

EVERYDAY I'M HUSTLIN'  
HIPHOP RHETORICS AND THE ART OF MAKIN' DO

A Dissertation

by

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## ABSTRACT

The field of Rhetoric and Composition traditionally centers the Greco-Roman tradition, specifically rhetorics and theories attached to privileged, white males, as the most important voices, while marginalizing rhetorics from other communities such as people of color, women, and queer folks. This dissertation makes interventions in the field of Rhetoric and Composition by privileging rhetorics created and innovated by communities centering non-written texts, non-linearity, everyday practices, and embodiment. It looks at how hiphop produces resistance, survival, agency, and pleasure through everyday practices and rhetorical traditions based in African, Latino/a, and Indigenous ways of knowing. Rooted in sociopolitical resistance and survival against colonial histories of oppression and erasure, I theorize “tha art of makin’ do” as a method employing tactics able to re-imagine, re-purpose, and re-deploy the material and immaterial in accordance to immediate and long-term needs.

Hiphop Studies scholar Tricia Rose writes that the ability to manage and navigate the concept of “flow,” “layering,” and “ruptures in line” builds a hiphop methodology for survival that “suggest[s] affirmative ways in which profound social dislocation and rupture can be managed and perhaps contested in the cultural arena.” This hiphop methodology produces voice, subjectivity, and agency as weapons to combat oppression, challenge discourses, and produce knowledges. I theorize how hiphop rhetoricians employ the art of making do through remixing, pastiche, mimicry, parody, and embodied rhetorics to shift power structures and relationships.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my little familia. Janisa, you held me down through this entire journey. Your love, friendship, and cooking kept me afloat. You are the best thing that has ever happened to me. Penélope Xóchitl, mi nocotzín, gracias por entrar en nuestra vida. Ojalá que te de orgullo de ser mi hija.

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## CHAPTER I

### CAN I KICK IT? (INTRODUCTION)

“We gotta make a change

It’s time for us as a people to start making some changes

Let’s change the way we eat

Let’s change the way we live

And let’s change the way we treat each other

You see the old way wasn’t working

So it’s on us to do what we gotta do

To survive.”

Tupac Shakur, “Changes”

“People talk about hiphop like it’s some giant living in the hillside coming down to visit the townspeople. We are hiphop: me, you, everybody. We are hiphop. So hiphop is going where we are going.”

Yasiin Bey (Mos Def), “Fear Not of Man”

It has become popular to talk about hiphop<sup>1</sup>, particularly the music, as dead. In 2006, Nas declared as much by naming his album *Hip Hop is Dead*, and releasing a single by the same name. Hiphop heads declared that the “real” hiphop stopped being

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<sup>1</sup> How “hiphop” is spelled varies from person to person and group to group. Throughout this dissertation, I spell “hiphop” as one word, but I will leave all other spellings along in accordance to the preference of each speaker. I spell “hiphop” as one word partly from following Elaine Richardson’s lead. Her book *Hiphop Literacies* is crucial reading for hiphop rhetorics scholars. Some spell “hiphop” as two separate words, while others hyphenate the term. No matter the spelling, it is referring to the culture, its



produced long ago and the current versions of hiphop culture are much too commodified and commercialized.

While Niggaz Wit Attitudes (NWA) alumnus Ice Cube stars in family comedies and Coors Light commercials, not all of hiphop culture has been sold for profit. The communities and cultural traditions from which hiphop grew continue to struggle against issues such as racial profiling, inadequate housing, unemployment, and systemic racism, to name a few. Simultaneously, as hiphop culture has become embedded in cultural frameworks in the United States, youth movements across the globe continue using it as a tool for resistance. Brazilian graffiti artists have written their protest stories across major cities and rival the best artists from New York. Indigenous rappers, such as the Detroit-based Raiz Up collective, start ciphers across the Americas where they tell their stories, share knowledges, and critique the destructive nature of capitalism.

This dissertation is an intervention in how we understand rhetorical practices and histories of rhetoric as culturally situated, particularly in and through hiphop culture. As a youth subculture created in response to systemic marginalization based on race and class, hiphop culture uses and borrows from rhetorical traditions based in African, American Indian, and Latino/a cultures to create art, expression, communication, knowledges, and resistance. The idea that rappers, deejays, graffiti artists, and break dancers can create something out of nothing is not a new one, but this dissertation theorizes “the art of making do” as a complex rhetorical tactic that both understands and produces rhetorics as capable of being reproduced, reimagined, repurposed, and recycled in order to meet one’s needs. In other words, the shifting of an empty cardboard box

from a shipping technology to one for dancing reflects breakdancers' abilities to create a space for artistic expression that also continues nonwestern dance traditions. The ability to create this space also ruptures physical places by redefining what they are used for.

This dissertation also intervenes in the field of rhetoric and composition by making space for hip-hop rhetorics as a legitimate field of study. I join scholars such as Geneva Smitherman, Elaine Richardson, and Adam Banks, whose works have demonstrated why studying particular hip-hop ways of “doing” rhetoric are not only fascinating, but vitally important to both the discipline and communities of color. This intervention also creates more bridges for the fields of hip-hop studies and rhetoric and composition to meet. Hip-hop studies as a field continues to grow, which marks the current moment as a crucial one. The past twenty years has seen an increase in the amount of hip-hop-based college courses, and the academy continues opening its doors for rappers, producers, and djs. Rapper Bun B teaches “Religion and Hip-Hop Culture” at Rice University while young people from Houston’s Fifth Ward rarely have the opportunity to go to college. Prominent hip-hop artists are joined by researchers and academics who are helping define the field. These present relatively high stakes, especially since the academy shares a long history of the problematic incorporation of the intellectual, historical, cultural, spiritual, and artistic work of people of color. The colonial nature of western archives and canons attest to the relationship non-white peoples and cultures have with scholars and academic work. And this relationship shares threads across all disciplines. For example, scholars collect, study, and store items and objects classified as hieroglyphs under the assumption that western institutions know

better what to do with them than these objects' home communities. Access to these objects becomes limited to those with academic privilege, which prevents communities from using them. The colonial authority practiced by western scholars extends into accessing sensitive places, such as burial grounds, to retrieve artifacts without regard for how ancestors and/or the home community feels. Advances in western medicine occurred at the expense of raiding Black graves for the acquisition of cadavers that have been used to provide test samples for scientists and skeletons to be used in classroom. Sacred sites across the Americas have been raided to provide archeologists and historians the primary materials to provide western histories of indigenous cultures and peoples. Many anthropologists continue building their careers off the labor, experiences, and lives of the communities they study. Native, African, and Latino/a bodies continue to be housed in museums, laboratories, and archives for the benefit of the academy and the detriment of nonwhite communities. The same goes for cultural knowledges and materials produced by these groups. Because hiphop culture grew out of the contributions of Black, Brown, and Red peoples and their synthesis of nonwestern cultures, languages, rhetorics, knowledges, and ways of knowing, it is important to recognize that hiphop is susceptible to the same colonial treatment other fields of study have received. This dissertation, in alliance with the hiphop community, argues for understanding hiphop under hiphop's terms, which means that hiphop studies must privilege voices and intellectual labor from the hiphop community as well as work for those communities. Doing so creates the potential for hiphop scholarship to radically shift the academic landscape. This includes privileging hiphop-based languages,

practices, pedagogies, theories, knowledges, and scholars as epistemic and methodological centers instead of solely focusing on using non-hiphop tools to analyze the culture. Otherwise, it's all wack.

### Methods and Methodology

In order to theorize the art of making do as a hiphop rhetoric, this dissertation situates itself in the fields of cultural rhetorics, hiphop studies, Africana studies, Indigenous studies, Latino/a studies, women of color feminisms, technical communication, and food studies. I define the art of making do as the decolonial practice of making use of available resources to achieve a desired goal, whether it be material, immaterial, or a combination of both. The art of making do as a methodological practice speaks to how marginalized communities respond to systemic efforts to bar access, limit opportunities, and maintain depravity by the colonizer/oppressor. Like Native American communities who made do with US government supplied white flour to create fry bread, hiphop communities in the 1970s were able to combine discarded technologies and public spaces to create hiphop music, dancing, and graffiti art. The fields mentioned above speak to the complexity involved when both theorizing and practicing the art of making do as a practice that pulls from and negotiates a variety of knowledges and materials based on the current moment. Thus, to produce the art of making do within hiphop culture, one has to combine cultural traditions, ways of knowing, and rhetorics from Black, Indigenous, Latino/a communities; available material and immaterial resources; and the space created by both time and place. All the fields mentioned above

inform how people of color have resisted and survived slavery, colonization, and cultural erasure through developing tactics that often required the ability to make do.

Considering the art of making do as a rhetorical practice and theory, one can see the art of making do has much to offer. For one, it joins scholars who have long argued that not all intellectual works occur in the classroom and that academic work exists outside the academy. As food scholar Meredith Abarca recounts in the introduction to *Voices in the Kitchen*, as a graduate student from an immigrant and working class background, she found troubling how much traditional academic work hides and ignores intellectual work done by people who do not have access to traditional educational institutions and materials (3). The field of rhetoric and composition generally defines communicative and writing practices through a Western European lens which ignores rhetorical practices coming from places like the Americas, Africa, and Asia. The art of making do looks at how marginalized communities use what is available rhetorically to reach their goals. It intervenes in the field by not only making space for make do rhetorical practices, but validating them as legitimate ways of doing rhetoric. It challenges the field to recognize that not everyone has access to the same privileges and demands that teachers allow for more nuance in their approaches to students.

In theorizing the art of making do as a hiphop rhetoric, this dissertation asks:

- What are hiphop rhetorical practices?
- What does rhetoric and composition look like through the lens of hiphop studies?
- How can we reimagine rhetoric and composition through hiphop? What possibilities does this act open up?

- How can we redefine histories of rhetoric by privileging rhetorical practices from marginalized communities?
- What are the roles of the body and the spirit in rhetorical practices?
- What theories does hip-hop offer to the field of rhetoric and composition?
- Can we denote a space for hip-hop rhetorics to exist as a field of inquiry and scholarship?

Ultimately, this dissertation builds on the work of cultural rhetorics scholars like Malea Powell, Victor Villanueva, Elaine Richardson, Octavio Pimentel, and Adam Banks who have argued for understanding rhetorical practices as culturally situated, and not deriving from one privileged center. By studying hip-hop rhetorics, we see that people lacking material and power privileges innovate ways to share knowledges, techniques, histories, stories, and art. This in turn, opens up how we think about the ways we define rhetorical practices, which can change the ways we conceptualize the composition classroom, the role of academic work in our communities, and ways to decolonize learning institutions, especially the academy.

Before moving forward, I offer the following working definition of rhetoric: rhetoric is how people, communities, and cultures make meaning through all forms of communication, including the oral, written, embodied, and their intersections. This definition is situated through the work of other cultural rhetorics scholars. First, Victor Villanueva's call to break precedent from a Greco-Roman centered history of rhetoric. Second, it builds on Casie Cobos's definition of rhetoric, which combines ideas written by Jay Dolmage, Walter Mignolo, and Malea Powell (Cobos 13). Dolmage offers the

concept of rhetoric as “the handing down of knowledge or the contestation of power through communication” (2010 Octalog). Mignolo argues against a centrally recognized Western knowledge base. Powell demands we remember that the colonial nature of scholarship in the Americas has erased and literally destroyed the bodies of its colonized subjects.

This definition creates a strong foundation from which to build a definition of hip-hop rhetorics. For the purposes of this dissertation, hip-hop rhetorics are how people and communities within hip-hop cultures make meaning through all forms of communication, including the oral, written, embodied, and their intersections. In other words, these are rhetorics practiced from a hip-hop center. I center hip-hop rhetorics particularly through the basic elements of the culture: deejaying, break dancing, graffiti art, rapping, and doing the knowledge, as defined by DJ Kool Herc<sup>2</sup>. It is also important to remember that hip-hop culture draws heavily from traditions coming from African American communities in the United States. Elaine Richardson and Ronald Jackson’s definition of African American Rhetorics is as follows: “the study of culturally and discursively developed knowledge-forms, communicative practices and persuasive strategies rooted in freedom struggles by people of African ancestry in America.” Hip-hop rhetorics, then, are ways of making meaning and communicating with an understanding that it has an inherent social justice element in it. The social justice element in African American rhetorics, and therefore, hip-hop rhetorics, is an important point to remember throughout this dissertation for several reasons. First, laypeople often

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<sup>2</sup> Herc is considered the founder of hip-hop.

share a negative opinion of hip-hop. Commercial hip-hop music, particularly gangsta rap, is often critiqued as misogynistic and homophobic by conservative and white communities. Many on the left, including African Americans, critique hip-hop music as misogynistic, homophobic, and pandering to racist stereotypes for commercial gain. While these opinions certainly merit attention and discussion, their overwhelming popularity elide the importance and merits of hip-hop culture, art, and knowledges. Hip-hop began as an intellectual and creative response to the poverty, crime, and extreme blight people living in predominantly Black and Brown neighborhoods experienced in postindustrial New York. Factors such as the decline of industrial jobs, white flight to the suburbs, and the reduction of adequate housing attested to the systemic and institutional racism that was being practiced against people of color in the city. Early hip-hop artists responded through art and ideas that used hip-hop based rhetorics to challenge and critique their oppressors. They provided an outlet for young people to express their emotions and frustrations about living in poverty. They made their voices heard. Thus, from its inception, hip-hop culture has carried with it a social justice component that continues to be important today. In an era where stop and frisk policies continue to demonize and harass men of color in New York, the boom and bap of protest needs to continue sounding off.

Finally, this dissertation also recognizes the importance of building alliances among different communities. Black, Indigenous, and Latino/a communities share mutual struggles against racism, white supremacy, and systemic oppression. In the Americas, these struggles share colonial roots. The long histories of people from all



three groups engaging with each other attest to the possibilities that exist when they work together. There is no West Coast hip-hop scene without Chicano rapper Kid Frost working with African American rapper Ice-T. Radical social change addressing social and material inequalities can happen if people of color make alliances to challenge oppression in all its forms. These alliances matter in hip-hop studies, since the culture is influenced by rhetorical practices coming from all three communities and their ancestors. These alliances matter to rhetoric and composition because they all prove that dominant understandings of histories of rhetoric inadequately represent how different peoples, cultures, and communities practice rhetoric. Dominant histories of rhetoric privilege the Greco-Roman tradition as the center from which all other traditions derive. Scholars often position Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato as the cornerstones of the Western rhetorical tradition. Rhetorical traditions beyond Europe are defined through the Greco-Roman lens and/or placed below the Greco-Roman tradition on the hierarchy of rhetorics.

Hip-hop culture creates art and intellectual work that centers community first. People of color do not have the luxury of forgetting or ignoring their communities and ancestors because so many have struggled to create the change and opportunities that exist for us today. In addition, there is a long, colonial history of the academy taking our work, our ideas, our theories, our bodies, and our resources, and using it to benefit the privileged while keeping us marginalized. This dissertation recognizes the importance of placing community first, never forgetting where we came from, and searches for ways to give back. You need to talk more about your methods and methodologies here by

drawing on methodologists in our fields. And, you need to talk about your methods in relationship to your methodologies.

