

SOUTHERN-PLAYALISTIC-HIPHOP-SPACESHIP-MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores how southern rap artists Lil Wayne and Andre 3000 use science fiction imagery to challenge narrow stereotypes and negative perceptions of what it means to be a black male hip hop artist while contributing to the genre, expanding the possibilities of hip hop's "commodified personas" (Bunten 2008). By focusing on southern hip hop artists, I shed light on the push/pull factors that these artists have had to transcend in order to authenticate themselves within the East Coast/West Coast binary of hip hop and to counter negative southern stereotypes. By embracing science fiction, alienation and Otherness, these artists change hip hop's geographical landscape of ghettocentricity to actively serve as a self-marketed cultural product. My research approach borrows from Stuart Hall's study of the traditions within the black repertoire in his article "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" (1992). He identifies the three main repertoires of black popular culture as an emphasis on style as the actual subject, the body as a canvas of representation and music as a focal point of the culture. These three categories work as the framework of my research and are used in tandem with explorations of the concepts alienation, Afro-futurism, and commodified personas as used applied to the analysis of the self-representations of Lil Wayne and Andre 3000.

For my beloved grandmother Nadine Dennis. She taught me that “if a task is once begun,
never leave it until it’s done.” I love you Nannie!

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INTRODUCTION

“Honestly, I think anything we try to do, we try to make sure that we’re being true to us we also know that it has to sell” –Andre 3000

I Am Not a Human Being is the title of rapper Lil Wayne’s latest studio album. This statement serves as a proclamation of Lil’ Wayne’s current “Martian” persona. Wayne is not unique in his post human mantra; other artists from the South such as Andre 3000 and B.O.B have sought refuge in fashioning science fiction themes to their hip hop artistry in efforts to authenticate themselves as power players in the national realm of rap music.

This thesis investigates how southern rap artists use science fiction imagery to counter stereotypes of southern rap and position themselves as rap celebrity. My research also seeks to uncover how the unique artistry of rappers Lil Wayne and Andre 3000 have contributed to the genre through expanding possibilities of the hip hop art form. By focusing on southern hip hop artists, my research highlights the unique plight of these performers who have gone to great lengths stylistically and lyrically in efforts to authenticate themselves within the East Coast/West Coast binary of hip hop, while simultaneously working to counter the limiting tropes of the black male rap figure. It is imperative to focus on these two artists (Lil Wayne and Andre) because they have each constructed identities infused with science fiction imagery that have garnered success and crossover appeal.

My discussion of Lil Wayne and Andre 3000 will borrow from Stuart Hall’s concept of the black repertoire as stated in his article “What is This ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?” (1992). He explains the three main repertoires of black popular culture as being an emphasis on style as the actual subject, the body as a canvas of representation, and music as a focal point of

the culture. Hall states that within the black repertoire “style –which mainstream cultural critics often believed to be the husk, the wrapping, the sugar coating on the pill –has become itself the subject of what’s going on” (Hall 27). By examining the cadence of southern rappers, slang and oral traditions, this paper will critique how Hall’s three repertoires represent the efforts of Lil Wayne and Andre 3000, and situate their style in post humanistic production. I also explore how blackness is written on these performers’ bodies. Hall states that the black body was used as “cultural capital” and at times it was the only form of capital blacks had. As a result, he argues that blacks have constructed themselves as “the canvases of representation” (Hall 27). I examine Lil Wayne and Andre 3000’s canvases through their style of dress, and how it relates to their personified image while keeping in perspective how it challenges the southern as an “unstylish” cultural stereotype. Lastly, I utilize Hall’s discussion of music, in which he explains how the black repertoire is “displaced from a logocentric world–where the direct mastery of cultural modes meant the mastery of writing, and hence, both the criticism of writing (logo centric criticism) and the deconstruction of writing” (Hall 27). For this, I discuss the musical innovation and the lyrics of both Wayne and Andre, which exemplify authentically southern, personified commodities and potential Afro-Futurism at play. In addition, I interpret the space imagery in the lyrics and the branding opportunities that the commodified persona creates through the likenesses of these rapper/performers. I chose to explore these forms of the black tradition through musical artists, because the critique of a non-literary world derives from the distinct oral traditions of the black Diaspora. As Hall would say, music is found deep in the life forms of black people and is the structure of their cultural life (Hall 27). Therefore, music is paramount to a discussion of black cultural expression.

In spite of the popularity and commercialization of gangsta rap, Lil Wayne and Andre 3000 have skillfully constructed space-themed commodified personae in an effort to re-appropriate the hegemonic construction of urban hip hop artistry and hip hop's performance of blackness. When constructing an identity outside of the traditional sphere of hip hop, one must be mindful of how new identities can be interpreted as inauthentic or fake. Appearing inauthentic can be the kiss a death for an artist. Consequently, I argue that they align themselves to many of the structures of Afro-Futurism, discussed below. Using Alexis Bunten's idea of the "commodified persona," which "can be broadly defined as a set of beliefs and practices in which an individual chooses to construct a marketable identity product while striving to avoid alienating him or herself" (381), I argue that alienation from a mainstream persona, that of urban gangsta, in the ever-changing geographical landscape of hip hop, makes one construct an alien identity in order to deconstruct the formulaic metropolitan "rap artist" persona. One may view Afro-Futurism as implicated in the post-human performance of otherness. The term "Afro-Futurism" was coined by Mark Dery to refer to the "African American signification that appropriates images of advanced technology and alien and/or prosthetically enhanced (cyborg) futures" (McLeod 341). Drawing from case studies of Wayne and Andre, one can explore the ways in which their construction of a commodified persona is achieved and reflected in their futuristic artistic productions that evoke Afro-Futurism.

Authenticity

Hip hop has long struggled with ideas of "keeping it real" (authentic) and the ability to package that authenticity as a marketable identity to sell to the (presumed) masses. Hip hop authenticity is described as "being authentic, or keepin' it real, which means staying true to yourself (by identifying oneself as both hard and Black), representing the underground and the

street, and remembering hip hop's cultural legacy, which is the old school. To be inauthentic, or fake, means being soft, following mass trends by listening to commercial rap music, and identifying oneself with White, mainstream culture that is geographically located in the suburbs" (McLeod 145). Therefore, the quest for authentication leads to the creation of a sustainable identity.

Southern rap has been viewed as a subgenre or subculture of rap production because of its broad differences from the traditional beginnings of urban rap. Creating its own style of flow, use of slang, and musical rhythm, the South became a microcosm of musical variety. Southern rappers introduced the world to such rap forms as "trap music," a southern version of gangsta music that focuses on hustling and drug dealing; "snap music/bounce" which is essentially party music consisting of fast rhymes and loud bass designed to get the crowd dancing; and "ringtone rap" which consists of nursery rhyme-level raps with an infectious hook that is typically downloaded as a ringtone that people can dance to while their phone rings.

The South has also benefited from timing and advances in technology. As a hip hop enthusiast, I believe that after the deaths of Tupac Shakur (West Coast rapper) and Biggie Smalls (East Coast rapper), the hip hop nation was fed up with the senseless feuding between the two coasts and just wanted to hear good fun music. Southern artists were able to benefit from this by offering something new and refreshing. Though most artists were not backed by major record labels, many of the early performers used their "hustling" efforts to independently record, sell and market their music right out their own car trunks. As explained in their raps, black men were used to "hustling" in the South with many not having access to steady paying jobs or other opportunities in their neighborhoods. In addition, technology has played a significant role in southern popularity by closing the geographical gap of music distribution. Since the new

millennium, music can be downloaded in an instant. Social networking sites such as MySpace, and digital mixtapes and EP's have made regionalism less significant over the past several years.

The rap genre has been acknowledged by cultural critics as the “quintessence of folk and vernacular aesthetics” (Richardson 201) within African American culture. Richardson notes that “for the first time, southern rap has in effect crystallized a convergence of the folk aesthetics in the rap world with the historical regional context from which black vernacular forms are understood to have historically emerged in the United States” (Richardson 201). Rap's emergence in the South services the idea of homecoming; in the sense of authentic black art returning from the East and North after black flight, back to its red clay beginnings.

The central argument of this paper is that artists who seek to use an alternative identity in efforts to increase revenue and expand the limits of their craft are participating in persona commodification and positioning themselves Afro-Futuristically. Afro-Futurism allows for southern rappers to be unique, authenticate themselves, and represent their origins (the South). In addition, it affords them control of their personal marketing, and the ability to produce songs that expand the hip hop genre. This phenomenon is interesting because early southern rappers embraced their red clay beginnings, where as new artists look to the celestial stars in search of fame and stardom.

Commodified Personas

In “Sharing Culture or Selling Out” (2008), Bunten asserts “the practices of constructing a commodified persona involve representation of cultural uniformity as a simplifying trope, self exoticizing as the Other, polyvocal alternations of identity culled from a repertoire of possibilities, and rejection of stereotyping through covert acts of resistance” (381). Though

Bunten's analysis points to Native American' tourist identities, I view Lil Wayne and Andre 3000's construction of their respective "commodified personae" is achieved through the use of auto-tune effects to distort their voices, prototype?/alien/Martian metaphors in their lyrics, ostentatious style of dress and dramatic visual performance. The use of these tools help these artists position themselves as alien "Others" though covert acts of resistance to traditional southern themes. This otherness also aligns with Afro-Futurist claims that the "Black diasporic consciousness seeks to return to an inaccessible homeland" in this sense the "utopian homeland that outer space metaphorically represents" (McLeod 342).

"Afrofuturism and Post-Soul Possibility in Black Popular Music" by Marlo David focuses on neo-soul music as the bridge between the "characteristic trope of 'alien-nation' within post-human thought... to explore black Atlantic experience" and its application to "radical black music styles [such as] electronic music and experimental jazz" (David 696). By using hip hop as my post human sound, one can expand this discourse to consider the intentional alienation from the tropes deemed "culturally human" and characteristic of a hip hop artist. Using the "commodified persona" as a lens sheds light on the ways in which hip hop is an extension of the Afro-Futurism discussion of post humanist artistry and works as "identities both embodied and disembodied, human and post-human" (David 697). The Afro-Futuristic presence in neo-soul music is viewed by David as "a reconciliation between an imagined disembodied, identity-free future and the embodied identity-specific past and present, which can provide a critical link through which the post-soul artist can express a radical black subjectivity" (David 697).

To hip hop enthusiasts, Wayne and Andre 3000 transcend the boundaries of what it means to be a black male commercially popular rapper, and break free of the constraints of the "gangsta" rap trope, fundamentally abandoning that sound of hip hop blackness. When trying to

decipher hip hop's "cultural representation" in terms of self-commodification, they divert the attention from the impossible question of authenticity and instead, refocus it on the artist's strategies of self-conscious self-representation mediated by African American cultural concepts of identity. With the creation of these "futuristic counter narratives," (David 698) they are able to express their talent through song, wardrobe and performance without the constraining boxes of creativity-suppressing tropes of hip hop identity. These counter narratives are represented in the opposing forces of the essentializing black gangsta identities of hip hop and the creative, fluidity of African American artistry.

Afro-Futurism: Phoning Home

To clarify, this thesis is in no way suggesting that the futuristic themes and sounds of hip hop are inherently new to hip hop or innovative. "Afrofuturists claim that blacks scattered across the Atlantic world are aliens in an alien land, ever on the lookout for clues and resources that point the way out of alien nations and conditions of bondage" (Gray 166). Themes of alien embodiment and futuristic landscapes are commonly used in literary and musical expressions by subaltern groups. This paper serves as an additional lens through which to view post-human representations in Afro-Futuristic thought and their connections to hip hop artistry.

"Sun Ra, Lee Perry and George Clinton all call upon similar tropes and metaphors of space and alienation that link their common diasporic African history to a notion of extraterrestriality" (McLeod 344). Perry, Clinton and many other musicians of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s patterned themselves after Sun Ra and used space-themed sounds and futuristic beats. In the hip hop tradition, Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash employed space imagery and sound. Although their efforts were revolutionary their adventures did deal with the same sense of

resistance to commercial conformity as current artists face. They were neither from the South nor dealing within the realms of neo-liberalism and the commodified trappings of popular hip hop tropes. For Wayne and Andre to step into a new frontier and phone home to a planet that their minds have metaphorically left is shrewd and entertaining.

Using and constructing new identities for their post-human bodies has proven the “potential for black wealth and power” (McLeod 344) that George Clinton’s lyrics have long prophesied. Focusing on hip hop as a stage to explore Afrocentric identity and space encourages us to ponder whether or not it is “logical to expect a culture that has been placed on the margin of society’s concern to employ the same language (pedestrian speech patterns or performance) used by those responsible for such marginalization, thereby reinforcing the very practice that [repressed] them” (Wilkins 2000). It *is* necessary to use those tools (capitalism, commodification, de-humanization) to counter societies’ hegemonic structure. Thus, one can use these tools coupled with creativity to profit from the profitless situation of the ghetto. These works lead towards a re-appropriation of what blackness and the performance of otherness looks and sounds like. These alien and futuristic metaphors are essential to the promulgation of Afro-Futurist teaching, insofar as it resurrects the common other in all of us, one that can be used to reconfigure the post Atlantic black experience and help to unexoticize the black body.

Brief Historical Overview

Creativity, authenticity, heart, soul, and gumption are a few of the characteristics one must embody as an emcee. Dating back to rap’s inception in the ghettos in New York City in the 1970s, rap has been a creative outlet for black and brown kids that live on and represent the margins of society. Highly regarded as a form of “ghetto news casting,” rap was about spreading

knowledge through the view of personal experience. As rap's notoriety shifted to the West Coast, particularly Los Angeles, the "gangsta" sub-genre emerged. Still following the "news" paradigm, West Coast rappers not only told of injustices happening in their neighborhoods, but they also offered sordid ways to retaliate against the powers that be. Through the years, rap and hip hop have grown to encompass all types of stories and deliveries but one thing remained true: rap was an urban tale.

