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*Latin American Perspectives* published online 23 November 2011

DOI: 10.1177/0094582X11427889

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# Taking Stock of the State

## Hip-hoppers' Evaluation of the Cultural Points Program in Brazil

by  
Derek Pardue

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*In 2003, Gilberto Gil, the new Brazilian minister of culture and legendary Brazilian popular music icon, announced a new project of cultural networking. Gil pitched the Cultural Points program to the Workers' Party administration and to the public at large as a fundamental resource for revealing and circulating the various forms of expressive culture for all Brazilians to access. This program has had a direct impact on local hip-hoppers as they have found new, legitimized spaces for employment and artistic expression. An analysis based on experience with the Casa de Cultura Hip Hop in the São Paulo metropolitan area over the past decade sheds light on the relationship between the "left" turn in Latin American politics since 2000 and the role of popular culture in the contemporary formation of citizenship.*

*En 2003, Gilberto Gil, el nuevo Ministro de Cultura de Brasil y legendario ícono de la música popular brasileña, anunció un nuevo proyecto de creación de redes culturales. Gil propuso el programa Puntos de Cultura a la administración del Partido de los Trabajadores y al público en general como un recurso fundamental para revelar y difundir diversas formas de expresión cultural que estuvieran al acceso de todos los brasileños. Este programa ha tenido un impacto directo sobre los raperos locales, quienes han encontrado nuevos y legítimos espacios de empleo y expresión artística. Un análisis basado en los últimos diez años de experiencia de la Casa de Cultura Hip Hop, localizada en el área metropolitana de São Paulo, examina la relación entre el giro "izquierdista" de la política latinoamericana a partir del año 2000 y el papel de la cultura popular en la formación contemporánea de la ciudadanía.*

**Keywords:** Brazil, Hip-hop, State, Culture, Citizenship

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In March 2001 the web-site designer and hip-hop enthusiast Reinaldo and I sat fanning ourselves, waiting for the next breeze to sweep across Jardim Luso, a neighborhood on the south side of the Brazilian megalopolis São Paulo. The annual Carnival celebration was over, and Brazilians were gradually returning to their daily routines. Reinaldo had recently launched a new web site dedicated to Brazilian hip-hop, "a portal for practitioners and fans to create networks and have access to various kinds of information, images, and sounds," as he liked to boast. On that hot day in March, he was particularly reflective about his future and the future of hip-hop:

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LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES, Issue XXX, Vol. XX No. X, Month XXXX xx-xx  
DOI: 10.1177/0094582X11427889  
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You know, we [in hip-hop] are not organized. We don't know how to really run a movement or build an industry, I mean, make something sustainable. I think sometimes about what I need to do to cover my costs to keep this simple web site up and what sorts of deals I need to make with companies that have nothing to do with hip-hop so that I can create a hip-hop space. I'm not sure how I feel about that.

His remarks prompted me to ask him what he thought he'd be doing 10 years from then. I was surprised when he plainly stated, "Well, Derek, whatever the state leaves for me."

Since 2001 many facets of Brazilian hip-hop and society have changed significantly as government and nongovernment agencies have developed their agendas in a balancing act between neoliberal entrepreneurialism and democratic socialism. The role of the state in social welfare and cultural development continues to be a point of debate and policy. Hip-hop, with its four "elements" of rap, DJ, graffiti, and street dance, and the active choices of its practitioners represent an intriguing site for a theoretical analysis of the state and citizenship, because hip-hoppers are dogmatic about the need for systematic and structural social change and for detached spaces for displaying autonomous creativity.

Throughout Latin America, hip-hoppers, as one heterogeneous community within the larger category of "social movement" actors, are at once intensely critical of the state because of the lingering vestiges of twentieth-century military and civilian dictatorships and dependent on state ministries of culture, education, and health for financial and logistic support. Hip-hoppers, in particular, use "culture," broadly defined, to attempt to reproduce this critique within a social model of community and *consciência* (consciousness). While the political economic climate has displayed a robust dynamism since the Latin American "opening" in the 1980s and the emergence of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the 1990s (Paley, 2001; Souza, 2007; Moehn, 2007), the state and its initiatives remain crucial for the livelihood of the many common folk who cannot purchase or inherit enfranchisement and depend, in great part, on the public sector for a forum of pragmatic citizenship (Avritzer, 2007; Holston, 2008).

The dilemma of hip-hoppers is not simply operational; it is existential. Hip-hoppers such as Reinaldo constantly worry about the status of "culture" in the phrase "hip-hop culture." Hip-hoppers understand culture as essential to subjectivity and the market and deploy terms such as "information," but they also understand that as a collective, a social group rooted in the working-class peripheral neighborhoods of immense urban areas such as São Paulo, they need institutional support to create and maintain the infrastructure of knowledge and cultivate a popular sense of desire for recognition.

Citizenship, thus, is an "entanglement" between what James Holston (2008) has termed the "entrenched" (the historically privileged or hegemonic) and the "insurgent" (oppositional movements or "counter politics"). I offer the case of the Casa de Cultura Hip Hop (Hip-Hop Culture House) as a revealing example of such an entanglement with particular emphasis on the role of the state in shaping contemporary citizenship in urban Brazil. Following Holston, I do not intend to impose monolithic moral judgments on either the state or hip-hop or, for that matter, the "popular." In short, "entrenched" and "insurgent" are not

necessarily revolutionary, popular, repressive, or conservative; rather, their characteristics refer to structural power and historical dynamism.

Ultimately, this article attempts to address the significance of the current Brazilian administration's return to and reinvestment in "national culture" and popular citizenship. For example, what does it mean when the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party—PT), which rose to power in 2002 and implemented a cultural program called Pontos de Cultura (Cultural Points) in 2003, professes national inclusion moving across historically intransigent lines of social stratification? And what does it mean when the Cultural Points program becomes a "label"?<sup>1</sup>

In this essay I take stock of the Brazilian state. I try to explain what hip-hopppers have known for some time now—that using the state is a tricky proposition. I also make the case that hip-hop is a particularly good place to investigate popular citizenship and state activity. Because rhetorically the two have very similar priorities and methods of communication and change in the present moment of nationalism within globalization, the extent to which state initiatives such as the Cultural Points program resonate with São Paulo hip-hopppers will indicate the relative value of the state in contemporary Brazilian citizenship. In light of the recent incursion of organized crime syndicates into a variety of public spheres in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the formal state may be losing its influence on citizenship practice.<sup>2</sup> For most hip-hopppers this is not a desirable outcome; they want to believe in the state as a consistent, "blue-chip" stock of economic and ethical value. However, the belief is tenuous.