#### Rhetorical Traditions and Interventions

As previously noted, this dissertation follows the path created by previous rhetoricians who argue for a culturally situated understanding of histories of rhetoric. Rhetoric and composition as a field still maintains the Greco-Roman tradition as the center from which the field grows. We see this in the ways that journals, scholars, and conferences pertaining to the field continue marginalizing cultural rhetorics. Although “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” was passed almost forty years ago, rhetoric and composition classrooms continue emphasizing Standard American English. Journals and books follow suit.

Patricial Bizzell’s comments on her role as co-editor of both editions of *The Rhetorical Tradition* help us understand both the way the field of rhetoric and composition is traditionally constructed and how rhetorics considered “nontraditional” fit into this construction. Bizzell acknowledges that a “tradition tradition” exists that has largely been created by white males for the benefit and privilege of other white males that continues to be the dominant pillar of the field (110). Other, and I use that word intentionally, rhetoricians gained interest in the field during the twentieth century when social justice movements influenced the Academy to include more white women and people of color and their contributions, which is evident in the second edition of *The Rhetorical Tradition*. While the appearance of more people of color appears as a sign of progress, I find two major points of contention. First, the insistence of maintaining a split

between the “tradition tradition” and “new traditions” maintains the logic of othering and marginalizing traditions not coming from Athens. The fact that Bizzell and Hertzberg do not interrogate why traditional texts and figures continue to dominate the field speaks volumes about the kind of inclusiveness the second edition actually offers.

Second, Bizzell ignores why other traditions have been largely erased, ignored, and marginalized from the study of rhetoric and composition. She states that the “new tradition” arose as more women and people of color entered the academy. She writes, “thinkers practically unknown to traditional historians of rhetoric, sometimes because we did not have the methodological and pedagogical approaches necessary to construe their texts as rhetoric and sometimes because their work itself was hidden from scholarly view, fragmented, or lost” (113). She labels these “new traditions” as “radical” because they demand “not merely the readjustment of existing scholarly priorities, but a whole new set of priorities” (113). Her statements speak around histories of European colonization, white supremacy, and the practices of genocide and annihilation that were a part of it. Bizzell makes no room for thinking about how different cultures and peoples had their own rhetorical traditions before and beyond the Greco-Roman tradition. She also ignores that marginalized people have formed their own traditions and tactics alongside, with, against, and through the dominant tradition. Cultural rhetorics as a field seeks to interrogate why histories of rhetoric and the field continue to perpetuate stories that ignore how colonization has produced the “tradition tradition.”

Work done by cultural rhetoricians is vital and valuable not only on an academic level, but for the communities they represent. The path towards upward mobility

emphasizes a model of assimilation that wants a homogenous US public and society, which assumes an invisible whiteness at the cost of releasing one's cultural voices, heritage, and rhetorics. The interventions made by cultural rhetoricians seek to honor marginalized people's ways of knowing by arguing for why the valuing of difference matters and how the erasure of people's rhetorical traditions is dangerous. It is also a continuation of colonial legacies that want to erase all difference in the name of white supremacy.

Geneva Smitherman argues for the centrality of language in producing, establishing, and maintaining power structures and relationships, and therefore sees language as inherently important in any action and/or movement striving for social change and revolution. She writes, "Language should be assigned a central place in models of social change and in political and revolutionary theories. The language-speech dialectic represents habitual, systematic social behavior. Its linguistic forms, embodying the world view of the society, are encoded in childhood in natural, developmental socialization processes" (106). Considering language as "social behavior" creates room for understanding how language is embedded and interconnected with other social practices, recognizing how nonverbal communicative practices also feature their own languages. These "languages" influence and are influenced by oral and written communication. Whereas traditional work in the field of rhetoric and composition wants to limit its area of study to alphabetic written discourse, cultural rhetorics open up areas of inquiry in order to gain a holistic and more inclusive understanding of how culture influences the ways people communicate and make meaning. The resistance cultural

rhetoricians meet from the field are tied to the reasons that standard US English continues to be perceived as the dominant form of language in the United States, as well as the language of upward mobility.

At the 2012 “Chairs’ Address,” for Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), Malea Powell emphasized the need for scholars to perform decolonial work in the field:

Our discipline—whether you call it rhetoric and writing or composition and rhetoric or composition studies, or rhetoric studies, or writing studies—our discipline finds itself at the heart of the narrative of modernity, and it is deeply mired in the much of the logic of coloniality. We mark our origins in precisely the same way—and in the same moment—as the colonial matrix of power—in the Renaissance’s reinvention of classical Greece and its own middle ages, a reinvention necessary for empire. We are part of it, we are part of maintaining it, and now, I believe, we must be part of de-linking and de-chaining those discourses from their imperial designs” (393-94).

Scholars working through a cultural rhetorics framework contribute significantly to decolonizing the field by challenging the field to reconsider how its histories, theories, and works are constructed. Contributors to cultural rhetorics include scholars based in ethnic studies, critical race studies, queer studies, disability studies, technical and professional communication, gender studies, Africana studies, Native studies, Latin@ studies, Chican@ studies, and hiphop studies. These contributions carry importance

beyond the field by aligning themselves with people doing decolonial activist work. In fact, it is activist work because the changes it seeks are liberatory in nature. Delinking from the traditional construction of histories of rhetoric makes it possible for communities to recognize, honor, and practice their own rhetorical traditions, which are tied to language, culture, history, and identity. One of the most powerful things a teacher in rhetoric and composition can do is stop him/herself from imposing one way of doing rhetoric on her/his students. The same goes for scholars and mentors in the field.

Powell's statement to decolonize rhetoric and composition studies is part of a series of declarations that seem new, but are a part of a legacy of scholars who urge the rest of the field to become more inclusive of marginalized voices. Victor Villanueva's landmark essay "On the Rhetoric and Precedents of Racism" urges readers to change the field. He writes:

Now as I try to think of how this profession can improve on its multiculturalism, do more than assuring that people of color are represented in our materials, more than assuring that people of color are read and heard in numbers more in keeping with the emerging demographics of the nation and the world, I remain tied to the belief that we must break from the colonial discourse that binds us all. What I mean is that there are attitudes from those we have revered over the centuries which we inherit, that are woven into the discourse that we inherit. (656)

Simply increasing numbers of students, professionals, and scholarship by people of color will not shift the field unless that inclusion requires a serious engagement with what

happens once those voices, theories, ideas, bodies, and scholarship enters the room. In other words, you can't let people of color into the party and not expect for shit to change. And that change should be fundamental. It should move beyond applying Greco-Roman rhetorics to understand how "minority" communities use and perform rhetoric. In fact, I don't much care for that work. Instead of moving "beyond," let's move in all directions to understand marginalized communities' rhetorical practices on their own terms, using their own voices. Villanueva literally shouts at the reader to shift the game:

Break precedent! We are so locked into the colonial mindset that we are now turning to the excolonials of Europe to learn something about our own people of color. There again, I'm grateful for the insights. But what are the ex-colonials of the U.S. saying, the ex-colonials of our hemisphere, now caught in neocolonial dependency? (659)

Villanueva is talking about the ways that scholarship and theories travel through intellectual trade routes established by the Western academy. Fields like postcolonial studies offer important theories and analysis from Europe and Asia without paying attention to voices coming from the Americas. Villanueva presents the example of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College where, "[s]ome Puerto Ricans, for instance, are arguing for *jaiba* (sic) politics, a strategy of mimicry and parody that might have application in the classroom..." (659). Theorizing in ways that privilege people of color as producers of intellectual work clearly breaks precedent from the traditional way the field wants scholarship to work. Like Villanueva's example of the implications of theorizing through *jaiba* politics, this dissertation theorizes primarily out of hip-hop

culture as an intellectual base that offers its own set of theories, scholarship, knowledges, and ways of knowing.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. emphasized similar points ten years earlier by urging members of the MLA to own up to their social responsibilities as part of one of the largest professional organizations in the United States. He writes, “What’s more, unlike our counterparts in other branches of the academy, we teach virtually every student who matriculates at the undergraduate level. Even at the most specialized technical institutes in this country, students must study rhetoric and composition” (23). As educators who teach, mentor, and engage with so many students, it is important to foster inclusion in our academic, pedagogical, and social practices. Gates argues that in order to fix the low number of minority students, administrators, and faculty in the academy, the field must decenter United States and European texts, theories, and languages. He writes:

We must engage in this sort of canon deformation precisely because Mr. Bennet<sup>3</sup> is correct: the teaching of literature *is* (sic) the teaching of values, the teaching of an aesthetic and political order, in which none of the members of the black community, the minority community, or the women’s community were ever able to discover the reflection or representation of their images or to hear the resonances of their cultural voices. The return of ‘the’ canon represents the return of an order in which my people were the subjugated, the voiceless, the invisible, the

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<sup>3</sup> Gates refers to William Bennet and Allan Bloom as “the two symbols of the nostalgic return to what I think of as the ‘antebellum aesthetic position,’ when men were men and men were white, when scholar-critics were white men and when women and persons of color were voiceless, faceless servants and laborers, pouring tea and filling brandy snifters in the board rooms of old boy clubs” (21).



unrepresented, and the unrepresentable. I for one, ain't going back there, and I am willing to fight anyone who tries to drag us all back there into that medieval never-never land. (24)

Fields associated with English departments should take Gates seriously because so many voices have been and continue to be marginalized. Powell, Villanueva, and Gates show that the call has been made over and over again, and although changes have been made, the field as a whole stubbornly refuses to let go of its obsession with the Greco-Roman tradition and the colonial structures that firmly keep it at the center.

#### Defining Hiphop Rhetorics

Hiphop is inherently rhetorical because it is a culture that is keenly self-aware of how people of color are seen, heard, and understood. Linguist H. Samy Alim states that hiphop artists are “ultraconscious of their speech” because they are making complicated rhetorical choices through their lyrics and linguistic styles (54). In speaking to their primary audiences, they want to make sure they send the right message, while still talking to other audiences.

Hiphop studies as a field owes much of its foundation to work done in Africana studies, critical race studies, and ethnic studies. Much of the writing that established hiphop culture as a site for academic inquiry occurred in hiphop journalism by writers like Dream Hampton, Bakari Kitwana, and Joan Morgan. Editors and writers working for magazines focusing on hiphop interrogated hiphop through topics and issues such as aesthetic values, the politics of representation, sexism, homophobia, and commercialism.

Many of these hip-hop journalists are now graduate students and faculty in colleges and universities across the country.

Tricia Rose wrote what many consider to be the foundational academic text of hip-hop studies. In 1994, *Black Noise* was published in an interesting moment for hip-hop culture. No longer considered a subcultural fad like many believed in the 1980s, hip-hop music, dancing, and styles were more popular than ever, especially with the popularity of gangsta rap among young people. Considered a social evil by parents and conservatives, gangsta rap epitomized white and middle class fears of people of color, namely Black men. The popularity of gangsta rap also meant that hip-hop cultural products were being commodified faster and more voluminous than ever. Tupac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G.<sup>4</sup> were still alive and building legacies that continue to influence MCs.

Rose offers useful definitions of hip-hop and rap that work as good starting points towards defining hip-hop rhetorics and methodologies. She writes:

Rap music is a black cultural expression that prioritizes black voices from the margins of urban America. Rap music is a form of rhymed storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music. It began in the mid-1970s in the South Bronx in New York City as a part of hip hop, an African-American and Afro-Caribbean youth culture composed of graffiti, breakdancing, and rap music. (2)

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<sup>4</sup> Shakur was murdered on September 13, 1996, and the Notorious B.I.G. was murdered on March 9, 1997. Both cases remain unsolved.

Hiphop, as a culture, is commonly defined through its primary five elements: graffiti art (bombing), break dancing (breaking), rapping (MCing), deejaying (DJing), and “doing the knowledge” (Kitwana xii). Bakari Kitwana acknowledges that the movement of hiphop as a youth subculture in the 1970s to a cultural giant today causes us to define culture beyond the basic elements. He argues that hiphop culture produces languages (both vocal and through the body), fashion, style, sensibilities, and worldviews (xii). Placing both of these definitions of hiphop in conversation with each other also reflect how hiphop produces its own theories, methods, and methodologies. People living through a hiphop or hiphop influenced worldview produce communication, knowledges, literacies, languages, and rhetorics both unique to hiphop culture and tied to the cultural traditions that influence and continue influencing hiphop culture.

When discussing hiphop as rhetoric, scholars place African American rhetorics as the primary foundation. In “‘The Chain Remain the Same’ Communicative Practices in the Hip Hop Nation,” Geneva Smitherman describes several rhetorical strategies and devices rappers use in their art. She identifies the rapper as “a post-modern African griot, the verbally gifted storyteller and cultural historian in traditional African society” (269). Smitherman shows how artists like Naughty By Nature, Geto Boys, Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, Notorious B.I.G., and Tupac Shakur regularly use Black rhetorical concepts such as narrativizing, toasting, boasting, playin the Dozens, signifyin, sampling, and flippin the script. For Smitherman, hiphop rhetorics are part of Black rhetorical traditions and histories that have been used and created in response to the oppression and dominance of white Europeans on Black bodies. Smitherman writes, “Thus, Rap music is not only a

Black expressive cultural phenomenon; it is, at the same time, a resisting discourse, a set of communicative practices that constitute a text of resistance against White America's racism and its Euro-centric cultural dominance" (271). As a "resisting discourse" it is important to locate hiphop rhetorics within the histories of resistance rhetorics in the spaces occupied by the United States and other colonial forces.

Elaine Richardson extends Smitherman's analysis by arguing for an understanding of Black rhetorical practices beyond written and spoken language. She argues that Black language practices in the United States are lived and experienced beyond the written word. African American Vernacular English (AAVE), for Richardson is "survival culture" (4). One of her critiques of scholarship on Black language is that it does not push deep enough into understandings of how AAVE does more than offer a different form of English. She writes, "By extending the definition of African American language usage beyond (surface level) syntax, phonology, and vocabulary, etc. into (deep level) speech acts, nonverbal behavior, and cultural production, the role of language as a major influence in reality construction and symbolic action is emphasized. The multiethnicity of symbols is more apparent in this view" (4). This analysis is particularly important to hiphop rhetorics because much of the ways that hiphoppers communicate go beyond language and writing. Scholars need to be more inclusive of practices such as fashion, cooking, djing, dancing, body language, and the visual to create better understandings of hiphop culture.

Richardson argues that hiphop language practices function as trickster rhetorics that are fully aware of how identities are imposed on bodies based on language. She

argues that hip-hop discourses “cross African American, General American English, Caribbean English, and Spanish, among other language backgrounds, to move the crowds and shift the framing of identities tied to those languages” while Anglo-American discourses attempt to narrow down languages to particular communities based on power and privilege (21). She furthers her argument when she writes, “[Hip-hop discourses] are constantly inventing, (dis)inventing, redefining, and reconstructing language to meet their needs and goals, and thus constantly engaged in the discursive (dis)invention of identity and the (dis)invention of language (21).

Richardson’s description of how hip-hop language practices are able to constantly change and shift the conversation through the combination of the languages, rhetorics, and cultural traditions at hand show both the intellectual complexity at work and the constant awareness of how oppression is working on and against nonwhite bodies.

Hip-hop rhetorics all share in the ability for taking what is given and shifting it according to one’s needs. Tricia Rose outlines the primary methodology of hip-hop in her theorization of its practices. Identifying “flow,” “layering,” and “rupture in line” as the three main theoretical concepts in rapping, Rose writes:

Interpreting these concepts theoretically, one can argue that they create and sustain rhythmic motion, continuity, and circularity via flow; accumulate, reinforce, and embellish this continuity through layering; and manage threats to these narratives by building in ruptures that highlight the continuity as it momentarily challenges it. These effects at the level of style and aesthetics suggest affirmative ways in which profound social

dislocation and rupture can be managed and perhaps contested in the cultural arena. (39)

This methodology emphasizes the complexity involved in producing hiphop productions as well as the constant awareness for the need to ensure resistance and survival. Hiphop rhetorics thus use rhetorical traditions long established through cultural histories in West Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean and colonized people's tactics and movements against oppression. Rounding out the definition of hiphop rhetorics is the influence of technology and economics. The birth of hiphop occurred in the postindustrial city, where urban centers no longer offered the employment opportunities that attracted people of color. Affordable and adequate housing developments have decreased over the past forty years, leaving many families stuck in poverty and without access to the kinds of employment, educational, and cultural opportunities communities need to grow and thrive. Hiphoppas took what was available and made it work for them. They also took discarded technologies and figured out ways to make music, art, intellectual expressions, and money. Rose cautions that without an understanding of how the digital and technological influenced the birth and growth of hiphop, we ignore one of its major aspects (25).

### Hiphop and Social Justice

As shown through the foundations of hiphop culture, a strong thread of social justice runs through all its elements. Beyond rapping, deejaying, graffiti art, and breakdancing, scholars, businesspersons, doctors, and community organizers have used hiphop rhetorics to create and foster community change. For example, Houston Healthy

Hip Hop runs workshops and after-school programs that teach elementary school students life skills such as good health habits and goal setting strategies through hip hop dancing. Hip Hop Public Health is an initiative in New York that works to end health illiteracy through music, videos, and games.

Work done in hip hop rhetorics should contain an element of social justice in it. Hip hop, as a culture born from the streets, should serve the very communities that brought it up. Scholars who are doing work in hip hop studies are also studying primarily Black, Latino/a, and Native cultural contributions and their various configurations in how hip hop was born, grew, and continues changing. In the spirit of taking responsibility and thinking ethically about the relationship between scholarship and marginalized communities, any work in hip hop rhetorics should work towards benefiting, healing, and honoring those communities. In the introduction to *Black Linguistics: Language, Society, and Politics in Africa and the Americas*, editors Sinfrey Makoni, Geneva Smitherman, Arnetha F. Ball, and Arthur K. Spears assert, “The selection of research topics originates in the proposition that Black Linguistics must contribute toward an understanding of the nature of oppression and strategies for conquering it, or at the very least containing it” (5-6). I would extend this claim beyond linguistics and as a general call for more scholars to recognize this responsibility.

Work in hip hop rhetorics should lead to liberation-based scholarship. This also means that theory should translate into practice and practices should inform theories. This dissertation follows my assertions by honoring the cultural and rhetorical bases from which hip hop was born. This dissertation also affirms the powerful work hip hoppers

have done over the past forty years to resist, subvert, and critique oppression. It proudly aligns itself with the work of other folks who found hip-hop as the space for creating, changing, and continuing vital intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and embodied practices for survival and growth.

### Deliverables

In following with putting theory into practice, this dissertation offers a series of deliverables that scholars, activists, and hip-hop heads can use. First, this dissertation provides a stronger understanding of hip-hop rhetorics. Building off the work of scholars like Elaine Richardson and Geneva Smitherman, who work directly in rhetoric and composition, and scholars like Jeff Chang and Tricia Rose, who work directly in hip-hop studies, readers will gain an understanding of how hip-hop rhetorics are tied to other rhetorical traditions, but also how hip-hop makes rhetoric in ways that distinguish it from other traditions.

Tied to this first deliverable is a stronger understanding of how rhetorical traditions coming from Africa and the Americas contribute to the ways hip-hop makes rhetoric. Traditions brought from Africa during the slave trade and developed in the Americas by slaves and later free Black communities provide an important foundation to the ways hip-hop developed in 1970s New York. The Bronx, Brooklyn, and the other spaces in New York also sit on Indigenous land. While hip-hop is commonly thought of as an African American creation, people from other cultures and ethnicities were important contributors to the birth and growth of hip-hop. Notably, Puerto Ricans like Crazy Legs of the Rocksteady Crew, aka Richard Cólón and DJ Charlie Chase of the



Cold Crush Brothers, aka Carlos Mandes, show that Latino/as were vitally important to early hip-hop<sup>5</sup>.

And the party don't stop here. My hope is that this dissertation illuminates and creates avenues for further inquiry. As both hip-hop and rhetoric and composition continue shifting, changing, and adapting to the needs of the people, students, scholars, and activists need to keep up pace. Anyone who has undertaken the monumental task of writing a dissertation knows that although they wish they could do it all, they can't. There are certainly limits and places to critique in the project, but hopefully they serve as spaces for someone else to pick up the mic and spit a few rhymes, knowatimsayin'?

You should also walk away with a few examples of how hip-hop rhetorics produce tactics for creating social justice. The art of making do, within a hip-hop context is a method of social justice. People who can find ways of achieving desired goals by making something out of nothing are geniuses in their own right. Rapper Lupe Fiasco in the song, "Hip-hop Saved My Life," raps, "One you never heard of/ Push it hard to further the/ Grind, might feel like murder, but/ Hip-Hop, you saved my life." The song talks about an aspiring rapper who works hard to break into the industry while dealing with a mess load of problems. The song ends with the lines, "Man it feels good, when it happens like that/ Two days from going back to selling crack." Instead of having to go back to selling drugs, the speaker is able to earn a paycheck. The song describes how the

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<sup>5</sup> People often go before the actual "birth of hip-hop" to talk about where it comes from. For example, the Nuyorican Poets are often credited with using performance styles that inspired rappers, and Muhammad Ali sometimes is called the very first rapper. Then there's the Lost Poets of Chicago who appear on rap albums and videos. I can go on and on...

speaker is able to live a better life, take care of his child, and ultimately give back to his community as a result of writing and performing rap songs.

Pointing to successful rappers and the ways they have given back offer some of the most visible examples, but hiphoppas who will never be famous use the art of making do all the time. This dissertation shows how clothing styles in hiphop have links to the ways Black folks have used clothing to continue cultural memories, engage in resistance, survive, and thrive. Cooking practices and djing share relationships that show how the mastery of the art of making do elevates both art forms for both producer and consumer. Hiphop in technical communication shows how hiphoppas have been doing technical communication in spite of lack of access to resources, and many times more effective than traditional methods. In providing avenues for resistance, survival, and growth, these examples produce social justice. When deliberately aimed at fighting oppression, these tactics are more powerful.

One way is through the classroom. The need for more hiphop pedagogies, and pedagogies coming from the margins in general, are still heavily underrepresented. This is particularly alarming as Latina/o presence continues growing in the United States, which means classrooms will see an increase in Latina/o students over the next fifty years. More Latina/os are also identifying as Indigenous, which signifies the importance of increasing the use of Indigenous-based pedagogies in the classroom. Most alarmingly, the wealth gap in the United States continues to grow, meaning that although people of color are going to take a larger representation in the country, many will remain

obstructed from gainful employment, educational opportunities, and a better quality of life.

For all these reasons, this dissertation argues not only for the effectiveness of hip-hop pedagogies, but their vital importance towards meaningful social change. Regardless of a student's background, teaching them through a pedagogy that is aware of how power relationships, race, and oppression function in the classroom and society at large offers a powerful set of critical tools for students to use as rhetoricians and beyond. For students who grow up in hip-hop communities, oftentimes coming from the margins, seeing aspects of their culture ethically represented in the classroom can offer much needed points of access to scholarship and the academy. For these students, seeing themselves as always/already knowledge producers can be illuminating and inspiring in spaces that often feel too white, too elitist, and too exclusive.

Bridge building among Black, Brown, and Red communities through inclusive scholarship that seeks to highlight previous alliances and call for more alliance making under the recognition of mutual struggles.

Finally, this dissertation offers an important deliverable that crystalizes all the ones mentioned above. It functions as a bridge, an invitation, and a continuation of work done when Black, Red, and Brown communities pull together to fight for change. In acknowledging and celebrating how each community intersects with one another intellectually, socially, and culturally it also extends an invitation for more folks to work together and do this kind of work. Fighting the power structures imposed on us by colonialism takes a united effort that respects each other's boundaries and invites

collaboration. It also shows that categories like culture, ethnicity, and community are porous rather than static. These pores can be opportunities to recognize the common and create partnerships and alliances in the face of so much oppression that continues to affect all our communities. The following section provides how each chapter will make good on each deliverable.

### Chapter Previews

Chapter Two discusses the art of making do as it applies to hiphop fashion practices. By acknowledging the history of controlling and disciplining enslaved and colonized bodies by white Europeans, this chapter shows why fashion matters in a sociopolitical context. This chapter argues that hiphop fashion practices, and the performances that happen through them, trace their roots back to African slaves using clothing, accessories, and performance as ways of producing resistance and continuing cultural practices. Early hiphoppas made do to create clothes and styles that responded to living in the postindustrial city, often by repurposing Western fashions and materials. This chapter offers further possibilities for people to create power and agency through fashion.

Chapter Three offers an ambitious moment of theorizing around cooking and DJ practices. The lack of availability to ingredients, often dictated by the oppression of people of color, has led to a particularly visible instance of the art of making do. Black, Brown, and Red cooks have had to adjust, change, and improvise foods in order to feed their families and communities. This chapter argues that a particular cook's "flava" develops out of the complex combination of cultural memory, traditions, and the ability

to improvise in the moment. This complicated practice is often ignored and denigrated due to Western conceptions of the craft/art distinction, which is also tied to the mind/body split. This chapter argues that similar things happen when hip-hop DJs perform for crowds. Early hip-hop DJs relied on mental archives created by constantly listening to and mixing music in order to create the right flava for the crowd. Because performances happen in the moment, deejays must make similar rhetorical choices, especially since they are supposed to inspire and move the crowd.

Chapter Four shows how hip-hop rhetorics have influenced and changed technical and digital communication. Hip-hop artists developed their own technical communication methods in order to get business done. Others moved into business and technological sectors and changed the game through hip-hop based methods. This chapter discusses what technical and digital communication looks like through the lens of hip-hop and joins the work of other cultural rhetorics scholars who are pushing the boundaries of digital and technical communication to be more inclusive of nonwestern theories and rhetorics.

Finally, Chapter Five makes a call for applying theory into practice by explaining the disciplinary implications of this dissertation. It discusses the radical possibilities for social justice work and transformation through hip-hop rhetorics. It also takes these possibilities to the classroom where I discuss some of the pedagogical tactics I have employed in my own classroom as well as what other hip-hop scholars have used in their own classes. Rhetoric and composition classrooms don't have to be boring to everyone and scary to the marginalized. A hip-hop-based classroom can foster the kind of fun and

intellectual inquiry that inspires students to claim their voices and wreck the academy like the gangstas they know they can be.

#### Tha Realest Thing I Eva Wrote

Ten years ago I was on the verge of becoming another statistic. As an angry shorty who increasingly discovered how racism was affecting his life, I stopped caring about school. I stopped caring about many things. I spent entire days laying in bed and entire nights drunk to ease all my pains. Then during one of my bed-induced stupors, one of Talib Kweli's music videos came on the television. Kweli repeats "Get by" throughout the song, which also serves as its title. Then I heard the choir sing the hook:

This morning I woke up  
Feeling brand new, I jumped up  
Feeling my highs and my lows  
In my soul and my goals  
Just to stop smoking and stop drinking  
I've been thinking I've got my reasons  
Just to get by

Those words spoke to me directly and clearly. I had been angry at the system but had little direction, and I didn't understand much. I knew things weren't right, but I didn't know how to proceed.

In the coming years, through obsessive reading and graduate school, I would gain stronger understandings of power, systems, and how they affect our lives. But my main source of information was and has remained hip-hop. It's been through listening to

hiphop music that I found voices that agreed with me, shared my anger, and dropped some knowledge on me. Talib Kweli, Kanye West, Yasiin Bey, and Common got me started, but I would go to other folks for more information. Lauryn Hill and Queen Latifah's funky flows led me to MC Lyte and other Femcees. Ana Tijoux and Calle 13 spoke openly about how colonialism continues attacks us Latin@s and why we should decolonize our daily lives as well as our lands. Big Freedia and Deep Dickollective would completely dispel my notions of what the real underground was about. While most hiphop heads will fawn over independent artists like Jay Electronica, homohop artists are on some real underground, activist work, showing the power that hiphop can offer those trying to change things.

When people ask if hiphop can provide real solutions and answers to problems, I am living proof. My academic training is as grounded in hiphop as it is in anything else. There are plenty of others who have come before me and walking alongside me who heard Tupac say "keep ya head up" when times were tough, and many more in future generations who will continue bringing tha noise and funk on a hiphop tip. Alongside many others, we do this and we do it to death because we know our survival depends on it.

## CHAPTER II

### SO FRESH AND SO CLEAN: HIPHOP FASHION AS EMBODIED RHETORICS OF THE EVERYDAY

In *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture, from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit*, Shane and Graham White discuss the example of jazz musician James P. Johnson's fashion choices as bricolage. Citing a 1959 interview for *Jazz Review*, Johnson reveals that jazz musicians adopted white styles, but "copied them and made improvements" (243). White and White offer the following analysis:

We would suggest that the phrase "made improvements" can bear some weight here. The constructed appearance of these musicians was, in time-honored African American fashion, an act of *bricolage*, creative combination of clothes (many with small adjustments here and there), textures, and colors that frequently belied the origins of its constituent elements. Much the same can be said of the musicians' individual performance styles. Johnson learned how to move on stage, how to win over an audience, indeed, how to play the piano, from closely observing his peers and sampling whatever was original: "if they had anything I didn't have," he admitted, "I listened and stole it." (243).

Rhetorically, Johnson's embrace of bricolage goes against Greco-Roman understandings of movement and order, since linearity, order, and concord are valued. African American



rhetorics do not desire to lay claim to control or power, rather, they work to adjust and change how power moves within the moment, understanding that it may change later.

White and White's theorization of bricolage within this context is important because it speaks to a rhetorical tactic being employed that informs not only fashion practices, but performance, identity, aesthetics, and art. *Bricolage*, as a concept, employs the individual's creativity with the objects at hand to create something different with resonances of the original objects and orders. Johnson's sense of making "improvements" bears even more weight when considering how power structures are shifted in accordance to Johnson's needs. Rather than simply adopting or assimilating into white fashion aesthetics, Johnson reads the adjustments being made as making the clothing and accessories better because of his own twist. White and White's analysis bears more weight when we extend their analysis towards hiphop, since, as they state, Johnson "sampl[es] whatever was original" in order to build his own skills and abilities as a piano player, arranger, and performer. The practice of sampling in hiphop follows a similar strategy in that samples are meant to take an item, a style, an aesthetic, a feeling, *something* from a cultural artifact/object, piece it with other objects/artifacts, and make something different, new, and perhaps an *improvement*. This produces the moment of 'stylin'.

This chapter discusses the art of making do in hiphop fashion as embodied rhetorics of the everyday. Theorizing through the concept of "stylin'," I first will look at how African and later African American people rhetorically used and continue using clothing, accessories, and performance as tactics in resistance, liberation, and social

justice efforts, both individual and collective. Hiphop fashion builds on these traditions by challenging dominant social codes that carry legal and material consequences. Stylin' disrupts dominant rhetorical histories and traditions by centering methods of communication, storytelling, critique, and other intellectual labors that come from the entire body and performance.

### Contextualizing Stylin'

The history of Black people utilizing style, gesture, and performance as an assertion of subjectivity within the politics of representation in the United States reflects the ability to make do. Regina Spellers speaks to the importance of exerting one's own style:

By taking agency in how we define our identity, construct discourse meanings, and live our lives, we return to a personal and cultural imperative to love ourselves. We create an opportunity for our stories to be heard and to be meaningful in a context that has traditionally negated their significance. As such, we open a space for healing. (240)

Historically, colonialism and white supremacy sought to oppress Black people using all available means. Systemic depravity across social, economic, and legal institutions constantly reinforced, and in many ways continue reinforcing, negative images of Blackness. Spellers presents an opportunity for healing through the conscious crafting of one's own identity, which also hints at the radical possibilities of the everyday and the art of making do. To become "meaningful in a context that has traditionally negated

[one's] significance" is to recognize how one already comes with the necessary rhetorics to begin radical resistance and change.

Black language practices are tied to *stylin'* because, as Geneva Smitherman states, "verbal performance" in Black experiences is rooted in African cultural traditions that privilege the spoken word. She writes, "Black speakers are flamboyant, flashy, and exaggerative: black raps are stylized, dramatic, and spectacular: speakers and raps become symbols of how to *git ovah*" (*Talkin* 80). In *Black Talk*, Smitherman defines "*git ovah*" as "[a] Traditional Black Church term referring to making it over to the spiritual side of life, having struggled and overcome sin" (147). She adds that in contemporary uses, it applies to people overcoming obstacles like racism and oppression to achieve a desired goal. Smitherman's theorization of Black speech denotes a relationship between language, writing, and the body that are distinct from an emphasis on written alphabetic texts more common in Western rhetorical traditions.

Embodied rhetorics preserve and transmit memory, culture, and history without the need for pen and paper. For enslaved Africans, relying on embodied rhetorics became more important. *Stylin'* was an important tool for survival.

#### The Colonial Uses of Clothing and Appearance

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade removed people from their communities, homes, and possessions. Colonization of the Americas included mass surveillance of non-white bodies. Slave traders and owners used physical, emotional, and psychological detention methods to prevent uprisings and escapes. Oppressing Black looks played a part in social control.

In addition to skin color, body shape, and phenotype, scrutiny over Black dress produced rhetorics and logics that established, justified, and reinforced white supremacy. If a non-white body did not “look” or “act” in accordance to colonial logics, it was deemed a threat, which led to violence. Just as this chapter argues how bodies carry the rhetorical potential to produce liberation, the slave trade understood the rhetoricity of enacting violence on bodies. Diana Taylor writes, “We need only look to the broad range of political practices in the Americas exercised on human bodies, from pre-Conquest human sacrifices, to Inquisitorial burnings at the stake, to the lynchings of African Americas, to contemporary acts of state-sponsored torture and disappearances” (22). The attempts to control how Black bodies looked and the ways Black people responded all show that the politics of dress and representation matter in the larger struggle for humanity and survival.

Historical accounts of African slaves attest to the level of deprivation they experienced from material possessions that tied back to their home cultures, memories, and land bases. Drawing from sources such as eighteenth-century diaries, Monica Miller shows how African people brought what clothing and accessories they could to the Americas. They valued items such as beads and jewelry made from materials such as stones, leather, and fabric. The following travel account from eighteenth-century Virginia serves as an example:

The men are stowed before the foremast, the Boys between that and the main mast, the Girls next, and the grown Women behind the Missen. The Boyes and Girles [were] all stark naked; so Were the greatest part of the

Men and Women. Some had beads about their necks, arms, and Wasts, and a rag or Piece of Leather the bigness of a fig Leafe. And I saw a Woman [who had] Come Aboard to Examine the Limbs and soundness of some she seemed to Choose. Dr. Dixon bought 8 men and 2 women and brought them on shore with us, all stark naked. But when [we had] come home [they] had Coarse Shirts and afterwards Drawers given [to] them. (qtd. in Miller 3-4)

The lack of clothing points to the ways Black bodies were displayed for buyers. The appearance of beads, rags, and leather point to the effort slaves made to adorn their bodies in spite of depravity. Miller argues that these limited clothing items, “hold within them the power of memory, of a place of autonomy as the only material retention from former lives in Africa” (4). When faced with an effort to erase one’s ties to culture and home, whatever objects one manages to keep take on an increased importance. How one wears their clothing also features performative aspects. Diana Taylor argues, “Embodied and performed acts generate, record, and transmit knowledge” (21). Under extreme oppression, the insistence on wearing clothing and accessories according to their own purposes shows not only a resistance to merely accepting what is handed to them, but also the persistence to maintain human dignity in the face of exploitation.

The final line of the travel account points to the kind of clothing given to slaves. It would be easy to ignore the importance of what clothing was handed to slaves, especially because many were handed clothing made from the cheapest materials. Slaves were dressed in order to fit where white society felt they belonged on social and human

hierarchies. The presentation and adornment of bodies mattered because slave owners wanted to maintain a hierarchy based not only on race, but also among slaves. Hair also mattered because the denigration of black hair and black hair styles fed into the denigration of people in order to maintain the perception that black folks were inferior to white folks. According to White and White, the heads of slaves were shaved as punishment, especially for women (57). These were deliberate rhetorical decisions that carried social and psychological impacts on people. Robin D.G. Kelley argues that in struggles by subordinated groups, we need to take into account the day to day activities people practice as important responses. He states, “Clothing, as a badge of oppression or an act of transgression, is crucial to understanding opposition by subordinate groups” (86).

Under these conditions, one must make do with available resources to create ways of continuing culture, preserving memory, and producing resistance. Whether forced to work on plantations, or dressed as butlers and maids, Black folks found ways to style themselves “...as a process of remembrance and a mode of distinction (and symbolic and sometimes actual escape from bondage) in their new environment. Slaves with access to textiles such as cotton and silks made conscious choices regarding how they wore those materials, such as the use of turbans. Others rehashed old and torn clothing to create new items and patterns on dresses and quilts. Some took discarded clothing given to them by their masters and wore them in ways that produced different styles, which often confused white people. Black communities also made do by transforming textiles, clothing items, and other materials into clothing and accessory

items that produced styles that were all their own. Female slaves were often in charge of altering and making clothing for their families and communities. They reformulated old clothes and scraps to create new items. They also used dyes and dyeing techniques within their own traditions and adapted local dyeing techniques. According to White and White:

It seems clear from the W.P.A. interviews with ex-slaves that the whole process of clothes-making—the fashioning from cast-off clothing and scraps of material of something that was of cultural importance to the slaves, the spinning, weaving, dyeing, and sewing typically completed in poorly lit cabins after a day’s work in the fields or around the Big House, and the infusing of all this with an African American aesthetic sensibility—was almost entirely the achievement of slave women (25).

What is important to note here is that clothing carries “cultural importance,” meaning that they served larger purposes than only clothing bodies. Weaved into the fabrics used to make clothing was also tradition, culture, and aesthetics. To people under enslavement, the ability to exert one’s identity and culture in the face of so much social control carries an important meaning. It allows for one’s humanity to show.

Free Black folks understood the distinctions that clothing and style created because white people assumed one’s status as free or slave partly based on appearances. Escaped slaves did what they could to look free. Whether freed or not, Black folks also understood that appearance also warded off thieves and abductors.

Beyond slavery, communities adapted fashion to suit their needs. Many dressed to distinguish class affiliations, while others dressed out of defiance. Clothing and

fashion were important to cultural events and institutions, such as Church Sundays, strolls along prominent city and town streets, Mardi Gras, Carnival, and as part of youth culture. In many cases, people picked up on make do traditions passed down from generation to generation.

### The White Gaze and Blackness

While Black folks made do with available resources to adapt, change, and innovate styles, white reactions found them confusing, comical and/or threatening. When Black styles considered threats to social hierarchies were disciplined through social, legal, ideological, and psychological means. The preoccupation with maintaining a watch on deviant bodies suggests the performativity imposed on them. Stylin' suggests the performative ability to twist, change, and improvise resistance in public spaces by subverting and rupturing the ways racialized bodies are expected to perform.

The adaptation of European fashion and hairstyles functioned as a critique of white styles. There is also an engagement with the politics of visibility that made black bodies visible on their own terms. In addition, the use of white fashion and styles were also transformed by the ways that black folks mixed them with African styles and traditions. For many white onlookers, the mixing of patterns and clothing choices that seemed not to match were lost on them. According to White and White, these styles were reflective of African diasporic traditions that found the mixing of patterns as part of a mind frame that found value in variation, flexibility, and unpredictability (23). If we are to look at how some African diasporic communities think about aesthetics and how they make meaning, then an appreciation of how African American culture appreciates



variability and change rather than linearity is important. For African American rhetorics, this means understanding how people are able to take what may not seem to work together and make it work. It also means that there is an understanding that unexpected change or shifts will occur, and rather than see those ruptures as an obstacle, the reaction to those ruptures is appreciated.

After emancipation and into the twentieth century, African American communities built on traditions and opportunities to develop style and fashion that continued to carry cultural significance. Across all social classes, events such as community festivals and church Sundays presented opportunities for people to wear their best. Strolls became important social spaces where people could not only wear what they felt were most fashionable, but exert their own sense of style and aesthetics. According to White and White, “To a considerable extent, the struggle over what freedom meant centered on the bodies of African Americans, that is to say, on the appearance of individual blacks and on the ways in which they collectively presented themselves in public” (124). Poor and working class folks often looked for ways to refashion clothing and accessories to present looks that argued against stereotypical images of poor folks as dirty, ugly, and ragged, while upwardly-mobile and middle class communities sought to distinguish themselves from other groups by adopting styles they felt reflected affluent respectability. Robin D.G. Kelley writes, “Seeing oneself and others ‘dressed up’ was important to constructing a collective identity based on something other than wage work, presenting a public challenge to the dominant stereotypes of the black body, and shoring up a sense of dignity that was perpetually under assault” (86). Since many African

Americans after the Civil War were subjected to limited means, public spaces, such as sidewalks, were claimed as leisure spaces. Strolls, parades, and festivals became important spaces where African Americans could exert their identities and presence in a society that still sought to keep ideas and identities confined to white supremacist notions of what a black person should be. By the time hip-hop culture picked up *stylin'*, it had an established history of using embodied rhetorics to produce resistance, critique, and art.

#### *Stylin'* Within a Hip-hop Context

Hip-hop very much carries the rhetoric of *stylin'* from top to bottom. The renaming of people and the adoption of personas can be viewed as the *stylin'* of one's identity. In going from Shawn Carter to Jay-Z, the ghetto youth from Brooklyn becomes the quick-witted rapper in baggy jeans and a jersey. Joseph Simmons, Darryl McDaniels, and Jason Mizell transform Adidas track suits and bucket hats into classic hip-hop gear through the personas they create as Run D.M.C. B-girls and B-boys adapted the gear they have on hand not only to create their signature style, but exert that style through the attitude on their faces, the way they crossed their arms, and the way they stood. Imani Perry states, "Hip hop dress is both art and politics because it constitutes an antiestablishment aesthetics of the casual, an antiobjectified aesthetic of the abstract, as opposed to the revealed body" (123). *Stylin'* within a hip-hop context allows us to view the conversion of clothing and accessories as a way of building one's reputation, prestige, and cultural capital among communities.

The b-girl and b-boy can be seen as the quintessential manifestation of making do within a hip-hop context. Early b-girls and b-boys, combined their working-class aesthetics with the right moves and poses to come across as confident, powerful, and fresh. In the early days of hip-hop, this meant that ghetto youth figured out ways to distinguish themselves and style themselves to look the freshest and the flyest in the fashion and style competition going on in the streets. In addition to looking the best, one had to achieve the best looks, by knowing how to pose and how to move. This contest for b-girl and b-boy prestige shows how people make do to create social capital among their own communities.

This ability to make do becomes important in hip-hop culture because it offers anyone the ability to stand out and be noticed, in spite of one's social status, economic means, or lifestyle. It also reflects how hip-hop offers embodied and material rhetorics not tied to alphabetic texts or methods of communication dependent on inaccessible education for marginalized youth. In order for a b-girl or b-boy to succeed, s/he must understand how the body is just as important as the clothing and style choices one makes. To anyone looking to achieve any sort of social acknowledgement or respect in the face of a society that largely ignores them, this becomes extremely important. It also is a way people are able to honor continuing histories and traditions of affirming their individuality and humanity in the face of larger social forces seeking to erase and eliminate them. This establishment of hip-hop fashion by b-girls and b-boys played out in different ways as new people took hip-hop and styled it according to their particular sensibilities.

Hiphop dandyism presents an interesting iteration of stylin' because it simultaneously ruptures style categories based on race, class, and gender. Hiphop dandies play on white and upper class styles to produce a fresh take on haute couture, while also troubling Black masculinities. We will look at rapper/producer Kanye West as an example of how hiphop dandies wreck all these categories.

### Hiphop Dandies

Within the Black traditions of making do with fashion, dandyism is particularly interesting because of the various intersections dandies occupy. In the struggle over the representation of Black bodies, dandies fully acknowledge this struggle and flaunt in the face of it. To dress as a dandy is in many ways a direct engagement and confrontation with the rights and privileges denied to Black folks by white supremacy. Dandies are also transforming fashion by taking choices and aesthetics and adding their particular flair to them, turning them into something different. Dandies also occupy a queer space where gender norms are challenged through appearance and performance. In stylin' oneself to achieve flair, attention, fabulousness, and turning heads, the dandy wants all people to look, relishes in that look, and wants to be celebrated for her/his uniqueness. The desire to stand out in the particular ways dandies do challenges gender norms such as masculinities that find dandy styles threatening to traditional ways of dress and gender performance. Black dandies, in choosing to break expectations on public subjectivities based on race, class, and gender, are transgressing spaces.

This value in the performance of dress continued as Hiphop developed much later, but the continued uses of colonial strategies to dominate, oppress and eliminate

communities of color continue to this day. Hip-hop grew out of the tactical use of places like basements, sidewalks, and parks in order to create music, graffiti art, and dancing styles in the Bronx, during the 1970s and 1980s, when the birth of the crack epidemic, violent crime, and extreme poverty offered the primarily African American and Latino population little options for social advancement (Chang 67). The manipulation of musical equipment and methods to invent a methodology allowing for the possibility of innovations such as rapping, sampling, and scratching, shows how the hip-hop community cleverly made use of immediate resources to create spaces of resistance and survival.

Practicing successful rhetoric extends to artists like West, who choose to actively cultivate a dandy aesthetic. Monica Miller provides a compelling and useful framework for thinking about how dandyism functions within African diasporic contexts, such as hip-hop. Miller roots the black dandy as a continued, creative response against white, European colonialism, aesthetics, politics, and culture that is never concerned solely with fashion choices and is always aware of the tension present in the relationship between “how each dresser sees himself and how he wants to be seen by others” (2). Negotiating this tension depends on understanding how “...black male subjects can be seen understanding, manipulating, and reimagining the construction of their images through the dandy’s signature method: a pointed redeployment of clothing, gesture, and wit” (4). The idea of a “pointed redeployment” is important because it gestures towards people’s abilities to create and exert agency through the body. As an embodied rhetoric, dandyism offers an empowering way for people to tell the world who they are rather

than what they should be. The use of signals and nuance is what allows interpreters to understand how the performance of black dandyism functions as a tool for resistance, disruption, and critique and not as assimilation.

Monica Miller categorizes contemporary black dandyism as heavily influenced by Franz Fanon:

...what I want to argue is not that these artists similarly exemplify Fanon, but rather how they use Fanon and others to create [in their art] a black diasporic aesthetic that uses the dandy and dandyism to communicate their vision of contemporary black identity. For these artists, [*Black Skin, White Masks*] represents a first step toward redemptive narcissism, a strategy of black visualization designed to be not merely what Fanon critics like Homi Bhabha would call ‘a look from the place of the Other,’ but even a dandyish look ‘one startling step beyond’ that vision of otherness. The dandyish images these artists present are not merely a vision of the empire looking back, but a vision looking through a shared history of black representation toward an image of black cosmopolitanism that is simultaneously rooted and detached, celebratory and censorious.

(243)

Under this framework, dandies are shrewdly able to take aspects of white aesthetic culture and provide an interpretation that creates new, fabulous transformations and possibilities that work against the psychological and emotional consequences Fanon describes in his work. When Fanon states at the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*, “In the

world I am heading for, I am endlessly creating myself” (204) dandies pick up the cause by challenging what it means to assimilate, to be black, and to be masculine.

Miller emphasizes that dandies create and signal transformation on both the level of the individual and the community. This is partly because dandyism “...requires an acknowledgement of a queer black presence and also an attention to the politics of the gaze,” (242). The driving force behind dandyism’s transformative power is the ability for queerness to challenge normativity as it exists within nation, community, and the individual. The two factors mentioned in the previous quote, “an acknowledgment of a queer black presence” and “an attention to the politics of the gaze” create areas of slippage where black dandies walk the thin line between assimilation and innovation.

By taking white aesthetics usually tied to white upper class fashion and prestige, Black dandies mimic the style and subvert it. In the act of mimicry, a slippage always occurs between the original subject and its new interpretation. This space of slippage is tremendously important because this is the space where Black dandyism finds its source of empowerment and agency. This is the space where stylin’ occurs for dandies. Thus, to merely say that Black dandies are assimilating or copying white styles is inaccurate because the style is never an exact copy of the original. This ability to move within slippages and create a fresh take is also an essential method in hiphop.

Hiphop dandies occupy an interesting space in the hiphop world because they both encompass and subvert the values held dear within hiphop culture. The acquisition of material wealth, especially through fashion is an important symbol of prestige among the hiphop community. Listen to a rap station for a few minutes, and you will hear the

names of more fashion brands than you care to know. Some rappers, like Gucci Mane, even have fashion labels in their names. Yet, the adoption of a dandy aesthetic runs against the often hyper-masculine image hip-hop, especially rap, promotes. The thug, gangsta rapper aesthetic that became popular in the 1990s continues to dominate mainstream rap scenes and images, including the ways that fashion is used within rap circles. The gangsta aesthetic, which is itself the product of making do to create a style now adopted by many in and out of the ghetto, combines working class clothing practices with high fashion objects to create the image of someone from the hood who has access to the finer things in life. For example, rappers adopted the use of baggy jeans and puffy jackets from drug culture and added scarves made by Louis Vuitton and Gucci. They took preppie styles from Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger and styled it up by sagging the jeans, buying them in larger sizes, and wearing sports jerseys over them.

Hiphop dandies, on the other hand, queer these styles by wearing them in ways that challenge what a rapper looks like. Sean “P.Diddy” Combs went from a gangsta look in the 1990s to fine tailored suits. His “white” parties, held to raise funds for charity, required people to show up in all white clothing. Rappers, actors, and other entertainers show up looking like they all live in the Hamptons. Other hip-hop dandies, like Andre 3000 and Farnsworth Bentley, make use of bright colors, and tailoring that feature softer, more feminine styles. Rather than wear baggy clothing that often hides the body, dandy styles also make people uncomfortable because they show male bodies in ways that are asked to look and appreciate in ways usually thought of as only for



women. In other words, the body is more prominently featured as part of the look, rather than the ways it is obscured by baggy clothes.

Female dandies, like Janelle Monae, subvert this look by taking the particular gender power relationships and turning them on their heads. While female entertainers are often asked and required to show their bodies in sexual ways, the fine-tailored look adopted by Monae actually covers her body in ways that run against gender expectations. Thus, while her figure is not obscured, it is covered, thereby rupturing what a female entertainer should look like. Regina Spellers argues that Black women face a “unique dilemma” in defining themselves against dominant stereotypes of Black female womanhood. Spellers states, “Utilizing the skills of self-definition and self-valuation presents a certain risk for African American women, yet these skills are key to their ability to survive in, reject, and transcend these interlocking structures of race, class, and gender oppression” (229). During her acceptance speech for the “Young Gifted and Black” award at the 2012 “BLACK GIRLS ROCK!” event, Monae explained she rocks her signature style as homage to her working-class roots. Before achieving fame, she worked as a maid, her mother was “a proud janitor,” her stepfather worked for the USPS, and her father worked as a trash man. She said, “They all wore uniforms. And that’s why I stand here today in my black and white and I wear my uniform to honor them” (qtd. in Rivas) Monae’s stylin’ rhetorically argues for the dignity of working-class folks and labor. She also deploys it as part of her social justice aims. She states, “This is a reminder that I have work to do, I have people to uplift. I have people to inspire.”

Rhetorically, her uniform not only communicates her social justice mission to her audience, but also to herself.

The use of clothing and accessories to fashion the hiphop dandy are not as effective unless the person wearing these items knows how to rock them. In other words, the ways one performs dandyism are just as important as the clothes. Dandies embody dandy rhetorics by learning how to pose, move, walk, and gesture. This is where stylin' comes in. Dandies take clothing, accessories, and their bodies, and style them to create their particular rendition.

It is here that Kanye West, as a queer subject, finds the room to challenge norms within hiphop and creates the possibility for reimagining different, inclusive identities that move beyond the status quo.

### Black Dandyism

Because hiphop dandies rupture gender constructions within hiphop, they exist as queer figures. Within the hypermasculine rules imposed and encouraged within popular and most exposed versions of hiphop culture, hiphop dandyism can be seen as threatening to the order. For hiphop dandies, this presents a dilemma: How to exist and negotiate these realms. In other words, hiphop dandies must negotiate backlashes created by dominant masculinities seeing dandies as threatening to gender constructions, while not appearing homophobic. Hiphop's ideas around "keeping it real" often can pull artists and other people to continuously uphold a love and closeness for the hood whether they actually came from the hood or not. Within hiphop performances, this is extremely

important, especially to those artists wanting to achieve higher levels of commercial success.

This raises one problematic issue that hiphop dandies may help address. Pride and defense of ghettos and the hood are important to hiphop, and can serve as important cultural defenses of people living in these spaces. After all, histories of low-income neighborhoods predominantly populated by people of color are often told in the most negative lights. Hiphop's defense of the hood is important, and the raising of awareness regarding poverty, crime, and injustice can serve as activism for change. The problem is when dominant constructions of the hood are promoted solely for the purposes of selling more records. The commodification of the hood makes money for a few people of color and studio executives who are predominantly white, and it perpetuates the consumption of entertainment based in violence, sexism, and domination that the United States historically has always had bloodlust for.

Hiphop dandies can trace their genealogies of other Black dandies in history. Dandies were also around in the post-industrial, hiphop hood. Hiphop dandies function towards rupturing the erasure of queer presences in the hood, in spite of how much gangsta rap wants us to believe that only thug soldiers lived there.

Kanye West, the boisterous producer/rapper, answered the prayers of people who thought that the blinged out, hyper-capitalist rap era of the mid 1990s and early 2000s had ruined the rap game. Instead of adopting a gangsta aesthetic, and rapping about violence, West's 2004 debut album, *The College Dropout*, critiqued social institutions he felt failed Black folks in the United States: the rap industry, education, and the

government. Critics both in and out of the hip-hop community praised the album as a breath of fresh air in the rap game, especially since gangsta rappers like 50 Cent were dominating the charts. West understood his place as a rapper was creating ruptures, which was part of his strategy. He saw himself as a different voice in the rap scene. He documents his struggle to fame in “Touch the Sky,” a song off his second album by saying, “Back when they thought pink polos would hurt the Rock.” West chose to wear colors like pink, which stood out among all the other rappers who were wearing athletic gear and baggy jeans. “Rock” refers to Roc-a-Fella Records, the record label started by Jay-Z and Damon Dash, which was known for producing New York gangsta rappers who often dressed after Jay-Z’s style, which was mostly sports jerseys, gold chains, and Jordans. West explains that when he arrived to the Roc as a producer, he stood out among everyone else because he dressed in a style that reflected middle class prep over the thug look. The idea of West being a part of a Roc-a-Fella roster that featured rappers like Beanie Sigel, Memphis Bleek, and Freeway looked like a risk, especially since Jay-Z and his rappers capitalized on their gangsta personas by selling records, collaboration albums, straight to video films, books, and fashion. A producer/rapper in pink polos seemed like a bad fit.

Because West understood he was making ruptures, he used his dandy status to his advantage. As self-proclaimed leader of a new wave of rappers, he embraced wearing pink polos, blazers, and backpacks that reflected a preppie look. By calling himself *The College Dropout*, he took the college look and took it out of the college campus and into the rap studio.

## Kanye West and the Anxiety of the Hiphop Dandy

Surrounded by a string orchestra, a small audience, and a continuous ring of forty-inch LED screens surrounding the room, Kanye West performed and taped his *VH1 Storytellers* television special in February of 2009. If Pee-Wee Herman rapped, he would look like West that night: light grey slim-tailored suit, white sneakers, a hot pink dress shirt, a black bowtie, and a pair of Versace shades. Towards the end of performing “Heartless,” he sat on the floor of his stage made of LED tiles and freestyled:

50 look at me now

Singing on the ground

With my pink shirt on

Does this look gay to you?

Well I don’t know what else to say to you.

Earlier that year, rapper 50 Cent released a song “Play This on the Radio,” that many believe the line “First they think that faggot hot,” referred to Kanye West’s rise on the hiphop scene, and interviews where 50 Cent discussed his views on West’s fashion choices and sexuality<sup>6</sup>.

50 Cent’s attacks are an example of what Marc Lamont Hill defines as “lyrical outing,” which is “the practice of calling an individual’s sexual identity into question through a variety of rhetorical maneuvers” (37). The act of lyrical outing is part of how hiphop communities police sexualities, especially among men. 50 Cent focused on

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<sup>6</sup>50 Cent continued commenting on West’s sexuality in later months. On 30 September 2009, 50 Cent made an appearance on the *Angie Martinez Show*, where he called the Lady Gaga/Kanye West “Fame Kills Tour,” the “gay” tour. 50 Cent’s statements appeared to be more an attempt at garnering attention and publicity since he called Jay-Z non-threatening as a rapper, in the same interview.

West's appearance and his fashion influences. Rather than adopt the baggy, street thug look popularized by gangsta rappers, West rocks a dandy aesthetic that prefers fine-tailored suits, the use of color, and a blurring of gendered clothing norms. Both clothing styles, and the myriad others used in hip-hop culture reflect a *make do* philosophy that rhetorically understands the power of utilizing one's outward appearance and its accompanying performance in order to reclaim and assert one's identity. Although both 50 and Kanye rock expensive, name-brand threads, the roots of these style sensibilities are make-do. This ability to make do with fashion traces its roots to the African American tradition of *stylin'* and goes back further to how folks in the African Diaspora responded to the slave trade, colonialism, and social mobility through fashion practices.

When West calls attention to his use of pink shirts, his trademark since stepping onto the hip-hop scene, he calls attention to an aesthetic style of dress and representation, one deeply influenced by dandyism, asserting both his successes and his penchant for the flamboyant and fabulous.

Kanye West's dominance on both the hip-hop and pop music scenes stands out as particularly significant because the popular aesthetics he cultivates through visual and lyrical representations appeal to various, seemingly oppositional groups, and he does so with remarkable success. West's use of dandyism also follows the tradition of utilizing this tactical use of subjectivity as a resistant, subversive response towards white-dominated discourses that often seek to downplay Black styles, ways of thinking, and representation. This dandy aesthetic is certainly not new to hip-hop, but the past decade has come to represent a critical mass of a particular kind of dandyism within hip-hop

communities, most notably personified by artists including André 3000<sup>7</sup>, Janelle Monae, Pharrell Williams of the Neptunes, and Sean Diddy Combs who signify a change in how hip hop culture recognizes queerness and queer contributions to hip hop. West stands out particularly because he has been able to simultaneously draw attention to queerness in hip hop as always/already having been present, while critiquing homophobia without dismissing or erasing the latter contributions. Also, West performs these acts without experiencing the sort of severe, homophobic backlash that often derails and ends the careers of artists like Big Daddy Kane, Ja Rule, and others, which partly explains why many rappers refuse to confront or work against homophobia in hip hop (Hill 37-8).

In an early interview with Tavis Smiley, West already understood his identity within the hip hop community as different from the thug, gangsta persona that subscribes to a hypermasculine, hood ethos. In recognizing his rising fame shortly after dropping the *College Dropout* album in 2004, West told Smiley, “Yeah, I’m sure I’m gonna have more responsibility [...] the more power I get, the more voice I have. There’s a lot of things that need to be helped right now, so I’m gonna have more responsibility.” West alludes to hip hop moguls like Russell Simmons, who were integral to the tremendous growth hip-hop experienced in the 1990s. A year later, while being interviewed by Charlie Rose, West explains how his critiques bypassed preconceived notions and reached audiences. He compared himself to a school assembly speaker who curses, “[a]nd that curse word actually sparks attention, and right when everybody’s open, he give you all this information—he sneaks it in.” This rhetorical tactic ties into black

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<sup>7</sup> I would argue that the accented “e” in André 3000’s name is further evidence of the dandy aesthetic.

dandyism, especially if seen under a Du Boisian sense. According to Miller, Du Bois considered black art to function like “propaganda [because] it is produced in a highly contested political and social climate that works against its creation and originality” (Miller, “W.E.B. Du Bois” 743). Under this frame, “the aesthetic matters to black folk not as an escapist dream, but as a weapon,” which Miller then argues for the inclusion of the aesthetics of clothing, and thereby categorizing black dandies as producing art. Keith Byerman further explains that Black art functions as propaganda because of the politics of visibility and who controls how art is received by audiences. Byerman states that Du Bois hyperbolizes Black art as propaganda “...precisely because black art, if it tells the truth and raises ethical questions based on that truth, will consistently be seen by readers from the dominant culture as propaganda, since it will be a repudiation of the racial ideology of that culture” (105). In the previously-mentioned Charlie Rose interview, West provides a simple explanation of what black dandies do best: “When you make ‘em smile, then you can style, and go wild.”

A year later, West found himself answering questions about his sexuality based primarily on his interest in fashion and art, which is an issue that has followed him through the majority of his career. In an MTV interview with Sway Calloway, West spoke out against homophobia within the hiphop community. He stated that two main experiences caused him to speak out. First, as a self-declared “mamma’s boy,” West believes he adopted what he perceived as effeminate characteristics as a child because he adopted his mother’s mannerisms. He states, “And then everybody in high school be like, ‘Yo, you actin’ like a f—(sic), Dog, you gay?’” West became extremely



homophobic, until he found out one of his cousins was gay. He states, “And at that point it was kind of like a turning point when I was like, ‘Yo, this my cousin, I love him and I been discriminating against gays.’” West goes on to say that hip-hop overwhelmingly “discriminates against gay people,” and declares, “I wanna just come on TV and just tell my rappers, just tell my friends, ‘Yo, stop it fam.’” This declaration is one of the few instances that a rapper as famous as West openly spoke out against homophobia in hip-hop.

Previous cases exist of rappers who have lost their credibility and realness because of the ways they have been attached to queerness. Big Daddy Kane was once one of the most successful MCs, and one of the most important to ever do it, but allegations that he was gay quickly ended his career. There are urban legends about Tupac Shakur that seek to discredit him based on rumors that he was raped while in prison. Ja-Rule, who sold heavily during the early 2000s saw his fame plummet after a much-publicized beef with 50 Cent. 50 made allegations that he knew that Ja-Rule was gay, and Ja has never recovered from the hit his credibility took ever since. Within the rap game, queerness has been used as a weapon to end careers.

Yet, Kanye West was part of a line of hip-hop dandies who were able to not only exert their styles, but grow their names and reputations. Kanye West, P.Diddy, André 3000, Farnsworth Bentley, and others flashed their looks and made them popular within hip-hop. Why is it that they could adopt queer fashion styles, and see their careers thrive rather than end?

In 2009, West once again was interviewed by Sway, and they again discussed homosexuality. This time, West was criticized by members of the rap community, most notably 50 Cent, for his attendance of Fashion Week in Paris, and specifically, for the way he and his entourage dressed. In a picture taken for the influential fashion blog, *Jak & Jil*, West and his entourage<sup>8</sup> are posing outside the location of the Comme Des Garçons show<sup>9</sup>. Each outfit demonstrates contemporary dandyism at its finest, ranging from the eccentric Taz Arnold's cheetah print tights, to Farnsworth Bentley's orange briefcase and matching fedora as accents to his black pea coat and grey slacks. This picture demonstrates how dandyism can negotiate several realms and create a unique twist on and by the hip-hop artist. Although the style of dress does not follow the baggy jeans and white tees that characterize the thug-rapper look, several of the men are wearing sneakers, including West. Shoes, or one's kicks, enjoy subcultural status within the world of hip-hop, and these men are rocking theirs with a couture twist. Chris Julian's sneakers are a soft shade of gold seldom seen on a rapper, but he wears the sneakers' tongues flipped out, over the jeans *a-la*-Run DMC.

West's tan leather gloves also signify a twist on another hip-hop staple: the wearing of athletic gloves by rappers, especially when performing. Method Man, of the Wu-Tang Clan, popularized the use of gloves as a way of comparing his skills as an MC to the talent and skill of professional athletes, such as batting champions and wide receivers. West evokes his skills as both a rapper and producer, but his choice to wear

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<sup>8</sup> The members of Ye's entourage include Don C., Virgil Abloh, Taz Arnold, Chris Julian, Ibn Jasper, Farnsworth Bentley, and Mr. Hudson. Only Mr. Hudson is not present in the *Jak & Jil* photo.

<sup>9</sup> <http://jakandjil.com/blog/?p=1158>

Louis V rather than Nike elevates his status to higher levels of dopeness. The gloves also gain acceptance into the world of hip-hop as suitable symbols of prestige, wealth, and power. In this sense, West's version of dandyism then engages in the competitive one-upmanship ubiquitous both in the dandy and hip-hop world. Dominic Thomas also makes this connection when talking about black dandies in Paris. When talking about the competitive nature among *sapeurs*, Thomas alludes to "the concept of 'battling,' namely the 'war between or among rappers, dancers, DJs, or emcees for prizes or bragging rights and to see who is best'" (962). The dandy who out-styles the rest becomes the *sapeur accompli*, which is what West strives to become, not only by dressing the best, but combining that dress as part of his creative process in making and performing music. Thus, in dressing like a dandy, West conjures up and changes old styles, battles rappers over popularity and influence, and articulates a way of looking at high fashion through a dope, fabulous, hip-hop lens.

West's entourage further blends hip-hop and *haute couture* to make something new by the performance of their pose. At first glance, the colors, patterns, accessories, and hairstyles stand out, but viewed within a hip-hop context, it is clear that the entourage is standing in a classic B-Boy stance. Known for her photography of hip-hop's early years in New York, Jamel Shabazz appears especially interested in the "glamour" of the youth she photographs, prompting Kelefa Sanneh to declare, "The images tempted you to imagine the 1980s as one non-stop, low-budget fashion show" (120). One photo in particular draws a connection to West's entourage: the image has four young, black men staring into the camera with the same swagger and confidence as West and his boys.

There is also careful attention paid to how the clothing fits and falls on their bodies. For example, three of the men are wearing hats that are tilted slightly in different angles, which adds a certain freshness and dopeness to their looks. The man without a hat is wearing a pair of chunky, Run-DMC glasses, similar to the ones worn by several of the men in West's entourage. Both pictures exhibit black dandyism's ability to create power and energy out of posing, gesturing, and carefully arranging one's appearance to reflect an attitude that exerts an identity rather than allowing the clothing to dictate their image.

Ibn Jasper, West's style consultant, responded to the photo's critics through his blog, calling them ignorant and dismissive of innovators in both fashion and hip-hop. According to Jasper, the Kanye West entourage often was invited to sit in the front rows of runway shows out of respect for their looks. He argues, "[a]nd the thing is, what we are actually doing, is showing the fashion world that American men, let alone Black Men, know how to really get busy when it comes to the fashion game." He also felt that West "is on the path to being the 1<sup>st</sup> American Black Man that high-end fashion buyers will be wearing with his Louis Vuitton collaboration" which would signify a significant shift in the relationship between hip-hop and high-fashion, one, that until recently, polarized primarily white, European designers as the producers, and the primarily Black Rappers as the consumers without much influence on creative process until after purchase. Traditionally, artists would buy Louis Vuitton items as a show of status and wealth, and if they wanted to design clothing, they would have to start their own

businesses, such as Diddy's *Sean John* collection<sup>10</sup>. For one of hip hop's artists to collaborate and design for a label like Louis Vuitton means that hip hop, through dandyism, could infiltrate and influence high fashion in new and interesting ways that could disrupt who gets to design, influence, and wear high fashion. The implications of centering Black aesthetics beyond appropriations, as many fashion designers have of not only descendants of Africa, but also other communities, land bases, and cultures, allow for radical reimaginings of the future of fashion.

Towards the end of his post, Jasper continues rebuffing charges that the Kanye entourage was effeminate by mentioning most of them grew up in Chicago stating, "...aint nothing sweet over here. We aint no punks! Getting dressed up and stunting on people is all a part of the Pimp/Player culture that we were raised in" (blog). This statement is especially important because it simultaneously asserts a ghetto masculinity as part of their dandy aesthetic, which then queers what it means to be a ghetto, hip hop youth.

In the second interview with Sway, West performs what Miller calls "redemptive narcissism," the act of utilizing the dandy aesthetic to resist oppression and judgment.

West states:

And in hip hop, there's people—and let's not even say scared like homophobic—but they're scared of the way people gonna look at them. If you see a person be like, 'I don't wanna stand next to Marc Jacobs 'cause I don't want that to bear on me because I'm just so cool.' One of the

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<sup>10</sup> *Sean John* recently made big news by signing a deal with Macy's to become the exclusive home of the brand.

reasons why, the perspective I come from with my raps and my songs, the reason why can't nobody dis me—no gangsta rapper, nobody can really dis me is 'cause it's so authentic.

Clearly West's rhetoric here is strategic since he understands that one of the most popular critiques of hip-hop is homophobia. He must both appeal and address several communities, including hip-hop, queer, and fashion. He does not call anyone in the hip-hop community homophobic, but he gestures towards anxieties about visual representation by bringing up his own photographic moments next to Marc Jacobs, which have not hurt either's careers. As a dandy, West enforces that the reason he can ignore criticism is because he is not afraid of the other's gaze, and he believes he represents an "authentic" form of black masculinity, one that allows for inclusion and collaboration rather than violence and hostility. Additionally, the mention of Marc Jacobs, an openly gay, white male carries the potential of evoking anxieties about gay, interracial relationships, but West's rhetorical stance, which is a hip-hop pose in and of itself, allows him to make statements like this one without overwhelming fears of a backlash from the hip-hop community or his fans.

West also responded to the photo of his entourage by ridiculing critics for focusing their judgments on color. He credits the gay community for being "smart enough to take a fresh-ass logo like the rainbow and say that it's gonna be theirs [...] the idea of colors, life and colors and stuff, I mean how is that a gay thing?" Again, this statement is another example of the kind of tactical mastery behind his dandy aesthetic. The image of a rainbow carries radical implications working against normative,

“melting-pot” discourses that often strive to erase difference in order to serve a heteropatriarchal, white-supremacist agenda. The colors of the rainbow, although separate and distinct, move together, signifying a collective interest in harmony, while still recognizing and respecting difference. White light is produced when all shades of light combine to make one color. West strips all power behind the association of color as disparaging towards any community and declares that he will rock colors and rainbows because he can control how they appear and function on his body, and because he allies with queer-pride ideologies that share commonalities with similar discourses coming from communities of color.

Kanye West’s dandy aesthetic signifies an important transition in hip-hop where the possibility exists for artists to acknowledge, collaborate, and ally themselves with queer communities without fear of losing one’s career. Understanding the nuances of black dandyism also opens up new critical possibilities for looking at music videos and song lyrics to begin the work of recognizing the queer work and contributions that have occurred and continue occurring in the hip-hop community. In addition, the black dandy also stands as a subject that offers possibilities for how black males may embody and practice resistance and critique beyond rhetorics that rely on printed media. Then, when they get their money right, nobody can tell them anything.

Building off everyday practices, the following chapter moves into another element of hip-hop and another home practice. Looking at the relationship between hip-hop deejaying and home cooking presents another nontraditional, embodied rhetorical practice. Much like *stylin’* uses the ability to make do to create something

different, a person's flava is cultivated through combining what is at hand, both materially and intellectually.



### CHAPTER III

## HIPHOP IS NOT DEAD, IT'S MERELY STARVING: COOKING AND DEEJAYING AS EMBODIED RHETORICS

“They say you are what you eat

So I strive to eat healthy

My goal in life is not to be rich or wealthy

Cuz true wealth comes from good health and wise ways

We got to start taking better care of ourselves”

“Be Healthy” by Dead Prez

As a Chicano graduate student determined to make my voice and traditions heard in the academy, I have had a tough time feeling like I belong. Like many other scholars of color, I am the first in my family to make this journey, which means I do not have the privilege others do. Every step is another unfamiliar one, and I am often lost. It is no wonder that there are so few Chicano/as with PhDs in the world.

In order to survive this journey, I have relied on practices outside the academy to nourish my body, spirit, and soul in the face of so much opposition. In my home, gently stirring my nopalitos as they sauté on the cast-iron skillet to a hip-hop beat makes me feel good. This is an act of communion. My head bops as Dead Prez sing about the importance of eating healthy. The green aroma, my motions, and the heat from the stove create a culinary-meditative state that protects me and nurtures my spirit. The anticipation of the meal infuses my entire body with happiness. I place two warm, corn

tortillas on a plate and carefully fill each one with the nopalitos as MF Doom makes food puns in the song “Rapp Snitch Knishes.” Sometimes I add beans, other times I add cheese. I use whatever is available. Next to the plate, I place my plastic container of salsa next to it while Sacramento Knoxx combines his Detroit hiphop, Chicano, and Anishnabe roots to produce funky beat tracks like “NDN Fry Bread is Slave Food.” How I plate my food belongs to the entire process. Eating them with corn tortillas and spicy chile reenergizes my body and spirit. For the duration of the preparation and meal, I am no longer in College Station, Texas. I am in my own, private space. I’m reminded of how Anzaldúa thinks of the connection between food and memory:

There are more subtle ways that we internalize identification, especially in the forms of images and emotions. For me food and certain smells are tied to my identity, to my homeland... Even now and 3000 miles away, I can see my mother spicing the ground beef, pork and venison with *chile*. My mouth salivates at the thought of the hot steaming *tamales* (sic) I would be eating if I were home. (83)

Makes your mouth water, right? Similar to Anzaldúa, I often remember those dishes unique to my family, especially those always-available staples that I took for granted as a child, but now beg for on the daily. Food scholar Meredith Abarca talks about temporality as an important aspect of cooking and eating because “the aesthetics of the moment as generated by culinary artistic creations are an engagement in a participatory relation” to our surroundings, environment, and each other (101). Recognizing that these moments call for our bodies, minds, and spirits to collectively experience food also calls

to mind the power of the ordinary as a radical way of challenging Western notions and assumptions about knowledge and aesthetics. Over-privileging textual-based knowledges, like the West does, makes us ignorant to how other knowledges and conversations, such as those provided by food, create different and important pathways to greater understanding and agency.

This chapter will argue that there is value to placing deejaying and cooking in conversation with each other in order to explore how making do functions within the temporal aspects of the situation. In other words, at the moment of cooking and at the moment of deejaying, something happens “in the moment” which relies on a set of rhetorics that differ from other forms of making meaning. The temporal shows us that there are cultural practices and knowledges that must be performed through embodied rhetorics, archives of the body, performance, and memory. Ultimately, this shows that the art of making do is a complex practice that uses a wealth of knowledge, cultural tools, and rhetorics in moments of necessity and lack. Someone who is good at making do in the moment is a skilled technician of her/his craft. This chapter then, also complicates of what we think about when we think about intellectual labors and the craft/art distinction. Art, in Western constructions, tend to privilege the fixed and eternal as signs of value of these art forms, while crafts are seen as limited by their functionality and temporariness. As a scholar interested in theory and practice as essential partners in creating academic work that works for communities rather than the other way around, theorizing the art of making do in temporal practices, such as deejaying and cooking provides radical possibilities for changing the ways we understand the practices as only

being essential for nourishment and entertainment. These are vital cultural practices that teach us how to create and sustain histories, traditions, and cultures through ways other than written, recorded, and other “higher” forms of writing and meaning making. In addition, placing both practices in conversation with each other offers the possibility of creating new, different and important questions about how each practice can change for the better. For example, the obsession over copying and plagiarism in music, and writing for that matter, does not exist in the same fashion as it does in cooking. How can we grow music making if we didn’t care if people “bit” off each other? Both cooking and deejaying are also practices that are learned not in classrooms, but through apprenticeships and learning from more experienced people. How does this change the ways we think about how people learn and make rhetoric? Finally, as practices that create temporary spaces, examining the rhetorics of cooking and deejaying carry important implications for how people can create spaces for belonging in and out of the classroom that open spaces for marginalized rhetorical practices to be practiced. First, I begin with two stories:

#### Story One: Sacramento Knoxx

With the release of his album, *The Rise of the Turtle*, Sacramento Knoxx, the previously-mentioned Detroit-based deejay, offered a narrative of how this album was created. He begins by writing, “Music is medicine, do everything with Love, from a Dream to Reality,” and jumps into explaining how the difficulties of living in Southwest Detroit, colonial traumas handed down through generations of abuses against his Anishinabe-Ojibwe ancestors, and internalized racial hatred forced him to stop and think

about what he needed to combat all these evils, especially as they were affecting his life. Before moving from his hometown to New York City, Knoxx lost all his equipment and hard drives containing most of his work, except for previous versions of the songs on the album. He states, “They’re in the form they we’re (sic) bounced down to for drafts, recordings, or demos, they’re in their rawest form. This batch of beats survived the wreckage and like a Phoenix from the ashes, they exist on Mother Earth to share, This is a sonic story of a spirit Rising Up. I exist” (sknoxx.bancamp.com). For Sacramento Knoxx, his ability to salvage his music, arrange it in an album, and offer it to listeners is an act of resistance and survival.

#### Story Two: Making Tortillas

I am in my kitchen, determined to finally make my own flour tortillas. I remember in the early 1990s, when Dr. Dre and Snoop made me feel so cool whenever I listened to “Nothin’ but a G Thang,” that my Abuelita made flour tortillas often. All I remember seeing from the dinner table was my Abuelita moving the rolling pin back and forth, making balls of masa unroll for her into perfect, pliant circles. Then she would slide one onto her comal and go back to rolling the next tortilla. Without making a mistake, she knew when to flip each tortilla on the comal, flipping them so quick with the tips of her fingers.

I asked her for her tortilla recipe once, and she explained it like she was telling me how to turn on the television. No measurements, no exact directions, just conversation.

That was a few years ago, and here I was determined to make my own. I found a recipe from *Cook's Illustrated*, which required minimal ingredients, and I made twelve balls of dough that needed to rest in the fridge for at least thirty minutes. When the moment finally arrived, I scattered some flour on my counter and rolled out my first tortilla. The ball of masa spread out in direction. I made a second pass, but this time, the masa stuck to the rolling pin. I dusted my rolling pin with more flour. Third pass, the masa stuck to the counter. I'm not adding enough flour. After rolling in all directions, this tortilla was much more egg shaped than the perfect circles my Abuelita makes better than even those automated tortilla makers you see at the supermarket. When it came time to cook them through, I easily slid one on the comal, but when it came time to flip, I could not flick my fingers fast enough to avoid burning myself. I tried three times, and each time I wondered how the hell my grandma's fingers moved so quickly. I wondered how she did it like it was nothing, no wince from the heat, nothing. So I pulled out the tongs and clumsily flipped each tortilla. This would be a dark secret I could never tell my family, nor all of Aztlan. Please, dear reader, don't tell anyone.

All twelve of my tortillas were oddly shaped. They tasted great because the ingredients were in the right proportion, and I followed directions, but the actual rolling of them was much more difficult than I imagined. The second time I made them, I got better at rolling. I realized that spreading the dough out with my hands, by quickly tapping the dough among my fingertips like my grandmother taught me to do for making gorditas, made a better start. The third time they looked less oval and more circular.

Tortillas do not require an extensive list of ingredients, and they are simple to make. But the technique requires knowledges coming from the body, primarily through the eyes, fingertips, and arms. My Abuelita is a master at making tortillas because she was taught by her mother, and she has been practicing for decades. Her technique is uniquely hers because she's fine-tuned it over the years. Her hands know exactly how much pressure to place on the rolling pin, in what directions to roll to achieve circular shapes, and at what point the tortillas are at the ideal thickness. Her body knows how long each tortilla has to sit under what kind of heat without undercooking or burning them. Her fingertips know exactly where to clutch each tortilla, the amount of force needed to flip them, and how fast to move to avoid burning her fingers.

The tortilla on the comal has always reminded me of a record on a turntable. When I see turntables and DJs scratching records, I can't help but think of tortillas being slid on a comal. I am not a DJ, but whenever I've had the opportunity to try scratching, I get excited about making those same sounds that I hear in hip-hop. When my fingers rub across the record, whether an old-school turntable or a digital one on my iPad, it's always clumsy. My fingers are intimidated about applying pressure, or I go too hard. I can't make the record move where I want it to stop, and I can't make anything close to the sounds that master DJs make when they scratch. This digital knowledge is so hard for me.

In the first story, Sacramento Knoxx offers a collection of beats that offer the possibilities for decolonization, resistance, and healing through the consumption of his music. In the second story, my over-reliance on a carefully measured-out recipe does not

yield the perfect results one would expect. The practices of deejaying and cooking, when placed in conversation with each other, ask us to think about the rhetorics employed in order to produce a beat, a playlist, a meal, or a recipe. In both cases, the end product demands that we pay attention to the rhetorics of the “moment” in order to both practice and consume.

### Temporal Rhetorics

Deejaying and cooking both depend on the rhetorics of the moment. The process of creating a music set or a meal all happen in the moment that may never be exactly replicated again and that incorporates the environmental conditions, available materials, the practioners, the consumers, and all the intersecting cultural knowledges and traditions on all ends to produce the particular moment. One could record through video, photography, and/or sound the experience of an amazing house party or a plate of amazing enchiladas, but that recording cannot produce the identical moment of consumption. These moments are informed by a variety of knowledges that are both produced and consumed in a variety of ways that include the body, the spirit, the soul, and the brain. All these factors directly challenge Greco-Roman and European understandings of the eternal as an important determinant of what qualifies as art and what qualifies as craft.

### *The Craft/Art Distinction*

The Greco-Roman tradition prefers intellectual practices that privilege contemplation and de-values physical labor. This is why Western European societies maintain hierarchies that establish high and low art primarily on who gets to practice



what. Those artistic labors traditionally practiced by men, such as painting, sculpture, and literary writing are considered high art because they privilege the mind, while artistic work traditionally practiced by women, such as quilting, cooking, and sewing, are considered lower arts because they incorporate the body. This gets further complicated by race and class because art traditions coming from non-Western cultures get placed on lower ends of the Western hierarchy because they are considered more primitive and savage than those of the West. This roots itself in Greco-Roman thought, particularly Plato and Aristotle.

Food philosopher Lisa Heldke writes:

Had he in fact taken foodmaking seriously (or more seriously than he did), I think it is far more likely that Plato would not have developed that particular craft/art distinction in the first place—nor would he probably have distinguished as he does between knowledge and opinion, theory and practice. Furthermore, had subsequent philosophers continued to attend to such activities as growing and cooking food, it is likely that the theory/practice dichotomy, which threads its way through much of western philosophy, would not have developed as it did. (203)

We see these concepts play out later through the mind/body split, which continues to impact how we think of labor, intellectual practices, bodily practices, and the ways we learn. To dominant Western thought, everyday work, like foodmaking, takes time away from the “higher” labors, which privilege passive, contemplative activities. These “higher” forms of work also privilege removal from one’s object of study/work because

it allows for a distance Plato argued allowed for objectivity. The idea of critical distance turns the subject of investigation into objects of study, including cultures, people, and communities. Classifications and labels become identifying markers that then allow knowledges to be filed in accordance to the organizing mechanisms of archives.

Foodmaking involves a direct, personal relationship with the tools, measurements, raw materials, and emotions of the cook. Foodmaking privileges sensory knowledges of the body that determine taste, style, presentation, and method that make the practice highly subjective and difficult to classify and control according to Plato's preferences. Thus, in the academy, where Plato still reins as one its cornerstones of thought, foodmaking receives little thought and attention as a tool for inquiry and knowledge-making. Heldke explains how these ideas still root themselves beyond the academy and into contemporary society:

Plato's hierarchy of kinds of human/parts of the soul makes its way into present-day life in the way that certain kinds of 'manual' labor are ranked below certain forms of 'intellectual' labor. This ordering can be seen in the way that the work of farmers, homemakers, and other such 'manual workers' is subordinate to the 'knowing professions' like bio-chemistry, genetics, and other sciences. (211)

The danger in allowing a hierarchy of work is that all labors and productions become categorized in accordance with power and privilege structures based on race, gender, sexuality, and ability. Women of color scholars and activists have long argued that work traditionally done in their families and communities is denied respect and validity by the academy, which also denies the idea that work like cooking, sewing, and story-telling

carries any important intellectual value—that is until is appropriated by the most privileged people, which are often white. For example, when food does receive attention, it occurs in an elitist fashion. Heldke writes that when food-making receives the scholarly treatment, as a “theoretical activity,” the practitioners are “middle- and upper-class cooks who invest enormous amounts of money in equipment and ingredients, to produce food that is ‘innovative’ and ‘artistic’” (213). The past fifteen years of interest in food cultures attest to this phenomenon. It is not until the Food Network and privileged bloggers pay attention that suddenly foodmaking becomes a legitimate intellectual pursuit.

This craft/art distinction is important because it also carries implications within hiphop itself. Originally, the privileged figure in hiphop music performances was the DJ because it was the DJ who worked the turntables, created break beats for breakdancers to translate into dance, and played the music that moved the crowd. Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton argue that deejaying is about much more than making playlists. They state, “It is about generating shared moods; it’s about understanding the feelings of a group of people and directing them to a better place. In the hands of a master, records create rituals of spiritual communion that can be the most powerful events in people’s lives” (13). As rapping transitioned from chanting lines and phrases to telling stories, the rapper took center stage, relegating the DJ to the background. Under this understanding, the DJ functions as the labor force behind the privileged artist/rapper.

It is no coincidence that as hiphop music became a commercial force, rappers were selected as the most visible figures in advertising, music videos, and concerts.

Looking over the years, one can notice that in many instances, the DJ is no longer visible, or hardly visible. In music videos, DJs appear sparingly and mostly in supportive roles, while rappers take up the majority of camera time. Early hip-hop music privileged the deejay as the most important music maker because deejays belonged to an important African American tradition that depended on Black deejays as important community figures. In addition to creating the conditions for a great party, deejays were responsible for relaying important news, helping organize community efforts, make commentaries on the issues of the day, and creating playlists that nourished the community with the music they needed to carry on with the day.

We can theorize that the craft/art distinction is partly responsible for this shift. When hip-hop culture was born, the DJ enjoyed equitable status among the three other elements (graffiti art, break dancing, rapping) because creators of the culture were not invested in hyper-capitalist elements. People have written that people in hip-hop were always interested in making money, but we can temper this argument by recognizing that hip-hop's progenitors could not imagine that the culture and art they were developing would produce millionaires. They were more interested in building up their income from the current wages they were earning. Once hip-hop started making money, there was a commercial need to establish hip-hop music as popular art, which meant appealing rhetorically to Western frameworks of art.

Rappers, correlated as street poets, were now the bards of the ghetto, telling the stories that needed to be told about the good and bad happening in their hoods. Because rappers told stories through words, audiences could easily latch onto their art, even if

they didn't get what all the words meant. In a culture obsessed with alphabetic texts, rapping naturally would emerge as the easiest for audiences to consume. In addition, because rappers practice their craft primarily (though not completely) through using words, this mental labor corresponds with Western frameworks of the craft/art distinction. DJs use their hands and bodies to produce their art, which becomes relegated to a craft. We see this further develop in the current status of the DJ as s/he exists on the radio.

In tandem with record companies, the mass consolidation of radio stations and holdings during the 1990s took power and influence away from local radio stations and deejays, handing it over to five major conglomerates: Time/Warner, Disney, Viacom, Newscorp, and Bertelsmann (*Hip Hop Wars* 17). The consequences, according to Rose, include what music gets played on the air, what artists receive exposure and promotion, and what local acts receive the air time necessary to grow local music scenes. One of the worst consequences of mass consolidation is the reduction in black radio news programming. According to Rose, "Historically, black radio news programs played a powerful role in gathering and disseminating information about black social-justice issues that were largely omitted from other radio program formats" (*Hip Hop Wars* 21). This kind of programming is important to other communities of color for two main reasons. First, with few exceptions, the majority of radio stations playing hiphop music are categorized in black-dominated formats, such as rap and urban. Second, black radio news programs provide a venue for discussing social-justice agendas and promoting the kinds of movements and activities that imagine and create change. If this kind of

programming is pushed to the margins, activists and their communities must look for ways of providing this information to listeners. Marcyliena Morgan explains that the African American radio deejay tradition combined with the Jamaican deejay tradition to create an important practice for hip-hop culture. She states:

To paraphrase George Clinton, the DJ's skill not only made you move, it removed you and healed you. Hip-hop DJs inherited the role of playing music that reflected the beat and mindset of a generation as well as the responsibility of providing a voice and information within a system of oppression and misrepresentation. They manipulated local sounds and sensibilities as well as demonstrated a musical sense of time, timing, and memory that embraced and provided shout-outs to the globe" (53).

The tradition of deejaying changed from an important cultural figure to a professional playlist maker in the radio world, a supporting act for rappers, and an underground figure for hip-hop heads. I argue that the craft/art distinction has something to do with this because like other crafts, the creation of playlists, music sets, and mixtapes are seen as activities that amateurs and professionals alike can perform easily, while rapping is the artistic enterprise that leads to fame and riches. The practice of deejaying also involves more manual labor than rapping. Good deejays spend hours digging through record collections, both material and digital, listening to all kinds of music in order to find the gems that will keep the party going. Deejays, whether in the home, on the radio, or at a party perform the unseen labor that involves song selection, making breaks, scratching, and paying attention to the crowd. Rappers, on the other hand, are seen as

artists that much like literary authors, are seen as storytellers who spend hours contemplating and thinking of ways to express their ideas and thoughts to the crowd. Rappers are often times talked about as poets, lending them the air of Western literary prestige. One only needs to recall Eminem in *Eight Mile* as a factory worker by day, who uses his precious free time to write raps in his notebook so that he can practice his art at the local night clubs. Thus, the deejay is the crafter, and the rapper is the artist.

The Western craft/art distinction also makes it difficult to understand the particular rhetorics cooking and deejaying employ because cultural productions are labeled as craft or art based on whether the product of a practice can exist as in archives as eternal and unchanging sources of knowledge. Although recipes can be written in books, and playlists may be recorded on CDs, the value of both practices is sold short if we only pay attention to the act of consumption. In fact, I would argue that both practices are best enjoyed and understood in the present moment, when embodied rhetorics, the surrounding environment, and the participation of all present are crucial factors.

The corporate takeover of the radio agency by a few companies has relegated the radio DJ into a glorified playlist player. Video games like DJ Hero make DJing appear as easy as clicking buttons. This idea that DJs are responsible for pressing “play” and making simple lists ignores complicated histories of how DJs tell stories, honor traditions, and must labor intensely to do a good job.

I’m not saying that I don’t like rappers because I get down with lyricists. I love listening to Nas because of the kinds of lyrics he produces. What I am saying is that the

DJ has been disrespected, not only in the ways we listen to hiphop music, but also in the scholarship that has emerged in hiphop studies. The field primarily talks about rap music and rappers without paying attention to the other elements. Before the microphone, there was the DJ, working those wheels of steel, simultaneously paying attention to the crowd, trying to figure out what to play next, gauging the mood in the room.

*The Present Moment, Embodied Rhetorics, and the Archives of the Body*

Heldke writes:

Foodmaking, rather than drawing us to mark a sharp distinction between mental and manual labor, or between theoretical and practical work tends to invite us to see itself as a “mentally manual” activity, a “theoretically practical” activity—a “thoughtful practice. (203)

Heldke’s theorization of cooking works against the Western mind/body split which also explains why the craft/art distinction exists. If cooking is a “thoughtful practice” demanding one to pull from several knowledge bases and weave them in complex ways, then it would make sense why the mind/body split does not suffice. One has to trust the knowledges coming from the senses, the body, memory, and the surrounding environment to prepare food. For scholars interested in producing work that values theory and practice as partners in creating transformative work, then looking at those practices that utilize both without a need to draw distinctions is important.

Food scholar Meredith Abarca talks about food existing “in the moment” both in preparation and consumption. The aesthetics involved in cooking run against Western concepts of art and intellectual labor because the Western tradition, “is based on an



aesthetic form that transcends ordinary reality in order to represent it as universal and eternal” (103). The argument is that true art is so powerful that it is supposed to evoke a universal response no matter the time and place. This also helps explain why artifacts are such an important concept to Western rhetorics. Alphabetic texts, files, photographs, and other storage technologies are thought to keep knowledges frozen in its unchanging state for future generation. Cooking and deejaying run against these notions because they privilege the temporal.

Meredith Abarca’s discussion of “el arte culinario casero” or the art of home-style cooking, helps us understand how the aesthetics and rhetorics of temporality are important to practices such as deejaying and cooking. She explains that practicing home cooking privileges aesthetics that are “sensory-based and emotional” (101). Her phrase, “the aesthetics of the moment” are about “being present in the moment,” which “are holistic, since food, the essential element for a culinary creation, is a sustenance that feeds the mind, body, and soul while connecting all three” (101). Using the Buddhist concept of “being in the moment,” Abarca explains that this practice involves learning to experience the world with the various ways the body understands, processes, and produces knowledges (102). Abarca writes, “One major critical tool offered by the aesthetics of the moment found in culinary arts is that such a moment is not absent of a localized history, meaning the history in which the artist (or art critic) situates her/himself” (104). When a cook prepares a meal, s/he employs knowledges coming from the brain, the body, and one’s emotions. Deane Curtin elaborates on these ideas when she writes, “Far from supporting the model of radical dualism, cooking provides as

clear an example as we have of what might be called a body/mind working together in unison, engaged in thoughtful practice which ministers to the whole person, an ordinary being in an ordinary context. (10). David Sutton maintains a similar discussion by talking about cooking skills as an inclusive practice. Building off Tim Ingold's theory surrounding "skilled practice," David Sutton writes, "Skill, then, involves much more than the application of a sort of mechanical force to objects (what he sees is a model of technology), but an extension of the mind/body, often through the use of tools, requiring constant and shifting use of judgment and dexterity within a changing environment. The environment is not objectified as a 'problem' that humans must 'adapt' to, it itself is part of the total field of activity, as in the example of a woodsman who in chopping wood, consults the world with his senses for guidance, not a picture in his head" (302). The idea of skill as a complex process inclusive of several factors existing in the moment also means that each result of the end product will also yield a unique result. People who follow recipes can attest that no two dishes taste the same even if two people are following the same recipe. Also, those cooks who compose food without written recipes and standardized measurements, or a combination of both, rely on knowledges passed down orally, through performance, and through the body to cook. Meredith Abarca theorizes this concept as the individual's "sazón":

The *sazón* (sic) is the ability to 'seize power over one part of oneself' through the epistemology of all our senses, which in turn helps us regain the body as a center of knowledge. The power of the *sazón* to conceptualize and articulate aspects of social reality has been overlooked

by privileging the faculties of sight and hearing. These faculties *are* of fundamental importance in a textually and visually based society like ours. Yet, to categorize the faculties of smell, taste, and touch as less valuable blinds us to the richness and complexity of the ordinary aspects of life, such as food, that makes our personal and collective lives meaningful. (76-77)

The ability for one to cultivate the knowledges of the body and develop an individual taste is a make do practice because one must harness all available knowledges and materials to produce the desired outcome. As one gains experience and knowledge, the ability to practice changes and develops particular signatures and other identifying characteristics.

The sazón also speaks to the performance involved in cooking. Thinking in terms of rhetorics, Arthur K. Spears describes performativity as the ways that African Americans use their bodies as a part of their rhetorical practices—as they are tied to specific cultural histories. He writes, “By *performativity*, I mean the stylistic dramatization of the self that individuals infuse into their behaviors. Members of other ethnic groups (e.g. American White groups) often see these behaviors as inappropriate forms of attention-grabbing self-expression” (104). Spears argues that performativity can be seen in practices such as language, cooking, and sports. He also speaks to how performativity can rupture spaces, especially since non-white, and therefore, non-heteronormative rhetorical practices can often be seen as deviant.

When directly thinking about the development of one's sazón in a hip-hop context, Joseph G. Schloss presents an interesting take. In his discussion of sample-based hip-hop, Schloss argues that deejays use repetition, particularly in the creation of loops of repeating bits of a song, as a musical form of signifyin. He states, "Theorists of popular music have historically tended to read repetition as the hallmark of mass production. But hip-hop in general—and the sampled loop in particular—is a logic of musical repetition *as* artistic differentiation; the producer's creativity lies in the ability to harness repetition itself" (138). The act of repetition in creating hip-hop beats creates a space where the deejay is free to improvise with sounds in order to create something different, moving, and funky. Much like a cook who may make the same dish over and over again, it is in the moment of creation that improvisation is embraced to create something good.

With all this discussion about food, one may wonder: what does this have to do with deejaying? If the art of deejaying privileges sound, and food making privileges other senses, does a real relationship exist for both as a launching point towards better understanding how making do functions in both? Although both practices engage with the senses in different ways, they do share important similarities that offer insight into thinking about rhetorical practices beyond creating and writing alphabetic texts. Deejays are combining different kinds of music to produce an experience for the audience that involves the active incorporation of the senses beyond the audible. Deejays must also observe and "feel" the room for the mood of the room, the body language of the audience, the dance styles happening, the type of crowd that's in the room, and much

more. Deejays must be able to combine elements in ways similar to cooking in order to produce something interesting, fun, and palatable for the audience. Deejays must also look at the list of available ingredients and make important decisions about what the next song should be, when they should interrupt the music, and what sounds to play with according to the situation. Much like a cook learns through the body how to stir an execute a sauce, a deejay must trust her/his hands to work the turntables in order to produce the right breakbeat and scratch on a record. Whether it's flavors or flava, both cooks and deejays are practicing important embodied rhetorics that are often ignored.

The same happens in deejaying. A deejay may take classes or lessons or follow software to work, but successful practice of the art demands much more. Good deejays do not want to sound like everyone else. This tradition heavily influences what a good hip-hop deejay is and does. They have unique sounds, tactics, and methods they employ to tell stories, to keep the party going, and to stand out from the rest of the competition.

The rhetorics of temporality ask us to think about cooking and DJing as practices not invested in the unchanging and eternal. They ask us to think about the rhetorical choices people make *in the moment*, where writing, communicating, and composing depend on combining experience, knowledges and materials at hand, and the emotional sense of the space, audience, and the composer to make do and create something acceptable to everyone.

To me, the DJ is a cook, and the cook is a DJ. The DJ pulls from cultural traditions, such as the griot, to combine histories, philosophy, culture, technological knowledges, and a sense for the room to put together a hot set that will keep people

moving to the beat. S/he will challenge them, balance their expectations with surprise, and be inclusive. S/he will bring up politics, memories, movements, arguments, and ideas. The cook performs very similar actions in her/his practice. Instead of pulling records out of the crate (whether it be physical or digital), the cook pulls ingredients to recreate a familiar favorite or a new recipe. Like a DJ using embodied knowledges to scratch, knowing exactly when to move her/his fingers and hands, the cook measures ingredients by eyeballing them and using the palm of the hand as measuring cups. These are sciences and technical knowledges way more advanced and complicated than standardized methods because it takes a wealth of cultural, bodily, and temporal knowledges to improvise, to make do.

#### Conclusion

So what does this all mean? Like a cook, this chapter took different ideas, elements, theories, texts, and practices, adjusted the measurements in accordance to the author's tastes, and let everything simmer slowly until it looked, felt, and tasted right. Like a deejay, this chapter combined all kinds of elements to tell the story of embodied rhetorics and the rhetorics of the moment. I gave you something familiar, threw in something unexpected, and I tried to keep the party going by presenting some food for thought.

Both deejaying and cooking, because they privilege the temporal and momentary, also hold the power to create inclusive spaces where people can listen to marginalized stories, traditions, histories, and intellectual work. Both the kitchen and the deejay booth can reimagine and transform for both the practitioner and the audience.

This carries radical implications for teachers in the rhetoric and composition classroom who are searching for ways to shift the politics in the room and address the power structures that inherently exist. When we all walk into the classroom, borders and barriers exist by virtue of so many different subjectivities and histories following us inside. This means the stakes are high for students who feel always/already marginalized, which oftentimes are students of color. Samy Alim states, “Why must their [students of color] language and culture always be used to ‘take them somewhere else’? *Right here* look good to me” (28). Students of color often feel that they must abandon or minimize their own backgrounds and rhetorical practices in order to achieve upward mobility. Using hiphop cooking/deejay rhetorics in the classroom can simultaneously move students away from a linear notion of educational progress and ground their educations on their own terms. We can learn from cooking and deejaying how to shift these spaces, whether one is facing the student who refuses to acknowledge power and privilege in society, or the student who wants to speak up but is afraid of being judged.

For students of color, this is especially important since many come from rhetorical traditions that have been ignored, erased, and marginalized by the dominant Greco-Roman tradition. As we have seen, practices such as deejaying and cooking, which use cultural traditions, histories, and rhetorics, show that one does not necessarily have to depend on alphabetic texts in order to produce complex, important, and powerful methods of communication and negotiation of ideas. In the final chapter, we will pursue

the importance of creating productive and transformative spaces for everyone as we discuss how hiphop pedagogies and the art of making do function in the classroom.



CHAPTER IV  
BOMBING THE WALLS: HOW HIPHOP RHETORICS TRANSFORMED  
TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

In a 1993 article for *The Source*, Nelson George spoke with hiphop founders Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash, and Kool DJ Herc.<sup>11</sup> In discussing their early involvement with graffiti art, breakdancing, DJing, and rapping, all three founders stress how young people's desires for putting creativity to work fueled hiphop's birth and growth. In the reach for creating something different and pushing the boundaries of music making, they detail how they applied "make-do" methods to make technologies perform according to their needs. After Grandmaster Flash discusses the origins of scratching, George remarks, "People don't appreciate how much technical knowledge went into the creation of music. You had to really study turntables and speakers and the entire thing," which leads Flash to explain that he had to "[b]reak-up plenty of equipment to get what it was" (48). To Flash, the discarded postindustrial city, its discarded technologies, and its discarded communities could not be artistically reflected through the available equipment and techniques that existed prior to hiphop. Flash states:

I had to custom-make my cue system also. I couldn't afford a mixer with a built-in cue system where you could hear turntable one or two in advance. I had to actually get a single pole-double throw switch, crazy glue it to the top of my mixer, build an external mix on the outside just

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<sup>11</sup> This marked the first time all three major founders of hiphop were interviewed together.

strong enough to drive a headphone, so when you clicked it over you would hear the other turntable in advance. But this whole idea of hearing the cut ahead of time took three years to come into being.<sup>12</sup> (48)

In describing how he built a cue system that made it possible to practice DJing, Flash is also describing the process of designing technological equipment according to a hip-hop DJ. Flash re-imagines in order to imagine, he puts theory into practice, and he *makes do* to create the technology needed to compose music on his own terms.

This chapter makes interventions in the field of Technical Writing by arguing how hip-hop technical rhetorics have radically transformed understandings of technology and technical communication, primarily by rooting themselves in responses against marginalization, erasure, colonialism, and white supremacy. As a culture actively conscious of how race, rhetoric, and writing intersect with technology, hip-hop makes decolonial moves that disrupt dominant narratives about technical rhetoric. Western discourses on technology privilege linear histories that always/already position white people as the leaders and recipients of technological advances, while limiting access from people of color. They also render non-Western technologies and technical rhetorics as useless, primitive, and backwards. Hip-hop technical rhetorics, through the art of making do, provide effective methods for innovating ways that not only supersede, but transform dominant technical communication. They create and organize networks of

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<sup>12</sup> