett & Hilfiker, 2006; jones, 2009). In the following quote, Donte Smith, known as rapper Mos Def, references perceptions of governmental spending priorities that exclude Blacks and members of the working class, declaring, "God save these streets, one dollar per every human being…It's dollar day in New Orleans. It's water, water everywhere and people dead in the streets, and Mr. President he 'bout that cash. He got a policy for handlin' the niggas and trash…" (Smith, 2005).

In his aptly titled "Minority Report" Rapper Sean Carter, also known as Jay-Z, reflects on the role of the media. In addition to the media's dilemma whether to strictly report a story or intercede and save lives, Carter also notes the power of the media to create perceptions of refugees and looters. He further addresses the perceptions comparing conditions of New Orleans before and after the storm. Carter laments:

Wouldn't you loot if you didn't have the loot? Baby needed food and you stuck on the roof, helicopter swooped down just to get a scoop through his telescopic lens but he didn't scoop you. The next five days no help ensued, they called you refugee cause you seek refuge. The Commander-in-chief just flew by…can't say we're better off than we were before. In synopsis, this is my minority report (Carter, S., 2006).

While covering many themes surrounding the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, Jay-Z makes strong references to government inaction, a testimonial in much of Hip Hop's response to the tragedy, exemplified by Kanye West's infamous statement made during a live concert for hurricane relief that "George Bush doesn't care about Black people" (Moraes, 2005; Simmons, 2010; Watkins, 2010).

Lil' Wayne also attacks governmental inaction and the ensuing perception of governments' role in the destruction and disaster. As a New Orleans native, born Dwayne Carter, Lil' Wayne expresses his personal connection to the tragedy. He boldly proclaims:

This song is dedicated to the one wit the suit, thick white skin and his eyes bright blue, so called beef wit you know who. Fuck it, he just let him kill all of our troops, look at all the bullshit we been through, had niggas sittin on top of they roofs. Hurricane Katrina, we shoulda called it hurricane Georgia Bush…Boy them cops is killers in my home, nigga shot dead in the middle of the street. I ain't no thief, I'm just tryin to eat. Man fuck the police and President Georgia Bush (Carter, D., 2006).

Carter also addresses the less publicized controversy of police savagery toward Black residents in the wake of hurricane Katrina. Media coverage and the flood of images played a major role in shaping public perceptions about the government's response to "the most destructive and costliest natural disaster in the history of the United States" (Lalwani, 2007, p. 10).

The African proverb, *Until the lions learn to speak, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter*, speaks to the wisdom that others will tell the story of the struggle and the importance for us to know how to tell our own story. This principle also speaks to the power of storytelling in activism. While public attention may have been short-lived, counter-stories continue to be told, exemplifying the implications of storytelling—through art, media, and public perception—for the theoretical framework of the policy development process based upon the policy decisions related to Hurricane Katrina and, more broadly, to defining the problems from the inside. The next section explores the role of stories to provide an insider's insight into defining problems.

Reclaiming the angle of vision: defining problems from inside the struggle. Often policy makers disconnected from the realities of those living in urban communities undertake this critical stage in the policy process of defining the problem (Kraft & Furlong, 2007). Therefore outsiders direct the problem, policy, and political streams—the multiple streams approach to policy relies on the convergence of these streams in order to move various issues onto the agenda (Sabatier, 2007). For people situated in urban environments, their exclusion from the policy process more often than not translates to an outsider setting the agenda for policies that affect their lives and fall short of resolving their issues. This speaks to Nketia's point concerning emic and etic vantage points and how these views thus focus political efforts differently (Thorsén, 2004). Similarly, Ngugi wa Thiongo (1987) notes that African writers "came to be defined and to define themselves in terms of the languages of imperialist imposition" (p. 5). This is seen as a means not only to imprison or colonize the spirit or soul, which can

be liberated through expression in native tongue and/or images, but also poses the threat of human commodification to meet the needs of imperial powers (Smallwood, 2007). The creative process can speak back to policy driven by those who are most directly involved in the problems policy aims to address.

The process through which artists creatively express their realities and experiences of their environment combats majoritarian representations that contradict such images and create dehumanizing stories (Jones, A., 2010). Wa Thiongo stresses the dilemma for the African writer saying that, "our capacity to confront the world creatively is dependent on how [socially constructed] images [of struggles with nature and nurture] correspond or not to that reality, how they distort or clarify the reality of our struggles" (Wa Thiongo, 1987, p. 15). This concept alludes to the power of storytelling in constructing realities from the perspective of those living at social margins, who thus perform a contextual analysis, using creative expression as a tool for socio-political activism and agency. By reflecting on and recording what they *see* and experience, artists employ a form of visual stenography to document their realities and environment (Warsame, 2008). The next section explores how this approach to contextual analysis emerges in the work of contemporary artists.

Visual Stenography in Contemporary Tales: Analysis of Activist Artwork

More than one hundred years after the first Black minstrel shows, contemporary artists like Goodie Mob, Donald Black, Jr., K'naan, Charlise Lyles, Aaron McGruder, M.I.A., Mos Def, Outkast, and others including myself, grapple with the same themes in a similar way. Working through a form of visual stenography, fusing art, inquiry, and

activism to create a sort of social commentary, reporting their lived experiences of (in)justice, artists aim to transform their realities (Warsame, 2008). Creative processes are used to produce knowledge that is evident in art but not so much in traditional forms of research as in what is found in ERIC. Visual stenography in essence produces documentaries or testaments created through a process of self and social reflection and awareness. For this literature review, I summarize stories of Black experiences told through the creative processes of artists to add examples of the diversity of these voices in visual and written storytelling to the aforementioned performance art. The idea is not to essentialize *Black experiences*, but to recognize these multifaceted, dynamic, and fluid experiences within the context of the phenomenon of the colonial encounter. Keeping in mind Robin D. G. Kelley's theorizing about hybridity as a lens of study of Black experiences (1997) and Patricia Hill Collins' use of intersectionality as an analytical heuristic for studying the experiences of Black women (1998), I am looking at these experiences also as unfinished counter-stories within a contemporary context very much influenced by the historical colonial encounter.

For example, in the outro of Goodie Mob's "Fighting," Cee-Lo goes on a rant describing his frustration at how historical, social, and political elements manifest in the hood, an environmental context for Blacks. This is some of what he says:

Know something, as individuals and as a people we are at war, but the majority on my side got they eyes open wide and still don't recognize what we fightin' for. I guess that's what I'm writin' for, to try and shed some light. But we been in the darkness so long and don't know right from wrong, ya'll scared to come near it.

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You ignore the voice in your head when you hear it; the enemy is after your spirit,

but you think it's all in your mind. You'll find a lot of the reason why we behind

is because the system is designed to keep our third eyes blind, but not blind in

the sense that our other eyes can't see. You just end up investin' quality time in

places you don't even need to be—we don't even know who we are, but the

answer ain't far. Matter of fact, it's right up under our nose, but the system

taught us to keep that book closed. See, the reason why he got to lie and

deceive is so that we won't act accordingly to get the best as we supposed to

receive. Yeah it's true, Uncle Sam wants you to be a devil too…but what's worse

is if I put it in a verse, ya'll listen to some bullshirt first. We ain't natural born

killers; we are a spiritual people—God's chosen few… (Barnett et. al, 1995).

In a song describing a struggle for spiritual and mental liberation, Cee-Lo cites this as

motivation to write or create and makes reference to a need to know oneself through a

process that is systematically unlearned and suppressed. The next artist continues this

commentary on the crisis of cultural reality within the Black community utilizing visual

media.

Though he works in a variety of media, Donald Black, Jr.'s photographic series of

emotionally charged images created from 2003 to 2005 of blackface minstrels entitled,

The Crisis of Realism, is used to explore how he traverses Black experiences in the turn

of another century. Black approaches this series like fashion photography, utilizing his

commercial training, juxtaposed with fine art conceptualism whereas the models are in

blackface. Spawned by experience—as the only Black male in his program of study,

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collaborating with his circle of art friends, answering a question posed to him, "Do you see yourself in your artwork?" and responding to a comment by a colleague that he is "a really strong photographer, but needs to shoot more white people"—Black moves away from the subconscious arrangement of objects and symbols in some of his other political work, toward the provocative portrayal of blackface minstrels to tell stories of Black experiences (Black, 2007).

The series creates a dialogue with the viewer, posing questions like: What have I done? Can you be bound by vision or in or by someone else's vision? How will you free your mind, yourself? At first glance, these images appear theatrical and staged, but once the viewer allows him or herself to experience the variations of shadows, depths, and blacks, the dialogue begins. The artist comments on this darkness, stating, "My work is not dark because I'm depressed or because I am angry. I truly respect the struggle of the shadow of the color black. We find community in each other through our feelings of misrepresentation" (jones, 2007). The artist's manipulation of shadow and depth of field parallels the depth of perception of Blacks in the entertainment industry and how the media depicts Black culture.

His work confronts our perceptions of beauty and culture with constructed depictions of the crisis of cultural reality. The conceptual element, alluding to physical and metaphorical boundaries created by racism, slavery, religion, relationships, and other aspects of Black experiences in America, forces viewers to participate in the story by examining personal inhibitions and ideas about race, ethnicity, beauty, and culture. Of this the artist states that, "art is supposed to invoke thought. It should make you feel

something. The feeling created when someone experiences art usually has more to do with the viewer then the creator" (jones, 2007). The intention is to provoke thought, as opposed to pity, to highlight an uncensored reality—so often Black experiences are seen as that of the "other"; Black's work brings these experiences to the forefront, allowing the viewer to empathize.

Black's images highly engage the viewer. For instance, a provocative portrait of white painted hands in front of a dark face asks the viewer to witness, as if saying, "Come look, come see, let me show you…darkness." At the same time this image acts as a mirror for the viewer to ask, "What have I done?" The contrast between dark and light in this image creates a shift of power similar to ethnic power struggles. The artist says, "I sincerely hope my work helps give a voice to the beautiful and exotic side of African American Culture, even if the influence struggles to reflect this same beauty. Our journey through the trenches in search of paradise will always be tough, until we face this dark reality we try so hard to ignore" (jones, 2007). While his work is not answer-oriented, the resolution proposed is acknowledgement, for the viewer to realize and evaluate Black experiences, changing the popular perception of Black people. Black reflectively narrates *some* of his educational experiences, and while his work unequivocally examines identity development, the next artist narrates identity development and *explicitly* examines themes that emerge from her education.

The title of Charlise Lyles' memoir is a thematic metaphor for boundaries, relationships, and expectations capturing the essence of her education—that which she learned from schools and from her life experiences. *Do I Dare Disturb the Universe:*

From the Projects to Prep School is such a fitting title for this coming of age piece. Her universe is defined by the interactions of the elements of this metaphor. Boundaries are physical barriers and self-created limitations from circumstances and politics to mindset and self-will. Our familial and social relationships are guided by these boundaries and also shape expectations—of ourselves, of others, and definitely of education, which is the pulse of this story.

Lyles' story is so compelling because it is familiar. Through her written exploration of identity and the different elements that influenced her, Lyles speaks to the experiences many have growing up Black. Many can relate to an estranged parent, often an absent father; the wealth of living in poverty, a nonmaterial, irreplaceable richness; wanting to escape the confinements of the immediate space; "navigating two very different social universes"; and finding one's proper place, or in this case, creating and recreating that place. Lyles speaks to an education of non-complacency and her experience of "disturbing things" (Lyles in an interview with the author partially published in CP2; jones, 2009, February).

Lyles' father's limited presence had a profound influence on her experiences, affecting the direction of her education, life, and written expression of stories. It is important to note that his example also provides evidence that one can be well educated without attending the best schools; that education is not always obtained from the institutions of schools. Furthermore, Lyles' memoir provides an educational critique as a living testimony of her experiences of the inequalities in education through her familiarity with Cleveland Public Schools and Hawken. Her story makes the claim of

disparity valid, explaining, "The curriculum, I feel, at Hawken and at many of the preparatory schools is designed to educate leaders, and the curriculum of public schools is designed to educate followers. And that's a broad sweeping statement, but I think there's a lot of truth to it" (Lyles in an interview with the author partially published in CP2; jones, 2009, February). Lyles speaks to the nature of schools to reproduce the class system in our society.

Reflecting on her transition from the projects to prep school, Lyles also speaks to Black identity development. Defining one's self may not always be easy or painless, but once one is sure of self, it is more comfortable to be one's self than someone else, someone unfamiliar to the discovered self. This story also describes the importance of defining one's own role. Lyles explained her choice for the memoir's title that references a question asked by J. Alfred Prufrock in a T.S. Eliot poem, saying, "I latched on to that very lyrical, very poetic image when I was at Hawken, because I always felt that when I spoke out about the raw inequities that I witnessed from my vantage point, going from projects to prep school, that I was upsetting the universe…and so disturbing the universe is a point of identity" (Lyles in an interview with the author partially published in CP2; jones, 2009, February). Hers is a tale of breaking boundaries, leaving her mark, and expression—daring to do something different, seeking knowledge, speaking and being heard.

Lyles joins ranks with several other contemporary artists who daringly break boundaries to have their voices heard. These artists are also speaking globally and speaking of the Diaspora, the global Black community. One such artist, Somali rapper

K'naan left a war torn Mogadishu on the last flight to leave the country at the age of 13 and poetically paints images of life growing up in Somalia before and after the start of its civil war. In the States K'naan felt like "a poet without words" so he learned English from listening to rap and to regain and establish his voice (Hannon, 2008).

> My old home smelled of good birth, boiled red beans, kernel oil, and hand me down poetry…The tin roof top humming songs of promise while time is locked into demonic rhythm with the leaves, the trees had the wind hugging them, loving them a torturous love bugging when it was over and done…Farmers, fishers, fighters, even fools had a place in production. The coastal line was a place of seduction. The coral reefs made you daze in reflection. The women walked with grace and perfection. And we just knew we were warriors too, nothing morbid, it's true. We were glorious—BOOM! Then one day it came, spoiled the parade like rain, like oil in a flame it pained, a heart attack sudden…It came in the morning with a warning and without. The hurting was a burden, only certain was doubt. A mythical tale no soul knows well, liberty went to hell, freedom called for shells… (Warsame, 2005).

Using his voice to raise awareness to such issues, K'naan speaks to the powerful tradition of poetry to create social change, saying, "Until the lion learns to speak the tales of hunting will be weak. When poetry hails within the streets, when poetry fails to be discrete, it travels across the earth and seas, from Eritrea to the West Indies. It knows no boundaries, no cheats…" (Warsame, 2005). K'naan also speaks to music and poetry as an outlet, a means to write through the melancholy of his depression (Hannon,

2008). "Consider, configure the shit that I'm endin', the pain, I'm literally going insane.

I'm frightened. My heart and my head have been fighting; I'm certain it's hurtin' the

rest of my body…" (Warsame, 2005). The use of creative processes as an outlet and a

voice are threads connecting the stories of these artists.

As an artist, I also aim to have my story heard. While my knowledge of Black

history and Africa is scarce and newly developing, my contemplation of my personal

experience nearly dates my existence on this planet. I have no claims to savvy socio-

cultural history, but I am in constant awareness, observation, and critique of my

surroundings. To be sure, my exploration of Black experiences is evident in my creative

works that by far predate my recent travel to Ghana during the summer of 2009. I

creatively work through the issues of race and identity in my experience and have

decided that the two are so closely intertwined that it would be nearly, if not totally,

impossible to separate one from the other, as noted in Sellers work on identity salience

and regard (Sellers et. al, 1998).

My experience is most certainly the Black experience as affected by the colonial

encounter. Though for me this conception is new, the evidence of this concept colors

my past and present being. Through a narrative reflection on my travel, I articulate the

deep desire to connect to the past and my unknown heritage. I explore many of the

same themes that emerge from the identity stories other artists tell. I explore identity

from the perspective of Black experiences and postmodernity, engaging in a creative

form of sociopolitical activism that exposes these perceptions. Utilizing social realism as

an approach to storytelling, I create a layered narrative that captures details in a

believable way while critiquing society and exposing issues that exist in reality, stylistically consistent with 20th century Diasporic art in general and specifically in West African literature and film (jones, 2009, August). When I reflect on my personal experience in relation to other scholarly works, I contemplate whether the existence of issues I face is validated only when they fit within the framework of previous research.

Is there value in the artistic expression of personal experiences? Consider remarks made by Stuart Hall in an interview that he is able to now write about these issues because he is at the end of the long journey to the discovery of his Black identity, "a space [he] couldn't occupy, a space [he] had to learn to occupy" (Chen, 1996, p. 489). This again adds credence to the African proverb. Creatively exposing themes of the colonial encounter, sometimes more subtly, artists present images heavily laden with political commentary and satire. Their work demonstrates the importance of storytelling to create a powerful public perception of problems as defined from within urban contexts that can potentially influence the policy development process in these settings. This perspective is missing from research of urban education, along with an understanding of the role this creative process plays in an individual's experience of urban contexts and how such stories produced may inform research toward systemic change within these contexts. The following section discusses how the contextual analysis or visual stenography employed by artists extends this activism to educational transformation, exploring the intersection of critical theory, participation, and the arts in efforts to transform urban education.

Troubling or Transformation? Intersection of Critical Theory, Participation, and the Arts

A review of existing literature on urban educational transformation exposes arts and participatory methods employed in efforts to analyze the urban context, the site for urban educational change. The word transformation is first unpacked to introduce a concept of "action" not typically understood in writing about educational change, but that is closely aligned with the production of art in discipline based arts education (DBAE) and informs an exploration of the creative process (Bates, 2000). During a presentation of "The Life and Legacy of Malcolm X" at Ohio University during the spring of 2000, Dr. Najee Muhammad demonstrated the linguistic deconstruction of the word *transformation*, which literally means to change the structure of something through action.

Through art education as such, *change* is represented through the enlightenment, knowledge, understanding, and appreciation gained from engaging with DBAE—art history, art production, art criticism, and aesthetics (Bates, 2000). In addition to how it is related to laws, customs, and policy in social science literature, in transformational art education *structure* implies the individual, school, community, and our world whereas creativity disrupts the grip of structures, allowing for agency and voice by unlocking the consciousness and allowing for in depth explorations of self and personal relations to environmental contexts. According to Brice-Heath and Roach's (1999) study of youth involved in community-based arts organizations working closely with professional artists, this heightened awareness through creativity leads to fuller

social competence as the arts involved students had more one-on-one time with adults, which enabled them to develop critical forms of academic and personal language and adult-like strategies for planning and decision-making.

These adult-like strategies for planning and decision-making take the form of action. In the sense of the linguistic deconstruction of transformational art education, *action* is art making and experiencing, creating, and expressing toward their contemplation of self and social context. This contemplation of self and social context is a precursor for heightened critical consciousness (Guishard, 2008) and as such, the arts present a means for social agitation through "the kind of trouble caused by a good art education [resulting] in change, change in the way students think, change in the way they behave, and specifically a change of mind leading to creative action" (Freedman, 2007, p. 205). It is this sort of *art as troubling* approach that needs further exploration. Transformational art education promotes the sort of activism Kerry Freedman speaks of, while allowing students to understand the relationship between their lives, school, and society (Fine et al., 2004). This process presents the opportunity to change society and perceptions about cultural existence as well as a medium to stimulate ideas about how to shape the world. This section explores efforts to address social (in)justice and educational change using arts and participatory methods.

Because the history of educational change reveals the absence of involvement of everyday folks in change efforts, I turn to an exploration of participatory action research (PAR). Guided by the aforementioned critical theory, PAR is also a stream of literature that attends to efforts at transformation and the "troubling" of the context of urban

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education. Critical activism takes place when youth are involved in a storytelling project utilizing art and PAR as means to interrupt the normal flow of things by reorienting power in the young constituents of education, nurturing their agency to tell their stories and (re)define their realities (jones, 2010, June). Encouraging the political agency of overlooked populations can be seen as a threat to power and authority and therefore seen as trouble making (Freedman, 2007). Urban education reform calls for troubling the fabric of social context in order to mend the disconnect between policy makers and those affected by policy. Art is a critical conduit in connecting policy makers, often unfamiliar with the everyday life and nuances of urban environments, and those affected by policy who dwell in urban spaces through the stories told in creative works by providing points of recognition within the artist's experiences and the context of education (Rosenberg & Ruskin, 2004).

Writing about PAR has connections to the creative process but exploration of the creative process within participatory methods is underdeveloped in this work. There is room to explore the connections between participatory and arts methods to determine whether the use of such methods might yield insights and inform policy toward transformative educational change at the individual and institutional level. Connecting webs between institutional structures, relations, and people's lives are presented by Weis and Fine (2004) as critical to understanding everyday realities and to changing social relations, which makes the case for looking at how stories told by artists may offer a close look at identity and agency in relation to structural conditions and illuminate the tension between these elements. This concept of oscillation between institutional

structures, relations, and lives is central to the Weis and Fine theory of method—

impacting how one collects and analyzes data—and central to the metaphor and

designing methods of composition that attend to a broader constellation of relations of

power in which individuals and groups are located. Oscillation is also a way into my

discussion here of connections between the arts, critical theory, and activism for change

initiatives in the context of urban educational settings.

The relational ethnographic approach within compositional studies described by

Weis and Fine (2004) assumes the situatedness of relations within a social, historical,

political, global economical context and the power of social theory to resist isolating a

group from its context. Therefore, the limitations of the design of compositional studies

are in the "risk that the in-group depth may be compromised at the expense of cross-

group analysis" (Weis & Fine, 2004, p. xvi). While the authors present an argument for

the heavy contextual analysis undertaken through compositional studies, they do not

address how this theory relates or applies to the creative process, creating a niche for

my current study.

As an example of a compositional study, the participatory action research (PAR)

study by Fine et al. (2004) of the impact of college within a women's prison complex

utilized knowledge produced from collaboration and action to change institutional

policy and practice. University researchers learned that what they may have perceived

to be paranoia on the part of the inmate researchers to disclose certain information

might have been local wisdom, familiarity with the prison environment and the

repercussions of such disclosure. This is similar to Jean Michel Basquiat's story of being

labeled by whites as paranoid about racism. Basquiat was a very young 22-year-old

artist when he hit the art scene in the early 1980's and was quickly consumed by the

pressures of fame and a popular lifestyle, succumbing to a drug overdose at the age of

27. In actuality, as one of the only Black artists recognized by the Western art world, he

experienced quite a bit of racism to which the white artists and critics had no point of

reference (Davis, 2010). In the PAR project, a process for critical consciousness and

identity (re)formation emerges as "the women were trying to describe personal change

or transformation as a process in which a woman recognizes her past, present, and

future selves in relation to one another and within social context…and most were

articulating the role that college played in helping them draw these lines of connection"

(Fine et al., 2004, p. 107). How does the creative process act in a similar manner to

develop such critical consciousness and articulate identity?

In another study, Cammarota and Romero (2009) explore how PAR can be used

with social science curricula to serve the cultural, intellectual, and social needs of

Latina/o youth and raise their critical consciousness while meeting state standards. This

is a PAR and social justice study looking at how this method informs the epistemology

and pedagogy of the high school curriculum. Cammarota and Romero note, "The

intention is for students to reclaim the political space that silences their voices by filling

in the missing element, student knowledge, for developing effective policies for young

people" (Cammarota & Romero, 2009, p. 54). Social Justice Education Project (SJEP)—

students are provided with social justice oriented poetry from which they identify

generative words and themes. This method is similar to Freire's approach to teaching

literacy through words that originate from students' environment allowing for knowledge construction and meaning grounded in lived experiences; research topics are self-selected and usually center on issues in the Latino community. Researchers do not define or theorize around the role that art played in this process. Students' understanding of the creative process is also unexplored. There is space here for such inquiry in addition to what students narrate about their participation in arts activities.

As a result of participation in SJEP, students have the opportunity "to transform existing and future contextualization of [their] realities" with an eye toward social structures and external institutional forces (Cammorota & Romero, 2009, p. 57). Students develop critical knowledge that aids to "foster an awareness of how to redefine one's self, community, and world in more positive, just terms… necessary for young people to feel capable and competent as agents of change, whether the change is initiated at the individual or societal levels" (Cammorota & Romero, 2009, p. 63-64). As with creative expression, frequently PAR influences transformative change or action at the individual level, among the students themselves, nurturing agency and voice, and changing perceptions about self and social context. From this level, potential exists to create social change by more broadly communicating individual learning and development to others and impacting the perceptions and actions of others. PAR intends also to influence the system level; getting to this level of action can be a challenge. At the same time, creating opportunities for overlooked populations to inquire about issues in their lives contributes to knowledge production and possibilities for change.

The cases presented by Cammorota and Romero demonstrate how PAR facilitates knowledge that makes connections between the classroom and students' lives. Through the research, students were able to document their experiences with security, courses, and language acquisition making small strides toward change in institutional policies and larger strides toward personal transformation. The project served as a tool for students to (re)develop personal identities, "community activism, and empathy for others' struggles" (Cammorota & Romero, 2009, p. 63).

Such critical pedagogy models actively bridge the exchange between researchers, young people, schools, and the political environment in order to affect change. Art and PAR are critical components of this equation engaging participants in civic agency. Storytelling provides participants a means to channel energy, emotionally liberating themselves (Rosenberg & Ruskin, 2004). Participants are actively transforming perceptions by performing their experiences, struggling against insouciance toward transitional moments in their lives—from the decision makers as well as their own indifference toward their realities (jones, 2010, June). This enables participants to change their mindset toward being more open to owning their experiences and emotions and sharing themselves. It is critical to explore how art helped to facilitate these outcomes and the role art played in this research. There is certainly room to explore why the arts are used with PAR and to theorize around the use of arts.

In a similar study of collaborative work (Wicks & Reason, 2009), communicative space is seen as an aesthetic to explore the relationship of personal understanding to that of others', much in the same way the discussion section of research operates.

Creating this space to communicate needs is part of group development. The process of

opening communicative space is mapped onto a theory of group development that

suggests a progression through phases of inclusion, control, and intimacy as identified

by Wicks and Reason (2009). Drawing on Habermas, researchers theorize around the

"boundary-crises between system and lifeworld to explore the theory behind the idea of

communicative space" (Wicks & Reason, 2009, p. 243). As researchers worked with and

engaged in the lifeworlds of groups of workers, they were able to identify contradictions

between participant perspectives and the requirements the researchers were

contracted to work toward.

Leadership must perform a delicate dance between exercising social power to

create the space for participation and relinquishing power so that participants can own

their work. Exercising the social power of leadership seems contradictory to the goals of

participatory work. What of creating a space where power dynamics are minimalized?

Researchers report that the more creative participants, after reflection on their

experience and the contradictions that emerged, "began to find ways to reconcile their

lifeworld experiences with system requirements in ways that genuinely reflected the

original objectives of the programme" (Wicks & Reason, 2009, p. 257). How was this

accomplished and what did this look like? What role did creativity play in this

reconciliation? Again, PAR and the creative process are presented as instrumental to

troubling context and encouraging transformation, but absent theorizing about the

elements and role of the creative process. It is necessary to look at how art, the creative

process, is instrumental in making connections between individuals, their social context,

and education. The next section explores metaphors of the creative process and connecting to social context presented within artistic development.

The Creative Process and Stages of Artistic Development

The creative processes of the aforementioned artists parallel the stages of artistic development as defined by Viktor Lowenfeld (1947), noted theorist of child development. While these stages are directly related to art and employ terminology relevant to the field of visual art, they are also metaphoric to how these artists explore race relations and outline the artistic expression of their individual discovery of themes that emerge from their experiences. While Lowenfeld's work details children's developing awareness of their physical environment, his work provides for further inquiry into the similar nature through which artists express their awareness of their social environment. This section provides a summary of the five stages of artistic development Lowenfeld outlines in his work entitled, *Creative and Mental Growth* (1947).

Scribble, the first stage, consists of disordered markings, whereas the child has little control over the marks. At this stage the child is merely making marks and enjoying the kinesthetic aspect of mark making, unaware of purpose other than the gratification received from creating. As the child progresses through this stage, marked by the ability to visualize in pictures, more control is gained over the marks, which transform into more complex forms named by the child.

Forms suggestive of human or animal figures begin to appear in the next stage, *Preschematic*, whereas a schema develops with little understanding of space. What the

child perceives as most important about the subject is visible in the drawing, usually an enlarged feature. At this stage, the use of color is more emotional than logically prescriptive as it is in the next stage, *Schematic*. In the third stage of development, the child also demonstrates spatial awareness by showing a relationship between what is up and what is down, and concrete baselines and skylines are placed in spatial relation to easily definable objects in the drawing. Exaggeration between subjects is further used in this stage to express strong feelings about the subject. Objects can appear to be drawn upside down, the "folding over" technique, when they appear on the baseline. The "X-ray" phenomenon occurs when the child shows the subject from the inside and the outside simultaneously.

The next stage, known as *Dawning Realism* or *The Crisis of Realism*, is a critical point in development as the child is ever more visually aware of self and their surroundings, but physically has not developed the ability to approach this awareness. This stage is categorized by a break from making scribbles to creating and organizing symbols based on the child's consciousness of the environment, personal experiences, details, proportion, dimension, and a greater grasp on space and perspective—demonstrated by overlapping objects and varying points of view. Developing consciousness is precisely what makes this stage so critical. More aware of personal ability as well as inability to depict an experience with a particular object leads to a crisis in the older child who is disappointed in and critical of their efforts to render reality, searches for adult-like skills and copies others, and is reluctant to engage in art activities into adolescence.

In previous stages, the process of making the visual art is of great significance to the child. In the final stage, *Pseudo Realism*, the product is most important to the child. This stage is marked by two psychological differences—visual and non-visual. The child is inspired by visual stimuli and feels as a spectator looking at their work, like a staged presentation. The child develops a greater understanding of color conceptually and how it changes under different external conditions. The non-visual marker noted by Lowenfeld (1947) is based on the child's subjective experiences and interpretations focused on emotional relationships and interactions with the external world. In such case, color is used more conceptually as a technique to reflect the emotional reaction to the subject (Lowenfeld, 1947).

Even through such artistic terminology—color, conscious, perception, perspective, objective, conceptual, control, awareness, emotional, space, relationship, environment, organizing, personal, symbols, exaggeration, external, interpretation, experience—it is seen how these stages mirror artists' exploration of concepts dealing with Black experiences. The comparison is so strong as these words are no longer metaphoric, but are synonymous with the artists' individual discovery of themes as exhibited through their work. Lowenfeld's theory of artistic development encourages further study of the creative process.

This chapter presents a review of extant literature for implications of connections between critical theory, the arts, and activism for educational change to illustrate where space emerges from the intersection of these streams for the study of the creative process. The premise of critical theory centers on troubling social space by

critiquing and redistributing power utilizing research methods that challenge traditional

paradigms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In studying Black experiences, more relevant

methods are sought to address and utilize the perspectives of Black people and

circumvent the "othering" that is inherent in the Western model of research (Thorsén,

2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Critical methods depend on such knowledge situated in

individuals and their social context and the use of counter-storytelling to reveal

overlooked issues from the perspectives of those who live within the context of urban

education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009). There is a gap in this research concerning a

particular approach to the creative process that artists use in constructing stories of

their experience, stories rich with social, political, and historical contextual analysis.

What can be learned from the process used by these artists as well as from the stories

they tell?

The use of such stories is presented as evidence of identity development, as

cultural tools of preservation, as a means for liberation, and as a means to uncover the

experiences of those situated at the margins of society (Smallwood, 2007; Solórzano &

Yosso, 2009). There is room to explore the role of the creative process in these efforts.

There is a need to uncover dimensions of the creative process that tell stories of a

particular experience from the perspective of the experienced and to theorize the role

of this process as it relates to educational change and the development of Black

identities.

The Weis and Fine (2004) piece centers on the individual and group in relation to

historical and structural conditions and using methods, likened to the creative process,

that collect and analyze data in such a way that unearths webs of power relations that exist within contexts. Such principles are utilized by participatory action research (PAR), which often incorporates the use of arts as part of the research methods. This work is done absent theorizing about the relationship between the arts and critical participatory methods. The literature calls for an exploration of the role of the arts in the development of critical consciousness and educational change efforts and of the sites of possibility within the creative process.

Lather, who is very much a part of the critical tradition, offers reciprocity and catalytic validity that connect with the PAR literature (Lather, 1986). There are unexplored connections between Lather's work and the creative process in terms of fostering critical consciousness, a deeper understanding of one's context, and transformation of realities. A further question remains: How can the expanded use of reciprocity be extended to the study of one's creative process through the use of a collectively created inquiry, which is then collaboratively theorized? There is space to explore a counter-narrative for/of Black experiences by telling the story of a particular approach to the creative process.

Critical theory and participatory methods place value on knowledge produced by the participants of research; those closest to issues being studied are instead embraced as *participants* and essentially become experts on their environment and are championed differently than by traditional doctoral research found on databases such as ERIC that view them as *subjects*. Critical theory is trying to negotiate the relationship between theory and practice as well as research and researched, taking into account the

notion of experiential knowledge. The challenge of embracing this framework includes

questions surrounding authorship of dissertation research when participatory methods

are used and reconciliation with the researcher's positionality within the work.

I took up the challenge of embracing a participatory framework to explore a

particular approach to the creative process and the implications it has for efforts to

transform urban education. There was still the question of "who am I?" in this research

process, because guides to conducting research and ethnographic studies—for the most

part—address white researchers and negotiating issues of whiteness. I am an anomaly

to the field of research, which still operates using what Cornel West calls a "normative

white gaze," and functions within the context of "normal"—all things white

(Stephanson, 1994). In the next chapter I lay out my approach to this study and how I

explicated my position within the Western construct of research, how I approached

study of "the other" as an "other."

