

Proposal for a Hip Hop Park on Chicago's South Side

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Project Description: A proposal to develop a community park. The site is located on the near south side of Chicago, in a vacant lot where two partial facades remain from the former building — a faux classical "coliseum." This "Hip Hop" park would be a place for outdoor performances, provide staging space for hip hop dancing, wall space for tagging and provide portable vendor booths along a street within the park to serve as a hip hop community flea market.

Theoretical Framework: Both my theoretical and practice work operate within a study of architectural power, symbol and significance on cultures forced to the margins of society that has been referred to by some as Activist Architecture. Activist Architecture is a way of perceiving, teaching and applying architecture that derives from, is relevant to, and vigorously engages the community in which the architecture is placed. It is a process in which communities actively influence the physical growth and direction of their built environment. I am attempting to apply concepts and information from the site of environmental conflict constructed by Hip Hop culture and Rap Music in today's society, into an applicable architectural theory.

I explore the relationship between music, space and architecture, particularly as it relates to Rap music primarily because as a manifestation of African-American urban resistance, Rap music has become the voice of the disenfranchised inner city, refusing to be defined by anything other than its own terms. Purveyors of Rap and its culture have taken something essentially powerless and made it powerful. This investigation rejects the typical — literal — translation of musical "notation" into architectural "symbol." Attempts to theorize architecture as a "translation of music" or as "frozen music," have always been, in my opinion, superficial attempts to reify production of the architectural with the sonic. I am not so much concerned with how music may or may not create a building, I am much more concerned with how music creates a spatial understanding that results in architecture.

Theoretical Foundations: The primary process objective was to incorporate the aspects of appropriation and adaptation to create something specific to the hip hop community's needs. By using the methods of flow, layering and rupture to create places where the sonic and visual facets of the hip hop

culture could interact and support each other, while providing a place where the novice could be initiated and its entrepreneurial goals could be supported, a spatial understanding of hip hop culture, as it is reflected in rap music, reveals three primary spatial principles necessary for the physical manifestations of hip hop architecture.

Thesis: First Principle of Hip Hop Architecture: Palimpsestic. The architecture of hip hop is linked to the urban context in which it was born. The site previously existed as a vacant lot, a dumping ground for various nefarious and sundry actions. The culture of hip hop — developed in part in response to being marginalized — began to appropriate this space and rewrite its purpose by their own material actions. Using existing materials and boundaries that lay discarded like so many notions of the residents themselves, the marginalized community rewrite the identity of the site from the regressive vacant "lot," into the progressive community "park," and, undergoing a palimpsestic transformation, asserted their power to name themselves and their community through the built environment.

Second Principle of Hip Hop Architecture: Performative. Hip hop architecture is about both providing the stage (backdrop) and privileging (inviting) the performance to produce space through the conjunction of bodies in motion. The park design is based on the theory that the interaction of people — the **performance of everyday life** — creates space. Within the African-American hip hop community, that performance of life is specific and highly refined, both consciously and inherently developed. The organization of the park attempts to address both. The consciously developed performances are reflected in the hip hop dance platforms and, to a lesser degree, the staging area — the places that are the most specifically created and consistently fluent in the hip hop community. The inherent performances of everyday hip hop life — the gathering of a "posse" or "click," the exchange of entrepreneurial ideas, community information and material culture — are located in the open park and bazaar areas. Within the park's boundaries, all places provided and subsequent spaces created are subject to modification and relocation by the hip hop community as their needs demand, while the overall continuity of the performative nature of the park

Community "Hip Hop" Park

Current conditions in many of Chicago inner city and outer edge African-American communities.

Sketch of park west facing elevation of remaining facade and new structural graffiti walls

Aerial Photo of site looking north towards downtown Chicago

Sketch of entrance from the graffiti gallery to the staging area between new and remaining structures and metal debris colonnade

Sketch studies of the resident's commercial bazaar booths for the park

Site Plan

0 50 100 feet
25 75

New construction from site debris
Park area
towards town

Existing existing warehouse structures

South side of town

remains constant.

Third Principle of Hip Hop Architecture: Adaptive. Hip hop architecture is **adaptive**. The available sites necessitates it; its users will demand it; material availability requires it; its construction will compel it. Employing materials that "lay discarded like so many notions of the residents themselves" in conventional and unconventional ways, the construction of this

park will build on the adaptive traditions in African(American) influenced architecture outlined above. In particular, the construction of the park will use the material located on the site — the remaining facades, discarded bricks, poles, rods, wood planks, boards and metal plates — in adaptive ways that speak to their creativity, subjectivity and create spaces that will ultimately reaffirm their identity in the post-industrial city.