## CULTURE AND THE STATE

To assess the significance of the Cultural Points program and the position of hip-hop therein, one must appreciate the modern history of the relationship between culture and the Brazilian state.<sup>3</sup> Such a discussion inevitably revolves around the concept of *brasilidade* (Brazilianness). The notion of a "national culture," a point of identification and investment that necessarily involves the state and civil society, emerged in Brazil during the 1920s from a productive hybridization of high, cosmopolitan modernism and autochthonous folkways in the writings and scholarship of Oswald de Andrade and Mário de Andrade. While the former elaborated a manifesto of cultural "cannibalism" in which Brazilianness would be a movement of art "for export" based on uniquely local and historically grounded articulations (or "digestion") of cosmopolitan values and aesthetics (Andrade, 1972), the latter worried more about the distinctions between indigenous tradition (e.g., *mestizo/mestiço* "race") and urban cosmopolitanism (e.g., "foreign" dance music, including genres such as the Argentine tango or U.S. jazz) (Andrade, 1962).

In particular, Mário de Andrade used his reputation as a poet and scholar to position himself in the late 1930s as São Paulo's first minister of culture. His fellow "modernist" Heitor Villa-Lobos, the internationally renowned composer, succeeded in gaining access to state resources to implement his own notions of national culture and civic education in such projects as massive popular choirs as a form of civic duty in the public sphere (Béahgue, 1994). Despite the

valid criticism of the modernists as proponents of a faux nationalism based in a detached, elite imagination (Schwarz, 1992; Bürger, 1984; Gouveia, 2006), their cultural production set the tone for the debate that continues to preoccupy Brazilian artists and politicians: What and who is included in national culture, and what is the role of the state in such formations?

To this end, cultural historians such as Bryan McCann (2004) and Daryle Williams (2001) have rightly concentrated on the first administration of the populist dictator Getúlio Vargas (1930–1945) and his efforts to make culture a state project of citizenship and a viable industry for export (see also Nascimento, 2007, and Barbalho, 2007). For example, McCann argues that the music/dance genre samba was always a challenge for state “cultural managers.” While samba performers often highlighted the racial mixture embodied in the mulatto and the sonic mixture of percussion and rhythm perceived as African with European melodies and harmonic progressions, the frequent protagonist of the *malandro* (hustler) and the culturally rich life skills of *malandragem* (hustling or “street smarts”) were, indeed, a sticking point with, among others, national radio programming managers. Censors did exercise their power (McCann, 2004: 65–67), but, more interesting, state culture brokers lobbied for “education” to control more effectively the meaning of samba.<sup>4</sup> In short, this is what Álvaro Salgado (1941: 79), a music critic employed by the Department of Press and Propaganda, referred to as the “social factor” in the “circulation of radio.”

Both McCann and Williams take pains to demonstrate that, at least in the field of popular culture, the Vargas regime calculatingly mixed fascist censorship with incentives for market entrepreneurship. After a period of experimentation with representative democracy during the 1950s, the construction of a new capital city in Brasília, a Peronist-style leader in Juscelino Kubitschek, and a land-reformer president in João Goulart, the old guard of Brazilian wealth and influence intervened, much as its counterparts had in Argentina, Guatemala, and Chile, and established a military dictatorship in 1964. Faced with an incipient protest movement, the military administration in 1968 decreed the infamous Institutional Act 5 (AI-5), which, most importantly for the purposes of this essay, outlawed political protest and established wide-ranging censorship over the press and artistic expression.

This brief synopsis of mid-twentieth-century Brazilian history will serve as an introduction to the cultural politics of Tropicália, a movement in the spirit of Oswald de Andrade’s “cannibalism” to recapture the essence of contradictions in Brazilian everyday life and market them as culture for export. While Tropicália was short-lived, its methodology of engineering local inflections of globally shared technology has left a vibrant legacy of popular-culture practitioners in Brazil and reopened doors for potentially joint projects between the state and civil society.<sup>5</sup> Its theoretical underpinnings stood in stark contrast to those of the Federal Council of Culture, established in 1966 by the military dictatorship, in that national culture was less a folkloric thing of the past to be preserved (see Chauí, 1986) than a dynamic pastiche or “digestion” and translocal circulation or “regurgitation” (using the cannibalistic metaphors of Oswald Andrade and his followers). Tropicália represented a pop critical consciousness that exposed exploitation and corruption in poetic fashion rather than providing mantras for a proletarian revolution (Buarque,

1992; Dunn, 2001). It was new and offered an alternative to conventional Marxism, by the 1960s an increasingly targeted ideology in Latin America as part of the globalized cold war.

For the most part, however, Tropicália did not translate into state-civil society partnerships but rather led to greater distancing and thus exacerbated the problem of cultural management under any sense of “democratic society.” Of course, the country was under military rule and a logic similar to that of the Vargas regime. The guiding rule of state engagement with public culture was authoritarianism (Rubim, 2008). Therefore, the levels of trust necessary for the development of genuine partnerships between the state agencies and civil groups were hard to come by. It would not be until the victory of Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva and the rise of the PT to legislative and executive power in 2002 that the state would revisit, albeit in different terms, Tropicalist ideas of national culture.

The person who perhaps most visibly demonstrates this intersection of Tropicalist aesthetics with cultural politics is Gilberto Gil, minister of culture from 2003 to 2008. Gil, a founding member of the Tropicália movement, has capitalized on his brilliance as a songwriter and musician as well as an honorary cultural ambassador since the 1980s, often alongside his fellow “cultural cannibal” Caetano Veloso, to insert himself and his ideas of national culture, popular politics, and social networks into the Brazilian bureaucracy at the federal level.<sup>6</sup> The Lula administration and the accompanying growth of PT influence in Brazil are often touted as significant, if not radical, breaks with the past. Lula himself, once a poor migrant laborer from the Northeast and later a union leader in the metalworking industry centered in the mega-city of São Paulo, was undoubtedly a departure from the silver-spoon, landowning oligarchs, military generals, and neoliberal technocrats of the past.

