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Back to Brooklyn
Tim'm T. West's NYC journal

Tim'm T. West is the flesh and blood side of 25percenter, a third of Oakland's Deep Dickollective. Homo-hoppers by their own definition, the Deep Dickollective assault rap music's masculine code. With their outlandish, asymmetric musical moods and political swagger, they're among black music's most brazen invaders since George Clinton landed the Mothership.



Tim'm has recently released a solo EP, and it is a striking counterpoint to his work as 25percenter. This record is haunted. Each fragment of sound echoes from the past: the Midwest's working class post-funk, Chicago house, NYC hip-hop, Memphis soul. As Tim'm speaks and sings, his generation's memories in sound blend into one another.

Junkmedia asked Tim'm to keep a journal of his recent trip to New York.

April 25, 2002

Writing the date, I am curious about the convergence with my **Deep Dickollective** alias, 25percenter. I'm aware of other convergences as well. Tomorrow night promises to be a full moon, and I tend to be pretty off-the-hook when performing under the full moon. Nothing seems incidental these days though. Every move and sensibility is impressed with its moment, and I'm thinking that this weekend might be mine to remember and relish.

Some three years ago I was plotting a departure from Brooklyn to become a professor of hip-hop. I had merely toyed with the idea of developing my artistry that impulse I abandoned in the early '90s, because it could not hold my desire for men comfortably. But today there is a place in hip-hop for a b-boy who desires other boys; and it's not through academic-speak, but through my own stylings as an emcee that I get to enter the ciphers openly and proudly as someone who is gay-identified. Emceein' required a level of bravery that I was not willing to assume when I lived in Brooklyn. That is, until, after some time at Stanford in a Ph.D. program, the confines of theory-speak began to reduce my personal struggle to this category of affect. Affect doesn't properly express what pains me about the world...

I am no savior of hip-hop, and it doesn't need one. I am, however, an avid believer in truth.

Integrity is about the "keep it real" that everyone is talking about, but that few are actually doing. When you are told you have full-blown AIDS and 192 T cells that's some *real* shit... talking about it without shame or dis/ease is some real shit.

It's scary. And it seems as if I had to decide at that moment whether I wanted to live or die. If by living I had to deny my desires for men, that would be to accept psychological apartheid. Living like that is an insidious, internalized and dead-ending self-hate. Like hanging on cliffs of self-annihilation by the very teeth that would enable you to scream for help. The nigger that calls me "faggot" hates himself and I had to voice this. The nigga that lets a nigga call him a faggot (and who is a faggot) hates himself even more...

I hope, when I'm done at Brooklyn Café, that a few of them love themselves a little more. Or that somebody doesn't feel that "faggot" means weak, or that someone experiences the magic that can happen when folk come together around music they love, whatever their sexualities, and hold it down nicely. I'm convinced that hip-hop will be better, because I'm adding some noise to the alluring cacophony that is our soul music. Between the deejay scratch, emcee flow and b-boy stylee, there is room for truth. It matters that we tell truth and the whole truth. We will all be better for it.

April 26, 2002

Last night was sooo ill in the best way. Ross and Manny and I ripped it. We'd spent much of the day connecting and re-connecting with NYCity, meeting folk who were excited about our arrival and feeding us mad love. I'm here this next day and feeling the warmth of the Brooklyn sun.

Feature

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 "I've been a musician in Melbourne for ten years and it was just time for a change of scenery and to put yourself in the deep end. You don't want to become complacent about the things around you."

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The New Pornographers
Challengers

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Scout Niblett
This Fool Can Die Now

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Among the conversations that have been the backdrop of this hip-hop experience is a statement that a brotha made at the forum put on by POCC (People of Color in Crisis) in Brooklyn: about learning to be comfortable in the spaces that are uncomfortable.

I think of the black dread-locked woman confronting Ross about the increasing presence of white people taking over Fort Greene. It was a really tense moment when I wanted to defend him by saying to that woman that "Ross ain't the problem." And yet, a part of me was curious about his response. It was an uncomfortable moment that I felt might produce something special, but it's barren fruit so far... still uncomfortable. I too am very concerned about the gentrification of black neighborhoods and where ethnic demographics and capitalism collide. Gentrification's winners are not so coincidentally white and wealthy, and this gets at me.