By the mid 1990s, the East and West Coasts were the centers of hip hop production with rappers Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls as its feuding kings. Following their murders, there emerged southern rap, most often dubbed as music from "the dirty South." Over the past few years, the music industry has witnessed major success from southern artists David Banner, Outkast, and the Nappy Roots as well as the succession of rap industry moguls and production powerhouses such as Master P, founder of No Limit Records, and "Slim" and "Baby" Williams, co-founders of Cash Money Records. As Riche' Richardson describes in *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South* (2007), the South has served as a place of difference and anomaly from the traditions of the black male dominated urban plights of the inner cities of the East and West Coasts (199). With the spark in southern rap's popularity, there has been a rise in the number of women and non-African American rappers and the addition of new slang words. Much like the storytellers of the New York boroughs and the Los Angeles ghettos, southern rappers chronicled the trappings of their neighborhoods. What made it unique was that the southern tale was told in thick southern drawl and was often accompanied with a singsong hook. Richardson describes the distinctiveness of the southern rapper's plight below:

Many contemporary rap artists are emphasizing the immediacy and specificity of life in the South, including the rural South, and are constructing the South as an

organic and viable here and now in the visual iconography and lyric context in which many contemporary singers and entertainers, even beyond rap, are highlighting Southern roots, and slang terms associated with the southern scene, such as crunk, are very popular. What has happened for southern artists in the rap industry in recent years is nothing short of a major breakthrough and revolution.

(199)

The revolutionary efforts Richardson describes led to the South's (with a heavy emphasis on Houston, Atlanta and New Orleans) visibility as a viable source of hip hop music. The rough street lyrics were present, the macho bravado raps were in abundance, and the southern landscape and its community support authenticated the whole process as a genuine hip hop product. Everyone is accepted in hip hop as long as they play by the genre's rules. If not, problems tend to ensue.

The problem arises when artists want to seek profit outside of or engage in dialogue beyond the scope of their presumed authenticity which initially resides in traditions of the East and West Coasts, and replace the authentication process of rapping with singing. To do so successfully, one may feel the need to construct a new framework or identity in efforts to re-authenticate oneself.

CHAPTER I: R U 4REAL: STYLE AND AUTHENTICITY

Although the South is the bedrock of African American music, hip hop was the only black musical form created in America without southern origins. As mentioned earlier, hip hop was birthed in the (northern) urban ghettos, and those harsh environments helped fashion the hip hop motif. The heart and essence of hip hop culture is the styling. Stuart Hall attributes black style as not the “husk” or “wrapping” of a product but as the actual content. As hip hop’s popularity grew through the 1990s, fans had the choice of listening to the gritty gangster lyrics “battle” rapped to precision over melodic beats containing sparse hooks from their New York brethren or equally gritty “gangsta” lyrics rapped in a sing-song pattern over sampled funk and soul tracks with amplified bass lines from their West Coast brethren.

Rap’s style evolved from party records where the MC hyped up the DJ’s performance in efforts to move the crowd to the MC taking center stage as the focal act. Roni Sarig iterates this point in his book *Third Coast*. He states that “rapping went from being about the crowd, to being about the competition, to being about the rapper (with audience members left to stand still and coolly nod their heads)” (xvi). This point is reiterated by classic club hits such as New York rap group Terror Squad’s “Lean Back” in which a verse states “My niggaz in the club, but you know they not dancin” and legendary rap trio Westside Connection exclaiming “gangsta’s don’t dance they boogie.”

As southern artists began to gain recognition, the music changed stylistically. The southern artists were not afraid to involve the crowd and entice them to dance. Most of the early southern hip hop acts were strictly dance records such as Luke’s “It’s Your Birthday,” a song deficient in lyrical content but abundant in bass and rhythm. The majority of the song consists of

Luke chanting “Go, it’s ya birthday” which he concludes by yelling “what’s that number one zodiac sign” in a sort of call and response between himself and the (recorded) audience that shouts back “noooooo” or “yesssssss” upon the mention of their celestial birth sign. The South has produced a plethora of dance tracks, “Back That Ass Up,” “Bank-head Bounce,” “Shake Ya’ Ass” just to name a few, and they all have helped to mold the South as leader in hip hop dance music.

By the end of the twentieth century, the South had carved a new route to the heart of hip hop fans and critics alike, which left many with the feeling that rap had reverse migrated and come “home.” “Starting in the late ‘90s and continuing to the present day, Southern rappers, musicians, song writers, producers, and labels have contributed far more than their share to hip-hop commercial and artistic success—extending hip hop’s hold as pop music’s dominant sound by introducing new sounds and fusions” (Sarig xvi). Southern rap began to surge in the new millennium, according to the *Billboard Hot 100* during a time period from 2003-2004 the number one spot was held by a southern artist fifty-eight out of sixty-two weeks. By the year 2004, “*Vibe* magazine reported that 43.6 percent of urban radio airplay featured Southern artists—that’s just artists compared to 24.1 percent East Coast and just 2.5 percent West Coast” (Sarig xv). As the South climbed the charts and changed hip hop’s landscape one record at a time, it wasn’t just “booty” music recorded. As Andre 3000 prophetically stated at a New York urban music awards show (in which him and his band mate were booed) “the South got something to say.”

Although the South was dominating the airwaves, the hip hop community still had trouble embracing this new style of music as authentically hip hop. Being inauthentic is the kiss of death in hip hop, and if one is perceived as not genuine, he is not welcomed into the

community. Since southern rap didn't fit the stylistic cues of hip hop, it was regarded as a subgenre to the culture and un-affectionately labeled the "Dirty South." Matt Miller explains the inception and connotation of the word in his 2008 online publication of "Dirty Decade: Rap Music and the U.S South, 1997-2007." He explains that:

The concept of the Dirty South as elaborated by the Goodie Mob [an Atlanta based rap group who first introduced the concept in their 1995 song of the same name] and other rappers and producers in several of the major cities of the South was complex, contradictory, and multidimensional. This multidimensionality encompassed ideas of a racist, oppressive, white South historically continuous with slavery; a 'down-home' black South marked by distinctive speech and cultural practices; a sexually libidinous South; a rural, bucolic South; a lawless, criminal South; and a sophisticated urban South. The Dirty South was forged in conversation with older or alternate modes of imagining the South, spanning a continuum from *Gone with the Wind*-flavored Confederate apologetics at one end to the idea of the South as a unique African-American homeland on the other. (1)

The Dirty South title charted a new geographical area on the hip hop map that expanded the urban coastal rap world to include Houston, New Orleans, Atlanta, Miami, Memphis, and Virginia Beach. Although it was a positive step to acknowledge the South as a separate entity with distinct style and innovation, the new regionally specific rap was also accompanied by negativity. Under this "dirty" moniker "the understanding of the "Dirty South" and southern rap music generally finds articulation in the already familiar stereotypes of the South as variously backwards, abject, slow, corrupt, communal, down-to-earth, rural, or oversexed" (Miller 1).

These negative connotations helped to further marginalize the budding industry and stifle positive and mainstream acceptance.

The South's inclusion in the hip hop terrain created a space for geographically keyed identities and expectations of authenticity. "Although the vast majority grew up in the city rather than the country, to outsiders, all southern rappers seemed un-urban, unsophisticated, and backwards" (Grem 62). This shaped the perception of the type of music that should come from the south as well. On one hand, the South continued the gangster motif present in rap music nationally with a distinct southern flair. The hustler ideology transferred into southern slums ideology of "the trap." The trap was a slang term for the ghetto and the music told stories of the drug dealing, using and murders that took place in the area. On the other hand, the South was authenticated as a dance music Mecca and flourished through the creation of various sub genres of "crunk music" and crunk's sub-genres of "snap" and "strip club" music.

Because *crunk* is a colloquial term, there is no textbook definition of or concise history of its conception. It seemed to appear in various parts of the South at very different times. In the beginning, "crunk" was mostly referenced in mixtapes, and was common vernacular in the club. Some believe that the term is a portmanteau meaning "crazy **drunk**." While others argue that it's just another slang word for hyped, or excited. Towards the late 1990s, "crunk" had been introduced into hip hop vernacular and made popular by the likes of rapper/producer Lil Jon. Lil Jon made crunk synonymous with Southern life, music and entertainment and quickly became the emblem of southern hip hop.

Crunk music's sound is characterized by heavy bass, looped drum patterns, and simple melodies. The tempo of the music tends to be slow steady build of bass; the lyrics are effortless

and usually performed as chants in call-and-response fashion. Snap music is derived from crunk and carried most of the same sound but included an infectious “snap” or “clap” sound in the tone that encouraged the southern dance crazes and ringtone popularity. Strip club music, also a spawn of the crunk sound, carried a dual meaning. The strip club sound encompasses the sounds of both crunk and snap, the bass is very complementary to the profession of exotic dancing and the emphasis on a large behind in southern strip club culture. The strip club also played an important factor in marketing and promotion of sounds in the south. Up-and-coming artists would try to get their records played in strip clubs and pay girls to dance to it and act like they enjoyed it. If they (the dancers) and the patrons enjoyed it, the song had a better chance of being played in local night clubs, and eventually local radio. These unconventional sounds, and uncouth promotional ethics, gained the attention of the national hip hop scene and were heralded as authentically southern style hip hop.

In order for a rapper to be accepted by the rap community, also known as the “hip hop heads,” one must be recognized as authentic. Authenticity has made and broken many aspiring hip hop artists’ careers and it makes it difficult (but not impossible) for label execs to conjure up creativity in the studio. Authenticity in reference to regional difference carries an added weight of scrutiny. Not only does one have to appear authentically “hip hop,” but one must hold allegiance to what is deemed genuine to one’s region.

To hip hop fans, artists have to live, breathe and behave the way they portray themselves in their songs. They must have communal ties to a neighborhood, traditionally an underprivileged one, and they must respect all cultural clues of style of dress, speech and gestures. All in all “street level acknowledgment remains the badge of ‘authenticity’ in hip hop culture” (Osumare162). Thus, the ghetto became looked to as the central site in which

authenticity is established. Osumare notes that even “U.S white teenagers and now youth throughout the world buy this stylistic and economic model, hip hop has created ghettocentricity that posits the black and poor ghettos internationally as a central trope of identity” (Osumare 158).

The “role of the ‘popular’ in popular culture is to fix the authenticity of popular forms. Rooting them in experiences of popular communities from which they draw strength, allowing us to see them as expressive of a particular subordinate social life that resists its being constantly made over as low and outside” (Hall 289). However, this emphasis on realness, staying true to your place of origin and focus on innate talent creates a problem for big business. The music industry as a capitalistic enterprise wishes to market certain trends and turn artists into pop stars for branding opportunities. This mode of business works at times but it is very unstable when dealing with such a passionate, hands on audience like hip hoppers. By the mid 90s, the two rappers Biggie and Tupac had created quite a media frenzy, with their highly publicized feud. When they both were murdered, hip hop cried out for new artists and less drama. It was in this social climate that the southern style was ushered in. More often than not, American popular culture is up for sale to the highest bidder. The market will continuously adjust itself to meet the needs of the consumers. When there isn’t a need present, the culture industry will introduce a “want” into the populace to fuel its commodity fetishism. Hip hop is unique in the sense that it does not respond to the pressures of the market. Hip hop sets its own trends based on community needs, not corporate ones. In other words, if it’s not hot in the “streets,” it will not appeal to the hip hop audience. Quickly the urban streets turned to the unbeaten path of the country roads, as hip hop head “home.”

Lil Wayne began his career as a pre-adolescent rapper with the Cash Money Records record label. The label was known for club anthems and “gangsta”-inspired lyrics. Though Wayne was young, he helped developed the sounds of the New Orleans “bounce” that was so prominent in its music. He is even credited as the creator of the term “bling-bling” which was used to describe their diamond encrusted jewelry. Since signing with the newly renamed Cash Money Millionaire record label at the tender age of nine, Wayne has recorded 17 mixtapes, eight solo albums and three collaboration albums; thus garnering his self-proclaimed title of “best rapper alive.”

Although much of Wayne’s success can be attributed to hard work and dedication, his regional status has helped and hindered him during his career. In the early years of his career, Wayne benefited from the shrewd business practices of his label’s owners, brothers Bryan "Birdman" Williams and Ronald "Slim" Williams, who sold records out of their cars and catered to the demands and popularity of rap within New Orleans and surrounding southern regions. Wayne was seen as a young local hero, gaining street credibility by selling drugs, rapping about local projects and making party records. As Wayne’s popularity grew he managed to continuously highlight and pay homage to his city of origin. Wayne maintained an ear to the street and used his songs to serve as the tabloids of the subaltern. His two most politically charged songs to date are “Georgia Bush” and “Tie My Hands” from his mix tape and *Carter III* album, respectively. Both songs deal with the onset and aftermath of the Hurricane Katrina catastrophe from an insider’s perspective of resident and victim. . It is this idea of reality simultaneously drenched in despair and hope that a hip hop audience can read as authentic which has drawn people to Southern rap.