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

"I believe in the importance of storytelling, of telling stories and listening to stories. It's how we learn as children; we internalize those stories. It's how we grow as adults. It's how we expand our knowledge of the world. So when we hear stories that dehumanize us, right, that's when the system that we depend on begins to break down. Just for a second I'd like to tell you a story…"
—Angela Jones[2]

My home is known as the "mistake on the lake". This is where my son was born. I'm a transplant here and have known several places. But there's something about this city. Cleveland is historically divided by the Cuyahoga River, into East and West, Black and White. But it's more than that; the division goes beyond geographic boundaries and color. The city is at once divided by more than such boundaries and at the same time connected by natural elements as if by tributaries, the channels and streams that flow into the Great Lake itself. Cleveland's pulse beats syncopated rhythms of struggle, the back and forth of power and economics in the Rust Belt and of complacency and unrest in the populace.

I woke up this morning and took my dog outside. It was an unusually balmy day for the grey skies overhead that seemed to promise a more frigid temperature. This was the last Tuesday of summer, and fall was just two days away. I loosened my hoodie, which I'd pressed around my body expecting the cold. I let my arms fall to my side and deeply inhaled a breath of Cleveland-fresh air—the refreshing, odorless pollutants periodically known to neighborhoods along I-77 S. I swear that my son developed asthma at 2-years-old when we moved here, to our home. I look up at the sky. Grey can be so beautiful and intriguing. The dense greyness is really the clouds that are actually glowing with the rising sun. There's something about this city.

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[2] Jones, A. (2010). Opening to presentation at the Ford Foundation Secondary Education Racial Justice Collaborative conference, New York, NY.

Just like that, which is basically typical of Cleveland weather, bright rays begin to fall across the neighborhood. As I take my son to school, I drive through the streets of the Turney-Warner, Union Miles, Mt. Pleasant, and Buckeye neighborhoods. The sun rises and sets so beautifully on these streets as if the heavens open up ever so subtly to say it sees our struggle; the skies glow, shining down promises of resurrection. Stopped at a light, I'm in awe as I take in the theater before me. I lean back into the seat; my hands relax on the steering wheel. I look to my left at a short block where nearly half the homes are abandoned, one of which has fallen victim to flames. The orange-gold glow of the rising sun rakes across these buildings making them look as majestic as the ancient ruins of Kush. Does anyone else see the beauty in this space, see the moments when the streets don't struggle to shine? Are we paying attention to these moments when the streets are simply brilliant on purpose, as if by design?

These thoughts replay in and out of my mind throughout the rest of the day. This isn't new. I constantly contemplate the simple complexities of this space. I've watched the heavens leave golden kisses over the valley and spill onto my street. It's nightfall now. My neighborhood is noisy with the sounds of nature; crickets sing back-up to the ruckus in my head. What is it about this city?

Something is wrong with the way I was schooled. Many of my Black peers didn't walk across the stage. Instead I, shining among us token few, walked the plank right into the sea of collegiate life where I should have drowned without the lifeline of the rudiments of identity and a preserver of how to apply critical thinking. I am the product of a failing public school system and of failed schooling. My schooling failed because as an exception, I did not yet make it out. I'm still trying to figure out how I got here and why we as a society have accepted the fact that anywhere from 40-80% of my peers are caught in a systemic cycle of poverty. I haven't joined my predestined place in society by taking up a meaningless, underpaid, white-collar profession—underpaid due to the nature of me and my sexual organs and skin.

I don't blame my peers for not being with me as if responsibility lies in others' perception of my peers as lacking hard work, effort, or motivation. I don't feel that I'm lucky, as if luck has anything to do with success and the nature of our society in the United States…I don't blame my teachers nor my principals; it wasn't the fault of the schools. My mother is not to blame, nor am I. It's beyond the scope of the classroom's walls and the embrace of the walls in my home.

I place blame, as if that's what's necessary to begin restoration, on the system and its prison with walls that can only be felt and not seen. At times, running into these invisible walls is felt so strongly, constantly, and subtly that I internalize the insanity of solutions to problems of social (in)justice sought through bureaucratic policies, as if we can fix the system. I do believe in strategic systemic change, that the system can be fixed. But meanwhile, what happens until?

While we spend billions on band-aid policies aimed at education and welfare, spinning our wheels chasing results proclaimed to be achieved through the latest trends in education and social reform efforts—what happens while we're waiting for Superman to

fix the system and right the wrongs of hundreds of years of legislation and practice (de facto) gone wrong? What happens to generations of young people caught in this spin cycle? What do we do while encouraging strategic systemic change?

The first steps in this initiative involve the restoration of our social identity, of Black identity. I think this is accomplished through the ability to define ourselves for ourselves, to be our own experts on our condition, history, and experiences and how this redefinition is a redefinition of "us" as Americans that forces a redefinition of othering, of Whiteness, of the West, of America. We need to tell our own stories. The village, proverbial and actual, will burn to the ground if we don't assess and address the fire in our own homes for ourselves.

Actually it's our inability to articulate our awareness of this imprisonment that's important. How to tell this story? What process to use?[3]

I begin this chapter with the above background narrative to situate my discussion of the research at hand and the personal context that drove my inquiry into the creative process. While there are numerous themes that derive from the narrative, many fall under the umbrella of issues related to my experience of my environment. The narrative is an artifact, a creative product, of my reflection on the environment around me. Referencing what takes place in the meantime while policy makers spin their wheels producing policies that inevitably seem to sustain the status quo, the narrative poses the question of *what happens until* suggesting the need for strategies or processes dependent on the agency of self.

The purpose of the research was to uncover a particular approach to the creative process, a reflective process of telling stories of particular experiences while considering the historical, environmental, social, educational, racial, and identity elements that form the context of stories such as the one told above. Through the course of conducting the research and telling the story of this study, a goal for this dissertation is to explore how

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[3] jones, v. (2010). Autoethnographic journal entry dated September 21, 2010.

a particular approach to the creative process may be reflected in carrying out this research.

Beginning with a reminder of the purpose of this study and research questions, the remaining sections of this chapter delve into the methods employed by the study to explore a particular approach to the creative process. The sections following the purpose describe the context and sample for the study. Then the researcher's perspective is detailed, followed by the theoretical framework. The final sections outline the data collection and analysis.

Statement of Purpose

This study focused on a particular approach to the creative process within urban contexts. The study made use of a framework steeped in critical theory perspectives and a participatory paradigm and was grounded in the traditions of Participatory Action Research (Cammarota and Fine, 2008; Fine et al., 2004; McIntyre, 2000, 2006; Sutton and Kemp, 2006) and artmaking as trouble making (Freedman, 2007). This research was informed by my experience living, teaching, and researching as a member of the Cleveland community over the past ten years.

The purpose of the study was threefold: (1) to uncover dimensions of a particular approach to the creative process; (2) to theorize the role of this process as it relates to individuals' experiences of urban environments and education; and (3) to consider how stories told through the creative process make connections and might influence the research process and contribute to systemic educational change. The research questions were:

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1. What do young, Black artists narrate about their experiences of life and the urban environment?

2. What is their understanding of the role the creative process plays in their experience of life and the urban environment?

3. How do these narratives speak to dimensions of a particular approach to the creative process and its relation to the urban environment and education?

4. How can stories produced through this process inform how we conduct research of urban education toward systemic change?

In order to address these questions and attend to the focus of study, methods and selection of participants were deliberate and sought to achieve the necessary intensity and depth drawn from sustained in-depth dialogue between Black artists in urban environments and myself, acting as researcher and participant. This dialogue, in the form of semi-structured interviews, was coupled with our autoethnographic entries.

Context

The context of this study, selected out of a desire to produce research that is relevant to the place I call home, centers on the "hood." The hood is a common reference to neighborhoods in urban environments and while the participants in this study are from specific hoods in Cleveland, and Providence, patterns and conditions in these hoods are representative of the industrial decline of urban centers across the nation. The city of Cleveland, Ohio is the nation's 3rd poorest city, where the local

unemployment rate is 9.4% compared to 10% for the state and 9.6% nationally (Brodsky et al., 2004; MacIver, 2010; US Department of Labor, 2010).

Similarly, the city of Providence, Rhode Island, rated 23rd in the nation for poverty, has an unemployment rate of 12.8 compared to 10.4% for the state (United States Census, 2012; Rhode Island Department of Labor & Training, 2012). With a 44% growth in its Hispanic population over the last decade, Providence ranks number 1 for unemployment among this group with a 23.3% Hispanic unemployment rate compared to 11.5% nationally (Austin, 2012). I feel it ethical to use the names of these locations because of the autobiographical nature of the study. This broader data is relevant to paint the background of the image for the study. It is provided as evidence to some of the contextual issues—poverty, population decrease and changing demographics, failing public schools— that I complicated through the current study in order to develop the details of the image.

Cleveland is the context for four participants in the study, while Providence is the context for a fifth participant. Because research question four is regarding systemic educational change, it is necessary to provide some context in terms of these cities' schools. The following statistical data from the Ohio State Department of Education is provided as evidence to the city's failing public school system that I again wish to complicate through the current study to provide a more detailed picture of the educational context in Cleveland. The Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) is considered failing to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) for the 7th consecutive year, with a state designation of academic watch (one designation above the lowest rate of

academic emergency), and it suffers from a drop in enrollment due to changing

demographics and school choice (Ohio Department of Education, 2012; Jefferson, 1991).

According to its 2010-2011 School Year Report Card, the district has an average daily

enrollment of 43,202—3,495 less than the previous school year—is only meeting 1 of

the 26 state performance indicators, and has a 62.8% graduation rate (Ohio Department

of Education, 2012). The district website gives the demographic breakdown of students

including 68.2% Black and 100% economically disadvantaged (Ohio Department of

Education, 2012).

The following statistical data from the Rhode Island Department of Education is

also provided as evidence to the city's struggling school system that I complicate

through the current study to provide a more detailed picture of the educational context

in Providence. The Providence Public School District is considered failing to meet

adequate yearly progress (AYP) for the 10th consecutive year, meeting 24 of the 33 state

performance indicators, and has a composite graduation rate of 68.6% (Rhode Island

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). According to its 2011-2012

aggregate report, the district has an average daily enrollment of 23,518 of which 63.4%

are Hispanic, 18.5% are Black, 17% are special needs, 81.5% are economically

disadvantaged, and 17.2% have limited English language proficiency (Rhode Island

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). It is important to note that

both Providence and Cleveland have much lower rates for "on-time, 4-year graduation,"

with that of the former being 52.2% and 66.1% for the latter.

Participants

Criteria for selecting participants in this study derive from the necessity of the sample to address the research questions. Selection of participants is also deliberate in terms of attending to the study's focus and to achieve the necessary intensity and depth drawn from sustained in-depth dialogue between artists. Participants are artists selected based on the following demographic factors: members of the generation ranging between ages 22 and 40 years old; self-identified as Black or of African descent; and dwelling in urban environments. Participants are selected based on the nature of their work to narrate experiential data pertaining to education and context. A participant must be willing to examine the role the creative process plays in his or her experience. Finally, participants are selected based on their approach to the creative process, perceived as fusing art, inquiry, and activism to produce work that not only documents experiences of social (in)justice, but aims to disrupt such unequal social relations (Warsame, 2008; Asante, 2008).

As exhibited by the opening narrative to this chapter, the origins of this study were very much autobiographical and likewise incorporated me as a participant as well as a researcher. As an artivist, with a background in education, photography, and painting, I work to improve the quality of public education in general and specifically for Black youth. I actively strive to approach life with an open heart, mind, and eye, using my work to create a visual dialogue, whereby expression is a powerful tool for change. As a student and citizen, I learn to utilize my perspective and creativity toward the goal

of interactive production, much like my artwork, and to create dialogue as a catalyst for social change.

MiLisa Coleman, Clifton Izzrael Coles, Derick Prosper, and Marquette Williams were selected as participants because they meet the above criteria. As a participant and researcher I strive to embody a creative drive and share some similar contextual experiences with these artists. Working with them to examine their experiences, I was better able to unpack and describe experiences for Black urban youth.

MiLisa Coleman, 22, is a recent graduate of Cleveland State University, earning a Bachelor's film and digital media with minors in sociology and Black studies. She was born and reared in Cleveland, in the neighborhood of Indian Hills located in the inner-ring suburb, Euclid, where she and her younger brother grew up with both parents in their home. As an artist, working in a variety of media including film, writing, spoken word, dance, and painting, her personal experiences inspire what and how she creates. Her work particularly complicates issues concerning the Diaspora and the greater human community. She has volunteered at the Juvenile Detention Center teaching Black history. Coleman's interests are in developing educational programs and curriculum reform.

Clifton Izzrael Coles, 27, is an emcee spoken word artist who produces conscious music with the purpose of spreading knowledge. As the middle of three boys, he and his brothers were born and raised by their single mom in Cleveland, in the inner-ring suburb of Maple Heights. Formerly a director of the youth sports and recreation program for one of the local YMCA branches, Coles continues to reach out to youth

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through his music. Avoiding the soapbox, he spits history rich, positive reflections of

and for "elevated consciousness" (Coles, 2012).

Derick Prosper is a younger emcee spoken word artist with a wise, centuries-old

soul. He grew up in Providence, Rhode Island and in New York City, but spent most of

his time developing his artistry in Providence. As an artist he has creatively worked the

business side to promote other artists, working behind the scenes in the music industry,

and is returning full circle to his roots in poetry. His debut hit the music scene in the 90s

after much success with the spoken word circuit. Delving into self and cosmos, space,

time, and a metaphysical spirituality, he was working on a message to the people,

#ATOM that he released on December 12, 2012. His organization has a component

dedicated solely to youth, particularly to engaging students who are under-resourced in

STEM activities. He advocates for and delivers arts integrated with sciences.

Marquette Williams, 39, is a filmmaker originally from Cleveland's east side.

Currently a Los Angeles transplant, Williams works mainly as a writer and director of

feature films while doing some television, commercial, and video projects. As an artist,

he takes an "organic approach" to telling stories about the human condition, drawing on

observation, history, experiences, and imagination to create storylines that really

engage audiences in an exploration of morality, alternative realities, and spaces to

dream (Williams). His involvement with young people includes running a mentoring

program while in college, working with students with disabilities and behavior issues,

and, most recently, giving talks at schools.

For the sample to be purposeful, I identified the primary artists from the creative

community through personal contact and referral. Coleman, Coles, Prosper, and

Williams provided the insider perspectives of public school graduates who continue to

work within urban communities. They were interested in telling pieces of their story

through exploring connections between their approach to the creative process and

education. As artists, each is very attentive to experiential and contextual analysis

within their work. Because their work and philosophy of art epitomizes the particular

approach to the creative process that I explored, these artists were selected as the

primary participants with whom I conducted this study.

Conducting this study with these artists was ideal for the purpose of

conceptualizing the creative process as they narrated it. Through their work, these

artists depict a crisis of cultural reality that confronts viewers' perceptions of ethnicity,

identity, beauty, and the human condition and create a dialogue with the audience

around these issues. These artists deliberately try to challenge and change existing

(mis)perceptions and realities through the dynamics of their work. As a group of

participants, these artists have a wide range of exposure and experience in art, from

local gallery shows, spoken word circuits, and performances, as well as regional and

national performances, to Hollywood and mega-media industries—these artists provide

a gamut for the art world. I focused on these artists who are actively trying to

understand, educate others about, and transform our urban realities.

For the purposes of this study, I did not include the experiences of other

mainstream artists. Instead, I used existing documentaries of other artists whose work

is deliberately political as extant data related to the creative process. The group of participants shared the commonality of exclusion from participation in telling stories of urban experiences and education that influence policy development.

Researcher's Perspective

I approached this study of the creative process and implications for research and education from a very personal space—from my own philosophy of art and my own experience as a product of a failing public school system, as a former educator in a failing public school district, and as a mom and auntie of students who attend schools in failing public school districts. I come from a working class background and as a student am currently considered living below the poverty line. As a single mother, I strongly believe in the support of the village in rearing my son and am likewise invested in my community. I am very familiar with negotiating spaces and institutions reflective of the dominant society and doing so as an outsider. The nature of who I am causes me to be in constant observation and critique of my surroundings, my interactions, my thoughts, my dreams, and the nature of that which is beyond "me" and the limits of my experience. Cleveland is my home. My instinct is to nurture, nest, and tend to home. My ethnocentric self is very committed to the Black community and my voice is distinctive in the particular vision I share that grows out of historical memories and commitment created by generations of communities of urbanites of African descent.

Over the past few years since 2008, while working with a group of students on a collaborative project between Cleveland State University and a local public elementary and a local public high school, focused on youth agency and social justice through art

and PAR, I have witnessed the transformative possibilities of such a critical pedagogy.

One of the goals of the project is to nurture students' voice in policy decisions utilizing

the creative process and storytelling activities. During our second year working with

students, the CMSD announced the proposed closing of the high school as part of its

Transformation Plan reform initiative (Galletta & jones, 2010, October; jones, 2010,

June).

Throughout the Transformation Plan process, which excluded the involvement of

students, parents, and community (jones, 2010, May), not much attention was given to

the experiences of students who were living out the transitions of the policies. School

officials and administration seemed more concerned with progressing through the

transitions "smoothly" and ignoring the various bumps in the road. Even while students

expressed some hardships, such experiences were swept under the rug rather than

looked at critically (Galletta & jones, 2010, October; jones, 2010, June; Galletta et al.,

2011). The participation of our youth researchers in a storytelling project focused on

the transitions they faced as a result of school closure produced knowledge that

contributed to a better understanding of school closure as a policy. This experience

feeds my inquiry and desire to explore how stories produced through a particular

approach to the creative process may inform how we conduct research of urban

education toward systemic change.

Ethical and Methodological Challenges and Dilemmas

My role in this research posed a sort of challenge; as a CMSD parent and former

teacher, I have a particular interest in education in the context of Cleveland and have

dedicated my doctoral studies to this research. My insider/outsider perspective offers

experiences on both sides of the issue of education. It is difficult to address the biases

and values created from my complicated experience, because of the experiential

knowledge I bring to this study. Thus, I explored how my position at times may have

constrained and extended my analysis. I also included the perspectives and experiences

of the other four artists who share, to varying degrees, an insider/outsider perspective.

While I remained aware of the existence of bias, I stayed honest about my perspectives

and the critical lens through which I viewed the information of this study and utilized my

own cultural intuition.

Cultural intuition (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009) in approaching narratives is

beneficial to the process of the researcher's reflexivity. It creates a greater possibility

for trustworthiness in the interpretation of the data. Cultural intuition may also

constrain interpretation, as when a researcher shares a context and a culture with her

participants to the extent that familiarity obscures new understandings. Researcher

reflexivity serves as a good tool for fully realizing the value of cultural intuition and also

exploring where it may impede inquiry. Reflexivity allows the researcher to fully realize

the intent of participatory methods, valuing the knowledge that participants possess

and the idea that the researcher has something to learn from the researched, creating

space for additional questions and knowledge to emerge (Lather, 1986).

In framing my research within such a critical paradigm, I employed the use of the

dialectic to explore how experiences are narrated and analyzed to avoid the "theoretical

imposition" discussed by Lather (1986, p. 262). Lather notes that neither data nor

theory should stand alone, so my analysis shifted between foreground and background

to expose the tension that exists in locating the participants' experiences in relation to

existing theory and the study of context influenced by theory (Weis & Fine, 2004).

While Lather advocates for the knowledge the participants brings, she also talks about

the inclusion of theory as a way to dialogue *with* participant experience in relation to

external factors (history, policy, media, discourse, etc.) and theory on such.

My use of the dialectic, as a conversation between data and theory, was both

responsive to my research methods of reflecting on the research process and exploring

themes that emerged in relation to existing studies and contextual factors as well as a

means to address ethical concerns. Lather further discusses the dilemmas of such lived

experience within research, through which I addressed my own positionality and role

within the research and again employed the use of the dialectic to oscillate between

narratives and outside data and theory to construct images of the narratives.

Also in regards to work space, sessions created space for deep exploration,

dialogue, and meaning making around issues similarly to existing studies of the contact

zone (Pratt, 1991; cite Torre). Such space welcomes differences and conflict. Consistent

with existing studies, creative space was a site of reproduction, resistance, and learning–

where one may not always be among like-minded people and the presence of difference

creates productive conflict. For example, in the case of this study's focus group session,

participation was a struggle in terms of eliciting conversation from less dominant voices.

There were many instances of disagreement, particularly around the idea of

"blueprinting" the artist's method. Such a discussion yielded more insight from all

members toward the understanding that the idea was to deconstruct our thinking, not necessarily our ability to narrate a unified story.

Consistent with critical theory, reciprocity was sought as a method to produce research equally beneficial to both the researcher and participants, so as to avoid exploitation of participants. Reciprocity became a methodological dilemma and a source of tension prior to data collection as the original artist I had been working with for over a year to design this research decided to withdraw because I could not offer him monetary compensation for his involvement. I am cognizant of the exploitation that exists in research of indigenous and marginalized groups of people and can respect the validity of the skill, craft, and knowledge artists possess. Keeping this in mind throughout the time that I worked with this artist, it was my goal as a researcher to identify his goals and needs in participating in this research and to be cognizant of and nurture reciprocity in our collaboration.

This artist was interested not only in telling and unpacking his story and his creative process, but wanted to produce a book and documentary of this, which we had agreed could be accomplished using the data (transcriptions and video footage) collected throughout the project. In a participatory manner, he therefore directed the research of a topic of interest, relevance, and benefit to himself personally. From this, we agreed to collaborate on educational products such as children's books and classroom curricula. While it can be ideal to offer monetary compensation for participants' time and contribution to research, the work was unfunded and I had no personal funds available for such support. It has been important to me that participants

benefit from involvement in other tangible ways, such as opportunities to advance personal goals and agendas as well as materials that can be used for personal gain. We established an agreement and moved forward.

After I gained Institutional Review Board approval to begin this work, the artist began to change the terms of collaboration; he was no longer interested in collaborating but felt that as a participant in the research he should be monetarily compensated for any products that resulted from the research. This truly pushed for clarification of authorship and ownership over the research. Afraid that such a dilemma would hinder carrying out the work, I sought advice from a volunteer legal service for artists. A lawyer reviewed my prospectus and helped me to construct a consent form for participation in the research as well as inclusion in the accompanying film. He instructed me that legally compensation is tied to contribution as an author, creator, and/or producer and any work solely created by me resulting from the research. As a result, legal guidelines would not require me to compensate the artist who would be considered equivalent to a source, post-research. However, the artist felt that without him, I would have no research and therefore he should be paid, so I opted to seek out other artists who might willingly participate without demands that I could not meet.

The use of critical theory and participatory methods (researching *with*) that place value on knowledge produced by the subjects of research, are necessary to help answer pressing research questions because those closest to issues being studied are understood essentially as experts on their environment, which disrupts the power imbalance created by traditional doctoral research in which the researcher holds the

expertise and creates knowledge. Understandably, traditions in research have, I think, created reluctance on the part of indigenous and marginalized peoples to become involved with research. This source of tension must be considered when carrying out participatory research that is steeped in critical theory.

Because the dissertation pulled me to be the sole author in chapter 5, this felt contradictory to the participatory process. Pressures to represent this work were intensified by my value on the knowledge that each and every participant brought to this study. Further, consistent with the study's key finding of art as a method, I wanted the data to be fully grounded in this research and to be presented creatively, which contradicts the traditional approach to the dissertation. Honestly to resolve this tension I chose to construct the chapter in such a way that allows artists voices to participate in the conversation through the construction of a counter story, first fully complicating artists' voices before even considering other sources beyond the initial literature review done to fulfill program expectations.

Critical theory negotiates the relationship between theory and practice as well as research and researched, taking into account the notion of experiential knowledge (Lather 1986; Weis & Fine, 2004). Here I took on the challenge of embracing this framework toward achieving praxis, including addressing questions of dissertation authorship with the use of participatory methods and reconciling my positionality within my work. The section that follows takes a more in-depth look at the critical and participatory paradigms that frame this study.

Framing This Research

This research utilized a critical theory framework in order to analyze the phenomenon of a particular approach to the creative process within the context in which it occurs, considering power relations and race, conflict with the urban environment, and structural inequalities within this context and within education (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2009; Lather, 1986). The study explored a counter-narrative for/of Black experiences as told through the story of this creative process (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009). Praxis was a goal of this research achieved by honoring the participant's contribution to knowledge production, moving beyond member check and into participatory methods and shared theorizing (Lather, 1986). Critical theory questions narratives that are normalized and serve as a justification for the way things are. In research informed by critical theory, a primary source and artifact often is historical memory. The results from such research contribute to the tradition of storytelling as a form of oral history in Black culture. In this way, which conforms with participatory methods and critical race methodology in particular, artists upheld the necessity of telling our own stories (Smallwood, 2007; Asante & Shahada, 2007).

A fundamental aspect of participatory and critical race research is valuing knowledge produced by participants within the social, political, historical contexts of the participants. Lather prescribes the following procedures I employed to achieve construction and validation of knowledge: interactive interviews; sequential interviews that encourage collaborative probing of inquiry; negotiating meaning with participants and collaborative theorizing; and exploration of false consciousness—dialectic between

self-understandings, questioning of beliefs within context of the pressures of culture, and self-reflection on the relevance of grounded and theoretical formulations. Using participatory and critical race theory to inform my theoretical framework, I explored in my research the role of the creative process in fostering such critical consciousness, a deeper understanding of one's context, and transformation of realities. In addition, I explored how the expanded use of participatory methods, particularly reciprocity, was extended to the study of one's creative process through the use of a collectively created inquiry around which was then collaboratively theorized. I employed such a model of reciprocity within the context of this dissertation research.

This design was inspired by a critique of education for people of color (Woodson,1933) and an epistemological tradition recognizing the generation of knowledge within the community itself (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Freire, 1970; Guishard et al. 2005, Guishard, 2009; Lewin, 1948). It was guided by the key principle that people situated within this context are best positioned to critique their educational experience and construct new possibilities for education. The research explored the creative process, particularly in terms of creating space for transformational arts learning and agency, examining implications for critical consciousness at the individual level, and understanding the way in which these processes may disrupt the hold of existing knowledge concerning urban realities. The following section details how the study commenced to achieve these ends (see Figure 3).

Phase & Aim	Guided by Research Question	Participants' Roles	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Data Sources
One Creative process & urban education and policy	1, 2, 3	**artists, vanessa** artists and co-researchers participate in collaborative data collection and preliminary analysis and theorizing	Case study approach with artists ○ Narrate creative process ○ A/V recorded series of (2-3) 1-3 hour sessions ○ Participatory Autoethnographic entries by each of us Variation of counter-story through dialectic	Grounded Theory Cumulative and iterative Oscillation and compositional studies Narrative and critical Analysis strategies (Figure X)	Existing data Artwork Interview Sessions Participant observation
Two Creative process & research	3, 4	**vanessa** secondary analysis and theorizing;	Participant observation Reflexive journaling	Analysis strategies (Figure X)	Existing data Interview Sessions and
education change		tion and writing of dissertation **artists** participate in focus group and member check	1 hr 40 min focus group 1-3 follow up interviews ○ A/V recorded 30 min sessions	Meta-cognitive	entries reflecting on process Participant observation

Figure 3. Research Procedures. This figure illustrates the research procedures by phase.

(Solórzano & Yosso, 2009; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Weis & Fine, 2004; Merriam, 2002; Creswell, 2007)

Data Collection Procedures

This project involved the artists and myself in storytelling as an opportunity for creative expression and as a method for data collection. The project was designed to be a space where we as artists and co-researchers participated in the creative process to explore our experience and analyze dimensions of the creative process based on this experience. The life histories of artists who are surviving the conflict with their environment created counter-stories that serve the purpose to understand, define, and transform their realities, similar to a study referenced by Lather in which the researcher worked with victims of domestic violence who sought "to understand and change their own oppressive realities" (Mies's 1984 cited by Lather, 1986, pp. 260-261).

Solórzano and Yosso (2009) outline their construction of a counter-story as a research method, piecing together excerpts from primary and secondary sources in such a way as to create a fictional dialogue with characters who represent the themes of the research. In my data collection and analysis, I achieved such a dialogue authentically through an actual dialectic with participants and secondary sources, oscillating between artists' stories (interview data) and some existing data (social, historical, contextual as well as extant research on art and artists documentaries). Additionally, contextual analysis performed by participants played a role in the dialogue in order to make the resulting story more dynamic and valid. Figure 4 illustrates how this oscillation took place through a series of dialogue-type interview sessions. The study proceeded in two phases in order to allow for oscillation, a metacognitive approach to analyzing the process unfolding within the research process, and to address the research questions.

First, in Phase One of the design, for the purpose of conceptualizing the creative

process as the artists narrate it, I conducted a case study with primary participants,

Coleman, Coles, Prosper and Williams, interested in articulating their approach to the

creative process and in making connections to education. I used the content of the

artists' works as material with the participants to elicit from them narratives about the

role of the creative process. Additionally, these artists and I recorded autoethnographic

entries as part of the data collection. We analyzed our autoethnographic entries,

looking for themes across the entries and narratives. A grounded theory approach

(Charmaz, 2006) was used for data collection and analysis with the artists to flesh out a

particular approach to the creative process. The artists were involved in the research to

Component	C	s	ib
Relation To Threads	context "stuff" (history, social and political experiencecs, existing stories and studies, artwork)—the background information brought to current study	session—exploration of subject, finding connections between context stuff and own life and experiences	in between—reflecting on research process, negative and positive space, and what makes the connection; through many forms of journaling--audio, visual, written, etc.
Space	negative space	positive space	middle space
Color	White	black	grey
Focus	Background	subject	(meta-reflection)

Figure 4. Oscillation within Sessions (Seshunz© vanessa jones). This figure illustrates the complex threads of information from "context stuff" each participant brought to this study, often in the form of storytelling. Our threads connected through the series of interview-type dialogue "sessions" to untangle this information and construct knowledge in relation to the study of a particular approach to the creative process. This process of reflection and oscillation between data sources was repeated until all topics/themes identified were unpacked and complicated in order to produce clarity by the end.

narrate their creative process as well as participate in preliminary data analysis and theorizing. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the artists and the conceptualization of the creative process was shared with them.

Phase One of the design involved conceptualizing the creative process as the artists narrated it. As a researcher and participant, I used the thematic issues that emerged from my autoethnographic texts, located in this document in the opening of chapters 1 and 3, to generate a semi-structured outline for interview sessions. In creating the protocol for the interview sessions and the in between, the Art21 website[4] was used to explore views on creative processes of other artists to aid in structuring interviews and as a source for reflection. The artists and I worked together to ensure the semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A) objectively addressed the themes surrounding their considered creative process, and left space to explore data that emerged from subsequent interviews and the "In Between" as well as extant research on themes and the creative processes of other artists (see Figure 4). The protocol was peer reviewed by those engaged in similar research efforts for clarity, efficacy, and objectivity.

I audio and videotaped these sessions and transcribed them for analysis (which was cumulative and iterative, progressively developed in response to emerging data), which permitted observation of artistic expressions and our engagement with the data (see Figure 4). In addition to analytical purposes, the resulting footage was also used as

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[4] Focused on contemporary art, the Art21 website has a collection of artists' documentaries, artwork, art teaching resources, blogs, and issues related to contemporary art. Art21 was created by a non-profit organization to use digital media to document and disseminate contemporary art.

a documentary report and to supplement written findings. Figure 4 illustrates the cumulative and iterative analysis as each of us artists reflected on each session, research on themes that emerged, and the process (this was the "In between") prior to connecting once more in another session. The ensuing session included a brief reflection on the "In Between" before tackling the next theme on the outline. This process was repeated until all topics/themes identified were covered in the series of sessions.

Phase Two involved the secondary analysis and theorizing of the process unfolding within the research itself. The case study during phase one allowed the participants and me to move into collaborative analysis and early theorizing of emerging themes. Phase two involved interpretation and writing up of the dissertation as results were explored with the artists in order to consider how the participatory methods are potentially reflecting the creative process, as indicated by the fourth research question of this study.

In order to address the fourth research question during Phase Two, I steeped myself in my research interests as a doctoral student to attend to how the creative process occurred during the participatory research between the artists and myself. I continued to be reciprocal in the sessions with the artists' understanding that I would theorize on the creative process in relation to research that leads to systemic educational change. The participants interacted with me and provided responses that continued to influence my theorizing. To achieve this, the analysis involved layers of study. The initial layer focused on the creative process as narrated by the artists. This

focus created an additional layer of study, where I turned the analytical lens on the creative process unfolding within the research. In doing so, I addressed the ways in which these processes may be employed in research to inform educational policy.

The study of the creative process during Phase One was mostly undertaken through the case study, but was also informed by existing data on other artists available through the Art21 website. In Phase One, the narrative experiences of the artists and me were documented through interviews conducted in person, over the phone, using Skype, and via email (depending on artists' availability) throughout the study, over the course of four months. The length of participation varied from about one to three hours for each of a series of two to three interview sessions.

Phase Two involved my interpretation and writing as I theorized about the ways in which the creative process in which the artists and I engaged reflects core dimensions of knowledge production, central to educational research. It also involved my theorizing about the way in which this particular creative process might influence systemic educational change. Phase Two did not disconnect the participatory process, as sessions with the artists are also part of the research design in Phase Two. To sustain participation and a reciprocal relationship in this research with the artists, Phase Two involved them in an hour-forty-minute-long focus group session in which Coleman, Williams, and I participated, and one to three 30-minute follow-up conversations serving to member check. I used this phase of the research to interpret the data (the creative process to that point) in terms of its utility to research, seeking artists' participation but driving the theorizing from my particular researcher's perspective.