Since 1985 and the official establishment of the Ministry of Culture by President José Sarney, the Brazilian state had made an effort to link cultural actors with general entrepreneurs. The Sarney Law and many of the subsequent constitutional reformulations (the Rouanet and Weffort Laws, for example) represented the state’s increasingly neoliberal turn in relation to national culture in postdictatorship Brazil (Rubim, 2008; Nascimento, 2007; Barbalho, 2007). During the 1990s and into the new millennium the state appeared to be moving away from any systematic cultural involvement. Even in his recent scholarship, now distanced from the pressures of political-party stump speeches, the sociologist and former Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso interprets globalization as an unshakable paradigm of prosperity and democracy, albeit variable with local histories and political “autonomy” (Cardoso, 2009). For example, he refers to the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, Bolivarianismo in Venezuela, and Brazil’s Landless Movement as traditional forces that impede Latin American countries from realizing the potential of the current reality of globalization. Although he focuses his analysis on the economy, the implication is that allowing “culture” (as exemplified by these popular, mass movements) to define the nation would risk a relapse into “enclave economies” of boom-and-bust cycles and isolationism (Cardoso, 2009).

However, perhaps because of his academic pedigree, Cardoso’s brand of globalization during his administration from 1994 to 2002 also included greater

participation in international conferences such as the 2001 World Conference on Racism held in Durban, South Africa. Therefore, he understood that some national culture, such as Africanness, necessitated a reevaluation in terms of socioeconomic relations (employment and education) and active sponsorship as an essential part of Brazilianness. In particular, the Cardoso administration began to study the possibility of implementing a version of affirmative action (Htun, 2004). The Lula administration carried this forward despite significant criticism even within academic and activist circles.<sup>7</sup> Upon consideration of such factors, scholars and politicians differ on the most accurate way of describing the approach of the PT as it relates to its predecessor and current rival, the Partido Social Democrático Brasileiro (Brazilian Social Democratic Party—PSDB) in terms of cultural management.

Under Cardoso, the PSDB secured power in 1994 and represented the first full-term, democratically elected administration in Brazil since at least 1960. Cardoso's administration, similar to those of Argentina, Colombia, and Chile at the time, provided significant incentives (mostly tax breaks) to corporations to invest in culture (Olivieri, 2004). The *estado mínimo* (minimal state) policy systematically transformed popular and national culture into both a democratic process of civic entrepreneurship, fostering individual and small-group access to funding through a theoretically merit-based ritual of application, and a market-based system of culture as an industry of products and a lucrative avenue for advertising a range of conventional corporate products. (For example, Franklin Templeton Investments highlighted the ethnic dress of the Indian sari in television commercials during the Australian Tennis Open to help secure its position in the global financial market and maintain a global edge.) With regard to Brazil, U.S.-based nongovernmental organizations and Brazilian federal agencies may invest in historic neighborhoods in Salvador, Bahia, the early colonial capital of Brazil, in pursuit of a growing "heritage tourism" market targeted at elite pockets of Brazilian and foreign consumers (Collins, 2008; Cesnik and Malagodi, 1998). Because "real" ethnicity and "real" Brazilian identities are also produced in this process, neoliberalism, in the words of Cardoso (1998), presents distinct "opportunities." As the former Brazilian president José Sarney (2000: 38) claimed, the lack of state presence "transfers the initiative of projects [including 'culture'], resource mobilization, and the control of its application to the control of society."

However, a number of scholars, activists, and politicians have debated the real referent of Sarney's term "society." James Holston (2008), for example, has argued that while the sociopolitical history of Brazil is certainly dynamic, its underlying logic of citizenship could be viewed as "inclusively inegalitarian." Has citizenship really been bolstered at the level of the individual and the small group under the neoliberal logics of democratic states and cultural management? Or does "society" simply refer to corporate institutions, with controversial residual effects for the local individual?

Similar to other Latin American states, Brazil has a conflicted track record in cultural management as it relates to "folk" and "popular" musics, as Mário de Andrade (1962) found during his tenure in the Department of Culture of the city of São Paulo from 1935 to 1938. Other Brazilian scholars have judged the tradition of cultural stewardship under the Brazilian state as unstable, demonstrated by the rapid dismantling of cultural institutions such as the

High Institute of Brazilian Studies by the military dictatorship and the Popular Culture movement by President Fernando Collor in 1990 (Rubim, 2008). The top-down model of "incorporation" and "education" has been patronizing at best and violent at worst. While part of this tension has arisen from the equation of culture with a Eurocentric notion of "civilization," another factor in the persistent gap between the state and marginalized social groups has been a systematic lack of recognition of the way ordinary people make meaning through creative expressions (Collins, 2008). That education and citizenship could be structured from below was certainly one of the world-renowned pedagogue Paulo Freire's central themes and flagship programs as minister of education at the municipal level in São Paulo during the late 1980s. Can such a perspective operate at the federal level, and, if so, what might it look like?

### THE CULTURAL POINTS PROGRAM

The Brazilian state has recognized almost 1,000 "points" of culture and identified roughly 35 *pontos* (major points) that serve as regional nodes connecting local "points." This recognition involves an investment by the state of approximately 200 million reais (US\$120 million) a year in popular culture. The Cultural Points program is specifically oriented toward existing cultural practices in marginalized social areas, both urban and rural, with the aim of dissolving the persistent stereotype that rural life is antithetical to a modern technological reckoning of culture (Loureiro and Callou, 2007). This is only one of the federal programs promoting civil society through cultural performance and social networking. As the former cultural minister Gilberto Gil reminded reporters, state investment in culture is not charity. Most assuredly, there is a return. According to statistics from the United Nations, 8 percent of the wealth produced globally is from "cultural creativity." In more concrete terms, cultural products and services generate US\$1.3 trillion annually with an average increase of 10 percent per year (see, e.g., Ramsdale, 2000).