Wayne has managed to develop his rapping career to mega superstar and mogul status in just a span of a few short years. This type of career trajectory usually only happens to rappers posthumously, but Wayne has managed to achieve it while alive. This re-imaging of Wayne can be attributed to his styling. The styling of an artist, physically and musically, shapes the way one is marketed and received by an audience. Thus, personas are vital to an artist's longevity. Over the years, Wayne began to transform his image: he grew his hair into long dreadlocks, he covered his body in tattoos, and his raps developed a new fast cadence that is slurred and unintelligible at times. Wayne's style evolved from the fashion most find commonplace, oversized t-shirts and baggy jeans, into a more unique, skater-inspired look. He began to commodify his persona from the way he dressed and his physical appearance, in addition to his rap styling and cadence. Physically, his body has become a walking mural with the majority of his body being covered with tattoos, including his face and eyelids. One of his most infamous tattoos is located on his face and states "I am music." His style of dress diverts from previous hip hop fashions trends as he has been seen wearing colored skinny jeans, fitted t-shirts, dark shades and can sometimes be seen with a fedora hat. Lil Wayne's resistance to the prevailing style of dress is a dissident way to distance himself from the hip hop norm.

Physically, Lil Wayne has become a robot in the studio over the past few years. 2008 marked his breakout year when he was featured on 300 tracks and his highly anticipated release *The Carter III* sold over two million copies. During this time, Wayne's music grew much darker and he has often been recorded mumbling inaudible words on songs. When questioned in interviews about his ambiguity, Wayne maintains that "only God" can understand him and that he is a Martian. As Wayne's stardom grew, his creative repertoire expanded. He has tried his hand at singing and using auto-tune, with such successful tracks as "Lollipop" and "Can't

Believe It” and has incorporated this cyborg-like sound into some of his latest musical releases. The “Lollipop” track offered the first glimpse into Wayne’s budding fascination with outer space which quickly evolved to that of an actual alien transformation. This track, which was produced and accompanied by the late artist Static Major, overflowed with heavy synthesis, slow drums, a vocoder and auto-tune. Realistically, neither weighty bass production in rap music, nor a rapper relating sexual innuendos to candy is a phenomenal feat in itself, but the voice distorting effects of auto-tune and singing from a noted Southern gangsta rapper is. On this track, Wayne becomes half man, essentially a cyborg in an attempt to blend the pitch of his voice with the synthesis of the beat thus creating a robotic vocal performance.

Alexander Weheliye argues in his “Feenin: Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music” essay that since the “production and distribution of recorded sound in the 1920s black popular music functioned as the embodiment of virtual voice” (39). Black singers and rap artists employing their “virtual voice” by the use of auto-tune to enhance their singing on tracks and hooks is becoming very popular in music. The popularity in hip hop “cyborgistry” inspired Wayne to sing with the accompaniment of auto-tune and vocoder technology on many of tracks since Lollipop’s release. The only way Wayne could sidestep the presumed criticism from hardcore rap fans was by equating his self-ostracized performance of otherness through his creative alien identity. Weheliye acknowledges that the virtual voice through technological advances such as the vocoder and auto-tune but he fails to consider the dehumanization of these tools on the user. Weheliye claims that the “machines reticulate the human voice with intelligent machines without assuming ‘information has lost its body’ or that any version of black post-humanism must take on alien form” (39). By Wayne positioning himself as not only the

greatest rapper alive but as a Martian, he can then negotiate the boundaries that we ascribe to the black/human hip hop artist.

An essential part of Wayne's persona-building comes from his affinity for name-changing. Name-changing is an essential part of persona building in hip hop, in which names are chosen based on talent, personality, affiliation, identity or even arbitrarily. In the *Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop*, Halifu Osumare explores the use of pseudonyms in hip hop and its correlation with the Africanist aesthetic. She asserts that "utilizing the naming process with the power of *Nommo*, coupled with the contemporary politics of persona and spectacle in popular culture, labeling and nicknaming have become ubiquitous in hip-hop culture" (36). The name of a rap group or individual is the public's introduction to who an artist is and what he or she is about so it is of great importance. With this fact in mind, it becomes almost essential for an artist to change his name upon reinvention. Artists such as Sean Combs, whose original stage name was Puff Daddy, changed his name to Puff after many legal struggles. Over the past decade, Puff has changed his name to P. Diddy and most recently to Diddy. Artists' names also reflect their evolution such as rapper Common Sense's switch to just "Common" or their growth as exhibited in Bow Wow dropping the prefix "Lil" from his stage name. Whether a rapper changes his name, officially adds nicknames (such as Wayne aka Lil Wayne), or just self referential (Wayne calling himself a Martian), each act speaks to the community and repositions him stylistically.

Earlier in his career, Lil Wayne was also known as Weezy F. Baby; there was Andre 3000. Andre Lauren Benjamin also known as Dre, Andre "Three Stacks," and Andre Ben-Jammin' (to name a few of his aliases) is one half of the hip hop duo Outkast. When Outkast first formed Andre went by the name Dre and his band mate's Antwan "Big Boi" Patton. The group's original name before Outkast was 2 Shades Deep. Roni Sarig explains the group's naming and

renaming process in great detail. He clarifies that the original group name had to be changed due to a local rap group that went by the name of 4 Shades Deep. Next, they changed their name to Misfits because Big Boi said “We didn’t want to be compared to anybody. We wanted our name to mean ‘apart from the norm’.” So they looked in the dictionary for similar words and they found “outcast.” Andre and Patton settled on the phonetic spelling of “OutKast” (122). As Osumare has mentioned, the naming and renaming process is essential to one’s story, she contends that “who is foregrounded and how he/she is framed become crucial dynamics of contemporary politics of identity. Whose story is being told and by whom are always of paramount importance, and have become even more crucial in the high stakes postmodern era of the twenty first century” (Osumare 2007, 36). Outkast’s name is ironic because they wanted to be distinguished from fellow emcees both southern and not, but their music was deeply rooted in the community and vivid southern imagery. Stylistically, they were set apart from the crunk, trap, and booty shaking themes of the South but the alliance to the region and sensibilities remained intact.

The name OutKast was prophetic of their style of music as well as its reception in the industry; fans and critics alike could tell early on that they had “something to say.” The group’s sound was unheard of at the time, especially from a group coming from the South. When asked to describe their music, Andre is quoted as remarking, “we got the feel of the blues, the togetherness of the funk music, the conviction of gospel music, the energy of rock and the improvisation of jazz.” Andre continued, “I don’t want to put us out away from everything, but our music sounds different... you listen to East Coast music, it’s got a kind of rhythm. You listen to West Coast, it’s got its own rhythm. You listen to southern music, it’s got kind of like a

bouncy feel to it. Its soul. That's what it is. Its soulful music with more instrumentation" (as quoted in Grem 59).

Their first album *Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik* (1994) set a landmark in hip hop. Sarig notes the album as "the start of an era when southern hip hop was not just regional or novelty, but a full partner in the culture (132). Though Dre and Big Boi didn't stray too far away from rap themes of violence, partying, and overt sexuality; they did present these issues with a sense of social responsibility and southern slang. Whether it was Dre's compassion for strippers in "Claimin True" where he calls attention to women "shakin' titties to pay the rent" or "Ain't No Thang" where he advises that "Pussy footin around don't be gettin y'all nowhere but stuck" or the nonchalance to the plights of the ghettos with the phrase "Ain't no thang but a chicken wang." The colorful phrases and advisory tales of the trappings of the hood are customary in hip hop but the styling was new, fresh and innovatively different from what the East and West Coasts were doing.

Even though the *Southernplayalistic* album differentiated the group from the urban coast, the group worked hard to drive a wedge between them and the South as well. Their second album *ATLiens* took their eccentricity to another level. Sarig asserts "Outkast represented Atlanta, but was also set apart from other Southern rap. As the conflated title (*ATLiens*) suggest. Outkast would not be tethered simply by region, it had one foot in outer space" (141). As their stardom grew it appeared that they were growing beyond their southern landscape and onto a higher plane. In the title track, Andre establishes the group's image in these two lines: "The alienators cause we different keep your hands to the sky/like sounds of blackness when I practice what I preach ain't no lie." From here, we can situate the group outside of the gangsta rap movement that was the current phenomenon of the coastal cities of New York and Los Angeles

and usher in the bass infused, psychedelic, funky, witty, slick-talking style of the South. Ken McLeod (2003) in “Space Oddities: Aliens, Futurism and Meaning in Popular Music” explains that the use of alien tropes in popular music typically resists the bourgeois concept of normality which, in Adorno’s words, leads to ‘the very disintegration of the subject’ (as quoted in McLeod 339).

Most of Outkast’s success derived from its unique position within hip hop authenticity. They were young black male rappers with not only a ghetto-centric view of the world but also a strong message of resistance to the trappings of the ghetto and yearning for elevation from its circumstances. Many of their songs served as ghetto advisory tales, such as their hit, “Spottieottiedopaliscious” where Big Boi cautions a young man to get a real job because you “Can’t gamble feeding baby on that dope money.” He ends the song by warning that taking drugs will keep you from getting a good job, saying “So now you back in the trap just that, trapped.” Their third album *Aquemini* made explicitly clear that Outkast was a different kind of rap group. Their business savvy, branding, and creativity was unmatched by other hip hop, contemporary or pop artists at the time. They won awards and broke musical records, but also paved new roads through their unique artistic visions. Notwithstanding their popularity, Outkast was well aware that not all “rap” fans were “diggin’” their new style. On the *Aquemini* album, there’s a skit about a record store salesman that offers a customer the new Outkast CD, but he declines, saying “At first they were some pimps, man but then they some aliens, or some genies or some shit... Man, whatever. I ain’t fuckin’ with that no mo’” (as quoted in Sarig 171). The rap industry, much like popular culture as a whole, is judged by fickle standards and finicky fans. Artists must constantly reinvent themselves to stay relevant but be careful as to not lose core fans.

“In order to capture the revisionist play inherent in hip hop cultural practice (including its play with capitalism itself) critical thinking outside of traditional institutional frames must be promoted” (Osumare 155). Hip hop promotes and challenges traditional marketing efforts by adopting unconventional standards. Many artists both new and seasoned have participated in “battle rap/freestyle sessions” which pits one rapper against another, usually performed live in front of an audience. In this setting, the fate of your popularity relies on the receptiveness of the audience, there are no retakes, no voice overs or adlibs; just a rapper presumably “spitting” (rapping) unrehearsed lyrics “off the dome” (off the cuff). Many of these freestyles are presented as features for popular songs. When a song is very popular, other artists record a verse and they re-release the song as a “remix” track. This has been an area that Lil Wayne and Andre have excelled in. Both artists have become sought after guest features for some of the most popular songs, with many rappers and R&B singers paying thousands just for them to be featured on a verse or a hook.

Other alternative methods of rap marketing and promotion lie in Osumare’s concept of “power moves.” She explains that “power moves in the economic sphere are hip hop strategic plays with traditional hierarchical power that seize the methods and processes by which business is conducted to interject alternative methodologies (Osumare 155). These methods include the distribution of free mixtapes, when an artist raps or sings over sampled current popular hip hop tracks and records the songs on a compilation album. There’s also the entrepreneurial route where an artist may record an album without the assistance of a label and distribute it through the trunk of his car or via the internet, eliminating the record company altogether. These innovations and more have led to hip hop lending itself to the creation of a unique fluid culture. These ideas,

rules and nuances have been the very essence that has catapulted southern hip hop music/culture into mainstream popular culture nationally.

By the year 2004, “Outkast was part of southern hip hop only in the way The Beatles were part of the British Invasion: They were rooted in it, but had so far transcended it that the group could no longer define itself next to regional peers” (Sarig 217). The group began to experience what Osumare calls “reverse crossover” success. Reverse crossover is the “postmodern dynamic of the white mainstream privileging the dress, style, slang, body language, and music predilections of the black ghetto” (162). Outkast experienced pop status success and began to make “power moves” with chart topping albums, six Grammy wins, and an eclectic film titled *Idlewild*.

Although the duo has always been eccentric, most of their album art depicted psychedelic paint and Afro-spaceman imagery, but it was not until Andre began to alienate himself from the group that his otherness started to show forth. Buntin maintains that “the person behind [the othering process] does not openly accept himself as an object, the ultimate human commodity, and therefore [he] openly resists being objectified according to the stereotypes” (382). Slowly as the group made more albums, Andre began to use the alienation he felt within the group and its music as a wedge to alienate himself from the hip hop tropes of the era. By 2003, he was “feeling burned-out by hip hop, Dre found himself writing pop songs, funk songs, jazz-flavored songs—music that involved singing and playing instruments, with little or no rapping” (Sarig 213).

Andre made “power moves” of his own by dressing differently and distinguishing himself from the group as far back as their second album. He adopted a name change, adding “3000” at the end of “Andre,” started dressing flamboyantly, trading the oversized baseball

jerseys and baggy jeans in for marching band uniforms, golf pants, feathers and wigs. He was also spotted wearing turbans and face paint. Fans sensed Andre becoming bored with rap, he missed shows, took up singing, began playing instruments and was famously quoted as saying: “I don’t really see me rapping forever... hip hop is really about the streets and the youth. Once you get older, don’t nobody really want to hear that” (quoted in Sarig 187). Though the group never broke up, their last studio album was sold as a double disc solo project: Big Boi’s efforts were titled *Speakerboxxx* and *The Love Below* Andre’s. Andre also shifted his talents to other endeavors such as his Benjamin Bixby clothing line, which he describes as “retro-preppy-nerdy.”

Southern rap artist Lil Wayne and Andre 3000 are not authentically southern because they use slang or partake in glorifying all the ghetto entities that the hood has to offer. They are authentically southern because they have taken the cadence in their speech, the uniqueness in their circumstances and coupled it with talent and used them to represent their southern cities (New Orleans and Atlanta, respectively) and bring them to national attention and exposure.