All interviews and sessions were filmed and audiorecorded with the use of a digital video recorder and GarageBand, an audio recording and editing software on my MacBook. These interviews were transcribed through the use of Dragon Dictate transcription software. I coded these interviews by date, location, and using pseudonyms for schools and individuals other than participants. In addition to interview data and autoethnographic entries, other data sources include a study of works of art, extant data on other artists available from the Art21 website, my own participant observation of the research project, the focus group, and follow-up interviews with the artists that served as a form of member check for my interpretations of their experiences of the creative process and were also included as data.

In order to conduct research using human participants, I submitted a proposal of this project to Cleveland State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and completed an on-line Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) course in the protection of human research participants. University policy states that IRB approval must be obtained before conducting research with human subjects or collecting any such data. This process was to ensure the safety of research participants by assessing possible risks involved in the study and the overall beneficence of the project to education and humanity.

Participant confidentiality was not an issue due to the consent by the artists to be named in the research and my own autobiographical data. However, names of schools, institutions, and organizations are changed for the study. The consent and release forms (Appendix A and B respectively), drafted with the aid of an attorney for

the arts, also delineate ownership and responsibilities between artists as related to the

creative research produced during the course of this doctoral dissertation. These forms

intended to establish ownership and rights to intellectual and creative property

produced in relation to this research and to establish a protocol for citation of and/or

reference to such work.

Analysis of Data

My approach to analysis was a combination of narrative analysis and critical

qualitative research as described by Sharan Merriam (2002). Through my use of first-

person accounts of experiences and education, I took a "biographical approach [that]

attends to the person in relation to society," with a critical consideration of the spaces

in which participants live (Merriam, 2002, p.9). Because my goal was to create change

in "our social context and ourselves" and to attend to the influence of power relations in

class and ethnicity, my analysis involved a critical approach (Merriam, 2002, pp. 9-10).

Validation was sought through the triangulation of data sources—interview data, extant

theory, artifacts, participant observation, and autoethnographic text.

The cumulative and iterative analysis of oscillation (Weis & Fine, 2004) is

illustrated in Figure 5, which shows how each artist reflected on: 1) the contextual,

relational, experiential elements brought to and that create the background for each

session; 2) research on themes emerging from the subject of the session; 3) and the

research process itself (this is the "In Between") prior to connecting once more in

another session and repeating this looping cycle throughout the series of dialogue-type

interview sessions. Each ensuing session included a brief reflection on the "In Between"

before moving on to the next theme or subject on the outline.

Analytical Steps of Compositional Studies (Weis & Fine, 2004)	
Contextual	locating narratives in relation to historical and structural conditions—how individuals make sense of this linked to their efforts to conceptualize and change context
Relational	reliance on categories of social identity while refusing essentialism but complicating analysis of how such categories manifest within "institutional life…[and] how individuals make sense of, resist, embrace, and embody social categories, and…how they situate 'others'"
Individual variation & modal forms	use of categories as "fluid sites for meaning-making" while complicating "textured variations" within group identities, looking for outliers or those at "radical margins" in relation to modality (Weis & Fine, 2004, p. xvii-xviii)

Figure 5. Analytical steps of compositional studies. This figure explicates the analytical steps for carrying out compositional studies.

Along the same lines as the compositional studies described by Lois Weis and

Michelle Fine (2004), toward theorizing about methods that produce a more complex

and multi-dimensional study of key issues in areas like education (see Figure 5), I tried to

creatively articulate contextual analysis as a form of visual stenography (Weis & Fine,

2004; Warsame, 2008). Visual stenography, again is a way of documenting life through

the production of various creative media, and an effort to theorize around these visual

and experiential cues by interpreting social, historical, and political context and using

imagery to capture spoken and unspoken themes (Warsame, 2008). I used visual

stenography as an analytical procedure and, in addition to the expected format, in order

to employ the creative and informative use of the data accessible in the study through

the digital and written media at my disposal.

I analyzed the interview transcriptions, study of artifacts, autoethnographic texts, and extant artwork by urban artists from the Art 21 website using the analysis strategies described by three authors and condensed by John Creswell (Figure 6) (2007, p. 149).

Analysis Strategies (Creswell, 2007)	
Sketching ideas	Writing in margins of texts, visual depictions, highlighting
Note taking	Study of Art21 website, written reflection
Metaphors	Working with words and images
Coding	Abstract and concrete; make keys
Synthesis	Combining codes into themes by noting patterns, emerging themes
Form Analytic Frame	Relate categories by studying themes in relation to literature and context
Restorying	Retell stories with beginning, middle, and end
Visualize	Display data visually; cutting, coloring, and organizing to show relationship between themes (Davies, 2000)

Figure 6. Analysis strategies condensed by Creswell. This figure displays the various analysis strategies employed in this research

All of this analysis and coding was done the old fashioned way by hand, writing directly on documents and transcriptions, cutting, and coloring.

The data were at times overwhelming, and as an artist, it helped for me to stretch out the materials in front of me, so I was able to visually organize the information and make sense of the themes. I literally began drawing conclusions! I used my son's crayons and dry erase markers to configure a way to color-code the themes, wanting the color to show relationships between the themes (Davies, 2000).

Limitations

The study is limited to the experiences of Black artists in Cleveland and

Providence (with Los Angeles and New York as additional places of residence), urban

environments that are at times toxic to the development and survival of these artists.

The study is limited to these urban contexts and is not generalizable to urban contexts

as a whole. It is limited to the experiences of filmmakers, emcee spoken word artists,

and writers. Lastly, the study is limited to this specific research and the

phenomenological narratives of its participants.

Delimitations

At the same time, the study findings inform our thinking about the creative

process in other urban environments. The results from this study might be extended to

industrial cities in decline and cities with rapidly changing demographics because of the

nature of shared characteristics of such spaces. The series of interviews as an effort to

achieve meaning making between the artists and me offers an in-depth and much

needed exploration of the creative process, further delimited by the range of experience

this collective of artists brought to the study. The study is strengthened by its ability to

complicate an individual's experiences filled with complexities of growing up,

developing, and resisting in often oppressive urban environments. Additionally, the

study is valuable in its consideration of a variety of elements or variables that may be

critical to understanding the experiences of Black individuals and their use of creative

processes in an urban setting. This study has potential to influence educational

practices as well as how we conduct research within urban environments. The study

offers a rich, in-depth account about members of a marginalized group of Americans. Additionally, it has the potential to advance the knowledge base of critical and participatory educational research in particular and, more generally, the broader research agenda in systemic educational change.

This chapter conveys the methods employed in a study of the creative process within urban environments. The research design for this study intended to uncover dimensions of a particular approach to the creative process and to theorize its role in the individual's experiences of life and education in urban environments. The research sought to learn how this process is relevant to participants. This work was informed by Woodson (1933), who speaks to the realistic analysis of the context of education. It builds on his work, underscoring through its design how people situated within a context are best positioned to critique and construct knowledge concerning the context. The research studied connections between experiences and construction of urban contexts. In particular it considered the relationship between the urban environment and education. Using participatory methods and guided by critical race theory, the study explored what stories of artists tell us about creating space for transformational arts learning and agency. In the next chapter I discuss study findings, moving toward a discussion of the implications for civic participation at the individual level and the systemic level. There is great potential to disrupt the systemic social story of inequality through revision and redefinition of urban realities as constructed by stories told through the creative process.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

"On the 3D manifest, we cannot 'think' things into existence because Man does not use his Brain to its fullest capacity now as he is distracted by illusions that govern His entire Way of Life…He is not Free to Be and exercise thought whilst in his most natural state… If He were Free, he would live off the Earth… Eat the Food that grows around Him. Build a Home of the Manifests and Elements of the Earth, and only work to Maintain that which he has Built. This is a Free Man. This Man has the ability, and time, to exercise his thought…He is Balanced and in tune with Nature, and since he does not have to Work, he has the ability to sharpen all of his senses and Master all aspects of Himself, use more of his Brain. This Man can make things Manifest. But he must first work physically to make them manifest. Not working for Money, but rather to Build His Heaven, on Earth…A Man should only work for Himself and those he Loves. When A man can do this, he is Free to allow his mind to grow to the point where he can Make things Move, and Manifest…"—C. Izzrael Coles[5]

Reflecting some of the themes that emerged from this study, I begin this chapter with the above "In Between" autoethnographic text by a participating artist who considered and illustrated how narratives of life and the urban environment were complicated by this research process. The purpose of the study was to uncover and theorize a particular approach to the creative process—a form of visual stenography fusing art, inquiry, and activism while considering the historical, social, and ideological context. How Black artists—othered and positioned at the margins of "civilization" in

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[5] Coles, C. (2012). Autoethnographic journal excerpt sent via text message dated July 18, 2012.

the United States—construct knowledge, context, and historical memory via the creative process is informative to urban education research and policy.

The study's findings were drawn from participatory methods that were employed to create reciprocity between participants and the researcher and critical analysis of data collected from interview sessions, observation, works of art, journal reflections or autoethnographic entries, and information from existing studies and artist documentaries. The research questions were:

1. What do young, Black artists narrate about their experiences of life and the urban environment?

2. What is their understanding of the role the creative process plays in their experience of life and the urban environment?

3. How do these narratives speak to dimensions of a particular approach to the creative process and its relation to the urban environment and education?

4. How can stories produced through this process inform how we conduct research of urban education toward systemic change?

The above "In Between" reflection also serves as an introduction to the findings of this research discussed here in Chapter 4, where I detail the relationship between the themes that emerged from the data. The key findings I discuss tell the story of how the participating artists narrated the creative process. Central to the findings is the way in which the creative process allows the artists to act as ushers of change and make "thoughts manifest" in their duty as artists to act as interpreters and messengers for

stories that have a divine source. According to them, they "just hafta" create

expressions of self and humanity, to capture culture, to build or have meaningful

dialogue with others, and tell stories of the nuances of these experiences.

The artists described the organic nature of the creative process whereby they

narrated a reflective process through which they make meaning and connections. The

divine energy within the creative process is related to "knowing thyself." As a method

toward knowing thyself—negotiating and complicating self-schemas—artists narrated

that creating is "wielding divine power and examples of such" (P. Breville, personal

communication, June 26, 2012). They told stories of their divine duty and responsibility

to create, which contributes toward preservation of oral traditions. Coles, one of the

participating emcee's, said, "The way we show this [knowledge of ancestry and divine

self] is through this divine art, Universal Language." The artists narrated that through

the creative process they are able to achieve an elevation of consciousness and connect

to a Universal Language, divinity, themselves, and humanity.

The participating artists revealed that the creative process is related to a natural

tendency toward theology and our human instinct to create—to contemplate a power, a

source greater than ourselves and tell stories of this relationship to the world around us;

to create in a similar fashion to the Creator; and to leave their mark in relation to

posterity—not only preservation of story, history, and culture, but also the preservation

of life, creating as a means of survival. Their stories illustrated their use of art as a

method, an indigenous paradigm as a way to approach life. The artivist aesthetic

narrated by these artists describes the value and power of art as a method to achieve

freedom, a declaration of independence. They narrated art as a method to achieve resolution of pressing issues within urban communities.

Beginning with a synopsis of what participating artists narrated of their experiences and the roles played by the creative process in these experiences, a visual model of the themes that emerged from the study is presented. In the sections that follow, I discuss the findings from the research, elaborating on study themes, followed by the artists' description of the creative process, the value and power of the process, why they create, how the process enables them to relate information and experiences, how they complicate identity, and their efforts to create change. Evident in the themes is a connection between the creative process as narrated by the artists and an exploration of the use of this creative process in conducting research in the field of urban education. This will be discussed in more detail within the sections below.

Black Artists' Stories about Education and the Urban Environment

The artists in this study narrated that they feel education should play a role in the development of citizenship and agency. Williams, a participating filmmaker, also touched on how from his experience, as a tool of culturalization institutions of education in urban environments thwart individual expression in efforts to maintain the system. The artists in this study told stories of how urban communities combated such toxicity and nurtured their creative process. Artists gave credit to having been afforded certain freedoms of expression, creativity, experimentalism, and imagination within their creative process that was developed in their upbringing and nurtured in their environments.

Artists described the importance of "being able to have space" to create and of access to materials and resources that allowed them to create ideally (Coles). They narrated a realization that such space and access is not always afforded in urban school settings. Williams commented on what is valued from an educational and social standpoint and spoke to the necessity of providing developmental arts opportunities outside of schools—of not relying solely on institutions to meet the needs of our communities. Artists noted that communities must pick up the slack where urban schools fail to meet our developmental needs, again telling stories of the various lessons and places in which they learned.

Coles, one of the emcee's in this study whose autoethnographic text begins this chapter, spoke to his basic arts education in middle school where he was allowed to be creative while learning abstract versus concrete thinking, techniques, and fundamentals of art, as well as the history of European artists. He noted however, that the foundation of his arts education came from home, from a family full of natural talents in the arts. He narrated that at home he learned to play the saxophone by ear as a fourth grader, had a watercolor desk in his room, and created his own comics.

In critiquing urban education, Coles stated that art enables one to reflect on environment and experiences via the senses and explained how schools lack the space to do this. He narrated that teaching to the test does not allow teachers to use their own senses and creativity in approaching the curriculum, offering the following reflection:

When I was growing up in elementary school, art class was like an hour a week

or something like that, one day a week where you learn some history of art, you learn about different artists of the past, but I mean art is how you exercise your senses. It's an interpretation of you taking in what you get from the environment via your…six senses. And that's a form of creation and a form of invention too…where true genius is…and that doesn't seem like it's important in the school system. It's not an important part of the curriculum, to me, at all. It's like an elective. It should be the basis of how you really teach anyway, in an artistic fashion, because again that creativity is what helps things to stick in people's head. Part of the backwardness of our society is that we don't exercise our senses the way we should.

Coles spoke to the change needed in schools and illustrated the contrast between the testing atmosphere in school versus real genius in creative thought that is not taught in schools. At the heart of this critique is that urban youth are not being equipped with higher level thinking skills, that a true arts education teaches the genius of creation, whereby "create" is the highest form of thinking (Armstrong, 2012). As evidence for his dissatisfaction for the state of schooling today, Coles noted that earlier this year when he removed his 4-yr-old from Head Start due to dietary restrictions, he has since taught his child reading basics far more effectively than the school.

Williams recalled that by second and third grade he was already drawing well on his own, creating a lot of portraits of well-known individuals, and that by fifth grade he was creating his own comics like Coles. He talked about the storytelling that goes along with the creation of characters and said that comic books were like his first storyboards,

his first introduction to film, whereby one takes something visual and puts stories to it, making sure the stories make sense. He talked about tagging and doing graffiti, growing up during the 80s with the political art movement (for which Basquiat was the poster child) that existed with the birth of Hip Hop. Williams attributed his gravitation toward art to being an only child, shy and cerebral, and often around adults, who did not have toys but could always give him a piece of paper and something for drawing. His mom taught him what he knew of art. He recalled his high school art teacher as a "cool, pimped out dude that wore a tie and let [him] do [his] art" whereby the teacher criticized the techniques used in Williams' work rather than the subject. He narrated that his teacher taught elements of art and principles of design. He credited his high school art teacher for his relationship with light, saying he gave him an "understanding of light that served [him] to this day."

As a participant in a session I recalled my middle school art teacher who first exposed me to artists in relation to art history and movements. Growing up though, I attributed my exposure to the arts as coming from home and recalled the frequent trips with my mom to the Cleveland Museum of Art and the books bought by my grandmother that introduced me to the art of ancient civilizations and particularly of Egypt. I definitely could not identify with the art hanging on the walls of the museum or with what was presented in school, so in middle school when we had a unit covering ancient Egyptian art I was ecstatic, but when my teacher labeled the art primitive, I was extremely offended.

While I finally felt culturally validated in an academic setting, racism prevailed and once again taught me that my culture was sub-standard in comparison to what my teacher called the master works of enlightenment evident in European Renaissance art. These ideas were presented separate from historical evidence of Moorish influence on the European culture, ushering these countries out of their dark ages (Nasheed, 2011). The idea of ancient Egyptian art was presented separate from a critical lens that would question how such accomplishments were achieved without the use of modern technology. Thus my first encounter with my own culture in an academic environment reinforced the not-so-hidden messages with which I was inundated that Western, European, and White were supreme and African, Black, and "others" were primitive, backwards, and sub-standard.

Coleman, the film and digital media student in this study, noted that art "had its own time" in her schooling and was not integrated. Interestingly though, she was able to best recall projects throughout her educational career where the arts were integrated either through the delivery of lessons or into her final product. She discussed how she would creatively engage with basic assignments and put forth more effort into producing artistic presentations, incorporating mixed media. She also noted characteristics of engaging classes and lessons, crediting the success of such to open dialogue, activity, visual elements, use of popular culture, and multi media presentations and engaging supplements. These connecting elements, successful in absorbing students in learning, are inherent in the creative process.

Coleman also talked about the absence of critical thinking skills and opportunities for the application of such within k-12 schooling. She stated that it was not until middle school that she had a formal art teacher and that she took her last art class in tenth grade. She also recalled her participation in a school wide "Challenge Day" which allowed students to share stories and participate in activities designed to build community. To her recollection, "Challenge Day" was an event held twice at her high school. She expressed her plans to translate for others the lessons she has learned from her own educational journey, explaining:

> With my major in film and digital media and the minors in sociology and Black studies, I'm looking at society as a whole and how we're affected. And so my focus is education, because I mean that's the foundation for everything, what you're taught… And so if I can take information that you can get out of a history book and create vignettes for children, translate things that [the teacher] would have to gather from a text into something that [students] can see visually, that can help [the children and students] process the information easier and in turn create their own stuff…not only are you giving the child multiple ways of absorbing the information and looking at these visual elements, in that way [they can] teach themselves new things.

As an example of her vision of multi-media education, she recalled doing a documentary project during college on perceptions of Africa, narrating a process very similar to a researcher's approach to a study and reporting findings, and noted that such assignments were appropriate for all ages. Coleman went further to say that k-12

history classes should be tied to a larger conversation and taught like particular history courses at Cleveland State, noting that there is a need to bring the critical aspect from the university into the k-12 setting.

Some of the artists reported feeling out of place in academic environments, and all related to being able to connect in various situations through Hip Hop. Connecting via creative elements like Hip Hop, which is a dominant cultural expression with African American origins within urban environments, reduces the toxicity of exclusionary structures like the academic environments of higher education. Artists narrated that the colorful, entertaining stories told via hip hop allow for the expression of Black experiences by those who live it, while at the same time allowing others to connect to some of the details of the stories.

Much like the concept of a visual stenographer, artists narrated that they record and act as witnesses, studying humanity and that there is an empathetic aspect to their process. They expressed that they want the stories they tell to be relevant to the human condition broadly and told in such a way that people can relate to and understand the message being channeled through them. By combining the study of humanity with their divine talent, these artists narrated being experts on communicating the nuances of human experiences. In expressing the steps of their approach to the creative process, observation is foundational and motivates their brainstorming, reflection, and "figuring things out" as a form of interpretation and meaning making. The next section visually illustrates themes drawn from this study.

Visually Modeling Dynamics of Thematic Interaction

Reflective of the narrative nature of this research, deeply rooted in African oral traditions, the data from this study are very complex and at times were overwhelming for me to understand in a linear manner. As an artist, it helped me to spread out the partially analyzed data on the floor, tables, and walls. This enabled me to visually organize the information and make sense of the themes, literally drawing conclusions. I got out my son's crayons and began configuring a way to color code the themes to show relationships between the themes. Using a Venn Diagram and, once again literally, drawing on concepts of color theory (Davies, 2000), I constructed a model to visually illustrate the dynamics of the study's thematic interaction and create a layered taxonomy of themes.

In the visual model (Figure 7) I used primary colors to code explanatory themes of the narratives on the creative process that guided interaction (research questions 1 and 2). I used secondary colors to code such consequential themes that emerged from my analysis of the relationship between the artists' narratives on the creative process and urban education (research question 3) as well as how the creative process might inform how we conduct research in urban education (research question 4). The themes are fluid and therefore the dynamics of their interaction can shift, when triggered. For example an increased amount of meditation may lead to deeper understandings that in turn allow one to make more and greater connections to new information. The triggers are circumstantial, contextual, external, and internal, reflective of the elements of a compositional study (Weis & Fine, 2004).
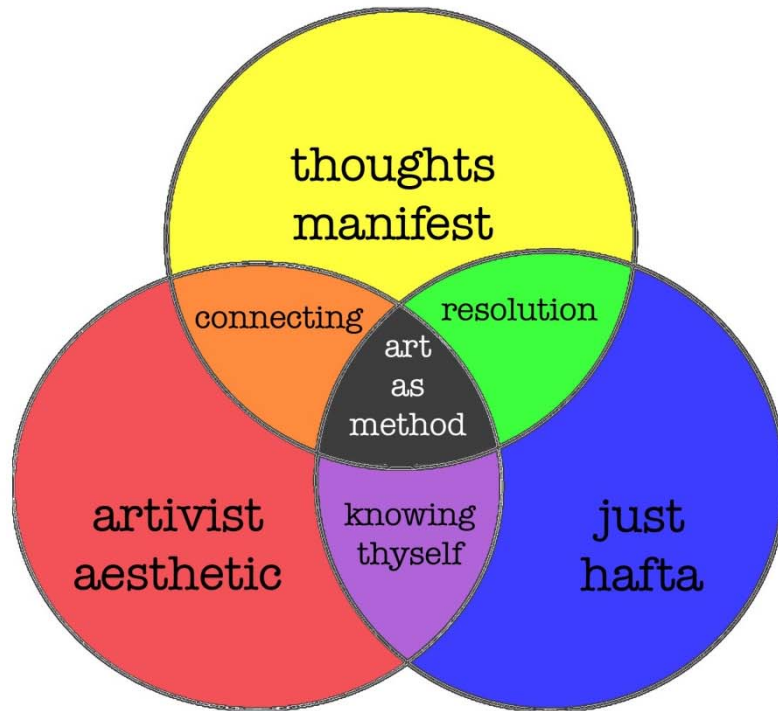
Key:

Source= Δ Sessions; Works of art; ∇ Observation; * Reflections; # Existing studies & artist documentaries

○ describes the narrated procedures of the creative process, of complicating and reflecting on experiential and external information, and producing toward such musings Δ ∇ * #

● why artists explained that they create in an organic fashion, citing personal, spiritual, and social reasons Δ ∇ #

● narrated power and value of the creative process to the artist, audience, culture, and specifically to communities at the margins and communities of color Δ ∇ * #

○ function, both part of and resulting from the creative process, as a way of relating complex and layered existing info, experiences, and new info, as well as a way of relating to audiences Δ ∇ #

○ desire and openness to participate in research and explore the implications within their creative process for our communities and how we learn Δ ∇ *

○ an outcome of the creative process related to identity, self-discovery, personal frame of reference, consciousness, and "being"; also references an African proverb Δ *

● creative process narrated as an indigenous paradigm toward life and achieving freedom of 'being' via knowledge of self and preservation Δ ∇ *

Figure 7. Visual Model and Key. This model illustrates the dynamic interaction and taxonomy of themes.

The explanatory themes, describing the creative process and its functions, are as

follows: *"I just hafta," "thoughts manifest," and "artivist aesthetic."* The themes that

emerged from my analysis of the relationships between the artists' narratives and urban

education and research are as follows: *"connecting," "knowing thyself," and "resolution*."

In the visual model, a key defines these themes and their respective data sources. I also

color-coded the key to reinforce the use of color as tied to the themes and their

interactions (Figure 7).

The key finding of art as method, is positioned at the center of this dynamic,

resulting from and informed by the interactions of the various parts of the model.

Based on color theory, the center color produced by overlapping all colors is black

(Davies, 2000). Metaphoric explorations of this phenomenon of black in relation to the

topic of my study would be intriguing, but to do so for the other themes would result in

an overuse of passionate, loud red and the need for murky, muddy colors of isolation,

complexity, and confusion, which would not work with the foundational theory of

primary and secondary color I have chosen to use. In the next sections I delve into the

details of these themes (without the limitations of color theory), beginning with the

artists' description of the creative process.

"thoughts manifest": Harnessing the Raw Power of Creative Flow

The artists narrated their process of creation, of complicating and reflecting on

experiential information and producing artwork responsive of such musings. The theme

that emerged from their descriptions is "thoughts manifest." To manifest one's

thoughts, the artists described a particular process (see Figure 8) with minimal variation,

narrating that they arrange and respond to various elements of the creative process in a

similar manner to conducting an orchestra. This section describes how artists narrated

using the body as an instrument in this reflective process, responding to various sensual

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stimuli and divine inner inspiration, to make meaning and to create alternate realities, at times going beyond the limits of conscious thought, time, and space and connecting this journey to the physical realm with the products they create. Artists explained that they create in an unstructured organic nature using whatever materials are accessible at the time they feel inspired in order to capture the flow.

They narrated that their process, utilizing popular media, music, and the power of spoken word is relevant to education because of how we learn and how to educate. In this manner they create with a purpose to spread a message. While it may be a slow process, artists described how they also interact with historical and social aspects of their context as well as building with others, engaging in meaningful and purposeful dialogue, and the importance of creative space to allow all of these aspects of the process to transpire.

Coles defined the creative process saying, "The creative process is for me, kinda sitting and reflecting on things that might have transpired, whatever you're going through at that time, different emotions, sights, smells, whatever, any of the [six] senses…that inspire you at that time." Artists reported that for them the creative process is a way of responding to stimuli—experiences that trigger sensations in our mind, taste, smell, touch, sight, and hearing. For example, in a session with Coleman, a participating film and digital media student, I noted her tactile urge to touch the paintings as she described them. In a similar manner, she actually incorporated a handprint on a dark painting with faces she described as her "mental self." She also explained that, "your body is art just because it is and it's with you as you go through

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life." Coleman described her body, the embodiment of the creative process, as a tool; other artists described themselves as such a tool or a vessel, and a filter for deciphering and disseminating information.
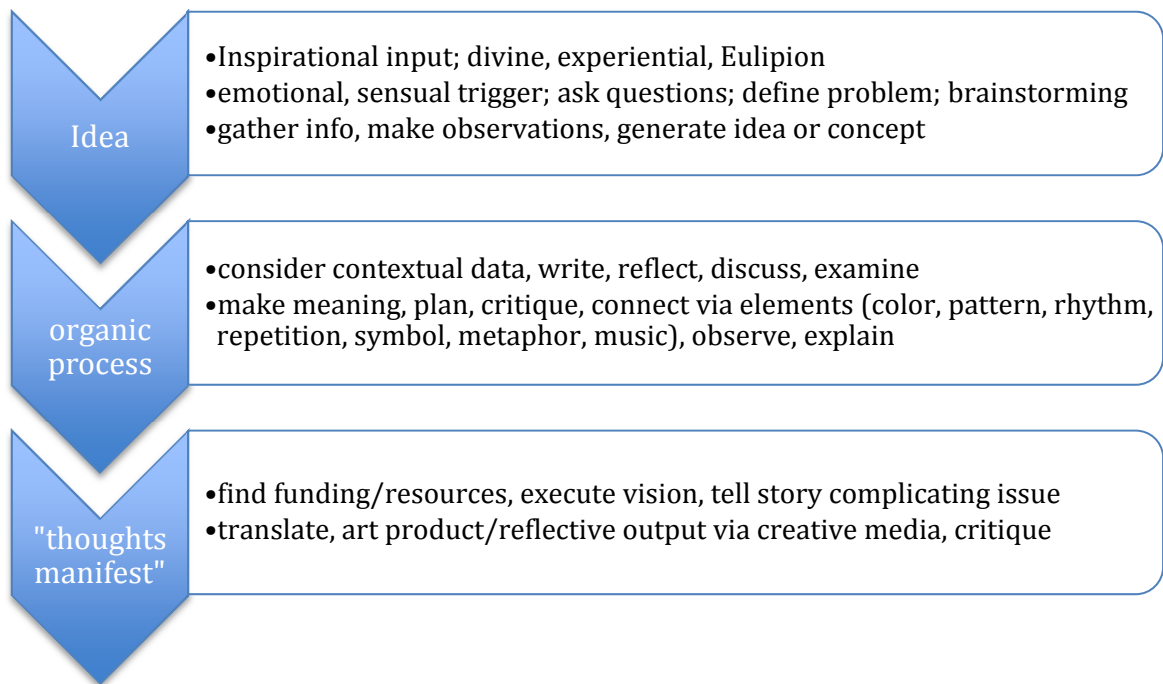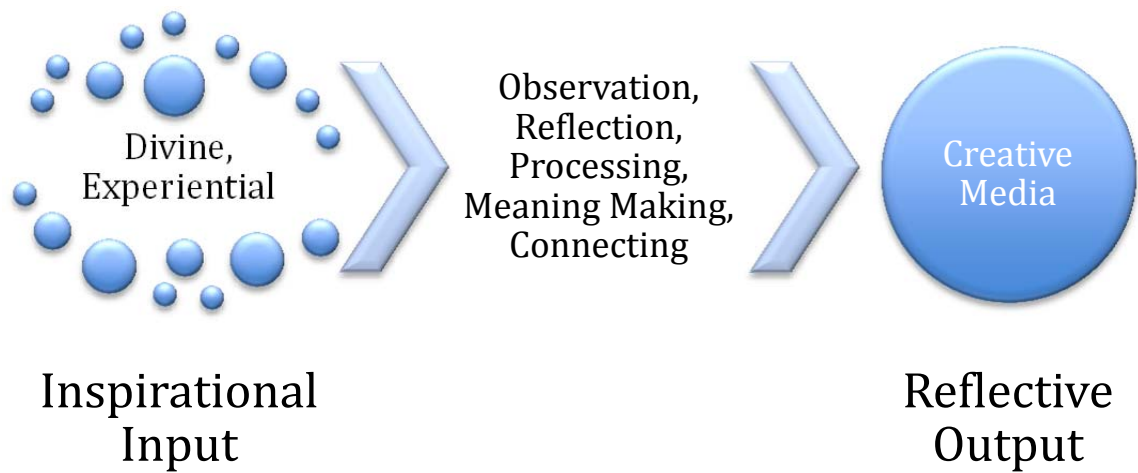
Figure 8. The creative process. This figure illustrates the steps and elements of the creative process as narrated by artists.

Artists narrated that their responses to stimuli include mental, spiritual, and physical efforts within the creative process to untangle and make sense of information, ideas, occurrences, and details. Prosper, another participating emcee, described this saying, "Basically I feel we have a lot of information and answers within, and my creative process is really just, doubt everything and [tap into that], find your own light." Williams, a participating filmmaker, talked about how artists sometimes make up stories about seeing something without hearing or knowing the actual story, but from making assumptions from observation, projection, and intuition. Coles explained this interpretive aspect saying:

> [The creative process is an] interpretation of whatever is going on in my mind or inside of me, so it can be an opportunity to paint a picture, even on a subconscious level of things that I may not think of otherwise. The creative process, whenever I'm making anything, kind of puts me outside of the box.

Similarly, referencing mental and spiritual aspects of the creative process, Coleman calls her approach a "mental scientific process for the soul." Williams said, "My art is extremely complicated so there's an aspect of it that is brainstorming." Again, artists narrated how the creative process is a reflective method for them to make meaning.

Beyond making meaning and thinking outside the box, artists complicated the spiritual aspect of the creative process and expressed that "thoughts manifest" for them via a method of transcending consciousness and time and of bringing back into the physical realm jewels from such a voyage. Of this, Prosper shared the following story:

> Rahsaan Roland Kirk was a famous multi-instrumentalist, jazz musician in the

60's and the 70's. He was blind, but, you know interview[er]s at the time asked

him, "Well you're blind, you don't see things, like where do you get this music

from?" And he would say he got it from Eulipion. And obviously they'd ask him,

"Well what the hell is Eulipion?" And he would say, "Well Eulipion is a spiritual

place, is a physical place. It is basically a place where all artists rendezvous, it's a

meeting point for all artists. So if you're a painter and you close your eyes, that

image that you see, that's Eulipion—you're bringing that to life on canvas. If

you're, you know, a musician and you just hit that right song and you're feeling it

and the notes, that's Eulipion. And then, if you're having a jam session in a

physical place and you're at a club and people are just jamming and enjoying the

show live, that's Eulipion as well." So, in the honor of him, I say that [art] comes

from Eulipion, because it just comes from within and it becomes something that

people can identify with. Or maybe they might not be able to identify with it

until they reach a certain point of consciousness that they can understand it,

'cause everything that we do doesn't always relate to the people [when] we're

doing it—'cause I like to say that I'm not making music for today, I'm making

tomorrow's music. You know?

Prosper explained that Eulipion refers to art that is inseparable from life, embodies the

life force, and evokes visceral sensations. Artists speak to creating with a purpose of

bringing forth ideas into being, alternate realities that connect our mental, spiritual, and

physical worlds. The artists maintained that while they create in response to physical

stimuli, their inspiration is also divine and flows from within.

The artists narrated that they work in an organic manner that allows them to capture this flow and the ideas that are being channeled through them. Williams described this elusive inspiration to create, saying:

> I don't know. It's just coming out of my head. I see it and I hear it, like it's real but it's in my head. It's like a photoplay. But not using paper, you lose certain things in terms of like feeling and flow—it makes you kind of non-ritualistic, whereas I think as a writer there's a certain ritual that goes along with your writing that you lose when you use digital formats.

Artists attest to writing in fast tangents, to capturing their thoughts as quickly as they come, using whatever materials are at hand when inspired to create. In order to take advantage of the flow, artists told of how they often use their cell phones. The artists report that phones are often utilized due to their accessibility and features that allow for recording, documenting, and taking notes.