In arguing that the position of hip-hop as a state-sponsored cultural practice is precarious, I point to the essential paradox of the relationship between the state and culture, especially popular culture, in contemporary Brazil. While one can argue that the present administration represents continuity from past state projects of cultural sponsorship, I believe that the Cultural Points program, as part of the "Live Culture" initiative spearheaded by Gilberto Gil from 2003 to 2008 and carried on by the acting minister of culture Juca Ferreira,<sup>8</sup> does, in fact, mark a significant break with the past. Furthermore, judging from the rhetoric of Gil and the project criteria he presented, hip-hoppers stand to gain a great deal of financial and ideological support from the Cultural Points program. Yet, the long history of paternalism of Brazilian governance and the strong neoliberal spirit of hip-hop economics and philosophy of "skills" and "information" cause many local hip-hoppers to pause and consider the program carefully. The success of the Cultural Points program does not depend on hip-hoppers' approval, but with the increasing popularity of hip-hop in peripheral neighborhoods of Brazilian cities, the relationship between hip-hop and the program may well provide insight into

the current status of cultural citizenship in urban Brazil from the perspective of sociopolitical structure and popular practice.

As discussed above, the legacy of Vargas and the modernists in the management of culture in Brazil is one of selective inclusion based on institutional judgment of what counts as culture and how to transform the popular into an effective discourse of the national. Such transformations have often involved “education,” an elite-based directive to “improve” the popular. In short, then, selective inclusion involves a quantitative process of numeration and documentation—an account of Brazilian cultural areas and their respective forms. In addition, selection involves a process of positivist cultivation around issues—in the case of samba, for example, issues of taste, class, race, and space. From the point of view of state culture, the hustler was problematic because of his avoidance of formal work, his location in the impoverished hills of Rio de Janeiro, his representation of phenotypical “blackness,” and his confrontational attitude. Again, cultural selection was a matter not of eliminating the hustler but of “recasting” him through censorship of samba compositions and performances.<sup>9</sup> The main pressure point was with regard to work, since the emerging ideology of “racial democracy” under Vargas took account of Afro-Brazilian traits as part of a vibrant urban popular scene within the new, modern Brazil.

The milieu of the Vargas era involved a renewed sense of nationalism and especially cultural nationalism. The globalization perhaps most famously articulated in the phrase “for the Englishman to see” (*para o Inglês ver*) reflects a Brazilian need for outside recognition in the legitimization of a home-grown cultural form. Globalization thus figured in nationalism as a lingering reminder of nineteenth-century colonialism and imperialism, as well as a germinating idea of Brazil as a producer in the culture industry through figures such as Carmen Miranda.

In the present moment, the articulation of Brazilian nationalism is essentially plural. This is captured in the ubiquitous phrase “many Brazils inside Brazil.”<sup>10</sup> Consequently, state management of culture must represent this plurality. What the Cultural Points program proposes is that such plurality be part of a Brazilian “web.” It also understands the many “Brazils” as, in part, constituted through global processes of diaspora and technological mediation. Whereas during the Vargas era and most of the twentieth century the global was a mark of dependence, the Cultural Points program sees outside locales as partly Brazilian spaces.<sup>11</sup> In theory, this is the main difference between “Brazilian cultures” under Cardoso and under Lula (and perhaps now Dilma and the new Minister of Culture, Ana Buarque de Holanda). The “opportunities” of culture reside in metaphors less of discovery and development than of networks and circulation.

The Cultural Points program is theoretically less concerned with listing cultures than with providing the technological infrastructure for local communities whose cultural projects speak to the global in a recognized Brazilian idiom. The keyword for the Ministry of Culture, according to their official web site, is *transversalidade* (transversality), a curious neologism referring to the two major themes of network and adaptive performativity. For

Gil the role of the state is to “provide information, libraries, video archives, circuits, forums for debate, tools, workshops, opportunities to produce, show and circulate . . . to provide a point for the hundreds of diverse, capable expressions of our plural, mestizo collage.”<sup>12</sup> As Claudio Prado explains, popular culture “works this way”:<sup>13</sup>

We [in the Ministry of Culture] are simply trying to facilitate the process by which Brazilians in the underserved peripheral neighborhoods are able more readily to connect their realities and experiences with the millions of potentially interested parties both inside and outside of Brazil about a range of topics that are global in nature. We as part of the Brazilian government must facilitate this exchange through the Free Software Multimedia Project because it is undeniable that the challenges that face Brazil face everyone.

As Prado, the coordinator of digital technologies in the Ministry of Culture, and Gil have emphasized, the idea of culture from the perspective of the Brazilian state is not *dirigismo* (a term with a long history throughout Latin America that connotes a top-down model of direction) but “autonomy” and “protagonism” (something akin to social agency) (Lima and Santini, 2007; Rubim, 2008). For Gil, this invigorated sense of the state and society can provoke a real practice of civil society or *política pública* (public politics). In his first year in office Gil issued a revealing “anthropological” definition of culture as not just about political policies but something all Brazilians *do* (Gil, 2003) and said that his job was to position the state as a facilitator of such everyday artistic practices.

In 2007, Gil gave a lecture in the city of Belo Horizonte to launch the second *teia* (web) of the Cultural Points program in which he underlined several concepts of civil society and the role of culture therein. His poetic description and explanation of the program demonstrates its remarkable suitability to hip-hop and helps contextualize the admittance and relatively successful participation in it of the Casa de Cultura Hip-Hop (Hip-Hop Culture House) in Diadema, an industrial satellite city in the São Paulo metropolitan area.

Gil is, of course, one of the most important and entertaining musicians in Brazilian history. Whether he is provoking audiences to reflect on the constructed nature of spirituality and pop culture in the late-1960s song “Bat macumba”<sup>14</sup> or lecturing on culture and the Brazilian state, he productively mixes memorable sound-bites with thoughtful theory. In 2007 he peppered his speech in Belo Horizonte not only with allusions to “webs” and “ramps” of social and cultural networking but also with invigorating phrases such as “It’s good to live life live,” “I think, I want, I am, I do, I change,” and, perhaps even more provocative, “The creation of power comes from the power to create.”

Gil’s rhetorical performance is not simply show. He has repeatedly explained the Ministry’s program as “points” in the sense of “connecting one to another” that require “action” to “announce an idea.” Furthermore, he has insisted that the program is not about “inviting society for something *ready*, produced in an agency laboratory. [Rather], we open a relationship of co-existence.” Such an action-based model of culture correlates well with local hip-hoppers’ discourse of knowledge and power mediated through information.