Today, Manny took a picture of me in front of a graffiti-like image contesting gentrification. So there is this identification that I felt with the woman who confronted Ross (unfortunately on the basis of his whiteness alone). And an identification still with Ross, who is very attuned to the geo-politics of blacks in the inner cities. I wondered if, when the woman said, "we cannot get used to your type here," she might have also assumed that Ross and me, or Manny and me, were fags, and that her statement designated a doubled politics of exclusion. "You're not wanted here" is so clich  in the worst way. I thought that someone, some decades ago in another space, might have said that to her ancestors.



Being black and gay and HIV+ sensitizes me to so many sides of things that living gets burdensome sometimes. Manny and I were going into deep conversations about black men and emasculation and how it leads to this exaggerated and hyperbolic masculinity that is very confining. Not just for gay men, but men, period. It is said that I am str8-acting (whatever that means?) and Manny at times can be more in touch with his feminine sensibilities than I. So we are both growing a lot, learning from each other; about the human condition, about the ironic dependence on labels like "gay" and "straight".

I was really proud that Manny and I could perform in front of hundreds of black gay boys and he didn't once mention (in a way so clich  among my so-called str8 male allies) "I have a girlfriend" or "speaking from the heterosexual perspective". He was, or at least it seemed, as comfortable as me in that space. My discomfort is of a different sort, as I am often at odds with what I perceive as self-hate, rampant among black men who love men. I was proud to represent hip-hop for all the gay b-boys who never had such a space to be "out" and had to suffer through all the rampant homophobia. After the show, several people were not sure if Manny and I were actually gay... and I had this strong compulsion to represent and say "yes... well... I am," just so I could shatter their image of what roles are available for gay boys in hip-hop. We are not just singing hooks, doing make-up and background dancing. We are also emcees, breakers, deejays, graffiti artists, dogganmit.

I have to go and meet a handsome guy for dinner, so I have to shut this down. Hip-hop, no doubt, will somehow be different because we came to NYC this weekend. Homohop Massive, and then some. Me, Manny and Ross, a m nage collage.

April 29, 2002

Last day and on the flight back to Oakland. Drained. Happy about a series of reconnections with friends. I think I'd taken for granted how many amazingly talented people I have in my life. I left NY and Brooklyn in 1998 heartbroken and exhausted with the hot-headed and cold people who mirrored the bi-polar climate there. New York was too fast for a country boy, and I was running too much, so amazed with the people around me that I didn't make any special efforts to cultivate my own creative sensibilities.

Nonetheless, it was a good trip. I hadn't missed the city since I left, but I'll miss it a lot now. I'll miss friendships that stand strong for more than a decade even with occasional and unintended disconnects. I'll miss Robin, an amazing woman who is among the most beautiful people I know, both inside and outside. I'll miss Jermaine, who has beautifully tapped into his own creative genius to produce some really incredible black art. I'll miss the daily diaspora-feel of blackness in Brooklyn that I only get in the Bay at Ashby flea market. I'll miss all the beautiful black boys who were comfortable gazing on me and who welcomed my look back. I can say with fervor today that I not only love but like myself. Something in this trip makes such a self-affirmation feel like a real breakthrough.



25percenter and Manny

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archives. I note this as Ross reminds me that the LA Riots were ten years ago today. Any national memory of this is eclipsed by the War on Terrorism. Why do we forget what we forget? Perhaps they are uncomfortable memories heavy with tension that pinch the gut, so it's comfortable forgetting. Our national memory and history is filled with this kind of forgetfulness.

I believe that our trip here will be remembered by lots of people many of whom may have the power and courage to demand the revolutionary inclusion of voices that are crucial to the evolutions of hip-hop. I'm proud of the opportunities I got to share with friends this weekend. As far as I am concerned, it wasn't about performing for a "gay" or "str8" audience rather it's about soul music and celebrating freedom and life.

I didn't see my aunt in NY. I presume it's not because it was an inconvenient weekend, but because she cannot let go of biblical reprimands against men like me who love men. In learning how to love, I am learning how to forgive: my aunt, homophobic emcees, myself even. It's all about accepting the spaces we be in enough to open ourselves to the next spaces. Love ass backward is evol(ve). Doin' it bravely.

Tim'm T. West, a.k.a. 25percenter
May 2002