In terms of the flip side to taking advantage of flow and to what Williams described as the "ritualistic" nature of creation, artists described how factors of accessibility affect their creative process. For example, the technology of a phone limits the romance and ritual described by the artists. Artists also criticized that the phone's text input often does not keep up with the speed of thought, and that the audio recording feature can be limited in length of duration. The artists explained that the inaccessibility of resources also inhibits one's ability to produce. Williams noted how expensive his art is to produce and that not everyone is afforded "access to one's dreams" of creating works that are shared and received widely.

Williams' above quote also references a work ethic and creating a habit out of practicing skills, both of which are critical to honing one's craft and ability to communicate broadly, tapping a divine "Universal Language" via flow. As an example of creating in response to this, Coleman and I talked about the rhythm of language and poetry and breaking the rules of language in order to "feed the flow that's coming out of you." We also talked about how I do this in my own writing and encourage this with my students. Rather than have my students frustrated with rules and rhetoric, I encourage them to get out what is in their heads and put their thoughts on paper. The artists narrated that operating in this way also allows them to confront emotions. Reflecting on what Williams called "structured organics," making a habit of practicing skills and responding to flow, Coles considered how such an approach allows him to create in an uncontained manner saying, "I mean there are songs that I've written that reciting them brings a tear to my eye—as an artist, sometimes the best stuff comes out that way and it's just uncontrollable." He went on to explain that in such a way his writing is similar to his personality, allowing him to tap into a divine source of knowledge (detailed later in the chapter) whereby he writes freely "off the top and sounds well researched."

This narrated organic approach to creating begins to speak to research question 3 in regards to learning and development. Coles reflected how this approach could be an effective educational tool, saying:

> [The creativity and pattern of] music [are] two of the most effective ways I say
> that we learn. I feel that taking those elements, which are key in all of our
> development and our learning process, and add them to a message that you

want to portray or convey to someone—if someone can bob their head to a song

and it's something that's teaching them something about themselves, about

politics or whatever, it's a very powerful tool.

Coles talked about aligning best practices, taking what we know to work from child

development and learning processes and using this as an effective tool for teaching. He

declared, "Edutainment is what hip-hop is in the urban community; one of the most

powerful vehicles we have is the music." Commenting on the effectiveness of music and

media propaganda because of how people learn through pattern, rhythm, rhyme, and

repetition, and the creativity of the presentation, Coles also spoke of the power of music

to raise awareness. During one of the sessions, speaking as a participant, I said, "I envy

musicians and moviemakers because I feel like [their] artform is more widely received

and has a bigger audience than I do as a visual artist. When you think about making an

impact, I mean, music I'd argue starts revolutions." Artists credit music and movies as

the most influential art forms with the ability to reach vast audiences without taking a

soapbox approach to spreading a message.

Participants narrated that the creative process can be slow, that music adds

energy to it, that it often involves late night hours, and that contemplation of the

product at various stages has a major role in the process. Coleman explained the

creation of one of her paintings and how she was influenced by the music she was

listening to while she worked—popular music by Rihanna, Gnarles Barkley, and Trey

Songz as well as legendary music by Fela Kuti, Jimi Hendrix, Lenny Kravitz, and Amy

Winehouse. This is an example of how artists appropriate and recontextualize

information. Artists say that music not only motivates them throughout the process of

creating, but that music also helps to tell the story, and set the mood of the story. They

talked about how music creates "soundscapes" that add details to stories and how the

best images and the best audio are needed to tell the best story. Artists reflected on

wanting to be able to relate their messages to the audience and using metaphor,

symbolism, and representation as tools within the creative process to connect

information, ideas, and experiences, not only to people, but also to a broader historical

context. The next section unpacks how artists not only interact with and employ music

to create, but also utilize their interactions and conversations with others to do so.

 Meaningful dialogue or "building": "If I ever wanted to understand me, I'd

have to talk to someone else, 'cause every little bit helps…"—Cee-Lo.[6] As the quote

illustrates, talking to others, known commonly as "building" can help one figure out

complex issues. Likewise, artists spoke to the tendency to utilize others, which Prosper

calls "cross-pollinating" and dialogue, of having conversations as part of their creative

process. For Coleman, these conversations often emerge in the form of texts and emails.

Artists narrated how this exchanging of ideas happens through a dialogue with

individuals as well as with exploring the relationship between the topic and the broader

socio-historical context. According to the artists, building allows them to not only

bounce ideas off of others and receive feedback, but also to form a network, also

crediting the importance of creative spaces—spaces in which artists are free to have

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[6] Green, C. (2006). Who Cares? [Recording]. On Gnarls Barkley's *St. Elsewhere*.

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these discussions, explore meaning, experiment, and make mistakes—to allow this meaning-making to take place and for the expression of the meaning.

Working with a team allows Williams to take in more structural feedback (on technical issues and execution) versus creative feedback. Regarding creative decisions, the artist reported that he trusts his own taste over anyone else's. The group of artists narrated that making creative choices for them is much like making informed decisions, whereby they narrated considering not only their expertise but also what they have gathered from reflecting on information. Williams speaks to the aspect of figuring things out from the audience's perspective and anticipating what will enable him to get the message across. In a similar vain, Coles stated that he is sometimes reluctant to collaborate with others for concern that they will not accurately represent his vision and that he prefers to maintain creative autonomy.

While the artists report interacting with other artists and people in general, they note that there is also a level of dialogue that takes place hypothetically. Of this Williams remarked, "So once I have an idea, I'll talk about it with people and kind of get their reactions to it. Through the whole process there is also this constant dialogue between myself and the characters." In the case of hypothetical dialogue, artists talked about "having conversations" with history, historical figures, and/or fictional characters that are based on a compilation of individuals. The artists narrated that in such a conversation the artist analyzes and considers what he or she knows about the issue and the context of that issue, historically, socially, politically, and within the story they seek to convey.

Artists gave credit to this hyper-contextual dialogue for also orienting their understanding of and connection to communities. Coleman emphasizes the critical nature of the creative process toward building communities and uniting people by encouraging connectivity and dialogue. She stated, "It becomes a habit to surround myself with like-minded, active people." Prosper attested that building a network created connections for him that led to his executive roles in the music industry and collaborations with big name artists on big name projects. Artists attribute such hypothetical conversations along with actual dialogue as critical to the their creative decision making and report that this dialogue takes place in creative spaces in which artists are free to have these discussions, explore meaning, experiment, and make mistakes.

Artists spoke about the importance of having space to create. Coleman spoke about growing up with a creek in her back yard and going to over night summer camps. Her back yard "is a good place to think" because for her, peace equates to serenity and nature. She talked about how young people in urban spaces may not have enough exposure to nature. Williams talked about sharing his workspace and the complications that can arise with "people in your space." While Coleman, Williams, and I all note that we prefer to "spread out" when we work in our spaces at home, creative spaces are not always physical space. For example, artists acknowledged the importance of risk taking within the creative process, the experimental aspect that requires space for the freedom to explore, make mistakes, and try different techniques when creating. Such a space includes access to time, materials, and constructive feedback.

In linking the creative process to urban environments, here the communication, expression, freedom, and social connections within creative spaces create a counterspace to some of the challenges in urban settings. As an example, artists detailed experiences in schools where communication and expression were neither tolerated nor encouraged. This was likewise the case in urban neighborhoods and at home for some in instances of disagreement with authority. Artists reported the creative process as a counterspace within the urban context, where one might feel politically and socially disconnected from the broader society. Coleman explained it the following way:

> It's like if you want to do an art show…You've been able to channel your energy and to focus on a particular piece and then to have someone see it and be like, "This is beautiful, this is nice!" When you hear the snaps in the crowd after you've said a poem, it's like, "They *feel* me; I'm not alone in this world. They *feel* me!" So art is expressions of life and at the same time, it's part of the foundation in building a community with people.

Coleman discussed how the creative process forges connections between people. As narrated by artists, the creative process also carves out spaces where our voices are heard, where we feel the freedom to express the meanings we have made from our experiences.

In regards to this expression of meaning, Williams professed, "Speaking outward is like paraphrasing the Truth, allows Truth to be heard." Artists discussed the expression of truths. During the focus group session, we had a conversation about how

artists' stories paint a more accurate portrait of urban conditions and experiences, which allows for root causes to be identified leading to the resolution of pertinent issues affecting our communities. Prosper supported this power of the story and illustrated the agency of spoken word in regards to art's relationship with science, whereby word equals sound, and sound, as a form of energy, equals power.

As a participant in one of the sessions, I further equated the power of spoken word using Creation as an example, saying, "God spoke things into existence. You know? Let there be light, and there was light." Coles continued, saying, "And also I mean just in terms of language, it's important that we all expand our vocabularies anyway. That's the reason for a lot of issues in the world, people don't know how to read things" (2012). Coles elaborated this point further, pointing out how the creative process produces manifestations of thoughts, as well as the need to stay knowledgeable and expand our thinking critically because of this. His sentiment leads to the discussion of the next theme that emerged from the data, a combination of power and value, which I call the artivist aesthetic.

Artivist Aesthetic: Creative Power

The artivist aesthetic emerged as an underlying theme, defined by the narrated value, timelessness, and pricelessness of the arts to the artist, audience, and culture and the manipulation and control of images to benefit society and communities. This narrated role of the creative process, nurtured specifically within communities at the margins and communities of color, is especially valuable in countering some of the toxicity that exists within the urban environment. Artists critiqued their educational

experiences within the urban context. Using "artistic talents to fight and struggle

against injustice and oppression—by any *medium* necessary" results in the combination

of artist and activist, *artivist* (Asante, 2008, p. 203). In narrating the use of their work to

promote an artivist aesthetic, the business side of the creative process was revealed.

Prosper articulated such an aesthetic whereby art produces information that can

be used for action invariably, noting that "information is information; it can be as long

as it's for action." Williams elaborated on this point stating that "true expression" lacks

judgment, whereby it presents ideas without asserting right or wrong, and is in a sense

unable to be commodified and controlled. He also stated that "[mainstream] society

fears things they don't control and they can't monetize true expression." This reveals a

tension between the creative process and business.

During the *Carried Away by Visions of the Homeland: African Diaspora*

Filmmakers Panel held at Cleveland State University, filmmaker Michael King

commented that when his students ask him how much money he is going to make from

a film, he replies, "I don't know, but I know that I'm gonna make another film. Ya know?

Film is my currency." Currency and control emerged as key factors within the business

aspect of the creative process. The artists in this study acknowledged that they must

consider their audience to a certain extent, especially in regards to the commercial

viability of their art. In a conversation juxtaposing old versus new, traditional versus

modern, and film versus digital, Williams' stance is one defined by his expertise and

intuition as an artist, stating, "my eye tells me what's beautiful." His comment reflects

the nature and innate ability of an artist to make creative decisions. Williams went on

to stress the need for artists to monetize the business of art, understand, control, and negotiate the business aspect in order to benefit economically from their art.

An unintended outcome from the sessions with the artists was a deeper understanding of the business side of the creative process. Prosper explained:

I started putting my artistry down and I started trying to understand and unravel this thing we call the music business, because you know, 10% is music and 90% is business. I was interested in learning how these moguls and executives are living more luxurious than some of these artists and these artists are the people's choice, you know. So I sacrificed my art, because I felt that learning the business side of it, it wasn't really about the art, so it kind of muted me from being an artist and doing my own artistry.

Williams and Prosper both discussed the tension that exists between business and creativity. They discussed the agency in mastering the business side, being able to negotiate creative control, freedom, and ownership throughout the creative process. Williams described this as follows, "Because there's a level of power to when the artist can conquer the business. You see, the business always runs the art, but when you can go in there and really run the business of the art, I think that's really where [power's] at." Such mastery of the business side is credited with providing more leeway to the creative side. Coleman discussed power in terms of the freedom creative decision-making saying, "Because I'm the subject, I have more control over what the media is, so I have total freedom." Her comment exposes the freedom artists feel when making creative choices.

Prosper learned the "business side" of the industry as A & R, a position known as Artist and Repertoire, for several major labels and artists. Of this he says, "It's just me refining my light. Remember I told you I had my light, I shined my light, and I put it on dim so as A & R, I could help other artists shine their light." Williams, CEO of a production studio, elaborated on the importance of access, opportunity, funding, resources, time, and planning and competency in the film industry, saying, "It's access to your dreams that makes it important as an artist." Williams cited these factors as determining and often limiting opportunities and what is creatively possible for artists in contrast to their artistic brilliance. In this manner, success is not always about talent. He attested that the factors of planning and competency contribute to the value of the art.

Both Williams and Prosper stressed the importance of relationships and networking in the film and music industries. Prosper discussed how art can often be lost when mixed with "corporatocracy" and how he at times has had to sacrifice his creative vision to be commercially successful. Williams explained the value of the creative process in terms of relationships and commercial success, saying:

> We make something that, it's total value is really in two areas: you know one, the person creating it, you know actually doing it, the satisfaction of making it, and I think two, someone else enjoying it, right, and whatever they put their value on that enjoyment is what you - how you [are] compensate[d] as an artist.

Williams ascribes value to the creation and sharing of art. The consideration of audience and the market for commercial viability at times trumps creative vision, according to what artists narrate.

Williams talked about the obstacles to creating and to writing, looking at the trade off between business and creativity, and how at times business and art are incompatible. Of this he said, "One thing that affects your art the most is kind of like the job, right, once you begin to get into the business." Williams spoke to the work ethic of an artist and doing the "math of your life" in regards to realistically how many films one is able to produce in a lifetime. In referencing "the math of your life" Williams addressed a sense of romanticism lost in exchange for time. This is also pertaining to the artist's livelihood—sustaining one's ability to survive, negotiating art and resources.

Williams and Prosper, both comparative veterans in the industry, also discussed power in regards to controlling one's art and ownership. All artists talked about the role of their work to control images and perceptions in general and specifically having control over the images of Black people. When I asked how to stop the exploitation of artists, our youth and people, participants responded that we must teach them their rights, teach them "the game," and teach them to be aware of intellectual property. During the focus group session, Williams stated that having power over this business aspect is the "only way to protect yourself."

The issue of power emerged once more as artists discussed agency as part of the creative process via a level of control over one's art, ownership of the story, and freedom. Artists explored freedom as being linked to layers of identity and knowing self.

Because of this freedom, artists credit art as an element within the urban environment that combats some of the toxicity—evident in measures of self worth portrayed via policies that reinforce inequity, media driven (mis)perceptions of Black people and their communities, and limited accessibility and opportunities to progress socially and economically—that often exists within the same space. Artists narrate that they "value the potential of the art to create individual value and worth, developing a critical mindset and a critical lens…" and assert that "part of the process is allowing you to be confident" in discovery of true self as well as an ability to critically negotiate the outside world (Williams).

Artists narrated that the toxicity that exists in the urban environment exists along side the richness of the communities. Artists articulated their belief that in order to access dreams, one's imagination has to be cultivated—creativity nurtured. The artists in this study told stories of how urban communities nurtured their creative process. Consider Williams' following reflection:

> There's not a lot of people who could particularly raise their child to be an artist, which is difficult period, you know, but to really foster that and be supportive of the arts I think is always really neat. So I guess for me, art in my environment was very key. I think it was easier and cheaper for my mother to send me to the art museum to a summer camp than to hire me a sitter, so art was kind of always a part of my deal in a lot of ways.

Artists gave credit to having been afforded certain freedoms of expression, creativity, experimentalism, and imagination within their creative process that was developed in

their upbringing and nurtured in their environments. Artists also speak to the importance of access to materials and resources that allowed them to create ideally.

Artists narrated a realization that this access to materials and resources that allows for ideal creation is not always afforded in urban school settings. In a critique of the urban school system, Williams reflected:

I think that school should be longer with more art classes…If drawing a bomb worked, artists would get paid, but since drawing a bomb does not work, only the kids in science class who develop bombs will get paid, because that works [for our society]… At the end of the day, [art] has to be separate—I don't know why people keep thinking we're gonna have new schools…You use the parts of the system that can help you build your own. That's why mom and pop art spots are important, because they're outside of the system. They don't care about your curriculum, they don't care about passing no test—it's about you; where is your talent. It starts off all independent… free from school…to figure out where 'you' lie in all that, to be able to flourish artistically in any of those art forms. When you move into a system that has an agenda or is funded through an agenda, it's going to be difficult for it to really be individualized like it should be. We should tithe to the arts.

Williams commented on what is valued from an educational and social standpoint and spoke to the necessity of providing such developmental arts opportunities outside of schools—of not relying solely on institutions to meet the needs of our communities. Artists note that communities must pick up the slack where urban schools fail to meet

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the developmental needs of youth, again telling stories of the various lessons and places in which they learned.

Williams criticized the educational system in our country in general saying that young people and adults "don't even know how the planet works." Initially interpreted literally as a reference to poor science education, I followed up and asked why he felt this was important. He explained, "The sooner children learn the politics of the globe, the sooner they can see how they can make positive change" (9.15.12). This criticism exposes how artists feel education should play a role in the development of citizenship and agency. The next section explores connecting, another theme that emerged around the role of the creative process in education.

Re:Connecting Through Tales: "We're divorced from the details that stories provide" (jones)

As detailed in the previous sections, the theme of connecting emerged as a way of relating complex and layered existing information, experiences, and new information, as well as a way of relating to audiences. As compassionate studiers of humanity, artists narrated that they inundate themselves with stories. They said that they use metaphors to make connections between personal lived experiences and the experiences of others. They reported further that the use of metaphor also allows for the exploration of personal experiences without directly connecting those experiences to the artist. Metaphors, as narrated by the artists, assist in meaning making; the artist's imagination combined with the actual story allows for connection. This section details the narrated educational experiences of the artists and the role the creative process played in

allowing them to make meaningful connections, including connecting to academic

spaces that can be unwelcoming to Blacks within urban environments. Four of the five

artists also narrated how they were able to connect to their own personal learning

process through their participation in this study.

During the focus group session, we discussed how music and entertainment are

critical to making connections and increasing exposure in urban environments, and that

Hip Hop in particular acts as a form of street reporting. Prosper, one of the participating

emcee's, talked about the universality and global interest in Hip Hop, especially in third

world countries. Some of the artists reported feeling out of place in academic

environments, yet all related to connecting to these spaces through elements of Hip

Hop. During one of the sessions I shared the following story of how my graduate

advisor's locs and ethnicity gave me a sense of belonging:

> It can be intimidating [to interview] to be in a doctoral program and not really
>
> even know what that means other than I know that I need to be on that level
>
> because education was denied from my people type thing, but not really
>
> knowing what a doctorate entails… So I'm all embarrassed and freaking out and
>
> then my advisor walks in–he wasn't my advisor then–he's this Black dude with
>
> dreads, and he was all into Hip Hop and education. I'm like, 'whew okay.' So
>
> that calmed me down and made [the interview] way easier.

Connecting via creative elements like Hip Hop, which is a dominant cultural expression

with African American origins within urban environments, reduces the damage done by

exclusionary structures like the academic environments of higher education. Artists

narrated that the colorful, entertaining stories told via hip hop allow for the expression of Black experiences by those who live it, while at the same time allowing others to connect to some of the details of the stories.

As noted earlier, Coleman, the participating film and digital media student, spoke of connecting to learning activities that integrated art or made use of the creative elements of art. She told of how she would expel more effort, retain more, exercise higher level thinking skills and application when information was presented creatively and/or she was given freedom to produce creative projects. Noting the characteristics of engaging classes and lessons, she credited connecting elements—open dialogue, sharing stories, community building, activity, visual elements, use of popular culture, critical thinking, multi media presentations, and supplements like Highlights, Zoobooks, National Geographic, and Weekly Readers—intrinsic to the creative process.

Coleman spoke of how such elements were present in particular history courses at Cleveland State whereby the professor would not only make use of multi media and visual presentations but she would also make use of critical theory, situating historical topics within a larger discussion of sociopolitical history. This learning experience allowed her to connect to hi*stories* starting from a narrow, more personal perspective that was increasingly broadened to consider a global perspective over time and space; Coleman attributed such connections to the creative process and felt that this sort of learning is needed and possible in the k-12 setting.

Evident in the data was the theme of critical thinking and analytical skills as often absent in education. The artists narrated their development of these skills through their

exploration of self and community within the creative process. These skills are deeply

intellectual and also very practical, often critical to survival on a basic level. In

academics and every day life, these critical thinking skills that can be useful in training

young people how to see, think, and navigate life. With an integration of the details of

our lives and that of our communities, often divorced from the curriculum, the potential

for critical engagement with ideas is possible. Through the creative process, education

might flourish for students in urban settings. Prosper gave the following example of an

event he organized that connected music and science, as well as shed light on students'

experiences of music:

> It was in the honor of Yuri Gagarin and it was a way to get the kids to see that
>
> being around science is cool if you can look at it for what it is, because you love
>
> music and you love the vibrations of music and you don't know why you love it–
>
> it's a science to it. It hits parts of your brain that allow you to feel good. It
>
> releases good energies and good vibrations that you know can be related to
>
> science.

Prosper's narrative suggests a learning experience that is more than a "practical

education." The event described by Prosper teaches young people the science behind

music as well as the science behind their attraction to music. Understanding the nature

of our attraction to elements within our environments reveals parts of self, an aspect of

thematic relationships to identity that will be further discussed in the next section.

Contemplating the connection between education and the creative process,

artists reflected on sources of learning outside of schools and their personal learning

process. Coleman further linked this exploration of self to the learning process

unfolding within this research study and reflected:

> You're learning through the research. I'm learning about myself as to what I do
>
> because before I thought it was all just subconscious, that I just do it, but I'm
>
> sure there's actually a process behind what I'm producing. But it's cool to
>
> actually think about that.

Four of the artists narrated that participating in this study allowed them to connect to

their own personal learning process. Artists narrated that as much as they do not think

about what they do consciously, they embrace the creative process as a way of life and

a critical thought process that allows them to dissect information and report their

findings.

This introspective exploration of the artists' use of the creative process

introduced an additional layer in the experience of artists. It underscored the role of

the creative process in facilitating identity development. The artists narrated how they

found pieces of themselves throughout the process. As a participant during one of the

sessions, I reflected on this saying, "Like you gotta stop letting the media and this bull

shit tell you who you are and how to be and you gotta really learn how to tap into who

you are and who your meant to be." I began to look at how unpacking the "original

state of being" and knowing thyself are powerful and critical tools against media

propaganda. How do we step away from the technocratic society we have created and

(re)connect to our natural instincts and original creation, value this and share it with

young people—how would this look in a lesson? The next section explores how artists narrated using the creative process to complicate identity.

"Knowing Thyself": Creative Process Toward the Freedom of Self Discovery

The theme of "knowing thyself" emerged as an outcome of the creative process. The narrated personal, experiential frame of reference for the creative process defines this theme as a method toward self-discovery, a state of consciousness, and "being" or our most natural state of existence. With their body as a critical instrument in the creative process, artists explained it is likewise an extension of self and lends to self-discovery and acceptance, to finding a balance between layers of identity and consciousness in order to unpack one's state of being. The artists narrated that they use abstract analogies to express personal experiences to which they do not want to be directly connected. This section further explores how artists revealed the creative process as a way to make meaning for themselves. In this manner, the creative process is a method toward freedom via the knowledge of self.

Artists noted that while the audience is important, often times the artists' vision trumps perceptions from the audience, because of their personal frame of reference for creating their art. While the process may share a common entrée into identity development, it also yields products highly individualized. For example, Coleman made a reference to painter Jean Michel Basquiat saying that even though nothing on Earth is "new," each individual's filtering and processing of experiences is unique, that each "new mind" is a filter. The artists acknowledged various factors that affect their experiences and how the creative process allows them to explore identity.

As much as artists narrated that their creative process is deeply connected to community, ethnic ties, history, and sociopolitics, they also narrated that it is about the desire to be free from such social constructions of identity. As a participant in a session looking at the interaction and relationship between experiences and self-concept, I reflected on a freedom to experience elements of life without social identifiers—ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, etc. Particularly, Coleman explained her use of the creative process to explore and get at the "original state" of being as a person, saying:

> I want to be in a space where I recognize who I am. And (thinking) identity is how
> you show yourself to the world... We are all a continuum; we experience things
> on the human level, but at the same time we're experiencing things because we
> are female, because we are African. I'm not going to live my life through just one
> lens...but really get at the bare bones of what it means to be a human being, and
> that's how I want to interact with people around me. And it's so awful, because
> of this technocratic society, you can't do it as easy as it may seem, because now
> you've created disillusion of who you are because of all these material
> possessions and creating fake identities through the use of Photoshop and
> Facebook.

In talking about identity, Coleman focused on three parts of self—the spiritual, physical, and social—and the types of interactions directed by each of these schemas. Coleman also talked about Johari's Window, negotiating our personal perceptions and that of others, and self-schemas in relation to these layers of existence. She alludes to

dissolution of healthy self-concepts as well as perceptions of humanity, really speaking

to a state of collective identity crisis at the same time she adverts to disillusion that

results from the falsehood of not knowing self.

Williams elaborated on the idea of "art as an extension of self, [his] personality

and viewpoints" and the nature of everyday living, but that it is rare for him to display

himself "naked" without the cover or mask of abstract analogies like fiction and

metaphor. He talked about creating from his personal frame of reference, comprised of

identity and experience:

> You pull from who you are. And who you are is all of it—your environment,
>
> history, your grandparents, newspapers, TV shows, radio, bad experiences at
>
> JCPenny's. You know what I'm saying? I think you have to use elements of you
>
> to create; I think to not makes 'em hollow. [Your creations] just are not full
>
> pieces of you, they are fragments and portions.

Williams' comment illustrates how one's discovery of self informs the creative product,

that the creative process allows one to complicate their experiences and identity.

Coleman affirmed how social identifiers are a part of how she creates, saying, "My main

frame of reference is being female and of African descent." Coles explained that a

personal frame of reference is ideal. He said, "Whatever I'm going through, I try to

speak from first person; the best way the most natural music comes out for me or for

anyone is just to relate your own personal experience and incorporate that into

whatever project." Coles also noted that creating from a personal space also allows him

to connect to his audience.

During the focus group session, the personal nature of the creative process was tossed around, and Williams stated that creation comes from self and that it is an intimate and sometimes private process. Coleman agreed, noting she feels most comfortable working in her bedroom. To express deeply personal topics and experience, the artists explained that they use metaphor. In order to tell the story and make others able to relate, metaphor is often accompanied by abstraction, exaggeration, and the use of symbols. These strategies, employed by all to add distance between stories told through their creative process and the deeply personal and sometimes painful nature of some experiences, allow for the expression and exploration of one's autobiography in such a way that allows the individual to confront issues without identifying directly with the issues in a personal manner. Artists note that fiction also creates a mask, which facilitates the ability to shape art from personal stories.

Furthermore, the creative process of coming to "know thyself" may draw on memories and what I, as a participant in one of the sessions, called "war scars" as proof of past personal trials and triumphs. These scars are often reopened in the creative process, but as noted by the artists, the creative process is a method toward healing such reopened scars. In regards to addressing touchy subjects, Coleman spoke also to how this starts with "an honest conversation, self acceptance, and building trust." She also noted that she is not open to explicitly sharing all personal subjects, that she uses the creative process as a way of "dealing with [her] own secrets." Quoting Langston Hughes, "without fear or shame," Coleman spoke eloquently of her body as her main tool in her creative process. In order to maintain a sane distance from the work,

Coleman spoke to patience and "not forcing yourself," which she does by "taking breaks to dance, sleeping it off, or reflecting, meditating, and just being still." She also mentioned the importance of having a mentor, which connects back to the dialogue aspect within the creative process.

As evidence of art as a method of research and/or discovery, Coleman stated that the objective is not just to get the message across to others, but to also understand something for herself. She said, "Like what is the big message that I'm trying to convey? And it's not just to other people, it's to myself, so sometimes you gotta sit down and explain yourself to yourself, like 'what are you doing?'" This illustrates the agentic nature of self-discovery as the individual artist processes, engages, and moves somewhere with an idea. Consider the following reflection made by Coles:

> If you would just be childlike and pure like you supposed to be, like the divine being that you really are, you would realize life's so abundant, man, you don't need to do none of that crazy shit anyway. Your mind's focused on other shit that's put here for you to keep your mind on instead of keeping it on yourself. We don't even have enough resolve to be able to meditate and reflect and look at ourselves inwardly because our minds are always out here. That's where your creative energy comes from, inner reflection, and that's where your divine inspiration comes from, reflection. If you were able to be free like you supposed to, your talents would be boundless and you would do what's right for yourself…

Artists described the creative process as a means to achieve a freedom of "being" and of preservation through knowing thyself and connecting spiritually.

Artists attest to being able to connect to the larger human story via knowledge

of self, history, and direct lineage to our ancestors. Coles explained that by knowing

thyself, one is able to recognize not only the divine source of creativity, but also one's

own divinity. Coles stressed that the importance of understanding self for self lies in the

fact that "the knowledge of yourself is divine and makes you a free being on this planet

that you gotta live on until you get to see the Creator." In this way, artists narrate art as

a method toward freedom, the urgency for which is unpacked in the following section

looking at why artists create.

Why Do You Create? "I just hafta"

When asked why create, the artists explained that they "just hafta." The artists

responded that creating was a basic need, from being a duty or responsibility to

providing therapy or relief. The theme "just hafta" is defined by what artists narrated as

an incessant need to create whereby they feel it is their spiritual, personal, and social

duty to create; these three areas that will be more fully explored in the sections that

follow. In this sense, artists illustrate communal and individual dimensions of the

creative process within urban environments. Like our ancestors before us who utilized

the arts to act as keepers of the oral histories, evident in the cultural work of the griot

throughout the continent of Africa, these artists narrated that they take up that

tradition. In relation to the role the creative process plays in their experience of life and

urban environments, they narrate: 1) a griot-like quality that enables them to be

masters of telling stories; 2) the aesthetic value of art to define cultures historically—

being a tastemaker and trendsetter, being legendary, and their role in making history; 3) and accessing dreams via the process.

The four artists narrated a fascination with storytelling, the human condition, and captivating people. Of this Williams says that "a person's story rules [him] in a way" and that he creates art as a way to stay connected to humanity because, "if you lose track of that, you really cease to be an artist." Coles defines his artistry through storytelling saying, "I'm always telling a story or trying to convey a message of some sort 'cause that's what an emcee or spoken word artist is, a storyteller. Your talent or your art is the mastery of the art of the spoken word." As master storytellers, these artists described their critical function in the stories they tell, their role to observe, analyze, interpret, and report out what they find. Coles explained, "As the spoken word artist, the emcee, or the rapper, you are that other instrument. The best way I can describe it is that you want to paint a picture with words, be as vivid and as detailed as possible to convey whatever message." Similar to a researcher's reflexivity, artists report their role as an instrument in the creative process.

I used the content of the artists' works as material with the participants to understand the role of the creative process. Coleman said, "'Why are you doing this?' I just have to! (Laughs.) I just gotta do this! I just do it because I feel it and it's something I need to do." These artists "just hafta" create and they talk about their work, what they produce, as being responsive both to their environment and to an innate sensation to (re)produce/tell stories deeply entrenched in various aspects of the human experience. The following statement made by Williams captures this:

You have the duty to tell the story or to witness something and recite it back in a

documentary or whatever it may be to engage the people…you have the eye and

the ability to capture that as an artist. That's what we've been created to do. To

waste talent is the saddest thing about an artist. So we bring it in through our

art, what we see and what we witness. We share it to people in a form in which

they can partake, as some form of entertainment. 'Cause that's what we do,

we're entertainers.

Williams's statement also exposes the duty that artists expressed. Coleman elaborated

on this duty, saying, "Let me write my own quotes, say something insightful or profound,

'cause we are here as human beings and we're observing and we're taking in things… we

shouldn't be just a bystander to our life; we should be actively engaged." Coleman also

pointed out how the creative process allows her to engage the environment around her.

Reflecting some of the sentiments expressed in the "thoughts manifest" theme

discussed earlier, artists report that they work with little to no pre-planned structure,

allowing ideas to flow freely, because the creative process has divine, raw, and

uninhibited qualities. Speaking to engaging this flow, Coles explained, "As an emcee,

you can write all the raps you want to but sometimes you freestyle and the best stuff

comes out that way. It's not so structured." The artists narrated that they work with

little to no pre-planned structure, allowing ideas to flow freely, because the creative

process has divine, raw, and uninhibited qualities. They narrated that this is a natural

response and process that really comes from without as well as within and has a "divine

quality of an inspirational universal" (P. Breville, personal communication, June 26, 2012). Williams commented, "So I like to write by hand the most because I feel like there's something romantic about it, you have the feeling with the paper and the rhythm and the flow and other things." While Williams noted his preference for writing tools that allow him a more intimate experience creating, as previously discussed, he and the other artists also expressed that accessibility to their preferred tools does not stop them from creating.

Artists emphasized that they will create whenever inspired to do so using whatever tools are at hand. Coles explained this saying, "[I use] whatever I have. I can write a little in my head, try to remember things or if a pen and pad is more convenient at the time. A lot of times I use my phone, I mean that's the most convenient thing, whatever I can find at the time." The artists emphasized that the goal is really to capture an idea. Of this, Prosper said, "I write wherever I can. I write on my phone, with a pen, a pencil, a computer, a typewriter, or whatever it is I can get it on to remember that that's what I was thinking and get the idea out." When it comes to the selection of media and materials, accessibility outweighs preference for these artists when trying to capture an idea. The following two quotes illustrate this idea of creating wherever and however:

I'm very organic and so I don't think that I'm really boxed-in in that way, in terms of how, or when, or where, and what I create or whatever—I'll create anywhere. I mean I'll write whenever I possibly can, because it's like you gotta write when the inspiration comes to you. You have to. You can't serve two masters. You

know, I'm an artist, I'm a vehicle for creativity, so I always look at that as being

what's most important per se, because I think that you really only have one

chance to create it…Right now, I've been writing a lot of scripts in my phone

(Williams).