## HIP-HOP'S INVESTMENT IN INFORMATION

On the surface, "information" appears to be a conventional substantive, a solid noun composed of reports, data, and facts. Hip-hoppers emphasize that information is essential to knowledge and consequently power. However, Brazilian hip-hoppers' use of the term signals something else; they use "information" as shorthand in discussing and evaluating hip-hop as constant discovery and creativity (see Lima and Santini, 2007).

Hip-hoppers often consider their access to information as making it possible for them to *trocar uma idéia* (exchange ideas). Hip-hop, similar to Trinidadian calypso and Jamaican reggae, highlights the construction and maintenance of one's reputation as a quality of public recognition and performative success. The reputations of rappers, DJs, *grafiteiros*, and street dancers (B-boys and B-girls) are based not just on stylistic prowess in the spectacle of the live event but also on their actions in their neighborhoods and the hip-hop and/or the peripheral community as a whole.

The accumulation of information is a process of managing social relations. Hip-hoppers and periphery residents more generally judge hip-hop as good/bad, positive/negative, or strong/weak on the basis of the collective intellectual activity of idea exchange. A "good" hip-hopper is an empowered citizen and thus, from a pragmatic perspective, a role model. Hip-hop is discursively and ideologically structured this way, much to the chagrin of some rappers who imagine themselves as "artists" and consequently part of a separate class of society called "entertainers." In this formulation, artists exist as a social class whose responsibility to reality is extracurricular, making social agency an individual decision.

The history of hip-hop in Brazil is part of a more general trajectory of information access among marginalized urban youth. According to São Paulo DJs, music producers, rappers, and pop music critics, "to be informed" is a valuable asset that speaks to culture, business, history, and ideology.<sup>15</sup> The term *informação* has been part of almost every conversation I have had with hip-hoppers since 1995. Brazilian hip-hoppers are always in search of more information; they represent an understanding of it in performance, and they divulge it in spaces of education and media communication. In short, hip-hoppers explicitly link information to who they are (Pardue, 2008).

Of course, we all are like this to some degree; we are what we *know*. However, in the case of the millions of shantytown residents around urban Brazil, identity is seemingly always represented as a lack of or tardiness in access to modernity and citizenship. If not expressed in terms of paucity, peripheral identity normally involves a set of negative attributes. As targets of daily though tacit prejudice in a social system deeply imbued with racism, sexism, classism, and regional-based markers of status, residents of the periphery accumulate dehumanizing experiences. Their worth to society is service, enacted in the quotidian gesture of the submissive head-nod performed in silence. As the Brazilian sociologist Luiz Eduardo Soares (in Padilha, 2002, and see also 2006) has argued, many young, poor, (sub)urban, black (*negro*, *preto*, *pardo*, etc.) kids and adults do not exist *socially*. There is a "social invisibility" that shrouds Brazilian cities.

Brazilian youth who are *sério* (serious) use hip-hop to combat what Jose Limón, in his description of young workers in South Texas, called a “growing depthlessness” (1994: 111–112) related to a flattening of historicity and an increasing proclivity to view culture as disposable. Hip-hoppers organize themselves in groups called “posses” and invest time in developing consciousness. Nino Brown, a teenage soul dancer in the late 1970s turned hip-hop archivist in the early 1990s, a coordinator of the Casa de Cultura Hip-Hop, and the founder of Zulu Nation Brasil in 2002, has become a spokesman for hip-hop as a theory of culture and a mechanism of popular education. I have accompanied him on a number of occasions where he spoke to groups of pre-teens, community educators, NGO representatives, and fellow hip-hoppers. He is remarkably consistent in his focus on the relationship between culture and consciousness. In particular, as I read over my field notes I found him repeating the statement “We must insist on the term hip-hop *culture*; it’s the *culture* that gets us in touch with each other. We create community and we discover ourselves in the process. This reality is our *consciousness*.”

### INSTITUTIONALIZING CULTURE

In Ricardo Piglia’s (2000) dystopic cyberpunk novel *The Absent City*, the institutions of culture, represented in the precarious stature of “the Museum,” are a site of disbelief, delusion, paranoia, and seduction:

They have closed down the Museum, so it is necessary to get past the iron fence that separates it from the street to get in. . . . To get there you must go up a ramp and through the circular rooms, until you reach the central gallery. The machine is at the end of a white pavilion, held up by a metallic frame. . . . The motionless machine blinks repeatedly in an irregular rhythm. At night, the eye glows, all alone, and its reflection shines on the window. (128)

It will be necessary to work on your memory, Arana said. There are areas of condensation, white nodes, which can be untied, opened up. They are like myths, he said; they define the grammar of experience. (62)

As one of the protagonists, Elena, a cyborg, struggles to maintain her function of producing apocryphal parables related to the repressive Argentine state during the junta years of 1976–1983, the reader struggles to take account of the shifting meanings of cultural institutions, technology, collective memory, and citizenship. Will the “white nodes” of myth become the new civic institutions of Argentina? Similarly, will the hip-hop discourse of information and consciousness find a home as a cultural point—a bureaucratic node in the contemporary circuitry of Brazilian national culture?

Gil, Ferreira, and others from the Ministry of Culture have made the plain argument that institutional “points” of culture are not only physical spaces integrated into the national landscape (urban, rural, suburban) but also constitutive of a virtual network through which participants can exchange ideas and access the information and experiences of other Brazilian citizens. In addition, as Gil has articulated, a “point” is not only a place, it is also a

*costura* (stitching) created by persons who “compose ideas, design and change landscapes: human, natural, urban, cultural, aesthetic, social, economic, political, environmental, sensorial, emotional, sexual, affective, creative, etc.”

This socio-geographical perspective on “points” is akin to hip-hoppers’ ubiquitous phrase *conquistar espaço* (occupying space). Hip-hoppers’ *raison d’être*, at least historically, has been opposition, and thus they tend to be dogmatic, but the role of change, as signaled in Gil’s notion of “stitching,” is understood as a spatial act both by Gil’s culture administration and hip-hoppers’ “party line.” What is at stake in both Gil’s “change” and hip-hoppers’ “conquests” or “occupations” is the idea of culture as necessarily institutional and thus constitutive of the national landscape. Hip-hop and popular culture more generally must be rooted in landmarks for ordinary citizens and thus visible in the routes of their daily experience.