CHAPTER II: SOON BEFORE LONG: MUSIC AND AFROFUTURISM

“We are not the same/I am a Martian” *Phone Home* by Lil Wayne

The second repertoire Stuart Hall concentrates on is black culture’s displacement from a “logocentric world”(27). The affinity to the written word conflated cultural modes to the mastery, criticism and deconstruction of writing. Hall argues that “the people of the black diaspora have, in opposition to all of that, found deep form, the deep structure of their life in music” (27). Hip hop has long been the avenue in which stories were disseminated in the culture. Rappers past and present have found solace in using their music as a tool to speak directly to the community. Artists reserve the liberty to speak freely in their music, the more honest, the more the performer is respected for “keeping it real”.

By critiquing the musical innovation and the lyrics of both Wayne and Andre, one can explore how the two authenticate their southern upbringing, the commodified personas they create, and the Afro-Futurism at play. Situating their lyrics in outer space rather than a particular region adds to the universality of the work that they create. Their music calls upon the broader traditions of alienations and displacement to relate across the hip hop and global Diaspora. It is important to focus on music because it has been the African American answer to the Eurocentric overemphasis on the written word. Thus music draws from and cultivates, the distinct oral traditions of the black Diaspora.

The price of fame is an expensive one, and has cost many musicians their privacy, sanity, their families and even their lives. As performers warn, the entertainment life is not always what it seems. As Wayne’s and Andre’s stardom has escalated they have developed a love-hate relationship with Hollywood and the music industry as a whole. These sentiments were best

captured in their song “Hollywood Divorce” featuring Andre (rapping a verse and singing the chorus), Wayne, Big Boi and Snoop Dogg.

The song begins with Andre crooning “Starts off like a small town marriage /Lovely wife in life, baby carriage /Now all the stars have cars, success of course /but it ends in Hollywood divorce.” Here Andre paints the scene of most struggling artists who actually make it. They aspire to rap, they become better at it, gain popularity (small town marriage). As their success builds, they can begin to provide for their family, accrue a better standard of living (wife, baby, cars), but it “ends in Hollywood divorce.” This last line is open-ended; it can refer to either, the divorce from your old way of life, the simple things you once knew that you know you have to sever ties with, or it can refer to how hard someone tries to obtain stardom and success to the point that one becomes married to the game, and this game is not granted yours forever and Hollywood (fame, fortune) ends up divorcing you.

Wayne has the opening verse, he sets the tone of the tune by describing his plight as a New Orleans native post Hurricane Katrina, rapping “And I’m a star/Yea, and I don't have to go to Hollywood /cause Hollywood come through my neighborhood with cameras on /I really think they're stealin from us like a sample song /I really wish one day we'd take it back like Hammer's home/The hurricane come and took my Louisiana home /and all I got in return was a durn country song /This whole country wrong.” At this juncture in his life, Wayne has become more than a southern artist, he’s a “star,” fame, and multiple houses but he still recognizes New Orleans as his “neighborhood” and “home.” This connectedness is important to fans and essential to his southern identity. These few bars work to cement Wayne’s heart and mind in his hometown no matter where the fame monster takes him.

He continues “What would you write if you just put a little ice on and cut your mic on /but you don't even write your songs /but Hollywood make you spit like a python /I meant Cobra.” This line comes as if he’s answering the looming question of his loyalty, Wayne dives into commenting on the issue of “selling out.” He turns the question on the audiences, asking “what would you do” if faced with fortune “put a little ice on” (jewelry) or offered fame “cut your mic on”? He even reveals the fourth wall stating “you don’t even write your songs” but Hollywood will make you spit (rap) like a cobra. This shows the audience the music industry is a business, whether you create your music or not you’re expected to perform it with much vigor, and the stinging intensity of a venomous Cobra.

After exposing the industry for making an artist work hard with or without creative license, he goes on to explain what one reaps for his efforts. Declaring; “hold up/Your grill's glistenin' /Spent a hundred thousand on mine to feel different - what's the real sense of it? /Uhhh Bling bling, I know /and did you know I'm the creator of the term I just straightened the perm and let it sit too long, they just makin it burn.” These lines address the need for artist to spend money on jewelry to fit the hegemonic hip hop standard. The “grill glistening” line refers to gold, platinum, and or diamond capped teeth that are so popular in the South, and other parts of hip hop culture. In a moment of reflection, Wayne questions why he even spent all the money just to be “different.” This false sense of individuality is magnified by his claim to being the creator of the popular term “bling-bling.” Linguistically the term bling-bling is an ideophone, which cites the sound that jewelry makes when light hits it. In hip hop terminology, bling-bling refers to gaudy, excessive or expensive jewelry. Bling was made popular by the hip hop community but quickly became indoctrinated in popular culture, and was added to the Merriam Webster Dictionary in 2006. In spite of Wayne’s proclamation, die-hard hip hop fans dispute that

the term was his, with various different critics crediting early 90s East Coast rapper Slick Rick and West Coast rapper 2Pac as some of the earlier recorders of the word. The word's inception is debatable but Wayne popularizing the word is not. The 1999 hit "Bling Bling" by rapper BG (Baby Gangster) featuring The Cash Money Millionaires, showcased an adolescent Lil Wayne rapping the chorus "Every time I come around your city bling bling/Pinky ring worth about 50 bling bling/Every time I buy a new ride bling bling/Lorenzos on Yokahama tires bling bling." The song was very popular and made the top 40 on the *Billboard Hot 100* list, thrusting the phrase into mainstream homes everywhere.

The fact that Wayne says "I just straightened the perm..." may be his way to address the nay sayers. A perm (in the African American community) is a chemical straightener applied to coarse hair. When left on too long, the chemical begins to burn the scalp. Metaphor, similes and double entendre are common practice in rap lyrics and often leave readers to prescribe their own interpretations. The "perm, ya'll let it burn" line may be Wayne admitting that whether he created the term or not he made it cool, in other words he straightened the perm (the already straight), but popular culture played it out, hence "they just makin it burn."

Wayne's verse ends with yet another critique of the industry, where he warns that they will "Make a movie of our lifestyle /But they earn like a dead body burned on a mantelpiece." Meaning; Hollywood which is pretty much synonymous with popular culture, will take your culture, and package it and sell it to the masses. I interpret "a movie" as reference to hip hop, in the sense that so much of the culture is out of the creator's hands. Big business directs and edits how the culture is viewed by the national audience. Even though the industry does not create the art (the music) they profit from it. The "earn like a dead body" calls attention to the earning something from doing nothing point. Wayne continues "that's why I try not to lie on wax like

this candle grease,” rehashing the authenticity argument, Wayne makes it clear that he does not fabricate in music, “on wax” references the tradition of vinyl records. Furthermore he raps “...and I be's the little nigga cooler than anti-freeze defrost on your window pane - Lil Wayne /but in Hollywood it's Litt-le Wayne /don't make me not /so that's why I got a pre-nup - I do,” this statements recalls the case of Nommo or naming in hip hop culture. Wayne makes a claim that Hollywood will try to change you, give you a different name and or persona, but to him it does not matter, because he’s married to the business but he’s “got a pre-nup” so he will leave the industry with what he came in with, presumably his integrity.

Dre launches his verse with wordplay and bravado. He quips, “Yeah, Yeah /A is for Adamsville /B is for Bowen homes /C if I give a fuck if you like me you know I don't” Adamsville is a predominantly black neighborhood in Atlanta and Bowen Family Homes was a business that built middle-class homes in the Atlanta Metro area. Much like Wayne, Andre established his communal connections with his southern brethren in the beginning. As if to say, I’m a country boy at heart, I still know my roots and he doesn’t care if you accept him for it or not.

He concludes his alphabet rhyme scheme with “D is for what I serve, I don't be on no curb /She ain't no junkie neither, I ain't no dope dealer /But she keep comin back 3-stacks, must be some crack /Put that pipe in her lap, she ain't know how to act.” The “D” represents the beauty of wordplay and known associations. In gangsta rap music, typically when someone says they “serve the D” the D would be the acronym for drugs or “dope”. Here Andres plays on that reference but claims the girl he’s serving to is not a junkie, and he’s not a dope dealer. This leads the mind to the second obvious reference in hip hop which would be sex, so the listener is cued in that he must serve her his sex instead of drugs. In true rap braggadocio fashion he boasts “she

keeps coming back, 3-stacks (stacks is an Andre 3000 slang term for money) must be some crack (crack = addictive).

Just when the listener is drawn into his sexual innuendos he switches gears retorting “Now that I've got your undivided attention/I'm gonna say this and run under condition one/Promise me you gon' stack, promise me you gon' ball /Promise me you'll invest three fourths of it all /For what? So your kids, kids, kids can have some cheese.” At this point Andre knows how the game is played in the entertainment industry. Sex sells. With this in mind he gives the audience a two for one deal, a little sex talk disguised as drug lingo, and with no additional cost, he adds a positive message. Outkast is genius at playing both sides of the fence. Their fame and popularity come from their being able to speak to very different audiences simultaneously.

Andre concludes the verse with an explanation as to why it's important to invest one's funds, he adds “cause wealth is the word /Rich is round the corner from the curb /Don't like what I write? /Shoot me a bird.” The “wealth is the word” line rehashes *Nommo*, the theory of speaking into existence, by equating wealth with being the ultimate goal. He urges that riches come and go but wealth is substantial.

The most provocative lines appear at the end of the song when Andre takes a minute to talk to the audience as the music fades out. He states “all the fresh styles always start off as a good little hood thing /look at blues, rock, jazz, rap /Not even talkin' about music /everything else too /by the time it reach Hollywood it's over /but it's cool /we just keep it goin' and make new shit.”

Afro-futurism

Music is the conduit of communication in the black community. In opposition to logocentrism, blacks use music to change the future while simultaneously negotiating the past

and positioning themselves in the present. In this respect blackness can be invented and made over via sound and representation. Herman S. Gray attributes the “most inventive producers of this reimagination of blackness, to the Afrofuturist” (163).

What connects the cultural productions of blackness and hip hop are the futuristic counter-narratives that move towards reconciliation of the past and the present. This reconciliation in the African American community takes place in the music. Engaging in Gray’s critique of the film *The Last Angel of History* by John Akrompha, he attributes the film as a “cinematic riff on black science fiction, identity politics, black cultural studies and black Atlantic soundings, black people are likened to aliens stranded in strange lands” (163). Gray continues that “the only hope of metaphorical and discursive escape is to be found in renarrating and reimagining the story of black dispersal and movement” (163). I propose that the same reimagining is happening in hip hop through the dispersal of southern flavored artistry.

Following this theme the music acts as cultural artifacts that contain “clues to black lives whose meanings can only be decoded (and renarrated) by Afro-futurists who traffic in sound, narrative, myth, cultural criticism, and science fiction.” (164). By positioning certain southern rap artists as Afro-futurists, who (unbeknownst to them) actively engage in post human/ post black futuristic play we can then begin to reconcile their disdain with the industry and their zest to expand the hip hop genre.

It is important to examine music because “black soundings function for Afro-futurists as perhaps the quintessential body of evidence that can be accessed, read and re-encoded” (64). In the case of Wayne and Andre, they have developed contempt for the music industry, and ultimately, the present state of hip hop culture led them to become detached from limiting hip

hop tropes. In efforts to express themselves, they re-encode hip hop, southern authenticity, and blackness into various alternative projects that question hip hop tradition. Afrofuturists “constitute themselves as a formation and movement engaging in shared cultural projects that cut across genres, scenes, spaces, and forms” (164). Befittingly, Lil Wayne cast his gaze in to the future through genre expansion, dabbling in rock and pop genres but situates his past and present as a balance between the drugs, sex and violence themes. While Andre 3000, on the other hand, cast his gaze futuristically by medium expansion. He has worked to expand his brand through film, costumes and clothing lines, as well as adopting a more pop infused sound.

Lil Wayne: The Martian

Though Lil Wayne garnered much success throughout his career, he was not content with his self-proclaimed title of “best rapper alive.” More recently, Wayne’s new fascination is rock music. Wayne is notorious for his rock star lifestyle of illicit drug use, fast cars and loose women (evident by his multiple arrests, the four different women with whom he fathered children, and his admitted drug addiction), but he had yet to try to cross into the genre itself. Drawing from his current success, rock seemed like the most natural progression for Wayne. The South is known for its rhythm and blues music and due to the popularity of artists like Wayne, southern hip hop has gained notoriety, but a southern rapper performing rock music has largely been uncharted territory.

Wayne’s current musical projects work hard to eliminate the genre restraints of hip hop completely. Showcasing his newly trained guitar skills on his last few albums, Wayne inevitably released a complete rock album titled *Rebirth*. The title is significant because it insinuates that Lil Wayne “the rapper” has died and that he will be born again as a rock star. This imagery of

denouncing the old and transcending to higher planes is reminiscent of other southern artists who have taken a different approach musically such as Andre 3000. It is as if rappers themselves acknowledge the constraints of the rap industry and see not genre expansion but actual separation from the hip hop genre itself as the only way to achieve the astronomical success that they seek. Consequently, these efforts can be viewed as an attempt to transcend the racialized and stereotypical characteristics of hip hop artistry.

In an attempt to break the monotony of rap conventions, Wayne debuted the video for his first rock single, “Prom Queen” which displays him in full rock and roll persona mode. He not only sounds the part (with loud singing and minimal word pronunciation), but he and his accompanying bona fide rock band also put on a very convincing performance of the rock star to come. Playing the dual role of hip hop artist and rock star requires an application of “double consciousness” which Bunten (2008) describes as “implicit in the representation of ethnic identity within in the [typical] hegemonic encounter” of, in this case musical genre conventions (382). Though rock and roll is historically derived from African American musical traditions, it is currently deemed as (at least popularly) exclusively white. Wayne’s artistry cannot rest on the laurels of his hip hop fame; he must carve out a niche in popular music’s reservoir before consumers let him cross those (figurative) genre gates. The fact that his album was “pushed back” four times before its actual February 2, 2010 release date may speak to the enforcement of the hegemonic structure within such music.