When it comes to writing, I always keep a notebook by my bed with the pen. And

if I'm not in a position where I have paper, I'll grab a napkin or something and

use a permanent marker or colored pencil and just jot something down. And

then with the help of technology, you have your cell phone there. I can just do

the voice recorder, record myself talking or do a draft in my text messaging. And

the reason for using these materials is because they're right there, so I think

that's the main reason for anything that I ever use, its accessibility (Coleman).

Artists stated that they utilize the text, notes, and voice recorder features of their smart

phones more often than not to document their thoughts, but will totally write on

napkins or whatever they can as well, so as to avoid the risk of losing what Prosper

called "feeling and flow." While alluding again to the divine role of the artist to channel

messages, Williams also spoke to the ritual of writing, to making a daily habit of writing,

as part of something he just has to do.

In order to create universal expressions of humanity, artists reported that they

act as studiers of humanity. As such, Williams expressed how artists become experts on

the human condition, saying:

That's what makes us so special—our empathy for mankind is what points out

the tragedies, or the injustices, or the triumphs, or the things that have not been

noticed in our society. It's also the thing that kinda captures and witnesses the things that go on in our society both good and bad. Now part of that is your ability to know and understand and interpret human beings. An artist is a studier of humanity and every aspect of it; we sit back and we take note.

Williams discussed the importance of also being average in order to connect with people. Artists spoke to the connectivity within the creative process that allows expression of human universals. Of this, Coleman explained the following:

My biggest thought right now is just humanity and trying to awaken the human spirit because of the technocratic society that we've become. You want to be able to relate to people just on a human level, because that's what we were first. The feeling or the idea is not independent of ourselves; somewhere, somebody is thinking and feeling the same exact thing.

Artists conveyed the agency of pushing beyond observation, to interpreting and documenting. Coles elaborated on this, saying, "The people going through this stuff, we have to be the ones telling the story. You can go to school long as you want to, if you are relying on information from someone outside of the community, you're not going to get the whole picture." In their view of artist as divine griot, the responsibility of storytelling is agentic and communicative, which further defines this theme of "just hafta" and answers the first two research questions of what artists narrate about their experiences and the role of the creative process in their experiences. Artists discussed a sense of connection to others and to resisting separation and individualism and to the

nature of the creative process to encourage and build communities and dialogue around important social issues.

Given their emphasis on a compelling desire to create, and its connection to community well being, artists had a lot to say about the role of the creative process in regards to issues important to our communities. Of this, Prosper explained, "[As artists we must] utilize our platform to change our images, basically create intellectual properties that integrate education, technology, and culture." Artists acknowledged the critical role of arts in education. Coleman went on to explain that it is important to work "in a space where you can create deep thought about what's happening and confront these issues without tailoring how you feel, but addressing it in a way that you can learn something, that it's just about information and passing it on, [sharing] with other students." Beyond arts in education, I think artists revealed a deeper correlation for arts *as* education, a more transformative impulse as a means to educate. Coles explained just this, saying, "With the music we can teach, as we can tell peoples so much about what's really going on in the world or in our own communities." Specifically, these artists use their entertainment platform to engage in social change – to actively change perceptions of Black people through creative scholarship that integrates arts, technology, and sciences.

Artists discussed their need to be artistically moral with creative choices in regard to the stories they tell. They narrated that they feel they play a role in capturing culture and sharing information as well as using their particular artform to confront media driven perceptions. Artists alluded to their ability to provide a correctional lens

to expose what Coleman called "popular ignorance" concerning the realities of Black

people throughout the Diaspora. Williams also spoke to contradictions that can occur

with film versus reality and the obligation of a socially conscious artist to capture

cultural realities. In the following sections, the spiritual, personal, and social dimensions

of the theme of "just hafta" are further unpacked.

A divine source: "I create because I feel as though I was made to do so…"

(Williams). As the subheading shows, on a spiritual level, artists reported their divine

calling to be a storyteller—to witness, interpret, and be a messenger of life and

culture—and that they create in an organic fashion allowing ideas to flow forth freely

and uninhibited. The artists in this study compare creativity to divinity, stating that

creativity "just is" and has a divine origin. Of this Williams made the following

comment:

> [It] makes you think; when you think it's a transcendental type of experience—
>
> when you create, it's the exact same thing from the standpoint of what an artist
>
> does, an artist channels. They wanna cut off your channel…Talent is God—that's
>
> what it is. You can't control it. You can't bottle it. You don't know what it is. You
>
> can't find it. For the most part, it's flowing out of you.

Here he also touched on how as a tool of culturalization, from his experience of

education in urban environments, institutions of education thwart individual

expressionism in efforts to maintain the system. Williams gave voice to being part of

the cosmos and how as an artist he lacks control over the flow because he is designed to

be a "conduit for the moment for information." He related art to science and spirituality

and declared, "the art is" (5.29.12).

In addition to the divine origin of the creative process, artists also speak to

creating as a form of worship, that the energy exchanged when singing, for example, is

much like vocalization and prayer. Regarding this prayer-like energy exchange, as a

participant in a session I reflected, "There is something so spiritual about vocalization,

being able to vocalize how your body feels. And I think that there's something to be said

about the energy exchanged when you vocalize." The artists narrated their feeling of

responsibility to create in honor of the Creator in addition to honoring and upholding

the tradition of storytelling, carrying out the legacy of our ancestors.

Prosper emphasized building from and connecting to a legacy of oral traditions

and storytelling, saying, "I still consider myself a poet. So I feel like I'm just trying to keep,

you know Countee Cullen and the Harlem Renaissance, JA Rogers and the elders that

came before us—I'm trying to just have them proud, that they didn't suffer in vain."

Beyond this, artists also narrated that art is an indigenous method to gain ascension as

evident in the following statement made by Prosper:

> I wanted to be able to tap back into before the European came with the Bible
>
> and the rifle. It's almost like the indigenous person would worship a tree, a
>
> religious person would cut down the tree and build a church. I just wanted to
>
> take it back to a better understanding and connection to the planet, and that's
>
> what Merkabah is, the attempt to bring the awareness of the possibility of you
>
> being able to ascend your consciousness and your spirit to another realm.

Artists reported being able to achieve a higher level of consciousness via the creative process. Coles spoke to how this higher level of consciousness allows for the creation of alternate realities, saying, "You want to be in another state of either consciousness or a different frame of mind and that's what you're trying to create on the paper or whatever... almost an alternate reality." They also spoke to a sense of responsibility to storytelling and oral traditions similar to that of a griot and feel it their duty to share stories with others.

As part of the duty felt to share stories with others, one has to see and know the story in order to tell it, therefore artists spoke to the procedural aspects of their process, observing and documenting their surroundings, being part of what they "just hafta" do. Much like the concept of a visual stenographer, artists reported that they record and act as witnesses, studying humanity and that there is an empathetic aspect to their process. By combining observation and the study of humanity with their divine talent, these artists narrated being experts on communicating the nuances of human experiences.

Observation was narrated as foundational in the steps of their approach to the creative process and motivates their brainstorming, reflection, and "figuring things out" as a form of interpretation and meaning making. Coleman discussed how watching others is part of her process and that public transportation is perfect for people watching. Artists "sit back and take note" and have the "eye and ability to capture" and share stories (Williams).

Coles elaborated on this point saying, "The biggest thing that I'm learning how to do is to say things without offending people. Especially as an emcee, you want to be

able to appeal to as many people as possible, and try to speak in a manner which a lot of people can relate to." While Coles noted that he maintains creative decision making, he stated the importance of considering the audience so that the message can be accurately and successfully received. All artists narrated that they want the stories they tell to be relevant to the human condition and experience broadly and to be told in such a way that people can relate to and understand the message being channeled through them.

Regarding the message being channeled through them, artists again narrated a divine source of information. Speaking to tapping into a divine channel, Prosper made the following reflection:

I think (pensive and paused, eyes looking upward) going within…Going within is important because a lot of the answers to the universe, we have within, we can tap into that. I think of concepts that affect me, that affect the community and when I think of art, I think that's the great conduit to kinda express your views politically, creatively, artistically.

Beyond meaning making, these artists contemplated the relationship between the creative process and spiritual dimensions, in addition to the divine role of artist. Coleman spoke to using the creative process to unpack the "state of being," sift through perceptions and physical, social, and spiritual layers of identity, and struggle through "illusions of identity." Artists credited the personal nature of the creative process, with allowing them to understand their spiritual selves. The next section unpacks this personal nature of the creative process more in depth.

Personal mission of the creative process: "Mine is a journal almost" (Coles). As
the subheading tells, artists narrated that the creative process plays a deeply personal
role in their experience of life in general, but specifically in urban environments it has a
role in buffering, complicating, and making sense from context and experiences. They
explained art as a healing mechanism and the stress and pleasure in creating. The
creative process narrated by the four artists allows them to make meaning of the world
around them as well as of their own personal experiences. Coleman reflected on the
idea of sharing in order to connect to the greater human story and the validation such
provides referencing the encouraging finger snaps at spoken word performances saying,
"They feel me!" Coleman's reflection also spoke to the acceptance and admiration that
results from creative explorations.

As discussed previously, artists acknowledged that the personal nature of some
experiences expressed in stories causes them to be more comfortable exploring such
through the use of fables, narratives, and short story fiction, which allows them to tell
their stories without the stories being specifically and overtly about them. In the
following reflection, Coleman expressed this while also alluding to the healing, or
therapeutic role, discussed earlier, the creative process plays in the experiences of these
artists:

So I think back to this line I heard in K'Naan's song, it's called, "Take a Minute."

He says, "I take the most heinous of situations, creating medication out my own

tribulations," and so that's why I [create]. In taking one of those moments, [I'm]

able to move past bad stuff. If we had to call it a proverb, that's exactly what I

would call it, because it's something you could live by. Living is being, BE

engaged with life!

In addition to making meaning and connecting to the human experience, artists

narrated that the creative process acts as a coping mechanism. Coles elaborated on this

saying:

Some of the shit that's going to come out ain't going to be good, but you still

have to face it, that's the thing. And that's also what art does for me, it puts

things into perspective, again things I might not have thought of on a conscious

level, things I might have actually suppressed come back out…So there's no way

of controlling it. I don't think you should–you should just let it go, because it's a

release at the end of the day. Whatever you're writing or whatever, you have to

address these different issues or else they fester and turn into monsters. And

it's almost an escape to paint whatever picture you want, to play with your

imagination and pretty much create your own reality, something to break the

monotony of the routine. You're free to express yourself however you want. I

can say things on the mic I can't say to people [walking down the street]…that's

freedom.

Artists confirmed that the creative process provides them with personal relief from the

human phenomenon of discomfort that is likely exacerbated in urban settings and that

such expression as a response to and reflection of environmental and sensual stimuli

allows for the creation of alternative realities. In such a way, artists narrated that the creative process acts for them as an outlet or escape.

When asked what it is that we try to escape from and why we feel the need to create alternate realities, whether we are not happy, satisfied, or content with the picture we have, Coles responded that the creative process breaks the routine. As the artists narrated that the creative process engages the mind in higher level thinking activities, Coles' comment fueled a discussion on how the monotony of routine creates a state of disengagement with life whereby we "go through the motions" of the routine without thinking.

The artists narrated that the creative process itself involves some level of stress, in addition to any stress that may be inherent within its focus or topic. Creativity in this way takes the form of energy that builds inside artists and demands a release. For example, when asked why he creates, Williams responded as follows:

> 'Cause I can't sleep at night… And that's the truth. I think that, you have a voice inside of you that is telling you these stories, or telling you these ideas, making you want to see certain aspects of life, or making you think about a certain thing you saw, to a grotesquely obsessive disorder in a way. In the sense that if I don't write a story, I can't sleep because I'll keep thinking about it and thinking about it and thinking about it and thinking about it and thinking about it and thinking about it, so it's like, I'll get up. You know?

In pointing out the source of inspiration, Williams also described the restlessness that accompanies the creative process. Prosper went further saying, "I create because it

keeps me balanced and it keeps me sane. If I'm not doing anything creative then there's

no purpose for me." Prosper narrated the artists' feeling that they "just hafta" create

for sanity's sake, for the mental calm that results from the process.

Participating artists reported feeling pleasure in creating, using the creative

process as a filter and/or deposit for mental and physical energy. Artists explained that

they use the creative process as a positive outlet to shift or transfer energy. As an

observation, I began to draw connections between physical manifestations of this

energy and the various activities of the artists, noting within which of the various stages

of the creative process (see Figure 8) when, for example nail biting, pacing, restlessness,

tapping, or shaking would take place. Artists spoke to channeling negative energy into

creativity, taking dark feelings and making them into something more positive. In this

way, the emotions attached to the focus or topic are part of the creative process as well.

The tone and speed of the artists' speech were important to my interpretation of this.

For example, in a session with Coleman, I noted her physical excitement evident in her

facial expressions, voice tone and pitch, and body language while discussing her music

videos.

I observed energy shifting in artists as they talked about their work, explored the

creative process, and became genuinely engaged in contemplation during our sessions.

I observed this energy in the body language of the artists. I watched their eyes flicker as

they thought and talked through thick concepts. For example, noticeably visible was

Coleman's building excitement when we unpacked the symbol of life in one of her works.

I noted her rapid eye movement when she was thinking about how ideas and issues

surrounding hair are connected to her work. She even made the statement that her

body is a tool she uses to express herself as well as to shift and release energy. In the

focus group session, I noted my own rapid eye movement when describing my artistic

interests; the movement of my eyes mirrored the thoughts, images, and symbols that

were racing through my mind as I thought about my creative vision.

As another example, in a session with Coles, I observed how he swiveled in his

chair as he talked but not as he listened to me talk. I also noticed that Coles made eye

contact when listening to me talk but not so much while he was talking. One session

with Williams was at four o'clock in the morning after a long day and night of shooting

and logging film. The artist was clearly sleep deprived and tired, but nonetheless willing

to meet with me and excited about the research project. I observed as he literally woke

up when he began talking about his creative process and art. He physically sat up more

in the chair and began to talk more clearly and fast. Reflective of the narrated

procedures of the creative process covered earlier, my use of observation here is part of

my analysis, not just noting what was said, but how the artists responded physically—

here they were physically and emotionally responsive to their creative processes.

Coleman commented on doodling as a way to illustrate a concept. I interpret

this as a way to communicate or express thoughts and allow others to grasp and visually

connect to the ideas in the sketches or doodles. I also see this as a way to release

mental energy. For example, Coleman brought a notebook with her to each session and

while she jotted down notes, she also sketched as we talked. While I interpret her

sketching as a way for her to focus the energy in her body that must be contained while

seated, I also see this as a way to focus her mental energies on our conversation. It is

important to note that this focus narrated by artists is not solely for the purpose of

creation, but also serves the responsibility to contribute to social change. The next

section explores narratives by the artists regarding how the social responsibility felt as

part of why artists "just hafta" create.

Harvesting our social potential: "I want to create because I want to touch

people in a certain way to be like the catalyst for change..." (Prosper). Connecting

back to the artivist aesthetic theme, artists talked about the power inherent in art to

make change in individuals, regarding the healthy nature of creative outlets, as well as

systemically by pointing out injustices in our society and encouraging the intolerance

and ousting of such injustices. As Williams elaborated:

> That's how growth happens. From a social standpoint, from a human standpoint,
>
> no matter what it is, it's generally the skeptic or the person that points out
>
> something that begins the conversation. I think the burden of that has always
>
> fallen on the artist.

Re-defining what is commonly seen as the definition of "thug," a criminal or bully,

Williams continued to illustrate the conceptual and literal relationship between a thug,

who is a rapper, who is a poet, who is a griot, who is a teacher; all of these as critical

roles played by the creative process in urban environments (for further understanding

of this re-definition, refer to "Sandbox Bully" by Izzrael). This is part of the social

responsibility felt by artists; artists reported an inclination toward artistic morality in

terms of a social responsibility to address issues concerning the greater good. The

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creative process becomes a space to complicate such issues by exploring the nature of the issues as well as their social implications.

In their works, these artists confront issues such as perception, identity, racism, feminine beauty, spirituality, Diasporic relations, and inter-dependence versus an individualistic society. The artists narrated that they embrace such a responsibility to address relevant topics with regard to humanity as a whole and specifically toward Blacks, whereby the focus is disrupting popular (mis)perceptions in order to create what Dr. Carmine Stewart (2012) calls a 'culture of expectations of excellence.' In relation to the experience of education, Prosper talked about the role of art:

> I think every form of true education trains a student in self-reliance, so if that's the case, I want people to be empowered by the art and art is definitely [agentic]. You can kinda change people's reactions, change people's perceptions or whatever through your art. That's one good gift that art can provide for people.

Artists spoke to using art as a platform to change images and perceptions, create intellectual property, encourage change and enlightenment in others, and confront (mis)perceptions driven by media. Drawing from their previously narrated experiences, unpacking identity and dealing with the impact of stereotypes and misrepresentations, artists then deal outwardly themselves by creating accurate and more positive images. In such a way, they see themselves as affecting change, influencing perceptions of identity and culture, playing a role in education outside of the classroom.

Prosper and Williams spoke to creation as a way to control the images and perceptions of Black people and our communities spread via mass media and to utilizing

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their means to create platforms where this happens. Prosper, describing his business, reflected the following:

> I felt that it was my responsibility if I'm gonna be a part of the system that's not being responsible with the images and the portrayals of my own people, that we can create an entertainment and event property or a company where we can utilize culture to create an understanding of who we are and better images. Because if we're going to worship certain images in the spotlight, it's better to create them. Because they say, "he who controls the images, controls people's self-esteem." So I felt that if we could control our own images, then I wanted to be a part of it.

In this sense, Prosper described the agentic power of the creative process that allows Black peoples to define their identity culturally, historically, and intellectually. Coleman also referenced the need for self-determination and definition in terms of the representation of Black people around the world, saying, "We need to take control of our representation in the media, and so we need to put forth these images, just to open the floodgates for conversation. I wanted to expose that popular ignorance." In such a way, the creative process for these artists acts as a means to avoid exploitation.

Referencing the duty felt toward responsible, accurate, and cultural representation, Williams said:

> I'm trying to be socially conscious about things. Number one I try to write and create from an Afrocentric point of view, so with everything I write, it's communal. It has a lot to do with social issues, group settings, people, and

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things like that. But most importantly, I try not to write solely about Black

people—I try not to remove us gratuitously from society.

Williams understands his use of creativity, producing documentaries like *Fatherhood*

101 and *Buckle Brothers* that explore unarticulated aspects of human experiences, as

having a social role to focus on what others might marginalize or overlook. He sees this

value as both "talking about people in the margins" and at the same time connecting

people in general to a universal human phenomenon, raising awareness to and

unpacking the details of experiences:

> Whatever it is that your artform is, it has something to do with what's around
>
> you, the environment, what's in your head from that environment. And if you
>
> don't assist with the change in that environment that you're witnessing, then
>
> you're just like a blind bystander, allowing things to occur because you are
>
> witnessing it. Most people can't witness it, because it's happening to them. You
>
> see? The artist can witness it.

Once again, speaking to the role the creative process plays in documenting and

interpreting, artists unraveled the relationship between the creative process and change

initiatives in urban environments. Part of the stories the artists told in this research is

that creatively looking at issues from a social stand point and really digging into things

that people are not talking about, allows them to address social issues and implications

through entertaining, captivating stories and scenarios (for examples of this, see films

Malachi 9, *Fatherhood 101*, and *Pangea* by Williams and *Why Do We Still Call Africa the*

Dark Continent? by Coleman; and songs *Merkabah: Chariot of Ascention* by DProsper and *The Herd-Heard* by Izzrael).

In a session with Williams, the artist demonstrated his thought process and how he so easily connects things and ideas that are seemingly unrelated. When talking about his current documentary project on fatherhood, he stated that the idea behind it is to "open up dialogue and to allow people to figure it out" and see how we are connected. He concluded saying, "Because at the end of the day, it's all about finding peace." His hopes are that through collaboration around a universal theme, phenomenon, and experience of fatherhood, our families might find resolution. His sentiments demonstrate how the creative process starts such a conversation and raises questions. Artists narrated that creating dialogue around social and personal issues is an intended outcome of their creative process. Coleman spoke to being open to experiences to shape perceptions and used her study abroad experience in Ghana as an example. Artists reflected on how their work generates needed dialogue around cultural issues in order to bridge the perceived gap between people and to address and change (mis)perceptions.

Along with challenging and changing (mis)perceptions, artists expressed their role in the preservation of culture in general and specifically the preservation of Black history. As part of this preservation of Black history, artists also narrated their role in *making* this history, further emphasizing the role the creative process plays as a catalyst for change. Williams explained:

I try to look at my creativity as also an opportunity to show something in cinema

or do something in cinema from a historian's standpoint that hasn't been done.

There's a certain level of filmmaking that's a competitive nature that has to do

with history–if you're trying to be one of the greats.

Williams spoke to his competitive nature and the desire to make history by doing

something in film that has not been done previously. Coles stated that, "as an artist,

you want to be able to show that you can do things that other people can't." Prosper

also illustrated this giving the following example:

We wanted to create a presentation where we could use star power to bring in

youth, to bring in people who might not necessarily think about space as

something cool to do. We were the first ones to create a concert on NASA's base

and turn the whole premises into a music festival, which honored science and

music. A lot of people don't understand that music is science, is math, is

geometry, so I'm all about the arts and sciences.

They see themselves not only as history makers and keepers of history but also as

connectors, linking people and information via the creative process. As such, artists

spoke to the necessity of telling stories from the perspective of insiders and to the

relevance of insider knowledge to provide a more accurate, detailed account of

marginalized communities. By doing so, artists acknowledged their role in addressing

the need to shift the conversation on Black expertise. Coleman spoke to education as a

foundation in such a movement.

When the theme of "organic" came up during the focus group session, artists related this directly to education and discussed how the creative process is such an organic approach to inquiry but that it is stripped from urban institutional education settings. As part of this session I reflected on how youth are socialized to see control as a sign of maturity, when in art it may be a hindrance. Noting, "Sometimes in our control we miss shit…So, it's almost like when you're a kid, you're fearless. You're taught to be afraid, so it's like unlearning certain bad habits we've developed," I linked control with fear and an unwillingness to take risks. Of this Williams commented that "real learning is what you go out and seek" and is similar to having the tools and skills inherent in the creative process to seek and find knowledge, where one reflects on context and experiences in the telling of stories.

In thinking about how the creative process relates to educational research, there are some interesting links here. Regarding dimensions of the creative process that resemble what researchers do, artists narrated how the stories told provide critical details to what is often experienced in urban environments. For example, one of my neighbors and a good friend of mine, Piree Breville, told a story to Coleman and me about the educational training in Haiti that was afforded only to the higher class and the colonial aspects of Haitian society. We compared this to what we had experienced during each of our studies abroad in Ghana as well as to what we know of colonialism in America. Relative to our musings on education and the Black community, Breville made a palpable statement connecting the legacy of slavery and imperialism to "what you think, what you feel, what you value" and how the media propaganda that controls this

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in the States, is less present in the islands (P. Breville, personal communication, April 8, 2012). We talked about this media propaganda and product placement that is distracting us from what we should focus on, further demonstrating the importance of the artist's role in counteracting these controlling images.

Breville's synopsis focuses attention on another role played by the creative process to resist "distractions from an educated mindset" and use of God-given talents to make an "impact with words, [organically figuring out things, from within using the inner eye, to see what kind of insight can be drawn from that]" (P. Breville, personal communication, April 8, 2012). This is again pointing to how the creative process utilizes knowledge seeking and meaning making skills. Artists concurred that schools disallow this process and are not equipping students with such critical thinking skills.

Because of this, Coleman narrated that she wants to use her degree in film and digital media "to assist teachers in creating supplements to the curriculum so that kids can learn visually" and connect to the stories from our powerful history. She wants to share history with youth and use scholars like Michael Gomez to really unpack the historical sources for root causes of problems throughout the Diaspora. Gomez (1998) and Smallwood (2007) historicize "race" and Black identity development as a result of the commodification of humans to serve economic and political interests. Such an historical lens on race is important to recognizing the source of some of its resulting ills. Citing a collective identity crisis of sorts as a root cause, Coleman reflected:

> We were on this planet trying to survive and having to rely on each other, and
> now we've grown to this individualistic society. It's like we don't need people,

but yes you do—your existence comes off of this interdependence. And I started

writing this poem just thinking about these things and trying to get back to our

original state. Who are we before all of these labels and divisions, and how do

we get back?

She explained that the idea is to unpack the justification for commodification of humans

and negative imagery of Africa and her descendants in the context of historic

perceptions as compared to modern perceptions. Coleman cited Harriet Tubman as one

of her favorite heroines, stating that she admires Tubman's fearlessness and resolve to

"take people with you" (5.20.12). She stated that a resolution to help others is essential

to disseminate information and build community. The next section unpacks the

resolution artists narrated that they seek through their work.

Resolution: The Artivist's Lens on Solution

The theme of resolution emerged through participants' excitement and interest

in this research project and their openness to exploring within their creative process,

the implications for our communities and how we learn. Williams noted, "I try to

integrate everything I can—I try to make social change [using] integration by showing

we are more alike than different; as an artist you have to display stories of resolution as

much as you can." Artists actively dissected their contribution to creating social change.

Reflecting on participating in this research, Coles discussed the natural fit for art and

education:

Learning my process and learning about myself [and how best to get the

message across is like teaching]—how am I gonna make it stick? The best

method is art. A good way to engage people is creatively so an effective way of teaching is to be creative with your lessons, make you think outside the box. That's what creative vision is, it's outside the box. Like with what we pushin' in schools, all it is testing, NCLB, that junk a few years ago. Everything is about standardized testing when basically they label our children. It measures them to whatever standards whoever determines to be whatever, instead of allowing free creative thought, which is what I think real genius is, creating and inventing things, but that's not what we learn in school.

Though they see the deep connections between art and education, they narrated that their role in social change is outside of schools using their art as the means.

Participants were ridiculously busy in their own lives and creative endeavors and yet enthusiastically participated in this research—during finals weeks, film production, and studio time prior to album releases. As a participant, I noted my own excitement over art as a method for research and as a space for stories to emerge. I was able to see areas of stories where potential exists to further build and collaborate. During the focus group session I mentioned that I still needed a consent form from Williams, so he wrote, "I consent to this shit. Cuz it's live" and signed his name. In his affirmation of the research, he viewed it to be awesome, exciting, and relevant. When getting at the essence of experience and the need to effectively communicate such, I noted Coleman's physical cues for excitement—evident in her eyes, facial expressions, and rocking body motion. These artists were visibly and verbally excited about how their creative process could potentially translate into learning and development.

Shifting the conversation to education in general, four of the five artists narrated that too often schools are not teaching *how* to do things. During the focus group session, Williams began to "spit industry game," explaining the practical details he learned while becoming a profitable filmmaker, that he did not learn such skills from institutions of education. Coleman, Williams, and I discussed the preparation and skills needed when entering the work force, not only as an artist, and how we generally have unrealistic expectations. Coleman said, "so that should be taught," regarding the practical education necessary to be successful. Similarly, Coleman noted that exclusion from the curriculum creates a disconnect and the importance for instructional materials to be relevant and relatable to students.

Related to the theme of resolution is the role that artists play in solving social issues, Coles spoke of himself as an activist, attending community events, engaged in artivism. During a session, we walked through my neighborhood, and he talked about getting the people invested in the space, cleaning it up, giving the kids something to do, building a sense of pride, and raising money by selling candy and having car washes. Coles spoke to the change needed in schools and illustrated the contrast between the testing atmosphere in school versus real genius in creative thought that is not taught in schools. He said he is trying to figure out "what [his] role is in addressing and solving some of the issues that we might have; that's what [his] role is as an artist, to tell the story." Artists maintain that the stories they tell are critical to creating change in our communities.

Artists articulated their role in highlighting the interdependence of natural elements that allows human beings to survive and thrive physically and our tendency to socially ostracize ourselves, looking at the preservation of our people as a critical aspect of the story. Artists speak to examining their process, how best to get messages across and engage audiences like teaching, and how our communities can benefit from their approach to creating.

It is difficult to separate the role the creative process plays from the artists' experiences. The creative process is a salient variable in the lives of these artists. The story as narrated by the participating artists, of which I am included, suggests the use of art as a method, an indigenous approach to life characterized by the way in which it allows us to reflect and complicate experiences and information, making meaning and "thoughts manifest" through our work in our duty as artists to act as interpreters and messengers for stories that have a divine source. Acting as keepers of history and oral traditions, findings suggest these artists "just hafta" create in an organic fashion, using art as a method toward "knowing thyself" —negotiating and complicating self-schemas. For personal, spiritual, and social obligations, artists narrated that they create expressions of self and humanity, to achieve an elevation of consciousness, to capture culture, to build or have meaningful dialogue with others, and tell stories of the nuances of these experiences.

The artists described "connecting," using the creative process to relate complex and layered information and experiences to new concepts and meaning as well as a way of relating to others. The "artivist aesthetic" narrated by these artists describes the

value and power of art to the artist and to communities as a method to achieve freedom, a declaration of independence. They narrated art as a method of activism to achieve "resolution" of pressing issues within urban communities.

Many of these themes suggest a process of disrupting unequal societal relations and countering the threat of being scripted into history. The revelation is that these artists actively model the creative process, using art as a method not only to create but moreover to negotiate life. In this way, their act of creating contributes to our communities and to society as a whole. Along these lines an unintended theme of the business aspect of the creative process emerged as artists also narrated art as a method to negotiate the world of commerce, a means toward sustainability. Thus, art as method implies a process of preservation—personal, communal, cultural, and historical.

Inequalities are present in research as well. In terms of how research is conducted in urban environments and within urban education, the participatory nature of this research reveals the emergence of themes through these artists' narratives of how dimensions of their approach to creating are very similar to what we do as researchers. Specifically, the need to document and tell the whole story is how researchers operate, feeling a duty to actively participate and create change in the world around us. However, these artists feel this duty also comes from a deep, connection, and dedication to a spiritual place and the physical spaces of urban environments and people.

This is not just a story of *why* these artists choose to create and sustain themselves as artists; this is also a story of *how* these artists create and what this means

for those of us interested in education and researching in urban contexts in order to

affect change in these environments. The final chapter discusses the implications of

why and *how* these Black, urban artists create and the relationship between this story of

a creative process and urban environments, education, and transformation.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION THROUGH A COUNTER-STORY

This research utilized a critical theory framework for analysis of a particular approach to the creative process within the context in which it occurs, considering power relations and race, conflict with the urban environment, and structural inequalities within this context and within education (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2009; Lather, 1986). As a goal of this research, praxis was achieved by honoring the participant's contribution to knowledge production, moving beyond member check and into participatory methods and shared theorizing (Lather, 1986). To do so, this study involved the artists and myself in storytelling as an opportunity for creative expression and as a method for data collection. In this final chapter, I will also utilize storytelling as a method for discussion and conclusion.

Designed as a space, during this study we as artists and co-researchers participated in the creative process to explore our experiences and analyze dimensions of the creative process based on these experiences. The life histories of artists, who are surviving a conflict with their environment, form a counter-story of urban experiences and create historical memory as a primary source and artifact. Their stories reveal a

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proactive approach to self-determination nourished through and by their environment.

This is a different story from the margins, of education versus schooling. Their stories

provide an insider's angle, correcting dominant perspectives of the urban experience

formed by outsiders and focused on damage, deficiency, and dependency that typically

inform trends in policy making and education reform (Tuck, 2009; Williams, 2005). The

results from this study thus contribute to the tradition of storytelling as a form of oral

history in Black culture. In this way artists uphold the necessity of telling our own

stories, which conforms with participatory methods and critical race methodology in

particular (Smallwood, 2007; Asante & Shahada, 2007). I am both writer and researcher

as well as participant. Because I am part of the community I am engaging in the study, I

use "our" and "we" in my writing.

Solórzano and Yosso (2009) outline their construction of a counter-story as a

research method, piecing together excerpts from primary and secondary sources in such

a way as to create a fictional dialogue with characters who represent the themes of the

research. Here in Chapter 5, I created such a dialogue authentically through illustrating

an actual dialectic with participants and secondary sources, oscillating (Weis & Fine,

2004) between artists' stories (interview data) and some existing data (social, historical,

contextual as well as extant research on art and artists documentaries) in order to make

the resulting story more dynamic and valid. This chapter thus models the participatory

methods utilized in this study through storytelling, specifically the use of a counter-story,

as a method for reporting research. The oscillation modeled by the counter-story also

reveals the reflexivity of a metacognitive approach to analyzing the process unfolding

within this study and to address the research questions.

This story utilizes the same metaphoric and conversational devices employed by

the participating artists to connect and make meaning of the complex themes in this

discussion. The sections that follow guide you through the non-linear story, fashioned

after traditional oral stories, much like the films of Quentin Tarantino. I start with an

overview of key points that synthesize elements of a particular approach to the creative

process in relation to the urban context and research. This overview provides a glimpse

into the complex themes, details of which become more clear in the sections that follow

it, as I discuss the artists' narrated experiences of life and urban environments and their

understanding of the role the creative process plays in such. Next, the plot thickens,

revisiting the overview in more detail as implications are discussed of how these

narratives speak to dimensions of this process and its relation to context. The story

builds toward climactic explorations of how such stories may inform research efforts

within this context and a discussion of some tensions. Finally, the story wraps up with a

summary, recommendations based on findings, and concluding thoughts.