Diadema’s Casa de Cultura Hip-Hop exemplifies many of the archetypical characteristics of Brazilian hip-hop as an ideal institution of popular culture and a point of engaged citizenship mediating between the state and the socially disenfranchised. It is also a site of contestation as local politicians and hip-hoppers use it to advance competing agendas of culture and authenticity.<sup>16</sup>

## THE CASA

When I arrived at the Cultural Center in the Diadema neighborhood of Canhema in July 1999 at the request of Nino Brown, I shared the general feeling that something different and exciting was going on there. By the end of 1999 local rappers, DJs, B-boys, B-girls, graffiti artists, and historians had joined forces with neighborhood politicians and journalists to persuade the Diadema Department of Culture to cede the government-run cultural center to an elected committee’s management. Since then the Canhema Cultural Center has become the Casa de Cultura Hip-Hop.

The widely respected and proclaimed “godfather” of Brazilian hip-hop Nino Brown was glowing when we met. Normally soft-spoken, he was excited at the prospect of having a fixed place for hip-hop:

This house can be a place where kids can learn about the continuities between funk, soul, R&B, disco, and rap. This is fundamental, in my opinion. I can move all those files and stuff you saw back in my house [in 1997] to a room here and make it into a real archive. A patrimony of soul, funk, and hip-hop.

The Casa quickly became not only a meeting place for youth to practice hip-hop and develop social networks but also—more important in the long run—an institution of hip-hop pedagogy. It consists of a series of one-story concrete-slab buildings surrounded by a 9-foot brick wall and in some places a spiked metal fence. In other words, it looks like a typical public service building—“a state thing” (*coisa do governo*). It has a covered concrete stage and a covered space for an audience of 500.

Every month the Casa holds an event called Hip-Hop in Action that features groups from the ongoing workshops, local “professional” artists representing all four elements, and a headlining rapper and DJ. According to the Brazilian rappers

Thaíde, Jamal, and Rappin' Hood, everyone performs *na moral*, which literally translates as "along moral lines" but is better understood as "in solidarity" and, practically speaking, "free." By 2003, virtually all well-known rappers from the São Paulo area, as well as many famous rappers and DJs from Rio, Brasília, Campinas, and Porto Alegre, had performed *na moral* at the Casa. According to the longtime DJ professor Erry-G and the graffiti workshop instructor Tota, the Hip-Hop in Action events not only make the Casa more visible but also "are learning experiences for everyone involved." Erry-G goes on to explain:

We learn how to organize and publicize hip-hop events. Perhaps most important, though, are the experiences of the local kids who wander into the Casa and the kids who are just beginning in the workshops. Why? The Hip-Hop in Action days are positive; the kids here in the neighborhood hear the music, see the dancing, the spray art, and then they see kids who look like them, some of whom they may recognize from around the way, and they see them *doing* something. They are up there next to Mano Brown, Rappin' Hood, Thaíde, DJ Hum, SNJ, Gog, Ieda Hills, all the hip-hop idols. They get interested. They come back. They sign up (for free) for the workshops, and they get turned on to the history, the fun, the art, the idea of saying something, the power of expression, and they become more positive about themselves and where they come from. Sometimes they make new friends, and that's also important. The beginners from the workshops learn what it means to perform. They develop their self-esteem, and that gives them confidence and an attitude that they take with them into whatever they do with their lives. We hope they stay for another round of workshops. We hope they get involved with all the elements. For many, just to get up on that stage is an achievement.

DJ Erry-G's description of the Casa is strikingly exemplary of Gil's notion of stitching in the collective act of exchanging ideas. For Gil and Erry-G it is the circulation that is the culture; the Casa hip-hop workshop is an instantiation of the federal government's "point." As Erry-G implies, the belief of wandering local teenagers is precarious; they are naturally dubious of a "state thing" like the Casa, but as they see others break the audience-stage barrier their imagination may take off. The apocryphal texts of rap lyrics, DJ soundscapes, graffiti images, and street dance moves are tangentially "authentic" in the conventional definitions of Brazilianness, but it is difficult to deny that hip-hop in the Casa represents a stitching, untying nodes and reassembling very real Brazilian experiences and skills. The Cultural Points program has attempted to shift the semiotic focus regarding culture so that it approximates stitching, and as this holds steady hip-hoppers have organized themselves and submitted dozens of proposals to participate in the refashioning of "the Museums" of Brazilian national cultures.

Until recently, the scale of interaction between the state and culture in the case of the Casa remained at the municipal level. While the political administrations in Diadema have kept a fairly tight leash on employment contracts and general funding for the Casa, in other venues public officials have declared Diadema the "Hip-Hop City."<sup>17</sup> In my conversations with veteran hip-hoppers employed at the Casa and neighborhood teenagers either at Hip-Hop in Action shows or in one of the free hip-hop workshops held regularly on the weekends, the message is consistent. They feel a certain respect about being associated with the Casa and being from Diadema.

The relationship was more or less comfortable for the PT officials and relatively positive for the hip-hoppers, although the hip-hoppers often complained about late salary payments and other ineffective bureaucratic mechanisms. Nevertheless, veteran hip-hoppers recognized that, given the general milieu of state involvement in popular culture, Diadema and the Casa had a good thing going. This helps explain the high percentage of workshop teachers from outside of Diadema and the large number of free performances at the Casa.