Lil Wayne’s sixth studio album *The Carter III* contains the track titled “Phone Home.” The “phone home” title is a nod to the popular 1982 film *ET: The Extra Terrestrial*, in which an alien is left behind on earth and attempts to contact his home planet in hopes of returning. In “Phone Home,” Lil Wayne begins by chanting “We are not the same I am a Martian.” The chant

is followed by a woman's robotic voice welcoming the listener and preparing them for their galactic journey stating: "Greetings from Planet Weezy/ We will begin transmission in/ 5,4, 3, 2, 1" The countdown marks the beginning of our impending space odyssey. The rest of the song is a verbal barrage of metaphors that Wayne uses as an opportunity to authenticate himself as alien, Martian and most importantly above par when compared to other rappers. Though this song, Wayne is able to displace his southern origin, and authenticate it with a fictional outer space and expand his profit margin through persona building.

Wayne uses each verse in "Phone Home" as an alien identity marker. In the first verse, he exclaims, "We are not the same /I am a Martian." This introduction lets us know that the artist and lyrics we are about to hear are like nothing we have encountered previously. After a few lines about murder for hire, he ends the verse declaring "hip hop is my supermarket/shoppin' cart full of fake hip-hop artists." This is where Wayne is self-reflexive, and recognizes the commodity fetishism of the rap industry and "buys" into its ideology. He re-authenticates himself by being the active consumer or even creator of the image and positions himself vis-à-vis the product being sold (the presumably *fake* rapper). The second verse begins "We are not the same I am an alien" and mid-verse he raps "Flow so sick, make you wanna throw yo' food up." This is the part where Wayne can become Weezy and just boast and brag about his skills. Weezy F. Baby is Wayne's pseudonym that he usually uses when he's in lyrical rap battle mode. This is a time-honored tradition in hip hop, for one to showboat or brag about his rhyming capabilities. Wayne's metaphors are poetic and eerie yet they have a tendency to elicit imagery that enhances his narrative. Wayne uses his last verse to reiterate his uninhibited alien/other self declaration proclaiming "They don't make 'em like me no more/Matter fact they never made 'em like me before/I'm rare like Mr. Clean wit hair/ no brake lights on my car-er." It is here that Wayne

recognizes that his autonomy is invaluable in the rap industry. Gray argues that it is characteristic of the Afro-futurist to “draw on images like alien, data thief, translator, scientist, and mythologizer to craft identities and to perform cultural politics...”(165). Thus, the lyrics could translate to meaning: that by establishing an alien persona, a character without precedence he will in turn have fruitfulness and longevity in his career.

If Wayne’s dominance and unique style have not been established for the listener by now his last few lines augment the aforementioned. “Phone Home” ends with the lines “ ...So I’m polar/and they can’t get on my system cause my system is the solar/ I am so far from the others, I mean others/I can eat them for supper, get in my spaceship and hover.” Once again Wayne turns into Weezy and puffs out his chest in pure rap supremacy. He raps as if he does not have to adhere to the demands of the English language (because he’s a Martian), and he purposely mispronounces words because as he’s claimed on numerous records “only God can understand [him].” According to these lyrics, Wayne feels that he is not even on the same planet as “other” rappers; he’s so superior in style that he could literally digest them, “eat them up” stylistically and continue about his business. Wayne uses his Martian alter ego as a process of “transforming identity into a commodity” (Bunten 385), in which he sells and promotes himself under this new image. Consequently his alienation from his original southern self can either expand his fan base or create distance between his established followers and his new creative turn.

Wayne’s eclectic persona exudes over into his Rebirth album as well, with many of the tracks ranging from love and love lost to illustrations of his extraterrestrial self. His second single titled Ground Zero is a hodgepodge collection of biblical, popular culture and science fiction metaphors. The song starts “Back the hell off /Rock n roll Jesus with all my nails on /all I need is a blunt and a bail bond.” This opening line sets the tone of superiority for the rest of the

song. Though Wayne is new to the rock genre, we can decipher that he believes he is the messiah, who has come to save/change things up a bit. He balances the biblical reference with the hard-edged drugs (blunt) and bad boy (bail bond) descriptions. The first verse ends with “I started on the block but that something to build on” Once again Wayne makes note of his humble beginnings, coming from the “block” but adds that that was just in preparation for his new status. Continuing the religious scheme, he asks “and how can I pray when I got nothing to kneel on.” Before the listener can decipher why he has nothing to place his knees on, the chorus responds with:

Hey
The ground is gone
don't look now but the ground is gone
I'm so high that the ground is gone
and I don't even know which crowd I'm on
don't look down but the ground is gone
don't look down cause the ground is gone
right now I'm a million miles from home
and I'm so high that the ground is gone

The chorus gives us the double entendre of being high (intoxicated) and high (elevated) in the sky. The intoxicating high is established during the first few lines, but the rest of the imagery builds on Wayne's already established celestial state of being. The “million miles from home” and “ground is gone” statements lead us to believe that Wayne has left Earth, he is in outer space on a different level than other hip hop earthlings.

The aforementioned song is a far cry from the formulaic mainstream rap lyrics that focus on degrading women, spending money, drugs, sex or violence. This space-themed song and Wayne's rock influenced album have taken a departure from the urban hip hop norm and even the southern norms as he channels his artistic side. Lil Wayne has been able to navigate through and around traditional performance tropes due to his self-proclaimed Otherness. McLeod (2003) states that "the adoption and embodiment of alien and/or futuristic personas represents one of the most powerful of such articulations, one that is common to all the disenfranchised groups." (339) This sense of self-alienation can be attributed to Wayne's willingness to transform.

Andre 3000: The Prototype

After the release of Outkast's third album *Stankonia*, Andre was often quoted that he was beginning to become bored with hip hop. Although the album sold over five million copies, and earned the group two Grammy's, Andre still wanted out. "Feeling uninspired and limited by hip hop, he began to see a time when he would outgrow the music. He even talked of enrolling in Juilliard to study music formally (Sarig 187).

This was also the era in which "rap's mainstream marketability... prompted a widespread lyrical shift from claims of performer skills to concerns of crossing over, selling out, and keeping it real" (Hess 302). In an interview with the United Kingdom's *The Guardian*, Andre expressed his growing dissatisfaction with hip hop stating "Hip-hop don't have no fresh energy, none at all. It's money driven, everybody tryin' to make tha cheque, nobody putting art in their albums anymore." Afrofuturists are involved in the global project of identifying and breaking codes that bar access to freedom from old narratives and debilitating discourses of black identity (165). Focusing on Andre's first solo effort, *The Love Below*, will demonstrate how Andre turns to

Afrofuturism (self-consciously) in efforts to break conventional hip hop codes and express his creativity.

The Love Below is a romantic *tour de force*, loosely chronicling the fictional tale of a young man's adventures of love. Even though Andre is a rap artist, the album consists primarily of singing and musical instrumentation, much like the rock album by Lil Wayne. Andre says he chose the title *Love Below* to describe "that bubbling under feeling that people don't like to talk about, that dudes try to cover up with machismo" (as quoted in Petridis). A whole album dedicated to love is a conscious sidestep from the commercialized rap albums of gritty street tales and sex. Through there are conscious rappers and records of substance being produced in mainstream hip hop, it is still rare or "alien" to hear an entire album of singing and pining over love or a love lost.

With the exception of Kanye West's *808 and Heartbreaks*, which was released five years after *Love Below*, we have yet to see a rap artist open himself up emotionally and become so vulnerable on "wax." The performance of black masculinity in hip hop draws upon the idea of "doubleness," again positioning the artist's construction of self with the authenticity of hip hop. Reframing W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of double consciousness, hip hop artists must navigate the duality of being authentic (being true to yourself) and marketable (doing what's expected to sell). Traditionally hip hop artists authenticate themselves through their words. If the art of rapping is replaced with singing, one must use the words sung to create a new identity in which authenticity can be established. The commodified persona acts as resistance as "rap artists confuse, or split their identities to subvert the often conflicting standards of authenticity and marketability" (Hess 298).

As quoted in Weheliye's "'Feenin' Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music" essay, Lindon Barrett in *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* contrasts the value of the black voice with lack of value ascribed to blackness in American mainstream culture (Weheliye 27). Weheliye describes how Barrett "distinguishes the singing voice from the signing voice of Euro-American alphabetical literacy" and how Barrett argues that the black singing voice "provides a primary means by which African Americans may exchange an expended, valueless self in the New World for a productive, recognized self." In terms of Afro-Futuristic post-human-ness, the "*signing voice* signals full humanity, whiteness, and disembodiment, where the *singing voice* metonymically enacts blackness, embodiment, and subhumanity" (Weheliye 28). Andre uses his singing voice to capitalize on his commodified persona, and serve as the "antithesis to the Enlightenment subject by virtue of not only having a body but by being the body" (Weheliye 28) thus revealing the power of his self-objectivity. Andre's style and his singing voice are categorically not human; they are cyborg or alien and serve as extensions of Andre's "otherness" because of his use of auto-tune.

Andre's eclecticism shines most brightly in the song and accompanying video on the seventh track of his album titled *Prototype*. "Prototype" is a song about finding love and celebrating female adoration. The track has a funk-laden sound, with burgeoning bass and electric guitar riffs. The verses are simple and serene as he croons about falling in love "again" with a woman who he feels may be his perfect match or at least the "prototype" of such. The song ends with Andre giving credit to the woman, and his love for her for "picking [him] up, and bringing [him] back to this world." These last lines suggest that he had given up on his earthly existence until he met this woman. Andre professes that all his hope and humanity was restored

upon this meeting and even if they were to part now, he could not be “mad at God” because they “met today for a reason.”

Gray adds that “to describe black people and their cultural practices these code breakers use epic tales and tropes of aliens, travelers, and dwellers whose aural soundtracks and imaginative visions are supplied by figures...” (165). Andre uses the tale of self as extraterrestrial, and the images are furthered in the aesthetics of the song’s music video. The video depicts a family of white-haired, multi-racial, aliens wearing long white gowns. The narrator claims that the group has traveled “3000 light years from their home planet Prota.” Upon their arrival they “experience the rarest of all human emotions...Love.” The rest of the video depicts the fairy tale encounter of love as described in the lyrics and ends with Andre turning into a human and staying on earth with his newfound love and their alien baby.

The aforementioned video speaks to the different perspectives that black artists have been able to achieve through their artistry. Although gyrating women, fast cars, and excessive money were the norm for hip hop videos, select artists have carved alternative paths. The Afrofuturistic gaze provides a space for black art to be viewed and negotiated outside of the stereotypical lens of negative representations. As a result of their success, Lil Wayne and Andre have become models to which popular culture can point to show how a black male rap artist should look, sound, and perform. Michael Eric Dyson finds the weight of this representation problematic. He argues that:

This situation makes it difficult for blacks to affirm the value of nontraditional or transgressive artistic expressions. Instead of viewing such cultural products through critical eyes—seeing the good and the bad, the productive and destructive aspects of such art—many blacks tend to simply dismiss such work with hypercritical disdain. A

suffocating standard of "legitimate" art is thus produced by the limited public availability of complex black art. Either art is seen as redemptive because it uplifts black culture and shatters stereotypical thinking about blacks, or it is seen as bad because it reinforces negative perceptions of black culture. That is too narrow a measure for the brilliance and variety of black art and cultural imagination (414).

Wayne and Andre have had to battle this dichotomy of love and repulsion and pave distinct ways in which to express themselves and represent the southern hip hop culture authentically.

CHAPTER III: WE ARE NOT THE SAME

The third repertoire in black popular culture that Stuart Hall calls attention to is the black body as cultural capital. He argues that there is “no escape from the politics of representation” (291) and “it is through the way in which we imagine ourselves that we come to know how we are constituted and who we are” (291). Lil Wayne and Andre 3000 have used vivid lyrics to re-imagine themselves as different artists, different from the ongoing rhetoric of “dirty South” and even different from the artists they once were.

As the lyrics they used spoke to their individuality, they begin to fashion their bodies as canvases of those differences. Both Wayne and Andre constructed commodified personas that made it easier for the audience to digest their creativity while concurrently expanding their profit margins. Osumare supports the idea that “hip hop’s commodification are based on identity representation and the promotion of a constructed identity –the cult of personality –in the market-place” (151). These artists capitalize on their representations and turn their bodies into objects that can be commodified alongside their music.

The Tattooed Man

Wayne’s body is covered in tattoos, fashioning him as a walking mural. Waist up, every visible inch of Wayne is covered in ink, with eight tattoos on his face alone. The rest span his hands, neck, chest, stomach, and back. To explore every tattoo is beyond the scope of this project, but there are six major themes around which all of the tattoos can be categorized. The themes consist of: Home Pride (“17” for the 17th Ward in New Orleans, a Fleur de Lis symbol, etc.), Music References (microphone, YM for his label Young Money, etc.); Names (“Weezy,” “Tune,” and various other nicknames and names of people dear to him), Gangster/Hood (the

“Blood” gang he claims and its various symbols and terminology), Biblical (prayers and passages), and Miscellaneous (an alien, a person without a head, Rolls Royce symbol, etc.). The most notable tattoos are on his face: he has the phrase “Fear of God” written across his eyelids with “of” resting on his forehead, the words “misunderstood” and “I Am Music” on his face. The latter two tats speak most to the persona that Wayne has struggled to create and maintain. Wayne’s deeds, performances and music have been severely criticized and his only explanation to the critics is no explanation. Instead of using his music and public appearances to clarify him, he uses them as an opportunity to cloak himself in mystery, as one whose action defies rationality. As his face tats declare, Wayne is not a man or even a Martian at times, to him, he is music personified.

The randomness continues as one examines the placement of tear drop tattoos under his eyes. Tattoo tears typically symbolize one’s part as murderer in a gang-related killing. Wayne has adamantly denied any involvement in such illicit activity, claiming that he just likes the way it looks. Random tattoos of cracks are duplicated all over his body, the most prominent ones stem from his hair line on to his face. Aligning with the religious themes he has, the cracks may be interpreted as representing the Christian belief that one is a cracked vessel in the eyes of God, a flawed individual in search of salvation. These moments of humility are thrown off by random symbols of violence, such as the word “trigger” on his finger. He attempts a balancing act with the words “a gun” and “the world” tattooed on his palms as if to say that he will always have them in his hands. Wayne’s body art presents his flesh as a canvas of the sacred and the profane, a walking conundrum.

The riddle that is Wayne is deepened by his public persona. His stardom has been characterized by an affinity for strippers, multiple kids with celebrity moms, jail stints and

unintelligible interviews. All of which adds to his mystery, allowing Wayne to thrive from the attention the miscomprehension affords him. The two most distinguished stunts in his career happened when he was photographed kissing his mentor on the lips and the day he began carrying a styrofoam cup with questionable contents. In the fall of 2006, a picture surfaced on the internet of Wayne planting a kiss on the lips of his mentor/boss Baby Williams of Cash Money Millionaire fame. Fans quickly dismissed the photo as either a hoax or sign of respect mafia style. Critics were quick to label him gay and or a product of molestation even though Wayne was well over the age of 21 at the time. Wayne and Baby both took to media outlets and explained away the issue as just a glimpse of their unique bond as father and son. Even in the macho and homophobic climate of hip hop, the issue seemed to die down quickly. This dismissal of potentially damning evidence of alleged homosexuality is astounding in the rap community and speaks to the solidity of Wayne's reputation.

Wayne's abundance of body art presents his "canvas" as Hall would say, as a work of art, but some feel that he may destroy this masterpiece with drugs and alcohol. For the past few years, Wayne has not developed an obsession with styrofoam cups. The addiction has less to do with the cups and more to do with the cup's content. After much speculation and blatant song lyrics ("weed and syrup till I die"), Wayne admitted that he is addicted to "syrup" and that is usually what is in the cups that he carries at all times. Syrup, also known as "lean" or "purple drank," is a recreational drug that is popular in the South. The drink consists of promethazine and codeine mixed with Sprite, Hawaiian Punch and/or Jolly Rancher candy. The drink is habit forming and can be lethal in large doses. Syrup has already claimed the lives of a few southern artists but Wayne is adamant about not quitting.

MTV.com interviewed Wayne in 2008 for an interview about his decision to donate money to his high school alma mater. The interview quickly turned to his slew of arrests and his budding syrup habit. When asked “why he won’t just quit the drink altogether,” Wayne responded:

"Do your history, do your research," he lamented "It ain't that easy — feels like death in your stomach when you stop doing that shit. You gotta learn how to stop, you gotta go through detox. You gotta do all kinds of stuff. Like I said, I'm a selfish-ass nigga. I feel like everything I do is successful and productive. It's gonna be hard to tell me I'm slipping. It's hard to sit and tell a nigga 'Stop.' 'Fuck, how can we tell this nigga to stop when every fucking thing he do is successful? This nigga is making progress. He just went and talked to kids and that shit was amazing.' Feel me? So what am I doing wrong? "Let me do me. Everybody's got their thing," he continued, "Why focus on me? Don't compare me to no one. Don't compare me to no one who has passed, and why they passed. I can walk out this bitch right now and get hit by a bus. Don't judge me. You wanna judge me, put on a black gown and get a gavel. Get in line with the rest of them that's about to judge me. I got court dates every other month. It's me against the world — that's how I feel." (“Lil Wayne on Syrup: ‘Everybody Wants Me To Stop... It Ain’t That Easy.’”)

Wayne’s drug habit is not anything exceptionally new in hip hop, it actually seems to complement his gangster persona. But the image of Wayne painted in this interview is of someone who is proud, yet dependent on this habit. In one instance, he’s the gun-yielding bandit

and, on the other, he's succumbing to the trap of a vice. This is a story that the subaltern can relate to, one of a man fighting the demons in his past and present but wanting something better for the future. All of these acts come together to present Wayne as an elusive trickster that's even harder to pinpoint than he is to understand.

Cultural critics have long made the connection of the trickster character in African American literature to that of the persona of the black musician. One of the most noteworthy studies was that of the Yoruba god Esu-Elegbara by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in his *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (1988). Mark Willhardt and Joel Stein compare Esu to funk music legend George Clinton in their "Dr. Funkenstein's Supergroovalisticprosifunkstication" article. They make persuasive connections between Clinton's position and that of Esu, paraphrasing the specificity of Esu's role as "the sole messenger of the gods...he who interprets the will of gods to man; he who carries the desires of man to the gods" (149). George Clinton becomes a trickster through the adoption of a "black science fiction cosmo" aesthetic demonstrated through the manipulation of his voice through synthesizer, his elaborate space-themed costumes, cosmic lyrics, and his multicolored hair extensions. Clinton serves as the producer of the signs and metaphors associated with psychedelic funk music and also the mediator of these images. Willhardt and Stein continue their Clinton/Esu comparison by describing Esu as someone existing in a space between "meanings divine and moral" positioning Esu as a character associated with numerous qualities encompassing: "individuality, satires, parody, irony, magic, indeterminacy, open-endedness, ambiguity, sexuality, chance, uncertainty, disruption and reconciliation, betrayal and loyalty, closure and disclosure, encasement and rupture" (149). Embodying all of these characteristics concurrently makes Esu a mix of "ambiguity and contradiction"(149).

Osumare extends Gates' analysis and equates Esu to the trickster play at hand in the global world market of hip hop. She notes that "as trickster, Esu never quite seems as he appears; illusion is his game, and challenge to the status quo brings him fame" (38). She then describes the status quo as reflective of the historical climate, anything ranging from slavery to individuals' perception of themselves within society. Osumare also focuses on Esu's other talent as the mediator or the crossroads who uses "profane vernacular" to negotiate the sacred and the secular.

Wayne's song "Misunderstood" from his *The Carter III* begins with the infectious sampled chorus from the song by the Animals that moans "But I'm just a soul whose intentions are good. Oh Lord, please don't let me be misunderstood." This statement seems oxymoronic based on Wayne's public antics and even the rest of the lyrics of the song, all of which insist on befuddling the audience. The song commences with raps of biblical references:

The wind blow, my dreads swang
He had hair like wool, like Wayne
dropping ashes in the Bible
I shake'em out and they fall on the rifle
scary, hail Mary no tale fairy
all real very, extraordinary
Perry Mason facing, the barrel if he tattle
my God is my judge, no gown no gavel

Wayne's affinity for religious posturing calls upon a mix of the sacred and profane that maintains a presence in rap music. Wayne skirts the line of blasphemy with the line "he had hair

like wool, like Wayne.” This posturing of seeing God in oneself though one’s faults allows for a deeper connection to spirituality. The Bible is full of stories of suffering and deliverance much like rap tales, turning modern rappers into street disciples. Mixing the pitfalls of the ghettos with the quest for redemption was a skill that slain rapper Tupac Shakur perfected. It seems fitting for Wayne to mimic the legendary Pac and nods to Wayne’s personal quest to be the best rapper alive. Wayne has an uncanny ability of patterning himself after hip hop greats. The rappers 2Pac, Biggie and Jay-Z arguably make the top ten list of many hip hop enthusiasts (under 30 years old). Wayne has adopted the hood tale posturing of Biggie, the gun-toting, rag-wearing, set-claiming, thug with a heart and a passion for Christ (pun intended) that 2Pac displayed so well, and goes by his last name Carter for his Carter album trilogy which nods to Sean “Jay-Z” Carter, who has appeared on a few tracks including their “Mr. Carter” duet.

Becoming the southern version of the some of the most quotable rappers should lead to acceptance, but this further complicates the relationship between Wayne and his critics. This consternation is addressed again towards the end of the song with the line “I know you don’t understand, cuz you thought Lil Wayne is Weezy/but Weezy is Dwayne.”

Before offering an explanation of the different characters, Wayne closes the track by addressing a news item he saw on television about the high numbers of blacks in jail for drug-related charges. He stops rapping and just talks on the track, the fourth wall is broken by the tone and the sincerity in his voice; you begin to believe that it is just you and him alone and that he wants you to break the cycle of crime. Things get personal towards the end of this five minute rant where he addresses Al Sharpton directly stating “Mr. Sharpton, hold on I ain’t finished with you man” in which he criticizes Sharpton for casting judgment on him and his music without knowing him directly. The plea turns negative when he quips, “I also don’t respect you and I

don't care if that's good or bad, you see, you are no MLK, you are no Jesse Jackson, you are nobody to me, you're just another Don King, with a perm, hahaha just a little more political, and that just means you're a little more unhuman than us humans." A black man, rapper or not, calling out one of the most prolific figures in African American leadership is risky business but Wayne is unfazed by his critics or the potential backlash from the incident, exclaiming "now let me be human (switching back from Martian to human for a moment of seriousness) and say, fuck Al Sharpton and anyone like him." Although the lyrics croon "please don't let me be misunderstood," Wayne uses the last few moments of the track to thwart the whole process adding "fuck if you understand me, I love being misunderstood...Haha why? Cause I live in the suburbs but I come from the hood."

Moving On Up

Wayne has been fortunate enough to relocate from the projects of New Orleans to mansions across the South from Miami to Houston, but he still embraces a hood mentality. Aside from the tattoos, Wayne has gained a lot of attention from his permanent "grill" of platinum and diamonds. A grill is an adornment made of metal and/or jewels that is worn over the teeth. Much like a tooth cap, the grill usually consists of a row or two of teeth impressions that can be used as removable or permanent fixtures. Largely popular in the South, the grill, more affectionately called "grillz," became a staple in Southern hip hop music and culture. The grill phenomenon spawned a plethora of grill anthems in the new millennium and even a hip hop grill impresario/rapper Paul Wall, who designed and sold grills to many hip hop notables over the years.

In the article “The History of the Grill” by Brian Sims, he explores the possible origins of “the grill. He begins his argument by stating that the first alleged historical account of African Americans wearing metal on their teeth can be traced back to slavery:

During slavery, slaves were of course denied quality dental and vision health care plans. However, on rare occasions, slave owners permitted rudimentary dental surgery to be conducted on their chattel. This, of course, was reserved only for the most valuable male slaves, those that an owner could not bear to lose to death caused by infection related to tooth decay. The slaves that received the dental work often had copper, tin, or sometimes bronze fillings for cavities and replacements. The metal in their mouth became a status symbol denoting their value to the master, and their superiority to the average slave, i.e., the more metal, the more importance. Showing one’s shiny “grill” became a way of notifying others (slaves, masters, etc.) that you were important, and ultimately not to be messed with. (1)

He concludes his argument by addressing the debate of whether or not gold teeth and grillz originated in the South. He debunks this myth by recalling rap artists from the East Coast who wore grillz in the 80s. However, he credits The Hot Boyz, Lil Wayne’s crew, as giving grillz public and popular notoriety in 1999, once again Wayne is on the cusp of a trend. Over time we have seen the popularity of grillz wane and surge but the general consensus in hip hop is that grillz of any sort have been spurred and kept alive by southern rap culture. Wayne took the trend one step further by making his diamond grill a permanent fixture, thus solidifying his renegade gangster persona.

Wayne's image is rooted in the outlaw figure. Through his works and efforts his persona becomes an extension of the gangster genre, while he uses space imagery to revise the classic gangster tale. Wayne presents these efforts best in his latest studio album *I Am Not a Human Being*. The album is a hodgepodge of songs that mix his space cadet ambitions with the gangsta genre ethos. The title track mixes these efforts most effectively with the lyrics displaying the culmination of Wayne the rocker, "Rock Star Bitch/check out how we rock/and if this ain't hip hop...it must be knee hop," the gangster, "it's the mob shit nigga/Martin Scorsese /heater close range, cuz people are strange," the rapper, "I am the Rhyming Oasis/I got a cup of ya time I won't waste it," the alien, "I am not a human being...Re, Re, Reporting from another world/Magazine full of bullets you can be my cover girl," the Christian, "shoot you in the head and leave your dash full of memories /father forgive me for my brash delivery," and the drug addict, "pop all the balloons and spit in the punch, yeah, kush and the blunts."

Wayne uses his popularity and music to connect to the hip hop community psychologically rather than politically. Wayne is known for his braggadocio lyrics but there is little attention paid to how the celebration of economic success can inspire young people to know that they can become greater than their current circumstances afford them. Wayne is popular because he resonates with a black audience that can relate to oppression. They can relate to the outlaw figure that challenges the status quo, that hustles and provides for his family by any means necessary and who maintains a connection with the community that birthed him. Wayne's connectedness to his fans have made his intergalactic journey possible. The rap community has watched him grow up in the industry in an established thug persona so they have been obliged to follow him as he branches out and transforms his music.

To hip hop, Wayne represents aspects of the forbidden. Singing, kissing another man on the lips, wearing tight jeans, and playing the guitar are not considered “gangsta,” but when a professed gangster who is so hard that he’s rapped about raiding your house to “shoot your grandmother up” does it, it becomes acceptable. Osumare’s research points to how the trickster of “Africanist aesthetics” lends itself always to revisionist uses, and thereby avoids complacency over time. This inherent “revisionist vitality is what makes the aesthetic extremely useful during shifting eras in the cultural zeitgeist” (155). Wayne positions his trickster aesthetic in his gun-carrying-New- Orleans-Martian persona; a mix of gangster ethos and southern sensibilities all rolled up in one and placed in a spaceship. Thus Wayne’s trickster creates a new improved product ready for mass consumption, arguably exploiting the African American trickster trope.

The Prototype

When considering the trickster play in Andre 3000, one sees how he draws from another of Esu’s personas, that of “divine linguist” which Osumare adds has “an even closer connection to the wordsmith’s ability of the ‘dope’ rhymer” (39). Outkast has always been praised for their witty lyrics and as Andre branched out on his own, he mixed the clever wordplay with creative songwriting. Andre’s style of artistry has evolved into elaborate storytelling and performance, Osumare recalls that the “hip hop emcee as both writer and performer is the master of the vernacular language and the invoker of *Nommo*, that is the legacy of the original trickster linguist” (39). Andre’s work thrives in his own “cipher,” devoid of popular rap constraints. A cipher, as described in Osumare’s *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip Hop* is “a conceptual space in which heightened consciousness exists...a privileged outlaw space” (40). Take, for instance, Andre’s featured verse on the UnderGroundKing’s hit song “International Players Anthem.” The song and accompanying video contain an oxymoronic anthem about being a

player for life, pimping women and having women “choose” to be with you. The irony is that the chorus is a soul sample that loops the phrase “I choose you baby,” while the other three rappers on the song, Pimp C, Bun B, and Big Boi, rap about wearing prophylactics during intercourse (“never f*** without a rubber”), and pimping women for life (“Put my pimpin’ in your life, watch your daddy get rich”), or avoiding potential impregnation (“Girl don’t touch my protection, I know you want it to slip/But slippin’ is something I don’t do, tippin’ for life?...Mmm mmm!”). The last verses work to counteract Andre’s opening verse and subsequent role in the music video.

The video’s premise is witnessing of the Holy Matrimony Mr. and Mrs. Andre Benjamin and their “wedding made in heaven” as the opening credits inform us. The video is filmed as if by a videographer filming a real wedding using a handheld camera. The quality alternates between that view and the standard camera setting, thus placing the audience into roles as eyewitnesses. The opening scene is filmed in a dressing room. Andre stands in the mirror adjusting the two curled locks of hair that adorn his face while the rest of the groomsmen play the dozens and make George Washington comparisons.

Playing the “dozens” is the African American tradition of making wisecracks or jokes about one another (Sarig x). As the camera pans out, Andre is pictured wearing a traditional kilt, dress shirt and bow tie. The group continues to make wisecracks as Andre exclaims “I have Scottish in my family (Oddly, a reference to a non-Afrocentric identity).” Rapper Bun B, a member of UGK, gives Andre a head to toe glance and asks “So who’s yo bridesmaid?” The group laughs on as Andre urges the group to “support me, come on now, support me.” As the group continues to joke and offer up discouraging marital support, Andre is isolated from the group. His values, the fact he wants to get married, and his style of dress differentiate him from

the pack. Andre's presumed group of friends in the film consist of well known southern and Midwestern black male rappers and comedians. Outside of the video, they represent the standard norm of the hip hop community: successful, chain-wearing, stylishly urban men. This juxtaposition speaks to the larger positioning of Andre in the industry as a progressive, unpersuaded by the norm, innovative thinker.

The next scene takes place in the chapel, as his bride-to-be makes her way down the aisle, Andre begins his clever rap poem: "So, I typed a text to a girl I used to see/ Sayin that I chose this cutie pie with whom I wanna be/ And I apologize if this message gets you down/Then I CC'd every girl that I'd see see round town and/I hate to see y'all frown but I'd rather see her smiling." Andre invokes the power of Nommo by professing his current love, to all of his past loves. In the rap world, where derogatory lyrics abound, where woman are passed around like trading cards, it is rare to hear a man confess his love for only one woman in an effort to quell the possibility of cheating. As if he hears the question before it's asked, Andre addresses the issue: "makes no sense I know, crazy/Give up all this pussy cat that's in my lap/no lookin' back." Andre places himself on a higher plateau of understanding: "Spaceships don't come equipped with rearview mirrors/ They dip as quick as they can/The atmosphere is now ripped/I'm so like a Pip, I'm Gladys Knight /So the light from the sun would not burn me on my bum/When I shoot the moon high, jump the broom/Like a premie out the womb." Andre's verse as a whole shows his evolution from the traditional machismo found in hip hop. The fact that he uses his legal name in the video and not his rap persona or various nicknames speaks to the sensitivity of the message. He makes it cool to want to be in love and want to be committed to one person. He also uses this verse as a moment to make a quick homage to soul music with the Pips/Gladys Knight reference,

it's the small gems like this that connect Andre's work to a tradition bigger than rap and rooted in African American cultural expressions.

As a whole, Andre's body of work can be situated into a larger body of themes in the tradition of black art as expression and freedom from oppression. Andre's work tends to be culled from a place of artistic yearning. He produces music that nods to the past, movies and videos that celebrate the extension of creative ability. Since his last album and first solo effort, 2003's *The Love Below* album, Andre has had his hand at acting, singing, instrumentation and featured solos on other rap artists' albums. He is famously quoted as saying "I am a lover of all kinds of art. And I just can't stick to one thing. I guess I could if I made myself, but I'd always be looking the other way, for other things." (Andre 3000 Profile)

Andre's trickster play is indisputably the "dope" rhyme skills that he serves alongside the theatrics. He has a knack for presenting an enduring story layered with references that all types of people can relate to. His seemingly abrupt change in appearance has been attributed to his relationship with neo-soul singer Erykah Badu. They had a child together in November of 1997, and though their relationship did not last, the changes he underwent during the process has had lasting effects.

During the course of their relationship, Andre became a vegan and more eclectic and adventurous. Andre began to reflect Badu's Bohemian flair of adorning oneself in dreads and head wraps. Some fans may have been unable to relate to Andre's new style but they could relate to his emotional state. Upon their break up, he wrote the song "Ms. Jackson" to (publicly) address Badu's mother whose last name is Jackson and apologize for the end of the relationship but promises to be a good dad and do what's best for his son. The visuals of the accompanying

music video were set in what appears to be the rural South, complete with dirt roads and a wooden shack. Andre, dressed in baggy jeans, Confederate flag belt, sans shirt with a crocheted scarf and hat combo, and Big Boi in jeans and a jersey spend the video attempting to fix a very old house and car, respectively. Throughout the video, all of their efforts fail, the car blows up and the house has a leaky roof. Andre croons “you can plan a pretty picnic, but you can’t predict the weather” which becomes the overall tone of the song and the video: sometimes things do not work out as planned.

Wigs and Cuffs Excite Me

Infatuated with pageantry, Andre presents himself in wigs, costumes, head wraps, and most controversially a Native American headdress to name a few items. Over the years, Andre’s outlandish style of dress has become his trademark. Andre does not indulge in the lavish display of wealth that has become the hip hop norm. While Wayne and others are “blinged” out with excessive jewelry and grillz, Dre admits to only owning one piece of jewelry, a Native American beaded necklace that he wears all the time in honor of his Native heritage. “In order to capture the revisionist play inherent in hip hop cultural practice (including its play with capitalism itself), critical thinking outside of traditional institutional frames must be promoted” (Osumare 155). Andre sidesteps rap tradition by bringing playfulness and a whimsical structure to his image. One moment he dresses like a Scottish highlander, then next like a futuristic Jimi Hendrix.

The rap community has spent over three decades establishing behavioral norms and setting stylistic cues for the masses to follow. With each new artifact Andre produces, he uses it to help destroy that complacency. Andre uses his “canvas” as a blank slate to be painted as he sees fit. The paint he uses is not permanent like Wayne’s body ink but more modifiable and can

be change on a whim. Andre has even focused his talents on providing clothing for others with his Benjamin Bixby fashion line. Aware of the trend of rappers lending their likeness to sell urban labels, Andre takes the preppy route, stating “the world doesn't need another clothing company. But it does need a certain funk.”

The word “funk” or “funky” is a popular term used in the African American community to describe something pleasurable as it relates to music, style or actions. Tony Bolden describes the origin of the term funky based on the research of Robert Farris Thompson: “funk(y) comes from the Ki-kongo word ‘lu-fuki’ which means ‘foul body odor’ as it is produced from physical exertion.” He continues, “funk(y) also signifies honest expression and integrity, because the artistic and/or material products that accrue from such exertion reflect a high level of commitment to one’s work” (15). Andre’s choice of adjective invokes a sense of timelessness. He wants his clothes to represent a style culled from freedom of expression and creativity.

Cornel West believes that “for most young men, power is acquired by styling their bodies... in such a way that their bodies reflect their uniqueness and provoke fear in others. To be ‘bad’ is good not simply because it subverts the language of the dominant culture but also because it imposes a unique kind of order on their own distinctive chaos and solicits an attention that makes others pull back with some trepidation. This young black male makes style a form of identification and resistance in hostile culture?” (quoted in Bolden 24). Andre’s body is not intimidating in a hostile sense like the tattooed warrior Wayne appears to be, but is definitely threatening to the normality of the black male body. Andre made it his mission to work to redefine himself and rap music, changing “gangsta” to refer to someone unwavering in his or her beliefs. He spoke this truth in his song “Return of a G” from Outkast’s *Aquemini* album, spitting “It’s the return of the gangsta, thanks ta’ them niggas that get the wrong impression of

expression.” He continued, “Then they questioning Big Boi, ‘What’s up with Andre? Is he in a cult? Is he on drugs? Is he gay? When ya’ll gon’ break up?/ When ya’ll gon’ wake up?/ Nigga I’m feelin’ better than ever, what’s wrong with you?/You! Get down!” The “gangsta” that Andre is addressing is a man who is able to rhyme about more than “switches and bitches,” one who thinks for himself, provides for his loved ones, and perseveres even in the face of adversity.

The feelings of being different and not accepted because of that difference conjures the very principle that Outkast as a group was founded upon: a quest to be apart from the norm. It just so happens that in Andre’s quest, he became separated from the group as well. Andre’s personal feelings of alienation came when he wanted to branch out and try new things. As he grew more comfortable in his artistry, he received more and more criticism. He poured his heart out and worked these feelings out through his music, which gave the fans something to relate to. Andre resonates with the audience on a level of shared awkwardness. His target audience is the young gifted/talented persons who want to be bigger than their circumstance. Andre’s music has formal ties to the ideology of therapeutic alienation. In John McWhorter’s book *Winning the Race*, he ties his notion of therapeutic alienation to the teachings of Eric Hoffer in his classic monograph *The True Believer*. McWhorter explains Hoffer’s thesis of questioning the need for choices and individuality stating “individuality is an unnatural condition, leading to a sense of existential disconnection, so much so that it is almost intolerably threatening to many people. This makes membership in collective ideological movement spiritually attractive, in absolving them of the discomforting responsibility of making their way as unbounded independent actors.” (165) Andre takes the trickster spirit of Esu and decodes the complex messages of social acceptance in hip hop to the audience by acting as a buffer. You can point to Andre and how he strove despite disapproval and find comfort in collectivity and shared alienation.

Music videos and songs help make the alienation people feel less traumatic, they then can view these songs like movies and these rappers as actors to work out forms of aggression and abandonment. Some critics such as McWhorter disagree and even go to the extent of viewing hip hop as “playacting,” as pretending, stating that the roots of the therapeutic alienation in hip hop comes from “spiritual insecurity.” He argues that people embrace alienation as a way of hiding from facing the real world as self-realizing individuals” (335) and all of this is very true. As Tricia Rose has stated, rap is the “contemporary stage for the theater of the powerless.” Rappers are the buffers and escape from reality that many yearn for. Whether the situation one raps about is real or imaginary, he represents a shared mentality and ethos of his community. The act of “representing” is the process of taking on the mantle from the past in the present moment. It also connotes responsibility to one’s present context –crew, family, and community. Gottschild clarifies that “the individual is obliged to ‘represent’ in the hip hop sense of the word, to rise and be counted for a specific community, to positively and righteously stand up for a ‘crew’” (quoted in Osumare 27).

Wayne and Andre represent and resist the mainstream commodification of the black southern body. Lil Wayne with his rock star ambition and Andre 3000’s eclectic taste departed from the hip hop norm and have channeled their artistic sides. These men have been able to navigate though and around traditional performance tropes due to their self-proclaimed Otherness. Subsequently, their appropriation of alien and futuristic personas give voice to the subaltern perspective and offers communication in a language that is understandable musically.

Working outside of social and marketing constraints has allowed these artists an avenue to re-script the performance of the black hip hop body. In the course of personifying commodities, hip hop “stages the difference of blackness, and its staging is both the Signifyin(g)

of its constructedness and the site of its production of the authentic” (Potter 121). These authenticities must be constructed, as Potter claims, in a postmodern reproduction of the already produced. Wayne and Andre reproduce hip hop performance of the black body and otherness and displace it from the clutch of the urban ghetto and situate it in outer space, a limitless world free from restrictions.

Wayne’s motivation is capitalism, he’s self-motivated, he’s different for different’s sake, and the gangster ethic pervades and shapes his identity to a stereotypical trope. Andre’s motive of artistry is community centered, its situated in a larger body of work, nods to the past in efforts to refine those traditions of the past (soul, funk, blues) and create new ones. Where Wayne’s persona reduces southern blackness into a commodity to be bought and sold, Andre offers a counternarrative of social awareness not materialism. In the end, they both have developed methods that have led to a maximum profitability and national exposure.

You Can Take The Boy Out The Hood But Not The Hood Out The Boy

Wayne and Andre cannot “authentically” commodify the urban ghetto because they are removed from it due to their southern origins and their social-economic gains. By no means is this thesis implying that they do not have an “ear to the streets” so to speak, or that they are totally disconnected from their urban brethren. It is essential to call attention to the fact that they have transcended the ghetto. Rappers have been criticized for profiting from the display of their circumstances of poverty. The problem arises when rappers *are* fortunate enough to transform their humble beginnings into a commodity. This poses the question: from where should one’s “victim of circumstance” motif derive from for future albums? One cannot rap about being in the projects all day if he is seated in a boardroom making business deals.

Rappers who align themselves with futuristic progression take a more liberal approach to commodification, blending plight and ghettocentricity with privilege. Cultural critics that have critiqued “ghettocentricity” tend to fail to account for the potential decrease of hip hop’s exchange value as hip hop becomes more mainstream and commercialized. Popular culture has had increased access to “ghetto bodies” and has become inundated with the fabulousness of the “ghetto fabulous.” Since the 1980s, rap has become more and more mainstream and fetishized, thus removing the mystery and a bit of the urban-ness from the hip hop cultural product.

Once the mystique is taken out of the fetishized commodity/object, one is left with a product at surplus without a market to sell to. With a lack of demand for a product such as ghettocentric hip hop, the producers/rappers will cease to produce it. Rap artist Nas has long campaigned that “hip hop is dead.” That statement may be a little presumptuous but rappers and consumers alike are sensing the impending death of rap, or, at least, rap as we have known it. In the face of rap, more specifically gangsta rap, becoming passé, artists are seeking revenue outside of popular venues. There was no alternative (at the time in the 80s) to profiting from the impervious ghetto and even the rural South, but it has become increasingly more lucrative to capitalize on a place that white, capitalist America has not deemed acceptable to picture black bodies: outer space.

Progressive artists recognize that in order for the genre to continue they must reinvent themselves and rejuvenate the market. In Afro-Futuristic tradition (as with the traditions of the marginalized in general), people tend to live on the margins of society. Until the urban ghettos and areas of the South becomes less marginalized and viewed as places that still need assistance and change, these post-human bodies must take up “space” in actual outer space. The use of

space imagery creates a new “centrality,” one situated in the limitless boundaries of creative expression as the final frontier and not in the confines of the ghetto.

One way that hip hop works to reposition its marketability is through the use of technology. Hip hop is using technological advances to extend the notion of “doubleness” within the human self for the artists. This “doubleness,” which is different from the authenticity/marketable doubleness of conventional hip hop, is needed to negotiate the image of life (live performances) and the imitation of life (recordings). Through the use of technology Wayne and Andre have been able to use their imitation of life, their recordings, as a marker for their post-humanism. These two artists use the gift of song to inject life into their alien identities. Singing, especially about love, can seem like blasphemy in the misogynistic world of rap performance. By stepping outside the hegemonic constraints of the artistry, these men are able to connect the Afro-Futuristic “gaze forward into the post-human/post-black future and into the black humanist past simultaneously” (David 698).

Working outside of social and marketing constraints has allowed southern artists an avenue to re-script the performance of the black hip hop body. In the course of personifying commodities, hip hop has styled the notion of modern blackness and that style has been staged as a site of authenticity. These authenticities are not the mere husk or wrapping but what Hall (1992) refers to as the actual product. Thus, the phenomenon of southern rap resolves the perplexing paradox of rap, which has relied on its “vernacular” aspects to proclaim its authenticity as an African American form and acknowledged southern folk roots but devalued voices that might be classified as southern (Richardson 201). Wayne and Andre’s music helps to restore the value in the southern point of view. What makes their efforts unique is that their idea of southern is not regional; it is not even land bound. Their southern identities are carried in the

style of their music, the drawl in their tone and the vividness of their stories. Their futuristic explorations help challenge the South as more than a collection of states positioned on a map, but as a condition of the mind.

BLACK 2 THE FUTURE: CONCLUSIONS

The relocation of rap from the North East and West Coast to the South has displaced hip hop's landscape from the metropolitan to the urban/rural landscape. This displacement spawned new sounds, drew attention to untold struggles and set new trends. As the South dominated radio airwaves and disseminated new slang and customs into popular culture, it left an indelible mark on hip hop. Matt Miller, in his essay "Dirty Decade: Rap Music and the U.S. South, 1997-2007" explains that:

The 'southern turn' in rap music involved, in addition to a complex and highly strategic play of identities, stereotypes, and imagery, a rearrangement of values within the music. The relocation of rap's creative center to the urban South resulted in changes in the conception of rap's narrative voice, becoming much less focused on the rendering of complex narratives of individual experience and moving towards an exhortative, collective expression. The musical aesthetics that underlie rap music production shifted towards a focus on loud and low bass tones and tempos matching the expectations of audiences dancing in clubs. While rap has always been, with a few notable exceptions, dance music, the southern turn involved an increased emphasis on corporeal enjoyment at the expense of narrated experience. (Miller 35)

This thesis has been an exploration into artists who work to bridge the gap between the dance heavy music of the South and the traditional personal narrative voice of the MC. Lil Wayne and Andre 3000 have used their eclectic styling to fashion themselves as southern artists alienated from the budding genre conventions of southern hip hop. Through the use of science

fiction imagery, Wayne and Andre have been able to counter the limiting notions of the southern black male artist from simple, dance-influenced, and stereotypically ghetto, to one who embodies unbounded creativity. Though their personas and motives for producing art are based in two different entities (Wayne's in capitalism and Andre's in cultural expression), they have employed some of the same tactics to achieve their success.

Summarizing Hall's three repertoires of black popular culture, I categorize Wayne and Andre's efforts into three categories of representation. Their style in regards to their rap dialect, the music they produce, and their lyrics, has worked to set them apart from the norm and what is deemed as authentically Southern, and their music infused with Afrofuturistic themes broadened the geographic landscape of hip hop and established their sense of alienation. Lastly, the examination of Wayne's and Andre's bodies as canvases of representation allowed for inquiry into how their feelings of alienation reflected their presentations of self while reaching back to the tradition of the African trickster and the powerful process of naming personified in the figure of *Nommo*.

Each of their constructed personas created a welcome sense of alienation. Wayne and Andre's message of being misunderstood and a social outcast, respectively, are messages that fans across musical genres can relate to. The subaltern and disenfranchised youth have to face feelings of being left behind and unaccounted for daily. Black and brown kids all over the world in various socioeconomic situations have to negotiate with the fact that they are not part of the dominant white elite class every day. Whether they decide to countenance these issues or not, hip hop serves as the rebel music in the soundtrack of their lives. The fact that Wayne and Andre originate in the U.S. South, embeds their struggle in a shared sense of community. They were co-founded in the struggle of growing up as a black male in poverty-stricken areas of the post-Civil

Rights South. This circumstance places them, too on the margins of society; a fact they embrace and acknowledge in their music.

Black to the Future

It is important to view the use of space imagery not only as a form of therapeutic alienation but also as a gateway to diversity. By situating the plight and comparison of the black male rap artist outside of regional confinements, Wayne and Andre are able to sidestep criticism and perform in ways uncharacteristic to of the southern rap artists. They are able to sing instead of rap, they are able to create music that crosses over to rock and pop genres and they are able to fashion their bodies in peculiar ways, under the guise of being Martians or prototypes, not subject to human fashion constraints. In addition, Wayne's and Andre's artistry has opened doors to other southern artists who might have been traditionally closed due to the "Dirty South" musical stereotypes.

Atlanta artists such as rap artist and singer Cee Lo Green of rap group Goodie Mob fame, rapper B.O.B., and songstress Janelle Monae' have each carved niche areas in hip hop fame through the use of hip hop genre expansion, futuristic landscapes and Southern recognition. These non-East/West Coast musical revisionist efforts have been adopted by artists of the Midwest as well. Rappers Kanye West, Lupe Fiasco and Kid Cudi have each used infusions of psychedelic sounds and self-imposed/ascribed alienation resulting in renowned success inside and outside the hip hop/ rap circle.

Perhaps the only artist to gain megastar status post Wayne and Andre, who also happens to employ many of the same tactics and experience of regional marginality is Midwestern rap artist and producer Kanye West. Kanye, who grow up in Chicago with his single mom but spent

many summers with his dad in Atlanta, is a very unique producer turned rapper who has rhymed and sung his way to the top of hip hop charts. Before we talk about Kanye the rapper, we must acknowledge his “post-soul” production style. Through the use of record sampling and digital looping, Kanye has turned himself into a cyborg, using digital technologies as an extension of his human self. As a rap technician, Kanye is able to “employ digital technology as instruments, revising black musical styles and priorities through the manipulation of technology” (Wilkins 200). McLeod discusses the use of technology as “common to many African American musical genres” and how “sampling and multi-tracking also allows for a type of aural time travel through the simultaneous representation and experience of past and present.” This blending of old sound and new musical patterns, aid in hip hop’s “intertextually signifying a collective notion of African American historical memory” (McLeod 345).

For instance, the song “Spaceship” from Kanye’s *College Dropout* album and the corresponding music video, contain the imagery of Kanye becoming an astronaut and leaving his mundane job in fashion retail. The lyrics state “I’ve been working this grave shift/and I ain’t made shit/I wish I could buy me a Spaceship and fly/past the sky” This song is semi-autobiographical, of how Kanye left school to pursue his dreams of rap and production stardom. For the space imagery and self-alienation process to be successful, one must “be packaged according to consumers’ desires” (Bunten 386), desires that are informed by specific ideas about what constitutes the value of non-mainstream hip hop culture. In Kanye’s case, he was able to identify with the middlebrow cultural feeling of worthlessness or Otherness and the longing to escape or “fly” from repressive dwellings. These lyrics align with “literal representations of resistance and metaphoric ‘difference’ [that] lie at the heart of many instances of space and/or

alien appropriations” (McLeod 339). Kanye is able to connect with the audiences by his use of space identity which then allows him to tap into ideas of a shared struggle.

Though Kanye continued to toy with science fiction themes in his music, even producing a “Glow In The Dark” concert tour which consisted of Kanye’s spaceship crashing to earth as he, through the guidance of his spaceship Jane, rhymed his way into become a Supernova, fulfilling his (metaphorical) personal quest to be the biggest star in the universe, it is in Kanye’s fourth album titled *808 & Heartbreaks* that we see Kanye’s fascination with outer space evolve into an actual alien transformation. This album was an impromptu studio effort drawn together over a span of two months after the passing of his mother and the breakup of his and his fiancée’s engagement. The album was produced using heavy synthesizer, beat machines and auto-tune. The heavy bass production and a rapper crooning about a love lost through the voice distorting effects of auto-tune mirrored previous productions by both Wayne and Andre. Through this process, Kanye West becomes half-machine half-cyborg in an attempt to blend the pitch of his voice with the blend of the beat thus creating a robotic vocal performance.

The popularity of hip hop cyborgistry inspired Kanye to produce and sing an entire album through the use of auto-tune technology. *808 & Heartbreaks* signifies the astonishing attempt of a “rapper” blending the tales of heartbreak with profound bass production, African drums, and song, all in one project. The only way Kanye could sidestep the impending criticism of a rapper “going soft” is by once again performing his otherness through a creative alien identity, a style made popular and perfected by Andre in his famed *The Love Below Album*.

Space as Rap’s Final Frontier

Exploring how artists have adopted jazz musician Sun Ra's theme of "space is the place" popularized by funk music but apparent in hip hop music throughout the South and the Midwest causes for a broader critique of rap and region. Returning to Miller's study of southern rap, he believes that as

Spatial imaginaries arise, already connected with material concerns and economic struggles. A shift in imagining the geography of rap opens possibilities to new participants. Imagined in a different way, the economic, material, and cultural resources of the South, once reserved for an entrenched white elite, open to the possibility of other claimants. The imagination of space (and the relative centrality or marginality of particular interpretations of imaginary spaces) lies not at the periphery of larger inequalities of economic, cultural, or political power, but is central and constitutive. (Miller 35)

This exploration of hip hop's southern landscape through the varied artistry of Lil Wayne and Andre 3000 demonstrates how regional rap requires us to take a second look.

In this digital age, we are moving into an era where region is becoming less important. With more artists gaining fame from the regions of the South, Midwest, and other less recognized locales, rap artists are looking to universal themes that a national audience can relate to. Rap's centrality has changed, making rap more marketable and successful creating self-made millionaires from would-be hoodlums. As rappers leave the neighborhoods to become branding moguls, the narratives change and the sources of authenticity shift. Rappers of the past were able to talk about their hard lives growing up in a small segmented area of the nation. These experiences were cultivated by the fans' shared experiences and promulgated through the industry as recorded stories of the lives of the subaltern.

Once rap became more commercialized, it allowed for the marketplace to construct these identities not out of lived experiences but out of marketing schemes. Due to the digital downloading of music, independent artists no longer had to sell music from the trunks of their cars or through local record stores, thus, making music from all corners of the world accessible right from the comfort of a home computer. All of these factors led to a de-emphasis on regionalism but in shared experience of alienation. Giving the audience a place that they can all relate to (a state of otherness, neglect, estrangement) and situating it outside of earthly and spatial boundaries opens a whole new world of imagination and stories to be told. Stay tuned.

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