Overview of the CounterStory

Lately, I'd been actively creating realities where I could be myself, the self with which I most closely identify. Looking outside myself and the situations in this research, I also considered how I view myself versus what others see, whereby role-playing acts as a function of "code shifting"—of identity and self-schemas. This is something the dominant White culture is generally oblivious to and is really part of my struggle to find my own voice and blueprint this for students to do so in our institutions in which they are inevitably faced with negotiating roles, relationships, and identity. Contemplating relationships and how identity emerges from these interactions, I had to step back and look at how each role was performed—how the roles played were situation and relationship based, meaning that I navigated my various roles based on context and my

level of comfort. What's the most important relationship? I believe that spirituality and knowing yourself are at the top of the list because in knowing yourself, you know your spirituality—who you are, what you're made of, where you came from, and what you're here for. This relationship you have with yourself orchestrates interactions with everybody else.

In mapping out grounded theory and looking at the role of the researcher in this process, I contemplated my role and how I fit into all of this. I contemplated the final step of telling the story of this relationship in regards to a visual model and the study's themes. As part of this puzzle, the dialogue and interaction with the artists allowed for each of us to act as mirrors for the other and our process, helping to see ourselves and to decipher our creative process. As artists, we fed off each other and nurtured each other through the research process. What's the importance of this interaction? How to articulate this relationship? Using art as a filter, I considered the various functions of this relationship—generative, spiritual, and reproductive.

The stories told by participating artists illuminate the various identity struggles evidenced by "code shifting" for Black people in general, and I considered the different roles (researcher, student, artist, educator, community member, research participant, boss, parent) that are relevant to the various interactions and numerous settings (academic, neighborhood, home, work space, research space). The artists and I began to see how the creative process produces space for us to be ourselves and how this research, the sessions, mimic and reproduce personal, interactive, and reflective space for artists to open up. This crafted space produced comfort similar to the "racelessness" and the freedom I felt to be myself that I experienced while studying abroad in Ghana where I felt human first in a myriad of "really nice life moment[s]…If the goal of our experience is light or enlightenment, [it is interesting to note that] the elements of light and dark work together to expose and create images…If light is what we're supposed to experience in life, it's almost like social identifiers—Black, race, socioeconomic status, gender, etc.— are lenses filtering out some of that light. The light still gets through because lenses are translucent, not opaque, though less light gets through. So I wonder if those lenses, those things that we make up that don't exist and are completely man made, keep us from reaching, fulfilling, and receiving that full enlightened light potential."[7]

In this reflection, I contemplated some of the study's critical and complex points for discussion. For consideration was creative space, the mental and physical places of comfort artists narrated that allow them to observe, dialogue, reflect, channel, transfer engergy, explain, make meaning, make art, and "be intelligent on purpose" (C. Yancey,

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[7] jones, v. (2011). Autoethnographic journal entry with quoted material dated January 1, 2011.

personal communications, 2009-present). Throughout this study, such spaces emerged

as if the research process created alternate realities where the artists and I were able to

open up and really focus on a particular approach to the creative process. The artists

narrated that the alternate realities we created in this study were different from their

normal scenarios whereby they go about *doing* often without reflecting on how and why

they *do*. This study allowed us to specifically focus on our creative identities. While

doing so I also began to reflect on the various relationships (academic, neighborhood,

home, work space, research space) that were being negotiated throughout the study

and the corresponding roles and identities (researcher, student, artist, educator,

community member, research participant, boss, parent) at play within the relationships.

While the artists narrated that the creative process allows them to work through self

discovery, identity and self schemas also emerged from the interaction of relationships

within the research process.

Below is an overview of all the key thematic categories that I will address in this

chapter based on the narrated experiences of the artists that participated in this study.

The figure below illustrates the key points that synthesize elements of the creative

process that will be discussed throughout this final chapter (Figure 9). It is important to

note how these elements move the artists toward freedom, reflective of the

emancipatory impulses in critical theory and participatory designs.
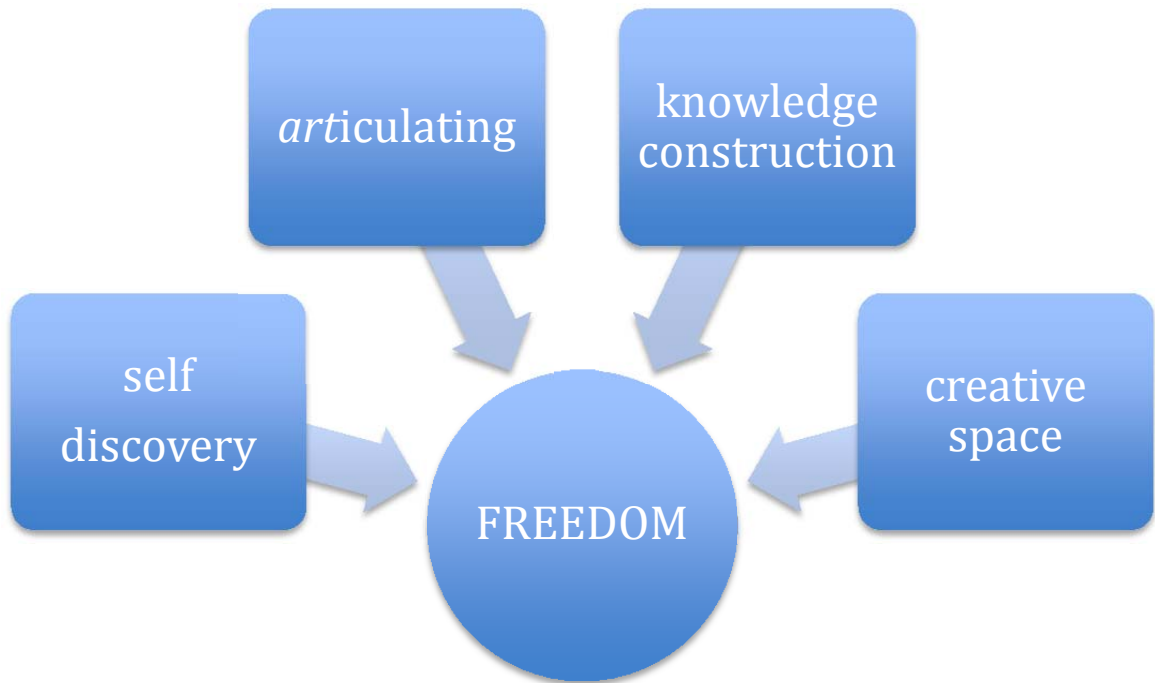
Figure 9. Key points. This figure illustrates the key points that synthesize elements of the creative process discussed in Chapter 5.

"Knowledge construction" is suggestive of various activities and ways of producing knowledge. It includes the ways of knowing in which artists partake to make meaning. Findings suggest artists use the creative process to explore the world around, within, and beyond us, and exercise our senses and minds to make meaning. The creative process is generative in terms of allowing artists to explore the relationships between topics and the broader socio-historical context in order to construct knowledge. Often involving reflective, metacognitive activities that lead toward creation, this underscores how the creative process engages artists in higher level thinking skills.

"*Art*iculating" describes the tension in communicating the story of this research, to likewise express the creative process narrated by artists. The artists told stories of complicating their experiences and of dreaming, enlightenment, knowledge of self,

divinity, and freedom; *art*iculating describes the tension I as the writer feel in synthesizing the study findings and in trying to document, convey, and replicate such deeply felt intangible aspects of the creative process. My writing begs the question: What would a creative curriculum look like?

"Creative space" is suggestive of the overarching context within which the narrated creative process occurs. Though findings suggest that creative space is not always physical space and can be deeply mental, artists also collaborate and "build," or have meaningful dialogue, with others. Artists narrated being able to build connections to communities, and craft counterspaces to some of the challenges within urban settings through use of the creative process.

Artists use the creative process as a method of making meaning toward "self discovery" and acceptance, to finding a balance between layers of identity and consciousness in order to explore one's state of being. Artists tap into self and discover answers to the universe. Findings suggest that artists are able to access their dreams through this process and channel divine messages. Artists feel their purpose is divinely ordained. In this way the creative process produces knowledge and yields freedom, sharing connections with critical race theory and other emancipatory social theories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009; Smith, 1999; Collins, 1998). Knowledge of self, one's relationship and understanding of self, is introduced as the most important relationship in my autoethnographic journal entry above.

Throughout the study we artists performed metacognitive activities continually—reflecting on activities with which we are very familiar as part of our

approach to the creative process—in order to shed light on what we do as artists. In doing so, we were introspective about what transpires during the creative process. We looked at cognitive and affective processes that are subtle and implicit, so natural to us that we do not often think about them. Our interaction with each other, what poet Carey B. Yancey calls "a dance of sophisticated energy," complicated the creative and research processes as we acted as mirrors for one another allowing for deep reflection, sight, and exposure (C. Yancey, personal communications, 2009-present). This chapter will continue to explore this reflective and metacognitive process using the concepts of photography, such as the role of a camera lens (that filters light and can provide a variety of angles of vision from close up and tight, to far distant and wide), and the processes of light and seeing, as well as the idea of its mirrors as metaphors that help guide the discussion of the study's findings.

For me, it was easy to see how what I do as an artist translates into my role as a researcher whereby the processes are so similar, but the unnatural part of these metacognitive activities has been trying to articulate this process and the discoveries in a linear way, an important glitch that will be further discussed later. I found myself constantly having translation issues and needing a different language with which to communicate this sophisticated analysis narrated by the artists—an approach that troubles what exists. How do I give meaning to my excitement for this study and articulate the dreaming, enlightenment, knowledge of self, divinity, and, freedom emphasized by the artists in this study, that these things are *felt* but exist intangibly? What is the relationship of these elements to our learning and development?

Enter, the artist, the storyteller who is able to relate complex and abstract ideas in such a way that creates stress for audiences, disrupting existing theories and perceptions, allowing them to *feel* the message. Throughout this chapter I attempt to tell the story of the implications of the study's findings—what Black artists narrated about their urban experiences, the role the creative process played in such, and what this means for urban education and research. Follow me through this story; I hope you *feel* me.

Black artists' stories about life and the urban environment at a glance. In this study I referenced *Black experiences* in such a way as not to essentialize, but to place these multifaceted experiences within the context of the phenomenon of the colonial encounter. For example, Robin Kelley (1997) speaks to the hybridity of Black culture as including diverse and contradictory practices and relationships that are complex and historically situated. Patricia Hill Collins writes about intersectionality (1998) as a form of analysis in order to "think through social institutions, organizational structures, patterns of social interactions, and other social practices, with each group encountering a distinctive constellation of experiences based on its placement in hierarchical power relations" (p. 205). I looked at these experiences also as dynamic, fluid, and ongoing within a contemporary context very much influenced by the historical colonial encounter. Thus a critical lens was used to unpack the experiential knowledge of Black artists within the urban environment and to address how knowledge is constructed within and about this context, forming a counter-narrative not only to majoritarian stories but also to traditional research.

The artists in this study, different from other artists in terms of the purpose for which they create, view the urban environment as a physical home and narrated their deep attachment to the space and people. Four of us also discussed our disappointment with the environment and with outsider's perceptions of and responses to it. While one of the artists narrated a much different experience of the space whereas she is not able to identify with the "fuck it" mentality, she narrated that she is able to see how such an attitude results from generations of collective identity crisis. (Some of the people in urban environments have this attitude and likewise this attitude is also evident among the middle class and affluent *toward* the urban context and its people). The artists narrated and demonstrated how they engage the environment through their art forms and education mostly outside of school settings. Though their media varies, these artists all interact with the urban setting using the creative process outlined in this study—producing artifacts that are a creative form of contextual analysis. This level of engagement provokes a response, a desire to record what one sees and theorize around these visual and experiential cues by interpreting the social, historical, and political context and using imagery to capture spoken and unspoken themes. These activities within the creative process are evident in our narratives, and they reflect the term visual stenography (Warsame, 2008), and embody their creative process like the style of Hip Hop. In this study, the artists' stories collaborated to produce visual stenography that focused on their creative process, a looking inward and outward, which forms a counter-story of Black experiences.

The counter-story evident in this research complicates traditional research paradigms and dominant narratives of "toxic urban environments" in that it reveals a knowledge constructed by the artists, shaped by their experiences of education in urban environments, reflecting the various lessons and places in which they learned growing up. Artists acknowledged "toxic" in terms of historical oppression (Burrell, 2010) evident in the symbols, metaphors, and exaggerations that tend to define urban contexts and people, such as the media driven (mis)perceptions of Black people and their communities. They narrated that such measures of self worth are further evident via policies that reinforce inequity and deny opportunities to progress socially and economically. Artists narrated that the toxicity within the urban environment exists along side the richness of the communities that enables the artists to dream. They articulated their belief that in order to access dreams, one's imagination has to be cultivated—creativity nurtured. In a session with Williams, the filmmaker in the study, he and I had a passionate conversation about dreaming in relation to our urban communities and society as a whole. He revealed:

> I think if you wanna lie to people, you put it right in front of them. And I think what you have right now is an environment of false shit. Part of it is that we have to create a better vehicle for us people to dream because a lot of times people aren't dreaming. When you have science fiction, which is our greatest way to dream, right, and you don't have minorities in the future, there's a problem…When you kill the dreamer, you kill the person, the ability to grow to be something different—you kill that dream, you kill them.

Williams' comment makes powerful links to false consciousness. Critical of the educational system in our country in general, Williams said that young people and adults "don't even know how the planet works…the sooner children learn the politics of the globe, the sooner they can see how they can make positive change" (9.15.12). Here, the power of imagination is crucial, and it seems tied to an ability to "see" through the "false shit."

In Williams' reflection, there are traces of critical theory's attention to "false consciousness" and the power of a dominant discourse to shape the way in which oppressed groups think and respond to their oppression. There is also a link to Paulo Freire's work on critical consciousness as a way of *seeing* through the dominant discourse and analyzing the relational and structural conditions in order to achieve personal and social transformation (Freire, 1970/1993). This is evident in the idea of dreaming, of being able to make "thoughts manifest" in order to create "alternate realities." This idea of dreaming can also be linked to other creative efforts historically part of Black cultural nationalism of the 1960's and 70's Black Arts Movement (Kelley, 2002). Robin Kelley reflects on his college studies during which he and his peers were excited with dreams of liberation by the title of Wilson Moses' book *Afrotopia* saying, "We looked back in search of a better future…We dreamed the ancient world as a place of freedom, a picture to imagine what we desired and what was possible" (Kelley, 2002, p. 15). The freedom artists in this study expressed they achieve through dreaming is consistent with Kelley's exploration of dreaming and liberation creatively sought through a reconnection to the past as well as a reimagining of the present. This is the

embodiment of *Sankofa*, the African proverb that speaks to connecting to the past in order to determine one's knowledge of self and direct one's future.

Dreaming is passive when defined as unrealistic and fantasy, but can be powerfully proactive in the sense of indulging in great desires, making dreams a reality. This is suggestive of the power and agency inherent in the creative process. Williams' criticism of the lies evident in the "false shit" also reveal how artists feel education should play a role in the development of critical thought, analysis, citizenship, and agency. In this manner, the study findings suggest great potential in education in relation to the creative process as narrated by these artists.

Artists also spoke to the importance of access to materials and resources that allowed them to create ideally. They narrated a realization that this access to materials and resources that allows for ideal creation is not always afforded in urban school settings. The implications of this finding point to the necessity of providing such developmental arts opportunities through schools. At the same time the artists underscored the value of these developmental arts opportunities outside of schools. This emerged in discussions about not relying solely on institutions to meet the needs of our urban communities. Artists noted that communities must pick up the slack where urban schools fail to meet our developmental needs, again telling stories of the various lessons and places in which they learned.

Artists spoke to the change needed in schools and illustrated the contrast between the testing atmosphere in school versus real genius in creative thought that is not taught in schools. At the heart of their critique is the implication that urban youth

are not being equipped with higher level thinking skills and the opportunities for the application of such. Such skills and opportunities are inherent in a true arts education that teaches the genius of creation, whereby "create" is the highest form of thinking (Armstrong, 2012). Coles, a participating emcee, told the story of removing his 4-yr-old from Head Start due to dietary restrictions. Since then, he has taught his child reading basics and feels his teaching has been far more effective than the school. This not only demonstrates self-determination and the continued ability within urban communities to be self-taught and harness the resolve for education that our ancestors maintained, but also calls into question exactly what is it that our inner city youth are getting a "head start" in (Williams, 2005). Are our institutions of education giving our youth a head start to poor diets and malnourishment of their learning and development? It appears so.

Williams' narrative revealed that though he had grown up in Cleveland, he attended high school in one of the city's more affluent suburbs. When asked if there were differences between the two educational experiences, his response focused on the arts. He simply stated, "They had money." His story points to the implications of inequitable accessibility to quality education and resources, whereby the suburban schools had quality and quantity of a variety of materials unlike the urban schools. Inequity reaches beyond the schools and into the lives of students, as Williams noted in his observation, "It's hard to focus on art when you tryin' to eat." He went on to describe an "assumption of culture" whereby the schools had expectations of college for the suburban students and therefore the arts were encouraged. These differences in resources and expectations have implications related to environmental issues. On the

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surface, when there are such dire struggles with literacy and poverty, it is hard to make

an argument for the arts. However, as this study revealed, the deeper benefits narrated

by the participating artists make a strong case for immersion in their particular approach

to the creative process, which will further be discussed.

In addition to the scarcity of resources for the creative process to be fostered in

schools, there is evidence in the artists' narratives of an absence in classrooms of

cultivating creativity that is indigenous—authentic and organic to the experience of the

Black community. This absence of cultural fluency on the part of educators and the

presence of a curriculum that privileges European artists and Western thought and

history resulted in many of the artists finding their creative process nurtured outside the

school setting.

As a participant, recalling my experience with the arts growing up, my story also

revealed implications of the importance of an arts education outside of the classroom,

whereby my grandmother introduced me to the art of ancient civilizations and

particularly of Egypt to which I could more readily identify as opposed to the majority of

the works at the Cleveland Museum of Art (to which my mom established my affinity

and relationship). My story further revealed the tension that exists within both the arts

and education in terms of cultural relevance and racist notions that set standards of

excellence.

As evidence of the privileging of Western ideas and European art in urban

schools, my story highlighted how when I finally felt culturally validated by exploring the

art of ancient Egypt in an academic setting, racism prevailed and once again taught me

that my culture was sub-standard in comparison to what my teacher called the master

works of enlightenment evident in European Renaissance art. These ideas, presented

separate from historical evidence of Moorish influence on the European culture,

ushering these countries out of their dark ages (Nasheed, 2011), point to the need for

more culturally relevant methods of teaching. Echoing study findings, the idea of

ancient Egyptian art presented separate from a critical lens that would question how

such accomplishments were achieved without the use of modern technology, also

supports the need for critical methods that tie lessons to a broader conversation that

considers sociopolitical and historical perspectives.

My first encounter with my own culture in an academic environment reinforced

the not-so-hidden messages with which I was inundated that Western, European, and

White were supreme and African, Black, and "others" were primitive, backwards, and

sub-standard, which implicates the need for a method to sift through such damaging

programming. As narrated by the study's participants, the arts allow them to "make

connections" to materials taught in schools as well as the institution itself, evidence of

the necessity of cultural validation.

Coleman's story about her level of engagement in learning recalling art in her

schooling provided further evidence for culturally relevant teaching methods. In general

this implication is supported through findings of participants' engagement with

creatively delivered lessons and/or lessons in which they were allowed space to

integrate the arts in their projects. Findings support increased engagement through use

of arts methods, consistent with a PAR study utilizing a storytelling unit focused on the

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transitions students faced as a result of school closure, whereby teachers spoke of increased class attendance and an increase in performance as a result of the storytelling unit (Galletta & jones, 2010, October; jones, 2010, June; Galletta et al., 2011). Findings reveal the following characteristics of engaging classes, lessons, and activities: open dialogue, activity, visual elements, use of popular culture, and multi media presentations and engaging supplements.

These connecting elements, successful in absorbing students in learning, are inherent in the creative process and thus have real implications for arts integration within the curriculum. Given this, there is great potential for integrating creative teaching strategies throughout the curriculum, the use of art as a way of "seeing" concepts through multiple and multi-media presentations, as a way of communicating information, as a way to connect existing information with new information, and as a way to process the experiences students bring to the table. Coleman expressed her plans to translate for others the lessons she has learned from her own educational journey, utilizing such methods for the k-12 setting, noting that there is a need to bring the critical aspect that she learned from the university into the k-12 setting.

What skills would the creative process bring to the curriculum? The skills of observation, analysis, interpretation, and communicating the results of this inquiry are central to the creative process, and also key to academic success. Added to the skills is a layer of culture and history as narrated by the artists. Like our ancestors before us who utilized the arts to act as keepers of oral histories, evident in the cultural work of the griot throughout the continent of Africa, these artists take up that tradition. They

reported that creating is a basic need, from being a duty or responsibility to providing

therapy or relief. Critical to the storytelling, then, is addressing the human condition,

and captivating people in that story while broadening their understanding.

"Just hafta" emerged as a dominant theme reflecting the incessant need to

create as well the spiritual, personal, and social duty to create that was felt by the artists.

Artists illustrated communal and individual dimensions of the creative process within

urban environments. From the stories they shared, the creative process is a salient

element almost inseparable from their experience, so to consider the implications of the

artists' stories, I consider scenarios whereby the creative process is absent from their

experiences of life and urban environments. The next section explores these scenarios

and the suffocation that results from lack of creative opportunities within urban

contexts. In this manner, the artists use art as method for "breathing room."

How do these narratives speak to dimensions of a particular approach to the creative

process and its relation to the urban environment and education?

"What is it about art anyway that we give it so much importance? Artists are respected
by the poor because what they do is an honest way to get out of the slums, using one's
sheer self as the medium; the money earned proof, pure and simple, of the value of that
individual, the artist. The picture a mother's son does in jail that hangs on her wall is
proof that beauty is possible even in the most wretched. And this is a much different idea
than the fancier notion that art is a scam or a rip-off. But you could never explain to
someone who uses God's gift to enslave, that you have used God's gift to be free." –Rene
Ricard[8]

Like Ricard, I was seeking to understand why art is so important, what role does

it have in our experience of life, so in Chapter 2, I turned to the literature. I examined

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[8] Rene Ricard's quote taken from Brant, P. & Allen, J. (Producers), Schnabel, J. (Director). (1996). *Basquiat* [Motion picture]. United States: Miramax Films.

existing studies of the creative process in search of analysis that went beyond its

influence on academic achievement, but these studies did not probe into deeper

relationships and functions within urban environments and schools. Further, a review

of existing literature on urban educational transformation exposed arts and

participatory methods employed in efforts to analyze the urban context, but this

literature was absent theorizing of the creative process within participatory methods. In

this study, attentive to its use of the arts so as to avoid the marginalization of the arts,

artists were able to really unpack *why* they create and what this means for their

experiences of life and urban environments. My task here is to draw from their

narratives and make the important connections to related processes of educating and

engaging in inquiry through research.

"Art as method" is the creative process that emerges from and is informed by its

narrated procedures, results, and roles: (1) "thoughts manifest" - complicating and

reflecting on experiential and external information toward making meaning; (2) an

"artivist aesthetic" – the power and value of the creative process to the artist, audience,

culture, and specifically to communities at the margins and communities of color; (3)

"just hafta" – creating in an urgent, organic fashion for personal, spiritual, and social

reasons; (4) "connecting" – a way of relating complex and layered information to self

and others; (5) "knowing thyself" – creating with a personal frame of reference,

negotiating identity and self-schemas toward self discovery; and (6) "resolution" –

desire to use creative process to affect change in urban education and communities. It

is an indigenous paradigm toward life and achieving freedom of "being," and its

indigenous nature is evident in its relevance, natural origins, and authenticity, emerging from strains of African traditions.

There are a few important terms to be aware of in regards to *art as method*. The unstructured time in which students should be given to allow them to respond to flow and brainstorm free of worry from rules or spelling is what Williams called *structured organics*. This time should be provided regularly in order to build a practice of responding to flow, being deeply absorbed and focused on their task (Shernoff et al., 2003), and a habit of creating and expressing thoughts. It would be ideal to provide this time in a *creative space* which describes, loosely, some elements of the sight of production including, time, physical and mental space, open dialogue, access to materials, sensual stimulation (music, incense or candles for scent, visuals, edible nourishment, resource materials), comfortable work space, and sometimes productive conflict—all of which allow the creative process to occur.

Related to art as a method is *visual stenography*, a form of contextual analysis (Warsame, 2008). The term reflects the Hip Hop culture of its origin and is likewise embraced through *art as method*. Artists narrated that the colorful, entertaining stories told via Hip Hop allow for the expression of Black experiences by those who live it, while at the same time allowing others to connect to some of the details of the stories. Some of the artists reported feeling out of place in academic environments, and all related to being able to connect in various situations through Hip Hop. Connecting via creative elements like *Hip Hop*, which is a dominant cultural expression with African American origins within urban environments, reduces the toxicity of exclusionary structures like

the academic environments of higher education and is an important element of the creative process. In Hip Hop, as in the forms of art narrated by the participating artists, there is an effort to document and interpret the urban experience in relation to social, historical, and political contexts.

It is important to note that Hip Hop is truly a culture that was purely birthed in the Bronx (Hill, 2009). However, when I look at rap and the culture and the rhythm and the style, a lot of what defines Hip Hop is very much African. As David Kirkland notes in a conversation, drawing on our heritage, we tend to learn and express ourselves a certain way, reflecting the oral tradition in music (Gilyard, 2009). I think Hip Hop and African traditions that date back to ancient and the earliest of civilizations is in us, in our genetic pattern. What is lost for Black students in terms of creativity and intellectual growth when these cultural traditions and aesthetics are stripped from the academic settings? How can students learn and express themselves if they are being completely shut out of what comes to them naturally? These questions extend from the k-12 setting to higher education, speaking to my own experience and supported by the findings of this study. What might the creativity narrated by participating artists offer as a source of knowledge generation in research and in education?

Much like the concept of a visual stenographer, characterized by acting as a "hood reporter" of sorts in *efforts to analyze and theorize around visual and experiential cues, interpreting context and using imagery to capture themes*, artists narrated how they record and act as witnesses, studying humanity. In their narratives they note that there is an empathetic aspect to their process. They expressed that they want the

stories they tell to be relevant to the human condition broadly and told in such a way

that people can relate to and understand the message being channeled through them.

By combining the study of humanity with their divine talent, these artists narrated being

experts on communicating the nuances of human experiences. In expressing the steps

of their approach to the creative process, observation is foundational and motivates

their brainstorming, reflection, and "figuring things out" as a form of interpretation and

meaning making.

Findings suggest that artists' use of abstraction, exaggeration, symbolism, and

metaphor is more than technique that is reflective of the style of Hip Hop; it also

demonstrates how artists appropriate and recontextualize elements from their

environment—making new meaning by borrowing elements from a source, rearranging

them, and presenting work that extends or changes the original meaning. Abstraction

exists within urban environments on several planes. On the most fundamental level,

the urban context itself is socially and politically approached as an idea independent of

the complexity of its attributes and people. For example, which will be discussed later,

is a "bleaching process" or the tendency to associate interchangeably "urban" with

"Black" and negative qualities like ghetto, poverty, and crime—all of which are ironically

considered independent of the historic legacy of slavery manifest via policies, actions,

and attitudes. Also ironic is the tendency to consider poverty and crime in isolation

from the rest of society, as if these ills are separated from and/or do not affect other

spaces and populations; popular perception of such is exaggerated in and symbolizes

the urban context. Through art as a method of inquiry, these factors are deeply

contextualized, rooted in experiences but also in conversation with broader contexts.

The urban context in popular perception is filled with exaggerations of violence,

poverty, sexuality, masculinity, "Blackness," deviant drug use, and desolation (Kelley,

1997). "Blackness" exists in popular perception as a static and homogeneous

exaggerated persona, which equates to being ignorant, unprofessional, unintelligent,

inarticulate, exotic, over-sexed, poor, flashy, the opposite of beauty, loud, sub-standard,

sub-culture, thugged out with hair weaves, hoodies, and sagging pants. Some concrete

renderings of the everyday lived experience of people of color living in poor

neighborhoods exist within urban environments that support these abstractions and

exaggerations. With the critical analysis that is central in art as method, however, these

renderings emerge more accurately as symbols of exclusion, marginalization, and

toxicity.

For example, there is often an overwhelming police presence in urban

neighborhoods. These same neighborhoods have been some of the hardest hit by the

foreclosure crisis resulting in dilapidated properties and abandoned buildings spray

painted with warnings of "danger," "condemned," and "no copper". Sometimes located

near factories that emit pollutants, these neighborhoods can also be littered with trash.

The neighborhood schools are also often dilapidated and performing poorly. There is

easy access to guns and drugs as well as liquor stores. In contrast, one is hard pressed

to find bookstores, coffee shops, museums, and fresh foods in these same

neighborhoods.

All of these every day events and lived experience, situated in critical analysis as evident in the creative process, serve as symbols and teach lessons, sending messages of society's lack of value for these neighborhoods and of assumptions that those in the neighborhoods have no values. Based on these overt messages, perceptions of these spaces and the people in these spaces are manipulated and controlled—emphasized via media propaganda, which has the potential to be internalized as urban youth and peoples sometimes try to imitate these images. Much to our detriment we have the tendency to embrace these exaggerated personas. For individuals in these spaces, there is a high risk for the self-fulfilling prophecy of poor self-image and academic underperformance, stifled development, and exaggerated behaviors that imitate the media portrayed urban personas. However, as a method toward knowledge of self, study findings suggest art is a method that complicates these negative messages and facilitates the making of meaning for the self, to resist being scripted into someone else's perception, story, and history.

Without this creative process, artists and other urbanites would need to come up with other ways of knowing and dreaming. Alternative methods would be needed to create solutions to pressing personal and social issues. In the absence of art as a method, other paradigms toward negotiating life and achieving freedom for artists and people in urban environments would be needed, possibly models less natural, relevant, and authentic to their experience than the creative process. Through the narrated creative process, artists resist susceptibility to be written out of history and/or have someone else telling their stories, which may not reflect the perspective or accuracy of

the whole story. Again referencing dreaming, the artists narrated that the creative

process allows them to participate in this other form of freedom. Of this very active

means of self-determination, Coles advised, "Don't let nobody sell you their dreams."

Too often, I believe, we as people of African origin have allowed our struggle to be

defined for us— from civil rights, to equal rights, education, etc.— when maybe the

struggle is knowledge of self. The next section explores the implications for unpacking

knowledge of self along with the other key points within the roles of the creative

process in artists' experiences of life and the urban environment.

Bleaching the curriculum: The creative process and urban schools. *It's like they take so much out of it that it's not even **art** anymore. It's not…It's like they fuckin' bleached us, so now we're not Black! Do you know what I mean? It's like they stripped us of all the fuckin' elements that are important to our experience, and they fuckin' bleached that shit. So now we're not lookin at Black kids, we're lookin at "urban" youth and ignoring poverty, and ignoring history, and ignoring the shit that recreates the position. Right? So if you do that same exact process—the stripping, the rapping process—to creativity… then it's not creativity anymore. It's regurgitation. It's repetitive and memorization….We talk about all these connections and connecting points and …being able to make that connection and communication with yourself through the artistic process, because that's why it's important… We're looking for this spark in all these places and its controlled. Art is important to creating your own points of recognition and then you're structuring your own identity; it's kinda to dig into self.[9]* vj 10.25.10*

My autoethnographic entry illustrates a stripping process that is occurring in

terms of what is happening in the curricula of schools simultaneously with the way in

which we talk about the effect of this on Black students. I start by trying to articulate

the removal of the arts in a sense of authentic arts education that allows for exploration

and meaning making as opposed to providing students with coloring sheets and crayons.

I then link the removal of the arts to the discourse around public and "urban" education,

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[9] jones, v. (2010). Autoethnographic journal entry with quoted material dated October 25, 2010.

whereby problems are discussed without the use of ethnic identifiers, as if we no longer

wish to acknowledge the issues surrounding the education of our Black citizens. These

two situations complement one another whereby urban education and its discourse is

"bleaching" us, removing the elements of who we are while art, as findings suggest, is a

process, consisting of re-cognition that has potential to get back to the elements of who

we are. "Bleaching" is a process that extends beyond urban education and into the

classrooms of even the most affluent settings, which privileges particular curricula and

educational structures with harmful consequences for Black students (Fine, Anand,

Jordan, & Sherman, 2000; Galletta &Cross, 2007). If bleaching is a form of desensitizing

us to our experiences and realities, which artists narrated as part of their experience in

schools, the creative process provides an emancipatory alternative that opens us up to

details allowing us to make meaning from our experiences as well as critical knowledge

of self. The creative process reinserts a context, a history, and a greater sense of self.

How do we step away from what Coleman called the "technocratic society" we

have created and (re)connect to our natural instincts and original creation, value this

and share it with young people? Reflecting throughout this research process, I have

been wondering *how* to teach young people to open up like the aperture of a camera,

letting in the maximum amount of light, in order to focus on and learn from the details

of their experiences. How to teach them to also stop down, closing the aperture to filter

out some of that light, bringing into detail background information and focus on a larger

depth of field, processing contextual information and relationships in terms of their

experiences? How to teach them that knowledge of self is critical to survival on a basic

level? How to teach them to *see* and thus a different way of *knowing*? How to

successfully, efficiently translate into education parts of the creative process, specifically

the critical thinking skills and reflection, that can be useful in training young people to

see, think, and navigate life as narrated by participating artists? My challenge is

articulating how to translate this conceptualization of art as a method, in essence a

paradigm, into a practical education.

Current reform efforts in urban education involve pushing STEM education,

which utilizes arts methods to problem solve but without providing students with any

arts instruction or experience. Reflecting on this, I ponder the possibilities for more

successful efforts, "What if the new initiative focused on Math, Science and Art?!"

(jones, 11.14.10; note there is movement in curriculum development in this direction, as

evident in the STEAM School Initiative, see www.steamedu.com). The study's findings

have implications for the use of a "creative curriculum" of sorts. My use of "of sorts" is

deliberate in that some artists felt capturing the creative process in any kind of

curriculum guide or blueprint would not be possible (and might taint it). Nevertheless,

since participating artists narrated that they sometimes accidently discover genius,

might not a blueprint to their creative process infused into education deliberately

encourage the development of genius? This supports African American poet Carey B.

Yancey's appeal for his people to "be intelligent on purpose."

In schools we currently focus on teaching to the test, yet our youth are still

failing and our country is globally falling behind academically. In a session with Coles I

noted that "you can get straight A's and be on the Honor Roll and not know how to

read—*but you know how to follow directions*" (with Coles' assertion italicized). The purpose of institutional education from the experience of this study's participants seems to be focused on conformity, which is counter to the principles and ideas on which America was founded. Because as Coles put it, "man knows naught by being told," the study suggests a different approach to teaching and learning, whereby art allows one to explore things. We should teach using the creative process to evolve, as individuals, a people, a humanity. This is what I want my people to get out of this research. Based on the study's findings (the information that I gathered with my participants of what the creative process does for them and means to them from urban and Black perspectives) there are implications for how a creative curriculum would promote such desirable outcomes.

While the study underscores the role of a method that is authentic and organic to youth of color in the urban environment, and the need to take education into our own hands, driven by a vision for self and community, there is also a point of concern that we should work within the system that we now have. A possible solution is a curriculum that teaches the creative process for self and community development. Such a curriculum would utilize the multi-media learning styles of the technological information age in which we live. This would engage young people in a familiar and natural way to how they learn, utilizing an arts integrated approach—applying social lessons from history, even from a commerce standpoint, and what we as artists have learned from our own experiences—to blueprint a strategy, a way to think and see critically and approach life situations, a holistic approach to education.

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For example, unstructured time, or what Williams called "structured organics" is helpful for getting thoughts out of one's head and toward the production of a creative work. Students could benefit from classroom time in which they are allowed to brainstorm without the worry of the technical aspects of writing or any other form of expression, harnessing flow through concentration, interest, and enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Particularly for those who struggle with writing, it may be helpful for them to simply write in order to develop less reluctance toward writing and grow in their comfort level with the activity of writing before introducing structure into the activity.

The artists narrated that "structured organics" also allows them to confront emotions that just come out when they are responding to flow. Since artists narrated that part of their experience in urban environments included needing an outlet for energy and emotions, this is particularly a benefit for youth who may need a release for some of the emotions that they deal with but have no constructive means of doing so. The flow narrated by artists also includes dialogue, talking it out, and freestyling (a form of rapping with no preplanned structure or lyrics, whereby emcees allow themselves to feel the beat of the music and/or the rhythm created by language and start to rap with the beat, taking cues visually, from their mind, or from words or objects suggested to them). This speaks to the artists' narrative of "unlearning" inhibition and their notion of "missing shit" when going through the motions of thoughtless routine. In discussing their understanding of what they have learned about themselves and their art, some of

which appeared to be enhanced by their participation in this research, the presence of metacognition is evident within the creative process.

Connecting this work to best practices in classrooms would involve taking what we know to work from child development and learning processes (Brofenbrenner, 1979; Cohen & Kim, 1999; Case, 1996) and using this in combination with an arts integrated approach (Lowenfeld, 1947; Bates, 2000). The study's findings suggest that certain elements—like pattern, rhythm, rhyme, and repetition, and the creativity of the presentation—are effective dimensions of the creative process that could easily translate into classrooms *and* communities. The creative process translates seamlessly into communities as a method to educate and raise awareness about issues and topics relevant to society as a whole and specifically within urban communities. The creative process allows artists to reach vast audiences without taking a soapbox approach to spreading a message.

Further implications for learning and development are evident in the ways in which the narrated creative process complicates the stages of artistic development as outlined by Viktor Lowenfeld (1947). While these stages are specifically related to art, they are also metaphoric to how the artists in this study explore their social context and create toward their experiences. Lowenfeld's work details children's developing awareness of their physical environment, and provides a reference point into the similar nature through which artists express their awareness of their social environment.

At the stage of artistic development called the "Crisis of Realism," children are more aware of the details in their environment, and at the same time, aware of their

ability to depict what they see. At the crisis stage within the creative process artists are metaphorically confronting all of the context stuff around them and their environment, trying to figure out the various relationships and who they are in these relationships, working through it creatively so that they can make sense of the context, generate meaning, and create toward what they have processed. (As a researcher in this study, I also face the crisis stage, complicating context, experiences, relationships, and meaning toward the production of this dissertation.)

Once they have gone through this process, which at Lowenfeld's Crisis stage is most critical, and produced work thus reflective, artists emerge from Crisis and progress to the next stage. Lowenfeld's next stage is called "Pseudo Realism." In this last and final stage, the artists can make the work, the environment, and these relationships into what they want it to be and what they think it should be (Lowenfeld, 1947). In this stage the process is less important than the final image, where artists create what they want to see; in relation to this study artists construct alternate realities as a form of activism, making thoughts manifest in this stage.

Pushing beyond Lowenfeld's Crisis stage and into Pseudo Realism, these artists who have different crafts narrated that one of the things they get from their creative process is an inspiration to create alternate realities, but in order for them to do this, certain conditions need to exist to foster the kind of thinking necessary to create these alternate realities. The "creative high" is indicative of art as a form of activism through the literal action and energy exchanged when creating and sharing (jones, 2010, June). This feeling of euphoria is also related to the exploration through art of spirituality,

metacognition, meditation, elevation, and knowing thyself—is this where freedom

exists? In the space created by artistic expression and connection to the Universal

Language and intersection with spirituality? Writer John Updike, illustrates this concept

saying, "What art offers is space—a certain breathing room for the spirit"

(Neighborhood Connections, 2011, "Arts & Culture").

Findings suggest the creative process functions as a sort of counterspace to

some of the challenges within the urban context where one might feel politically and

socially disconnected from the broader society, by providing artists a means of

communication, expression, freedom, and forming social connections. Artists told

stories of their experiences of the authoritative hierarchy within urban educational

institutions and neighborhoods whereby those with or in power (teachers,

administrators, police, parents) exercised such by suppressing and/or repressing the

expression of others to "maintain order" particularly in instances of disagreement with

the authority.

My experience of teaching supports the study's findings. My classroom, the art

room, served to counteract this hierarchy—"bad kids" would flock to my room,

sometimes skipping out on other classes to come and just sit, as if they were more

comfortable in the art room even when they were not creating art per se. What they

were creating was space, breathing room, freedom within a space where they felt

trapped and suppressed. The findings suggest that the creative process allows artists to

forge connections between people and carve out spaces where our voices are heard,

where we feel the freedom to express the meanings we have made from our experiences.

There is something about the genius loci of the space that allows the creative expression/exploration to happen and there is a need to understand and replicate that space. Creative spaces are not always physical spaces. For example, artists acknowledged the importance of risk taking within the creative process, the experimental aspect that requires a freedom to explore, make mistakes, and try different techniques when creating. Such a space includes access to time, materials, and constructive feedback.

Findings also suggest that "creative space" is a non-structured space of open dialogue, connecting, building, risk taking, making mistakes, and exchange—where conflict and tension are allowed to surface to lead toward understanding. It also allows for teaching and learning, constructing knowledge, the exploration of relationships, and building communities. The creative space acts like an outlet or escape, and enables one to meditate, dream, and work toward resolution or solution to pressing issues. This is exactly what happened within this study's interview sessions with participating artists.

The process itself involves some level of stress, in addition to any stress that may be inherent within its focus or topic, the release of which is part of the troubling process. While it may be a challenge for schools to allow this process to emerge, such is accomplished through authentic open discussions, meaningful curriculum, skilled teaching, and nurturing relationships. These elements were demonstrated in a PAR study involving youth in storytelling activities around school closure whereby exploring

the strong emotions attached to these memories was viewed as opening up "old wounds" by administrators. The project truly allowed students to make sense of their experiences and in turn offered critical information to discussion on school closure (Galletta & jones, 2010, October; jones, 2010, June; Galletta et al., 2011). This study supports these findings.

Fostering such spaces in schools allow for deep exploration, dialogue, and meaning making. It also requires a willingness to allow for difference and conflict. In this manner, the creative space reflects elements of what Pratt (1991) conceptualizes as the contact zone and what Maria Torre theorizes as a means of knowledge generation and emancipation (Torre et al., 2008). Consistent with existing studies, creative space is a site of reproduction, resistance, and learning—where one may not always be among like-minded people and the presence of difference creates productive conflict.

In conducting this research it has become more clear the challenge for youth in a toxic urban environment. Where within the "hood" are young people able to experience productive conflict? To access flow, take the necessary time to record their thoughts, make sense of their thoughts? Where might they practice and develop a ritual of writing, make a daily habit of writing, as part of something to which they can engage in such a way meaningful to them? Findings suggest that while such an approach is absent from institutions of education in urban settings, its potential within such spaces is great especially when backed by the support for this approach that exists elsewhere throughout the hood. The next section explicates the breathing room this particular approach to the creative process provides in the lives of artists.

"Being heard is like breathing" (Coleman): The creative process in the lives of

Black artists. From the pleasure of creating, to escape, to an outlet for energy that does

not transfer otherwise, responding to some compelling nature—the feeling of being

destined to create as a divine assignment—this section explores the implications of the

roles the creative process plays in the lives of artists. The participating artists explored

their use of the creative process as an approach to living, an indigenous paradigm,

whereby artists interact with divinity and their environment to make meaning and

interpretations for themselves and others. Immersion in this natural element, creating

and sharing stories in a sort of transactional energy exchange, allows them a certain

freedom.

If as Coleman reflected, "being heard is like breathing," the consequences of not

being heard or of not breathing imply suffocation, cutting off one's access to air or a

form of oppression. As a member of a historically oppressed group of people, my mind

instantly connects oppression to slavery. In one of Cole's autoethnographic entries, an

excerpt of which opens Chapter 4, he detailed his observation of the mental

enslavement of our people. He talked about not using our brains to capacity and being

distracted by illusions, such as money and materialism that are so deeply embedded in

our way of life that we are programmed to pursue trifles. As findings suggest, the

creative process encourages critical thought (Guishard, 2008) and engagement with life

whereby artists reported it allows them to "break the monotony of routine" in which we

are susceptible to programming and to "go through the motions" without thinking.

Coles' entry is an example of his consideration of the themes that emerged from this

study as well as an example of the metacognitive activities within this study (Armstrong, 2012).

Coles reflected that in general, people are not free to be in natural state of being—free to experience life without the hindrance of social identifiers. He claimed that resulting from this form of slavery is an inability to make "thoughts manifest" as well as a diminished capacity to be self sufficient, self governed, balanced, and in tune with nature. The creative process as narrated by the artists in this study is a way to sustain life (like breathing) and to resist oppression (that might get in the way of sustaining life) through the exercise of thought and the mastery of aspects of self.

Continuing the conversation of being heard, participating emcee Coles reflected that the presence of corny (trite and lame) rappers is due to the fact that "so many people are not heard." Study suggests that, as Coles explained, "The shit that we're hearing doesn't resemble our story, though everybody rapping isn't trying to tell our story, [they *are*] telling a story. Some of these stories mimic and parrot the dominant narrative of the urban environment." As previously discussed, Hip Hop is a culture and means of expression with which we, the participating artists and members of our generation, more readily identify. Coles narrated, "We more often than not gravitate toward rap because we're not exposed to a creative curriculum in the classroom in schools, so we seek to satisfy our creativity elsewhere." This finding is connected to the "bleaching" discussed in the opening of this section and provides further implications for art as a method to negotiate life in the urban context.

The creative process allows artists to make meaning of the world around them as well as of their own personal experiences. The theme of "knowing thyself" characterizes this whereby this is an outcome of the creative process related to identity, self-discovery, a personal frame of reference, elevated consciousness, and "being." Participating emcee, Coles referred to his process as a journal. In relationship to existing artists' documentaries and testimonials, this personal exploration provided by the creative process is similar to what filmmaker Eliaichi Kimaro spoke about at the *Carried Away by Visions of the Homeland: African Diaspora Filmmakers Panel* held at Cleveland State University during the 36th Annual Cleveland International Film Festival. Kimaro said:

> What I found was, the more personal I got in that exploration, the more other people have been able to connect with that story and that journey and that wanting to understand where we come from and what are the stories we've inherited and what are we passing down…through the personal, I've sorta plugged into the more universal quest for understanding…my own Black experience (2012).

Kimaro's statement not only reflects the personal nature of the creative process, but also supports the findings from this study, speaking to connecting to self, history, and audiences. In addition, this study suggests that validation results from this connection to the greater human story. Similarly, another filmmaker on the panel, Terence Nance commented on the personal nature of his work that "speaks to the reality of [his] life, of all the ambiguity." Study findings support that the creative process allows artists to

make sense of their complex experiences.

This contemplation of self and social context is a precursor for heightened critical consciousness (Guishard, 2008). As such, the creative process could play a role in social agitation through "the kind of trouble caused by a good art education [resulting] in change, change in the way students think, change in the way they behave, and specifically a change of mind leading to creative action" (Freedman, 2007, p. 205). It is this sort of *art as troubling* approach artists use to "trouble" experiences and divine messages to shift perceptions of knowledge construction, realities, and identities and ultimately toward resolution through the preservation of self, culture, and history. Artists attest to being able to connect to the larger human story via knowledge of self, history, and direct lineage to our ancestors. Coles explained that by knowing thyself, one is able to recognize not only the divine source of creativity or afflatus, but also one's own divinity. In this way, artists narrate art as a method toward freedom.

The creative process was found to have physical benefits for the artists, as a means to shift energy. The artists reported a basic level of pleasure from creating, consistent with Lowenfeld's theory of artistic development whereby the first stage, *scribble stage*, is categorized by the enjoyment in mark making (Lowenfeld, 1947). Extending this notion of pleasure in mark making, the findings illustrate that the creative process is cathartic in a sense that it allows for a release of energy that builds inside artists. In such a way, the creative process acts as an outlet or a form of escape. This is supportive of Piaget's notion of equilibration—the creative process as a vehicle through which the artist not only connects with the larger audience but also resolves his or her

inner conflict over his or her state of existence (Cohen & Kim, 1999).

As evidence of this generative nature of the creative process, of art as a method of research and/or discovery, findings suggest that the objective is not just to get a message across to others, a task similar to that of a researcher's, but to also make meaning for oneself. This has implications of agency, whereby the individual artist processes, engages, and moves an idea forward. One of the filmmakers on the panel at CSU, Ava DuVernay, who described the process of creating a film about being in one space for an extended period of time with her aunt who was battling cancer as a way of "meditating on that time." Supporting this, the creative process allows for a dynamic conversation with self, when one is either concentrating or not conscious and reflecting on something and piecing together the existing information with new thoughts or solutions. This allows one to accomplish things, take and make actions. She stressed the importance of going beyond *just* telling the story by saying that there is a need to "take care with the image and not just tell the story." The social responsibility felt by artists to be moral and relevant with their work supports DuVernay's expressed need to "take care" with the images produced by artists, the implications of the power of the creative process to control and dictate perceptions that will also be discussed.

Further in terms of being generative, making meaning, is that the creative process acts as a discipline for the mind. As revealed in the theme "just hafta," there is an urgency to create that precedes a "quieting of the mind" achieved by artists via the creative process. Like a form of meditation, the process creates focus, a way to streamline thoughts making them more linear, and take abstract ideas and turn them

into action, products. Like with meditation, these artists narrated that part of their creative process involves listening to the heart (Coelho, 1988). As previously discussed, the personal nature of the creative process allows artists to understand their spiritual selves. As one of the participating emcee's, Prosper put it, "what you seek is within you" and the creative process allows artists to go within and discover and create answers. This implicates a different way of knowing, speaking to tapping into a divine channel.

An autoethnographic journal entry of mine serves as evidence of a different way of knowing. It is also evidence of the metacognitive reflection within the creative process that mirrors research processes:

> Maybe I process information in such a way that I feel it before I understand it, like the only way I'm able to point shit out situationally is when the situation arises that explains what I'd been feeling and not able to express…like was I reacting to an outcome and couldn't pinpoint it? (12.29.10).

Personally, I experienced a series of epiphanies in relation to the study's thematic web that began to emerge for what I had been creating (an autobiographically influenced short story, a painting, this research model). Some of these epiphanies even preceded the study's analysis, which was when participants and I began to complicate the concepts from the study. The concepts revealed began to resemble existing theories. These concepts included layers of existence as complicated in my creative non-fiction piece entitled *Herstory*, in my painting inspired by the Bible story of Lot's Wife, and in my research, as well as teachings of truths (evident in meditation and "knowing thyself") from major religions and philosophical thought. Since I actually had no previous

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interaction or exposure to such, my personal revelations correlate with what artists

narrated and contribute to the implications of this study's theory. Rather than the

study's revelations being redundant, my journey toward discovery models a different

way of knowing consistent with how the study exposes such as a contribution to

theory—the remembering my participants talked about.

Findings on the creative process as narrated by artists reflect notions of

spirituality and religion. This is further evident when looking at the etymology of the

word religion, which in root stems from "to reconnect." It demonstrates a form of

theosophy or knowledge of God achieved through direct intuition and individual

relations. In addition to the divine origin of the creative process and source for some of

its inspiration, findings also suggest that making this connection and creating is a form

of worship. Beyond the energy exchanged when singing, for example, being much like

vocalization and prayer, participating artists narrated that through the creative process

they honor the Creator. In addition they honor ancestors by upholding the tradition of

storytelling, carrying out this legacy. The creative process has implications for art is an

indigenous method to gain ascension of consciousness beyond our physical realm and

likewise produce "alternate realities" that connect our physical realm to higher planes in

the stories told through their art. In this way it also implicates cultural and personal

preservation, this reported sense of responsibility similar to that of a griot and their duty

to share stories with others.

The implications for personal preservation are evident in laws of attraction. As

part of further analysis of the organic nature of the creative process and its ability to

make connections—drawing in what you need from around you, from the environment in order to feed the message, what it is you are supposed to be doing, how you are to survive. This is directly related to animal instincts and creation within our natural environment, how our senses are triggered and send information to our brains. This relates to the previously discussed implications for deducing knowledge from creation. These concepts are evident in my autoethnographic reflection:

> Animals sense when a mate is fit to assist in carrying out reproduction and protection of the unit, the family, the social group which also shares genetics that must be passed on for the survival of the species. [This is similar to] gut reactions, instincts, omens, déjà vu all as guides that we are on the correct path to which one needs be open to learn from the journey, preservation. This story of preservation needs to be told. The example is just as much needed as the restoration of our identity. This story could act as a survival guide of sorts for the younger and next generations (12.29.10).

Suggestive of preservation, art as a method toward life in regards to a survival tactic, this is all drawn from the theme "thoughts manifest" and relevant to its procedures of complicating internal information and producing toward such musings.

Artists use the creative process as a method of making meaning toward self discovery and acceptance, to finding a balance between layers of identity and consciousness in order to unpack one's state of being. The consequences for a lack of method toward knowledge of self, I would argue, are evident in all the negative affects from the legacy of slavery that currently plague our people and communities—high

crime, deviant drug and sexual behaviors, depression and suicide rates, poor academic

performance, over labeling of learning and behavioral disorders, and unhealthy racial

identities. Through the narrated creative process, artists connect with their personal

divinity and history, each individual's personal legacy of freedom. A disconnect in this

area would put one at a loss for how to negotiate life. In this way, the study finds the

creative process is a means toward personal preservation. The next section explores art

as a method of cultural preservation.

Preservation: Implications of the roles of the creative process in urban

communities. The study has further implications for preservation in regards to culture.

Findings suggest the agentic power of the creative process that allows Black people to

control and define their identity culturally, historically, and intellectually. In this way the

artists demonstrate such self-determination through the creative process, which

likewise acts as a means to avoid exploitation. These urban artists as artists of color

reported that they feel a greater responsibility to change than does the "mainstream"

artist.

In regards to issues important to our communities, art is a method of activism in

which education is a critical component. The creative process allows artists to create

change in the way in which people of African descent are portrayed by the media, to

"create intellectual properties that integrate education, technology, and culture"

(Prosper). The creative process allows artists a means not only to make meaning in a

communal, collaborative sense with dialogue, but also to share meaning and thus

educate others. This once again reflects the traditional role of storytelling in African cultures.

Reflecting the role of an indigenous paradigm, like the key finding of this study, Coles questioned, "Why can't we apply our gravitation toward rap and hip hop to other areas of our life?" He continued to explain, during an "In Between" reflection:

Hip Hop is a culture and [rap is] the language of the culture. That's the way we talk to each other, the way we tell our stories, through oral tradition and rhythm because we're African. That's how we do it—it's not a bad thing either because a lot of stuff is being told through the music. Even the rappers that lie are revealing stuff that's wrong in our communities, painting pictures of some bad situations. Whatever they create in their mind is something that has put them outside of reality…The gift that man has is that we can use our minds to put us elsewhere and that's what people do. When they create, even in raps, they tell stories that say they don't have this shit, but they want it, so they talk about it. They can dream about it because in their mind they got it and it shows you the state that people are in. When you hear what the wants are, then you start to think about—*[Holy shit! We in trouble!]* Exactly. It's like, damn that's what you want?! (my comments in italics).

In further regards to being generative in meaning making, art is a method toward making connections and increasing exposure in urban environments. In this way, supportive of Seller's notion of identity congruence and the facilitation of the sharing process for students of color, Hip Hop in particular acts as a form of street reporting.

Connecting via creative elements like Hip Hop, which is a dominant cultural

expression with African American origins within urban environments, reduces the

toxicity of exclusionary structures like the academic environments of higher education

and further emphasizes the aforementioned implication for culturally relevant teaching

methods. Stories told via hip hop allow for the expression of Black experiences by those

who live it, while at the same time allowing others to connect to some of the details of

the stories. Implications for the agency of communicating stories (part of the previously

discussed role as griot) are evident in the themes "just hafta" and "connecting" whereby

artists narrated the use of the creative process to resist individualism and separation

and to encourage dialogue around important social issues and build communities. The

creative process crafts critical spaces in which to complicate such issues and likewise the

artists' resolve to (re)address perceptions of our communities and people.

Further regarding issues within our urban communities, the creative process acts

as a buffer, a sort of coping mechanism for artists and within the urban context it plays

the role of creating alternate realities. These findings support the agency of artists

telling stories and creating images from the inside perspective as a means to provide

relief from the inundation with majoritarian representations that contradict their

realities and create dehumanizing stories (Jones, A., 2010). This demonstrates the

dilemma presented by Wa Thiongo that, "our capacity to confront the world creatively

is dependent on how [socially constructed] images [of struggles with nature and

nurture] correspond or not to that reality, how they distort or clarify the reality of our

struggles" (wa Thiongo, 1987, p. 15).

Through the creative process artists construct alternate realities in response to and as a reflection of environmental and sensual stimuli from the perspective of those living at social margins, and thus perform a contextual analysis as a form of activism. They described the importance of "being able to have space" to create (Coles). They draw meaning from their engagement with their environment. The creative process is mirrored our interaction in sessions, creating an alternate reality. Woven through the film supplement to this dissertation is footage of Coleman, the film and digital media student, in her backyard, part of her "creative space." With our natural environment as part of our space, Coleman talked about how young people in urban environments may not have enough exposure to nature.

This finding supports Tracy Lind's assertion (Lind, 2004), in her study of lessons from God, that, "Unfortunately, many children are growing up without any exposure to or experience in the world of nature and are thus not learning nature's wisdom… alienated from the natural world, their natural intuition is thwarted and their natural learning is inhibited" (p. 48). While the implications of the lessons from the Creator were previously discussed, here it is important to note that physical creation has equally important lessons for us as we are all created from the same "star stuff" (Sagan, 1980). By reflecting on and recording these lessons, what they *see* and experience, artists employ a form of visual stenography to document their realities and environment (Warsame, 2008).

While the artists in this study acknowledged that they must consider their audience to a certain extent, especially in regards to the commercial viability of their art,

deeper still remains an innate desire to continue to create. What does this mean in certain situations within the urban context whereby this desire to create is repressed? While this is also pertaining to the artist's livelihood—sustaining one's ability to survive, negotiating art and resources, what about young people who are not afforded the opportunity within schools to develop such a process?

Young people without such creative opportunities will miss out on all the benefits of the creative process as previously discussed in this chapter. Of particular importance is that findings suggest power in "the potential of the art to create individual value and worth, developing a critical mindset and a critical lens" and evidence that "part of the process is allowing you to be confident in that" discovery of true self as well as an ability to critically negotiate the outside world (Williams). The artivist aesthetic, defined by the value, timelessness, and pricelessness of the arts to the artist, audience, and culture and the countermanipulation and control of images to benefit society and communities, specifically within communities at the margins and communities of color has implications of agency in resisting toxicity within the urban environment. This is particularly imperative in regards to the artists' critiques their educational experiences within this context making a case for arts integration and likewise an argument using "artistic talents to fight and struggle against injustice and oppression—by any *medium* necessary" (Asante, 2008, p. 203).

The implications of "access to one's dreams" for the urban context are multi-layered and embedded in the language of access and dreams. Artists cited access, opportunity, funding, resources, and time as determining and often limiting

opportunities and what is creatively possible as opposed to an artist's brilliance; that

success is not always about talent. This story is evident far too often in our urban

communities in a variety of ways. Art agitates by pointing out injustices; part of finding

resolution is in pointing out our commonalities and connecting over issues rather than

dividing. In the chaotic world we live in, peace is troubling the waters of everyday life.

"Resolution" emerged in part of their mission as artists to affect change in our

communities. Though they see the deep connections between art and education, they

narrated that their role in social change is outside of schools using their art as the means.

The next section discussed the role of the creative process in such change with relation

to research.

How can stories produced through this process inform how we conduct research of

urban education toward systemic change?

"The daguerreotype seemed to demand verbal articulation: a written attempt to
understand and sometimes to overcome the representational power of the image"—
Susan Williams[10]

The artists in this study defined their particular approach to the creative process

as a conduit for connections to communication; what they communicate speaks to a

process of reflection and consideration that leads to meaning making that is then

applied to how these artists negotiate life. For a moment consider the comparison of

their narrated process to that of a camera and how to see. Sight is based on finding

points of recognition derived from images in our minds and recovering the information

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[10]Williams, S. (1996). "The Inconstant Daguerreotype": The Narrative of Early Photography.
Narrative, 4(2), 161-174. Retrieved on October 10, 2012 from
http://www.jstor.org/stable/20107080

about these images; a spark of sorts results from connection to and recognition of an image. One of the earliest photographic processes is the daguerreotype, which is known to fine art and photography enthusiasts as a mirror with a memory because it is literally a positive image on a metal support, conceptually consistent with the metaphor for electricity, the conduit and the spark, as well as the narrated transmission of energy within the creative process.

The photographic process of the daguerreotype has limitations: the positive images are unique and cannot be reproduced; the surface was delicate and housed under glass, difficult to view from certain angles; the mirror image of the subject was highly detailed, often revealing unintentional information; and oddly enough it is rare to find a daguerreotype of a Black person, such an object is priceless! The quote within the subtitle here calls for the complication of both the process and the resulting image of the daguerreotype, urging for the linguistic articulation of a representational power that seems beyond words with respect to images of Black people.

When this comparison is extended to images of Black people, one might discover an operation of a collective identity crisis stemming from the legacy of slavery and racism. Within such a construct, positive images of Blacks are unusual, rare, and not readily reproduced, identity is complex and fragile in a sense of being highly susceptible to outside influences, and the essence of our situations within America is difficult to view from certain angles. Recall that sight, based on finding points of recognition derived from images in our minds and recovering the information about these images, results in a spark, making connection through recognition. Now extend this metaphor a

step further to the analysis that happens in research. The images of Blacks have details that often reveal unintentional information and teach overt messages that diminish self worth. Such images create currents to which we cannot easily connect to make a spark.

It would thus seem futile to utilize the daguerreotype to complicate the process, images, and representational power in regards to Black folks. As such, this process is antiquated and limited. In this sense, the daguerreotype acts in much the same way as traditional research paradigms that offer a limited and often distorted angle through which to view the experiences of Blacks. Ghanaian scholar Ephraim Amu proposes that "instead of always borrowing methods from the 'study of the Other'…[the African and Diasporic experience] is now more often studied with endogenous and relevant methods" (Thorsén, 2004, p. 200-201). In support of this call for relevance, the knowledge produced within this study's narrative of process contributes such a method to the field of education.

The artists in this study narrate a process that purposefully reproduces positive images of Black folks, more accurate representations of the complexity of who we are, resistant to definition by others, and places corrective historical and social lenses on our situations within America from the perspective of the subject, those on the inside. The process narrated by these artists has the potential to reveal information purposefully, with the goal of dialogue, enlightenment, and solutions to some of the issues faced by Black people who dwell in urban environments. The process involves mirrors and reflecting, observing, and critically seeing. It creates sparks and allows for points of recognition.

To further the comparison, consider memories both conceptually and literally—historical, personal, and social memories. Parts of certain memories create what I, as a participant in one of the sessions, called "war scars" as proof of past personal trials and triumphs. Like a scar is the physical part of memory, the stories told through art are the proof of what is remembered from experience, and they validate one's existence (Black, 2010). The artists narrated that the creative process is a method toward healing such scars. This is evidence of metacognition at its best within the creative process.

However, what is happening in schools reflects the opposite of nurturing memory and producing healing. In the urban classroom, youth are systematically desensitized to the details of their experiences (see this especially in the instance of school closure, Galletta & jones, 2010, October; jones, 2010, June; Galletta et al., 2011). The creative process narrated by participating artists in this research resembles the photographic process of sensitizing, sensitivity to light, opening up to the details of one's experiences, a different way of *seeing*. It produces narratives that act as critical media to explore relationships for how we negotiate life and historical evidence of Black identity formation (Freedman, 2007; Smallwood, 2007).

The implications for this process of healing memories, through "knowing theyself," "thoughts manifest," and "just hafta," supports existing studies on the psychological healing process (Bletzer, 1998) and speaks to the healing of "the collective identity crisis" affecting people of African descent in America. The theme of "knowing thyself" emerged as an outcome of the creative process. The narrated personal, experiential frame of reference for the creative process defines this theme as a method

toward self-discovery, a state of consciousness, and "being" or our most natural state of existence. With their body as a critical instrument in the creative process, artists explained it is likewise an extension of self and lends to self-discovery and acceptance, to finding a balance between layers of identity and consciousness in order to unpack one's state of being. Coleman spoke eloquently of her body as her main tool in a similar vein to a feminist movement that explores the political and personal nature of women's bodies (Conboy, Medina, & Stanbury, 1997).

In the opening autoethnographic entry, I allude to DuBois's "veil." In complicating the various 'lenses that filter out some of the light' we experience and in contrast the freedom I felt from experiencing "racelessness," my reflection reveals how constructed elements of identity operate, at times intersecting and then sometimes seeming to almost disappear, and inevitably have a critical impact on one's participation in life (DuBois, 1994; Collins, 1998). Moreover in terms of identity, artists narrated that the creative process allows for connection to our divine origins, an en*light*enment that continues to carry the metaphor for sight. It is also important to note that the theme of light threads throughout participants' works (see Izzrael's *SoUlar Musik*, *The Light Show EP*, and his current projects entitled *LightWork* and *SoUlstice*; DProsper's *Merkabah* and he current project released 12.12.12 entitled *ATOM*; my current study and the vision of it for my neighborhood, a project called *Emerald Tablet*).

The theme of "light" and this connection to the Creator also threads through this study as artists revealed the creative process in relation to the story of Creation, theosophy, or the knowledge of God achieved through direct intuition, special relations,

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and ecstasy—much like the feeling of the "creative high"—and in relation to Kabbalah, which includes the purpose to "bring Light" (Bar Yochai, 2007). As a link to the Hip Hop culture, it is interesting to note that the practice of Kabbalah uses esoteric methods including ciphers. If you have ever participated in or witnessed a cipher, a circular freestyle, poetic type of flow created by two or more people performing spoken word, the created energy is undeniable and *felt*!

The voices that resonate with the artists from within and beyond are divine and ancestral. The experiences that inform God come from a place of origin, defined by omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience that allows for the discovery of universal truths. The ancestral voices speak to artists from history and allow for a connection to the rhythms of our past and past lives. These voices, that transcend generations, cultures, time, and space create a shared experience that then informs the creative process. In turn through the narrated creative process, artists construct stories of this journey. The process sheds light on the artists' experiences of the world around, within, and beyond them. What they share with others are the truths from their journeys, some of which form counterstories to the dominant narratives of urban and Black experiences. The counterstories for Black experiences are explored in the following section.

How study informs research of Black experiences. The filmmakers on the panel at CSU as well at the participants in this study note that, as put by filmmaker Ava DuVernay, "Black is definitely part of the stories they tell." Their experiences as Black people in the United States are naturally a part of the stories they tell. Though the

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participants in this study have varying preferences for ethnic identifiers—of African descent, Moorish American, Black, Asiatic, and African American—they adamantly acknowledge the unique affect this category has on experiences. The creative process in this way plays the role of finding balance, sifting through layers of identity and consciousness in order to unpack one's state of being. Artists explore their identity through the sophisticated manner of their artistic process and complicate the ongoing "textures" of their experiences to provide details in their stories, thus avoiding an oversimplification of identity and consciousness, as reflected in the study of Black identity development by William E. Cross, Jr. (1991).

The African *dilemma* is described within the contemporary frame of the colonial encounter and the need for "some kind of restoration of [African] identity" because the context in which we live is filled with "the legacy of European things" and with it the problem of how to re-contextualize the formulation of traditional African identities threatened by the legacy of the institution of slavery within our contemporary context (Thorsén, 2004). While this formulation for analysis of context utilizing the relationship of history and the present speaks volumes to Black experiences in post-colonial, post-slavery America, the creative process—with its use of visual stenography as a form of contextual analysis—supports restoration and reconciliation with mainstream identity through an interrogation of self that sifts through our layers of experience (Thorsén, 2004; Chen, 1996). The stories told by artists provide a window into this process.

Findings suggest the creative space within this research process allowed the artists and I to work through and build from our differences. Above and beyond our

differences, it is important to note that each of our identities was situated in an understanding of self, such that transcends social constructs of race, class, and gender. Such and understanding of self was personally and individually constructed, where yes, social identifiers were acknowledged as affecting experiences and relationships, but moreover each individual's relationship with the Creator leads to a divine understanding of self, as Coleman affirms in the beginning of the film, "I Am." The stories told by artists pose critical questions. Which is more important, the image or the process? Is it more important that you can name or label your experiences than having a process toward understanding them? In this regard, a critical finding from this study, is that through the creative process you can construct what you want, create an *alternate reality*. What is exciting for research is how such an alternate reality was co-constructed in this study. Next is a discussion of how participatory methods allowed for this co-constructed knowledge.

How this work informs participatory research. Connecting back to the "artivist aesthetic," findings suggest the agentic nature of the narrated creative process to make change in individuals, regarding its generative nature to make meaning, form connections, and transfer energy, as well as systemically by starting conversations that point out injustices in our society, and encourage intolerance and ousting of such injustices. This type of dynamic was evident in the study in the interactions between myself and the artists, where energy shifted in artists as they talked about their work, explored the creative process, and became genuinely engaged in contemplation during our sessions. In a similar documentation of the creative process, segments of the

supplemental film, *Art as Method, the Reel: Artists & their counterStory of urban experiences* (GreenHouse Studios, 2012; Appendix C), show this dynamic. Such dynamics have implications for our communities and education and can influence how we conduct research to influence systemic change.

Artists talked about responding to flow and that flow also includes dialogue, talking it out, and freestyling (a form of rapping with no preplanned structure or lyrics, feeling the beat of the music and/or the rhythm created by language, taking visual cues from their mind or from suggested words or objects). This technique was evident in the research process in the context of my participatory methods and allowed for the emergence of co-constructed meaning. Interview sessions were specifically semi-structured in this manner to this as well as allowing for the undirected emergence of participants' stories and themes. This form of flow was further evident during the "In Between" phases of the research when participants and I each literally drew connections between themes which we then took into the next sessions and/or follow up communications during which there was more dialogue around these themes that led to deeper meaning and understanding. This is an example also of achieving further analysis with participants.

This discussion of meaning that reflects the community's knowledge and experiences accurately also has implications for research in terms of processes like "building" that are more participatory, particularly the communal implications for constructing knowledge about the hood. The dialogue and interaction with the artists allowed for each of us to not only act as mirrors, helping each to *see* the other and our

process, but to act as questioners, reflectors, co-constructors, and co-inquirers into

understanding the phenomenon of the creative process. There were times were our

opinions based on our experiences differed, but the research process allowed us to

expand our knowledge based on "building." We offered extensions of ideas,

complicating each other's experiences and knowledge, and coming to points of

agreement and understanding. This supports the Vygotskyian notion of distributed

cognition whereby we created meaning through collaboration with the voices of

knowledgeable others (Kim & Baylor, 2006). Such communal knowledge construction

also creates further investment in a variety of areas: 1) the research process leading

toward solution, 2) in the hood itself, and 3) the stories of the place and its people. This

investment is evident in the study's findings, particularly through the theme of

"resolution."

   Tensions: "Troubling" within, without, and through the creative process. *I've
contemplated how I've tortured myself throughout this dissertation process by trying to
operate in such a way that is so unnatural to me. I'm already feeling out of space and
pressure in this doctoral program, my knowledge, my (co)existence with White
counterparts, constantly scrutinized. My methods, experience, passion, energy, focus
and the information I embody not valid—troubling the institution just by Being…Hours
upon hours, days, weeks, months, and now years I've tried to conform to guidelines,
timelines, bylines, structures, organizations—all these lines that neither fit me nor
complement my shape…all the while drawing in and complicating the knowledge that I
need to complete this work—though this doesn't adhere to the timelines and guidelines.
At times crumbling under this manufactured pressure to perform to someone else's
standards, telling myself "I can't" and all the while Knowing "I can" but internalizing the
feeling that I have or am somehow failing.*
   *"I just can't see the story yet, I can't see the relationships, but I know the story
and the relationships so how do I articulate this if I can't see it yet?" My advisor, so
patient, "It will come—this is part of the process, you know that!" My good friend and
colleague with whom I've taken this journey toward PhD (we've supported each other,
prayed for each other and nurtured each other's energy throughout this process), says to
me, "vj! You got this! You* know *this! Why are trying to* think *and* do this *way, that's not*

the way you think and operate?! You gotta do it your *way—you are brilliant! Just make sense of this stuff visually and then tell the story." Exactly.*

I'd been trying so hard to subscribe to Western driven academia that only my body rebelled against the structure trying to (mis)shape its soul, while my mind lapsed into forgetting how non-linear and "non-traditional" Our thinking and Being, and Knowing Is. So what does this imply for how we conduct research, construct knowledge? If my highly educated, intelligent, experienced, grown ass crumbles under pressures of exclusion, imagine what our children are doing? In fact, you don't have to imagine, observe. Observe how our children identify with learning in schools. Observe how they struggle. Observe how they rebel. Observe how they resist. Observe their resilience trying to fit in with the system that tries to squeeze them through or lets them slip through the cracks.

Even some of the language I've been using and outcomes I've been focusing on seem (mis)guided by Western thought. Like 'systemic change' is the buzzword in educational research, but really we are spinning our wheels (Henig, 2008) trying to transform a system that was conceived to exclude us and produces policies that inevitably support our failure within this system. So why am I so worried with trying to show relevance to educational policy and systemic change when systemic change is 1) not relevant to Our condition, and 2) farfetched at the least? Fuck trying to change the system, we gotta change ourselves and do what we can, control what we can…the system is out of our control. However, by creating change personally, and in small steps, we make ourselves better in order to function and efficiently operate/negotiate the system in which we live.

My basic academic achievement is a form of militant resistance. In creating change in me, I Am. I am resolved to model this ideology, to spread it, my role in creating solutions to some of the issues faced by those in my community. This resolution Is revolution and evolution. This Is Love. Love Is Divine. Love comes from knowledge of self; self is love. As participants remind me: "Divinity just Is" "Art just Is" "Love is everything" "There's no weapon against Love." Knowledge of Self is the linea franca of Love, this the language we as peoples should embrace.

This autoethnographic entry reflects my grappling with the colonial encounter in relation to me as an artist in academia and the structuring of knowledge that may be limiting what we know of experiences. In this way, the entry reflects a counter-story to traditional research methods and perceptions of knowledge construction. If learning and discovery reflect the non-linear iterations of critical and participatory research and inquiry, why must research conform to a linear format? The knowledge produced in the

dynamic process may become lost, muted, or misconstrued in efforts to fit a static translation.

The entry also reflects how art as method complicates the grey areas of experience—the grey space of compositional studies—and reveals the tensions around identity and self schemas in negotiating this space, processing relationships, ways of knowing, and resistance within lived experiences of socio-political history and policies. Findings suggest that not having a healthy and/or accurate sense of identity is an issue in the urban context and the creative process plays a role in discovering knowledge of self. Artists demonstrated how they compose images or create knowledge based on their critical reflection and consideration of elements—context, space, internal and external factors to the subject, the relationships of the elements to one another and the broader image—and that through the creative process they are able to make meaning for themselves and of themselves. Being involved in the development of a sense of self, through the creative process, acts as a buffer to the brainwashing process. In the context at hand, the act of defining self and developing an identity could prevent youth from being misled by dominant images and personas relating to youth of color in poor communities. The study finds that the layer beneath "knowing thyself" is learning everything else that you do not know.

This relates to the data in several ways: 1) unlearning hazardous programming, whereby we have been disconnected from an authentic engagement of self, a natural way in which we learn, that has led us to believe we are sub-standard; 2) art as a method for critically obtaining, analyzing, and creating knowledge; 3) art as a method to

explore and situate experiences within the urban context; 4) art as a method to explore and situate historical and political movements—using the creative process to understand as Williams said, "how the planet works" and how to affect change; and 5) art as an indigenous paradigm toward life and freedom. As noted by another Black artist within the very same community, "The more you know, the less you can be controlled; the less you are controlled, the more freedom you have. The more you're controlled, the more you have to survive; the less you're controlled, the more freedom you have to live" (Black, 2010). Findings suggest art is a method, a means of "breathing" and of being sustained that enables one to move through survival toward freedom—survival mode is bad, free living is good.

Conclusion: Art as Method, an Indigenous Paradigm

The steps and elements of the creative process (see Chapter 4, Figure 8) narrated by the artists describe a process informed by a very specific self-schema (namely, the African American diaspora situated specifically in this place in time in this part of the city in this particular part of the world) that closely resembles the research process: articulating a question (reflecting an idea), collecting information/data on that idea, interpreting those data, communicating what has been learned. Although in some ways the research process is frequently conveyed as a linear process, when it makes use of critical and participatory methods it is often more iterative and halting. In this manner the creative process yields knowledge.

As evidence of this generative nature of the creative process, of art as a method of research and/or inquiry and discovery, findings suggest that the objective is not just

to produce knowledge and get a message across to others, a task similar to that of a researcher's, but to also make meaning for oneself. The natural ways in which artists construct knowledge of their complex, multifaceted experiences heavily influenced by the colonial encounter, and use their craft to define themselves and control images of people of color fits with existing interpretive communities' indigenous paradigms from the perspective of the "outsider" within research (Smith, 1999; Collins, 1998). As noted by Maori scholar and indigenous methods researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), artists "share experiences as peoples who have been subjected to the colonization of their lands and cultures, and the denial of their sovereignty by a colonizing society that has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives, even after it has formally pulled out" (p. 7).

In this study, artists narrated a process of re-cognition, of *seeing* through manufactured distractions, from the perspective of an urgent struggle and survival, and reconnecting to self—a process of self-determination through the recovery of self. The artists narrated art as a method of remembering. Embracing the African proverb/concept of Sankofa, which basically describes the critical importance of looking back to history and having an understanding of one's ancestral past before moving forward into the future, this concept of remembering speaks not only to ancestral connections but also embodies the remembrance of Christ. This speaks to remembering our own divinity as we were made in God's image. The participating artists narrated that through their creative process they are able to connect to themselves, humanity, and the source of all creation using a divine, "Universal Language," and likewise to

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achieve an elevation of consciousness. The goal is freedom.

Furthermore, the creative process allows artists to act as compassionate studiers

of humanity similarly to a qualitative researcher. The stages of artistic development

(Lowenfeld, 1947) apply similarly to social cognitive awareness within our creative

process, reflections of how we are experiencing life and likewise the development of

critical consciousness (Guishard, 2008). Artists reflected on wanting to be able to relate

their messages to the audience in a similar manner to how a researcher guided by

critical theories hopes to convey findings. Both, artists and researchers, want their work

to be relevant to people and society. The group of artists narrated that making creative

choices for them is much like making informed decisions, whereby they narrated

considering not only their expertise, but also what they have gathered from reflecting

on information and how this relates to broader consideration of context and purpose.

These are instances that theoretically connect the use of arts methods with

participatory methods.

Dimensions of the creative process are also evident in the participatory research

process itself as it involved the artists as co-researchers and co-constructors of

knowledge. In this manner, the artists have connected to their own personal learning

process, and mirrored it back to each other. Artists narrated that as much as they do

not think about what they do consciously, they embrace the creative process as a way of

life and a critical thought process that allows them to dissect information and report

their findings.

The study has implications for the expression of truths as understood from an

insider's perspective. Williams professed, "Speaking outward is like paraphrasing the Truth, allows Truth to be heard." In looking at this language in relation to the Black artists' narratives about their experiences in the urban environment, the study finds that the artists' stories paint a more accurate portrait of urban conditions and experiences, which allows for root causes to be identified leading to the resolution of pertinent issues affecting our communities. The creative process engages such meaningful stories, dialogue and knowledge construction within and about these environments. This communal construction of knowledge (Kim & Baylor, 2006) and likewise of apropos solutions speaks to reclaiming the angle of vision and defining the problems from inside the struggle (see Kraft & Furlong, 2007; Sabatier, 2007; Thorsén, 2004).

The artists' stories and the knowledge we produced provide critical details to what is often experienced in urban environments, though overlooked, misunderstood, and/or corrupted by research. Relative to our musings on education and the Black community, a fellow artist, writer Piree Breville made a palpable statement connecting the legacy of slavery and imperialism to our context. Breville said, "What you think, what you feel, what you value" are the results of consorted efforts of media propaganda and product placement that is distracting us from what we should focus on. Through the creative process, artists resist such "distractions from an educated mindset" and use of God-given talents to make an "impact with words, [organically figuring out things, from within using the inner eye, to see what kind of insight can be drawn from that]" (P. Breville, personal communication, April 8, 2012). The creative process utilizes critical

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knowledge seeking and meaning making skills as power toward being self taught and a determination to not only resist but push back against systemic brainwashing (Williams, 2005; Smith, 1999; Burrell, 2010).

Supporting this power of the story, participating artist Prosper illustrated the literal agency of spoken word in relationship to science, whereby word is sound, and sound as a form of energy, equals power. As a participant in one of the sessions, I extended the power of spoken word to Creation, saying, "God spoke things into existence. You know? Let there be light, and there was light." Narrating how the creative process produces manifestations of thoughts, what are the implications for this when thoughts and actions are centered around positive (re)imaginings of urban environments and the people who dwell in these spaces? A collective, concentrated prayer and meditation on change? There is potential for being able to actively create the change we see necessary in our lives and communities.

The creative process allows artists to act as ushers of change, to make thoughts manifest as interpreters of messages that have a divine source. This is believed to lead to revolution via a creative flow deeply rooted in spirituality. Cole's "In Between" reflection dated June 26, 2012 complicates the spiritual aspect within the creative process whereby he asserted, "'Re-ligo' [the Latin root of 'religion'] is to (re)connect consciousness and the divinity and infinity of man's mind. Boundless is to be free and unbound by connecting to the Source via knowing thyself and our connection to divine origin as divine duty, leading to a metaphysical existence."

The artists' stories revealed that the creative process is related to a natural

tendency toward theology and our human instinct to create—to contemplate a power, a

source greater than ourselves and tell stories of this relationship to the world around us.

Creating in a similar fashion to the Creator, we leave our mark in relation to posterity. It

is not only the preservation of story, history, and culture, but also the preservation of

life, where creating is a means of survival. Artists told stories of art as a method of

inquiry and discovery, an indigenous paradigm toward life and freedom via the creative

flow, "knowing thyself," and connecting to our divine origin. Artists narrated art as a

method to achieve freedom, a declaration of independence. As such, the road to

revolution is paved with knowledge of self and creatively crafted bricks.

EPILOGUE

"The work still has to be done. We need to be descriptive about this literacy and map it."
—David E. Kirkland[11]

"Art as method" can potentially answer Kirkland's call for new and indigenous

methods and scholarship to describe our literacy—the ways in which we construct and

express knowledge. Speaking specifically to our colorful and complex language that

we've crafted out of Hip Hop, he notes, "Youth and people in the city are creating

languages of connection and critique and sometimes a language of accommodation"

(Gilyard, 2009, p. 225). Referring to the African proverb that also guided my study, in a

conversation with Keith Gilyard Kirkland speaks of the power of rhetoric wielded

throughout the streets whereby the lions are telling their stories through Hip Hop

(Gilyard, 2009). The study of our language of literacy should also fit us lest meaning be

lost in translations of the oppressor's tongue (Wa Thoingo, 1987). While Hip Hop

provides a space for us to be heard, Solórzano and Yosso (2009) quote Gloria Andalzua's

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[11] Gilyard, K. (2009). Conversation with David E. Kirkland. In V. Taylor (Ed.) *Conversations in cultural rhetoric and composition studies* (pp. 223-243). Aurora, CO: The Davies Group, Publishers.

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call to transform and occupy theorizing space with our own methods. The next steps for the current research involve *art*iculating the design of *art as method*. What does this look like in practice?

In the film that supports this research, I ask participating artists how we take what we've learned about and through our creative process and put it back into the school system. There was some debate as to whether this is possible. Tension seems evident between the creative process as being purely subconscious (and therefore one can't document or produce a guide on it for educational purposes) and the creative process as capable of being conveyed in some way in order to make it replicable in situations, such as classrooms, where it may have been absent. I believe this research in fact eases this tension through its demonstration of the creative process reflected while carrying out the project.

Artists' engagement in this research suggests that there are elements of the creative process that are commonly experienced across the group of participants. There are several things that took place in the research that shed light on the "structured organics" of the creative process in a way the artists may have not thought possible. The "building"—talking through and fleshing out experiences—that took place in the interviews over time created a phenomenological, deep exploration. Critical theorists Phil Carspecken and Michael Apple (1992) and others refer to this as dialogical data generation, which involves "data generation that proceeds through establishing an intensive dialogue between researchers and [participants]" (p. 548). This dialogic engagement with me as another artist also speaks to the importance of shared angle of

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vision and situated standpoint (Collins, 1998). The importance of my role in this relationship—our creative interaction that was generative, spiritual, and reproductive—demonstrates my conceptualization of art as a method of participatory research.

The research demonstrated the need to (re)frame intellectual space to include a more critical discussion of creativity that considers the higher level thinking skills within its processes as well as its intuition. This discussion might also be mirrored by our purposeful creation and use of physical space. In this research, crafting creative spaces through the use of materials and settings (like artwork and studio, neighborhood, and natural green spaces) was conducive to guide and elicit the exploration of process. We used autoethnographic writing—inner and outer reflection and searching which is also part of the creative process—to pursue ongoing and iterative analysis.

The implication exists to outline and perhaps create settings and intentions where such processes may be developed among youth. Derick Prosper, one of the participating emcee's whose marketing company is dedicated to providing students with sciences and arts education gave an example of organizing curriculum around the arts. In Chapter 4, he described a lesson that explored the science of sound and light. Using a hologram demonstration of a popular music artist, he illustrated science and arts concepts toward an understanding also of how humans are physically responsive and attracted to our music and sounds of choice.

Difficulty exists in trying to explain these intangible things that are felt, like speaking things into existence as a form of creating. Such manifestations of thought are tied to the subconscious/spiritual dimension of the creative process. As such, the

research found a reciprocal relationship between the creative process and spirituality. Can one create a guide or a blueprint to the creative process that might be useful without suggesting that the subconscious/spiritual dimension of it can be replicated in and of itself? Is it important to separate out the spiritual dimension when there is no emphasis on religion? Beyond this, can a genuine approach to arts education truly occur within schools?

While the study makes a compelling case for arts in education, I refer back to the previously posed question of what *art as method* looks like in practice. This would require an examination of what is meant by practice. Are we talking about theorizing possibilities for practice or are we speaking to evidence of practice? In theorizing possibilities, participating emcee C. Izzrael Coles profoundly reflected, "If a more creative curriculum existed, perhaps our kids would excel… because of the curriculum that we have in our schools people don't have a real sense of anything, a real sense of pride, and they definitely don't value education…what it boils down to on so many levels is a lack of knowledge of self." The study supports Sir Ken Robinson's contention that creativity "is as important in education as literacy and we should treat it with the same status" and his call for a paradigm shift (Park, 2010). At the same time, Coles and Robinson spoke also to schools ruthlessly squandering the natural talents of students. So in speaking to the evidence of practice, our schools have a poor track record. In this regard, the study strongly supports the need for a proactive approach to art *as* education, whereby our communities foster this self-determined effort and avoid exploitation (Anzaldúa, 1987; Smith, 1999).

Perhaps, as Prosper referred to community-driven arts as thriving underground, this is a more creative state that resists the element of co-opting. There is a tension between story told and story corrupted, co-opted, bought. In this way, "corporatacracy" acts similarly to educational institutions, whereby pressures to produce, regarding products and accountability, have led to "bleaching," the stripping down, packaging or standardizing of art in order to assess students according to aggressive testing policies. Maybe our communities should continue to decide what *art as method* looks like in practice. The message conveyed in this study is both within (the urban artist community) and beyond (those outside the community): If research shows that aspects of learning and development facilitated by this creative process is a way we gravitate toward finding knowledge, and we're not doing this in the classroom, what are we doing in schools?

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB PAPERWORK

Student researcher: Faculty Supervisors:
vanessa jones   Dr. Brian Harper and Dr. Anne Galletta
440.622.8850   216.875.9770   216.802.3044

Cleveland State University

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

My name is vanessa jones and I am researching the experiences of urban artists involved in a particular approach to the creative process and what this means for them as well as urban education and research. This project, under the guidance of Drs. Brian Harper and Anne Galletta, is for Dissertation Research, a part of Doctoral Studies in Urban Education at Cleveland State University. I want to collaborate with you in efforts to define and theorize a particular approach to the creative process, documenting and adding your personal stories of art and the urban environment, currently missing from this research. The questions I'll be addressing through my research with you are:

1.) What do young, Black artists narrate about their experience of life and the urban environment?
2.) What is their understanding of the role the creative process plays in their experience of life and the urban environment?
3.) How do these narratives speak to dimensions of a particular approach to the creative process and its relation to the urban environment and education?
4.) How can stories produced through this process inform how we conduct research of urban education toward systemic change?

As part of this research, I will take on the role of researcher and participant, as my experience of the creative process and what it means for urban education and research will also contribute to the data collection and analysis. The data collection will include information from interview sessions, observation, works of art, and journal reflections, as well as information from existing studies and artist documentaries. A product of this research will be my dissertation.

The sessions will be recorded, semi-structured dialogues lasting between one and three hours taking place in person or via phone or Internet, depending on your availability. The focus group will be structured the same way as the sessions, only bringing all participants together. In between each session, I ask you to write or audio record journal reflections on your thoughts concerning the preceding session and bring these reflections with you to the next session. A documentary as a product of these stories will include footage from the data collection and supplement my literature review of the subject and dissertation research, creating a visual dialogue. I am asking for your participation over the course of two months and for your consent to the following:

• The use of your name and likeness within the dissertation and supplemental documentary
• To provide data (interview responses and artwork; audio, video, and/or written journal reflections on sessions and emerging themes; evaluate experience with project)
• Provide examples of and reflections on creative works as data sources for research
• Share in the initial phases of data analysis and theorizing
• Support research activities through dialogue, interview, reflection, and review of preliminary analyses as a form of member check and ongoing participation in the study
• State areas of variation, disagreement, and/or confusion throughout project

Student researcher: Faculty Supervisors:
vanessa jones   Dr. Brian Harper and Dr. Anne Galletta
440.622.8850   216.875.9770   216.802.3044

- Participate in a series of 2-3 recorded interview sessions and a focus group with other artist participants (1-3 hours each) and several follow-up conversations as analysis proceeds
- Waive the right to edit the final film product
- Cite project for any future use of work resulting from this collaboration

As a researcher and participant, I will undertake the following activities:

- Conduct a review of literature and existing studies related to project
- Comply with Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards for conducting research with humans
- Develop research design for collaboration with you to the extent allowed for dissertation research
- Share in initial phases of analysis and theorizing of a particular approach to the creative process
- Share sources for areas of variation, disagreement, and/or confusion throughout project
- Support your efforts to flesh out, define, and understand your approach to the creative process through dialogue, reflection, and review of analyses and theory
- Provide examples of and reflections on existing studies and data related to research
- Introduce you to critical theoretical methods through dialogue, analyses, and theorizing
- Promote art as activism, agency by telling one's own story and defining one's own perspective
- Conduct secondary analysis and theorizing
- Review secondary analysis and theorizing with participant
- Maintain records of data collected, analyses conducted, and theories produced throughout project
- Document project through audio, video, photo, and journaling
- Within two weeks of the conclusion of the academic semester, deliver to you dialogue and interview transcriptions, footage, and final copy of film for your promotional and educational use
- Evaluate participatory experience with project
- Produce written dissertation and supplemental documentary of this research
- Cite project for any future use of work resulting from this collaboration

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary; you may withdraw at any time with no consequences whatsoever. You acknowledge that withdrawal of your continued participation does not preclude me from using any film or interview material recorded or gathered during the period of your willing participation. A possible risk to involvement in this study includes the potential for disclosure of sensitive information while sharing personal experiences in relation to the topic of the creative process, education, and the urban environment. To address this, I will provide you with interview questions beforehand, allowing you to process what you share. Benefits of your participation include the opportunity to explore in-depth a topic of personal interest to you and the potential of stories you share to contribute to a growing movement to revolutionize urban education. In addition, you will be given a platform to share your expertise with an audience of educators, scholars, activists, artists, and policy makers; you become the voice for a particular approach to the creative process providing agency and insight for a marginalized population. It truly is an opportunity to not just set the record straight, but to actually create the record, to document your story as part of a storytelling tradition in oral histories.

The film produced will be for educational use with a wider public audience. It will clearly state its purpose, which is to consider a variety of elements that may be critical to understanding an individual's

Student researcher: Faculty Supervisors:

vanessa jones   Dr. Brian Harper and Dr. Anne Galletta

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experience in order to influence educational practices and research within urban environments. In doing so, the film will focus on personal perspectives representative of the individual separate from affiliations with departments, schools, or organizations. I will work with you to edit material for appropriateness and relation to covered topics. You will be provided an opportunity to review a rough cut of footage and inform me within two weeks of any material of concern that should be excluded from the final editing process. You waive the right to edit the final film product. You may be required to sign a separate appearance and material releases.

You may contact my supervisors, Drs. Harper and Galletta, or me, at the numbers listed above, if you have any questions about the project. I am asking for your agreement to give your time for (3) 1-3 hour recorded interview sessions; to possibly one to three 30-minute follow-up sessions over the next two months; and to be recorded for inclusion in a documentary.

"I understand that if I have any questions about my rights as a research subject I can contact Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board at 216.687.3630."

I agree to be interviewed.

_____

Participant's Printed Name

_____

Participant's Signature   Date

I verify that I am 18 years of age or older. (Circle one):   Yes   No

I give permission to be audio/film recorded during the interview. (Circle one): Yes   No

I give my permission to have my name used in the film and written dissertation materials. (Circle one):   Yes   No

Student researcher:

vanessa jones

440.622.8850

Faculty Supervisors:

Dr. Brian Harper and Dr. Anne Galletta

216.875.9770   216.802.3044

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

(2-3) 1-3 hour Individual Sessions: What is your experience of education and life in urban environments? What role does the creative process play in your experience? Multiple interpretations of the following "talking points" will guide this discussion. I am interested in your perspective as an artist, community member, educator, parent, and student. Think of your experiences and opinions about these talking points.

1.) Define the creative process.
- What does it mean to/for you? Why do you create?
- How do you talk about the work?
- How do you see your work making an impact or creating change?
- Talk a bit about your most recent work. What was the process of creating toward your most recent project? What was the goal?

2.) How does your process unfold?
- What (tools) do you use? Why?
- Talk about your choice of materials and imagery. What is the relationship between your media and the subject?
- Discuss the relationship between visual, and creative/conceptual elements and your work. How do you manipulate elements in your work?
- What elements do you prefer and how do you use elements?
- What do you respond to when you work (impulse drawing, light, details, etc.)?

3.) What is central to the process (the elements of the creative process)?
- How has this central force led to creative collaborations? Work with various media?
- What's different about working with others? Various media?
- How does your work connect to community? Your life experiences?
- What is the process for addressing personal, controversial, or taboo issues, issues that generally aren't talked about?
- How do you keep sane and distance yourself from the emotional aspect of work?

4.) What is your experience with education?
- What role has art played in your experience of education?
- How does your art reflect this?
- How was art a part of your educational training?
- How do you see a need for change in our schools? Communities?
- In what ways are you involved with education?

5.) What influenced or caused the creative process to occur?
- What influences you? Where do you get visual references? What symbols do you use?
- What statements are you making about social issues?
- How does your process/choices you make reflect your lived experiences?
- How do you file inspiration? How do you keep track of everything (process, steps, ideas, progress, cataloguing images)? How do you plan?

6.) What strategies were used during the process? (or as part of the process)
- What effect occurred as a result of your choices and the strategies you used? (consequences of strategies)
- How do you feel about the use of technology in relation to other media (traditional/fine art)?
- What is your attitude toward the end product?

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*In Between (Deciphering the Grey Matters) This is a space to reflect on how you are experiencing the research process and identifying the steps of your creative process. Please create an audio and/or written journal of these reflections.

- What are your thoughts coming out of the last session?
- Looking back, what themes do you recognize?
- What concepts, work or creative processes—personal or someone else's—come to mind? What connections are you making to artwork, process, experience, history, and/or socio cultural elements? Bring any references to our next session.
- What questions remain unanswered for you or concepts that remain unclear?
- What are your thoughts/feelings about participating in this project?

Focus Group This is a space where participants come together to discuss the creative process and their experience of the research process. Multiple interpretations of the following "talking points" will guide this discussion. Think of your experiences and opinions about these points.

1.) Define the creative process.
- What does it mean to/for you? Why do you create?
- How do you talk about the work?
- How do you see art making an impact or creating change?

2.) How does your process unfold?
- What (tools) do you use? Talk about your choice of materials and imagery. What is the relationship between your media and the subject?
- Discuss the relationship between visual, and creative/conceptual elements and your work. What elements do you prefer? How do you manipulate or use elements in your work?
- What do you respond to when you work (impulse drawing, light, details, etc.)?

3.) What is central to the process (the elements of the creative process)?
- How has this central force led to creative collaborations? Work with various media?
- What's different about working with others? Various media?
- How does your work connect to community? Your life experiences?
- How do you address personal, controversial issues that generally aren't talked about?
- How do you keep sane and distance yourself from the emotional aspect of work?

4,) What is your experience with education?
- What role has art played in your experience of education? How does your art reflect this?
- How was art a part of your educational training?
- How do you see a need for change in our schools? Communities?
- In what ways are you involved with education?

5.) What influenced or caused the creative process to occur?
- What statements are you making about social issues?

6.) What strategies were used during the process? (or as part of the process) What effect occurred as a result of your choices and the strategies you used? (consequences of strategies)
- How do you feel about the use of technology in relation to other media (traditional/fine art)?
- What is your attitude toward the end product?

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APPENDIX B
SUBJECT RELEASE FORM

Name of Film:	(tentative) Art as Method, the Reel: Complicating Tales of Visual Stenography and Implications for Urban Education and Research
Producer:	vanessa jones
Subject:	
Address	
Phone	
E-mail	

I, the Subject named above, authorize Producer, and Producer's agents, successors, assigns, and designees, to record my name, likeness, image, voice, sound effects, interview and performance on film, tape, or otherwise (the "Recording"), to edit such Recording as Producer may desire, and to incorporate such Recording into the Film, and any versions of the Film and all related materials thereof, including but not limited to promotion and advertising materials. It is understood and agreed that Producer shall retain editorial, artistic, and technical control of the Film and the content of the Film. Producer may use, and authorize others to use, the Film, any portions thereof and the Recording in all markets, manner, formats and media, whether now known or hereafter developed, throughout the world, in perpetuity. Producer, and Producer's successors and assigns, shall own all right, title and interest, including the copyright, in and to the Film, including the Recording and related materials, to be used and disposed of, without limitation, as Producer shall in Producer's sole discretion determine. I acknowledge that I am not, and do not intend to be, a joint author or co-author of the Film.

I hereby grant to Producer, and Producer's successors and assigns, the perpetual, royalty-free, non-exclusive right to record and reproduce art work and other original works created or owned by me (the "Licensed Material") in connection with making and creating the Film, including recording and editing the Licensed Material on film, tape or otherwise, and to reproduce and publicly display the Licensed Material, in whole or in part, in and in connection with the Film and all versions thereof and all materials relating thereto, including the making the Recording, advertising and promotion. Producer, and its successors and assigns, shall own all right, title and interest, including the copyright, in and to the Film, including the Recording, to be used and disposed of throughout the world in perpetuity without limitation as Producer shall determine in Producer's sole discretion, including without limitation the right to distribute the Film in all manner, format and media, whether now known or hereinafter developed.

I represent and warrant that I possesses or have obtained all rights to the Licensed Material necessary for the grant of this license and that the rights granted hereunder will not conflict with or violate any commitment, agreement, or understanding I have or will have to or with, nor infringe upon any rights of, any person or entity. I shall pay and indemnify and hold Producer and her grantors, directors, assignees, agents, and licensees harmless from and against all claims, losses, costs, expenses, settlements, demands, and liabilities of every kind, including reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses, arising out of or incurred by reason of the use of the Licensed Material set forth herein or the inaccuracy, alleged breach, or actual breach of any representation, warranty, covenant, agreement, or undertaking Licensor has made herein.

_____   _____
Name   Date

APPENDIX C

LINK TO SUPPLEMENTAL FILM

As part of the methodology for this research I produced a supplemental film to visually illustrate some of the concepts of the study as well as the dynamic dialogue and interaction between the artists. The film, *Art as Method, the Reel: Artists & their counterStory of urban experiences* (GreenHouse Studios, 2012) can be found at:

https://plus.google.com/100203850149221461209/posts