This began to change in 2007 when the Department of Culture at the federal level recognized the Casa as a cultural point. What had been a relatively organic development of hip-hop culture, institutional “occupation,” and reputation began to be tested by competing interests. Such interests reveal contested notions of culture and of effective citizenship. By 2007 there were already nine recognized cultural points in Diadema, including organizations for popular poetry, audio-visual production, dance, and theater, a pop art museum, and *folia de reis*.<sup>18</sup> The federal government provides 185,000 reais (approximately US\$110,000) per year in five installments to each of them, and the municipal government must supply the infrastructure and professional and maintenance labor.<sup>19</sup> The inclusion of the Casa incited a sharp debate over whether hip-hop was, in fact, “culture.” DJ Preto El, a member of Zulu Nation Brasil and a workshop teacher at the Casa, described the scene this way:

You see, there’s an official sign from “Ponto de Cultura,” which was supposed to be installed a while back. It’s going here at the Casa. It will reinforce the importance of this space, the struggle we’ve endured to conquer this space. It’s not just about the ABC [an acronym referring to the industrial cities of the Southeast region of the São Paulo metropolitan area] but about all of São Paulo and Brazil as a whole. This was the first hip-hop center in Brazil. The problem is that some people at the current municipal Department of Culture see this as a farce. They don’t like our culture and don’t want to see us grow and be strong. It’s a simple space. In short, there is a misunderstanding about what the Casa is and what the Cultural Points program is. What’s worse is that these two factions are in the same building—one of the buildings in the place that you have visited several times, right there! Truthfully, I don’t understand and am confused, as I feel many are right about now.

In a 2009 e-mail exchange, Tota underscored the difference between the municipal and São Paulo state bureaucracy and the federal department as significant in assessing the state-culture relationship.

Thank God, we’ve got another project. It’s all about the “graffiti poético” [the name of Tota’s glossy magazine project]. The state government initiative under the rubric of “cultural action” is great. They make the red tape easy—less worry about receipts, strict budgets. We don’t have to produce all of this paperwork up front. This gives us a certain distance from bureaucracy and allows us to do what we understand. They give us time after the fact to do the accounting. The problem with the Cultural Points program is that they delay their payment. I’m still waiting for the money they owe me from the spray cans I bought over two years ago.

Tota’s and others’ frustration with the federal bureaucracy has resonated within the Ministry of Culture itself. In June 2010 I spoke with João, a “cultural manager” of sorts who directed the Hip-Hop Cultural Prize, Preto Ghóez

Edition. This prize, in honor of Preto Ghóez, a hip-hop and black activist who died in a car accident in 2004, promised 1.7 million reais (US\$1 million) in 135 awards for selected projects. João explained to me that he had expected approximately 5,000 applications. The state waited and then lowered expectations to 1,500, but just days before the extended deadline of July 5 there were only 200 applications in João's inbox. The problem, according to João, was clientelism. "There are big, important, self-made hip-hop [and working-class] organizations, such as CUFA [Central Única das Favelas (Favela Center)], and they didn't support the prize, so I know there are a lot of folks who simply won't apply, because they don't trust the prize. It doesn't have the reputation."

## CONCLUSION

Some scholars argue that the state's exploitative history with regard to the popular is virtually irreversible and therefore there is no consistent moral ground from which to sketch a productive and comprehensive state project of education and citizenship. Cognizant of this situation, Brazilians working in a range of popular media have directed their attention to citizenship projects at other levels—translocal, diasporic, global, or urban local (Moehn, 2007; Holston, 2008). State agencies are potential resources alongside NGOs (such as CUFA) and small-scale corporate sponsors in the simultaneously very local and global markets of, for example, recording labels and clothing lines for hip-hoppers to explore for a wide range of projects.

The model of hip-hopper-as-entrepreneur is not only neoliberal but also squarely within a widely accepted hip-hop paradigm of expressive creativity. In contrast to the situation in the United States, rap music by Brazilians has not penetrated the mainstream in the entertainment industry. Virtually no Brazilian makes a living by rapping alone. Hip-hoppers must be creative in diversifying and commodifying their skills.

While in the United States this model of neoliberalism has reflected an increasingly "hollow" state (Klein, 2007) that limits or abandons its institutional engagement with the public sphere, the Brazilian state under the PT has articulated an alternative model of citizenship. Part of the difference between the Lula era and the previous Cardoso administrations is quantifiable; Lula increased the budget of the Ministry of Culture 80 percent in his first two years in office. Perhaps more important in the long run, however, Gil and Ferreira explicitly employed "culture" as a live act with ever-expanding possibilities. Instead of being considered as a list of genres and institutions to be preserved or a number of techniques to be learned, national culture is discursively technological engagement with others. Culture is thus the generative process, a recording of the encounter, with "national" being a signal of inclusion aided by state resources and institutions.

Not all hip-hoppers follow the lead of the Casa. For some hip-hoppers and other practitioners of popular culture, the Brazilian state is hopelessly inefficient and not really committed to the peripheral community and social change. These hip-hoppers have turned to the market and, following many U.S. hip-hoppers, have worked to create "brands" attachable to a number of

“blue-chip” commodities such as clothing. I have focused here on another choice—the laborious process of negotiating with state agencies at various levels to persuade state officials that culture is a practice of networking and self-discovery through the medium of aesthetic activities. As DJ Preto El remarked, even in the Casa, probably the most successful example of state–hip-hop relations, understanding breaks down and mutual recognition disintegrates. While social relationships in the marketplace are primarily determined in quantitative terms of value and sales figures, in the nexus of state and civil society relationships are more discursive and less cohesive.

I have examined the campaign agendas of the Brazilian Ministry of Culture and São Paulo’s hip-hop community by deconstructing the rhetoric of the Cultural Points program and the hip-hop talking points of “information,” “idea exchange,” and “spatial occupation.” Theoretically, the stock of the state as a resource for hip-hop appears to be high, but there is obviously a difference of opinion as one moves from the federal to the local level. Tota, for example, has come to see the state as a value with a fairly low return but the municipality as pragmatically stable.

I have argued that the relationship between hip-hop and the state is important to track because it is indicative of general trends of citizenship. The ups and downs of recognition and funding with regard to the Casa reflect a fragmented landscape of citizenship as it relates to popular-culture practices. While the state remains a player and an important asset for hip-hoppers, its reputation, damaged by its historical co-optation and commodification of the popular, is compromised but still promising. I echo the sentiments of hip-hoppers such as Nino Brown, Preto El, and Erry-G when I assert that a robust state engagement with the marginal peripheral public via hip-hop matters because there are few other options among most (sub)urban Brazilians for education in the sense of self-knowledge and the cultivation of a desire to engage in the civil sphere. Ultimately, a representative democratic state is obliged to provide these opportunities in a systematic fashion, and the structure of hip-hop in its more orthodox versions, grounded in social action and self-esteem, is an ideal vehicle for such civic education and social inclusion. In short, hip-hop organization and performance in Brazil represent a potentially empowering and democratically managed sociality of knowledge.

At the time of this writing, the official plaque affirming the Casa’s status as a cultural point has not arrived. I wonder if Reinaldo would still offer what used to be a standard reply from a resident of the periphery to a question about his future. Is the Brazilian state really invested in “leaving something”—providing institutional opportunities—for Reinaldo and the millions of other Brazilians who are unable to purchase basic services? And will hip-hoppers remain committed to the ideology explicitly linking aesthetic production to social transformation and idea exchange? The relative success of the Cultural Points program may provide insight to these questions.

## NOTES

1. See the comments of Célio Turino, coordinator of the Cultura Viva (Live Culture) program at <http://www.inclusaodigital.gov.br/inclusao/noticia/programa-cultura-viva-alcanca-a-marca->

de-500-pontos-de-cultura-no-brasil/. See also Paley (2001) for an analysis of the nexus of social health movements and a free-market economy in postdictatorship Chile.

2. This statement is not an argument for a theoretical model of a "parallel state." State actors are certainly in partnership in the creation and maintenance of local infrastructure attributed to crime syndicates. For more on this relationship in the case of Rio de Janeiro, see Arias (2006).

3. For a discussion of state policies regarding culture during colonialism, see Souza (2000).

4. See also Jocelyne Guilbault's (2007: 44–46) discussion of British colonial and local Creole middle-class management of carnival musics in Trinidad.

5. See Coutinho (2009) for a discussion of the influence of Brazilian interpretations of the work of Antonio Gramsci during the military dictatorship, especially as they related to the relationship between the state and civil society. In the context of military repression and the AI-5 legislation in particular, the Brazilian left began to develop a notion of civil society as increasingly antagonistic to the state as a means to dissolve the military hegemony over national politics.

6. It is significant that in 1987 Gil did hold a political position as the minister of culture in Salvador, the capital of the state of Bahia and the home of many of the Tropicalists.

7. In fact, the Brazilian intelligentsia is very much divided regarding this issue. For more on the debate, see <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/educacao/ult305u401519.shtml>. For a statement from those who oppose the measures in education, see <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/educacao/ult305u401519.shtml> (a letter from self-proclaimed "antiracists against racial quotas" to the president of the Federal Supreme Court drafted on April 30, 2008, and printed in the leading newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* on May 14, 2008). For statements representing academic proponents of Lula's affirmative action policies, see <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/educacao/ult305u401519.shtml>.

8. The current Minister of Culture, Ana de Hollanda, has had a more tense relationship with participants and manager of the "Cultural Points" program as demonstrated in this on-line article, see <http://www.culturaemercado.com.br/politica/ana-de-hollanda-recebe-pontos-de-cultura/>.

9. I borrow the term "recasting" from the hip-hop scholar Joseph Schloss in his discussion of DJ attempts to given new meanings to old prerecorded sounds.

10. See, for example, Rother (2004) and the Novos Brasis (New Brazils) program sponsored by Oi Futuro, formerly known as Instituto Telemar, at <http://www.oifuturo.org.br/oifuturo.htm#/novosbrasis/> (accessed March 1, 2009).

11. In 2005 Gil promoted a project of cultural exchange as part of the Cultural Points program called *cultura livre* (free culture). In this instance he traveled to Tunisia and met the North American computer programmer Richard Stallman. They "shared" various software technology, and Gil performed music both live and virtually with Tunisian artists. See [http://www.cultura.gov.br/foruns\\_de\\_cultura/cultura\\_digital/na\\_midia/index.php?p=12810&more=1&c=1&pb=1](http://www.cultura.gov.br/foruns_de_cultura/cultura_digital/na_midia/index.php?p=12810&more=1&c=1&pb=1).

12. The excerpts from Gil's speech come from the Ministry of Culture web site: <http://www.cultura.gov.br/noticias/discursos/index.php?p=29242&more=1&c=1&pb=1>

13. This excerpt comes from an online You Tube interview from 2008 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJbbqHbAjuI>. See also <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WdJPvGAFGE0> for a comparable interview in English with Prado.

14. Gil recorded this song in 1968 as part of the legendary Tropicália collective recording with Caetano Veloso, Gal Costa, Tom Zé, Os Mutantes, and others. It is an exercise in concrete poetry, with the lyrics taking the phrase "bat macumba iê iê, bat macumba ai ya" as if it were a structure. Over time, the singing builds it up and breaks the phrase down syllable by syllable. "Macumba" is a popular term referring to the Afro-Brazilian religion of candomblé. In colloquial speech it carries negative connotations with racist overtones. Here Gil playfully subverts such meanings.

15. For a cross-cultural comparison on the value of being informed, see Maxwell's (2003: 52–56) discussion of the local importance given to doing "research" by hip-hoppers in Sydney, Australia.

16. The case of the Casa certainly does not represent all experiences of cultural points or even those associated with peripheral popular music. There is a growing scholarly literature on such state-sponsored cultural organizations and the challenges of and opportunities for progressive citizenship. For more case studies, see, for example, Loureiro and Callou (2007), Bonilla (2005), Reis (2004), and Dourado et al. (2008).

17. See regional newspaper articles such as [http://www.cmdiadema.sp.gov.br/blogs/index.php?blog=5&title=hip\\_hop\\_e\\_opcao\\_para\\_final\\_de\\_semana&more=1&c=1&tb=1&pb=1](http://www.cmdiadema.sp.gov.br/blogs/index.php?blog=5&title=hip_hop_e_opcao_para_final_de_semana&more=1&c=1&tb=1&pb=1) (accessed February 1, 2009) and <http://www.metodista.br/rroonline/cultura/dia-mundial-do-hip-hopi-tem-comemoracao-em-diadema/> (accessed March 15, 2009).

18. *Folia de reis* is a popular Catholic practice originally from the rural countryside areas of the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais. *Folias* feature music, dance, and parades and are based on the narrative of the journey of the Wise Men to Bethlehem and back to the Orient. For an ethnomusicological analysis see Reily (2002).

19. See the official Ministry of Culture web site, [http://www.cultura.gov.br/cultura\\_viva/?page\\_id=31](http://www.cultura.gov.br/cultura_viva/?page_id=31).

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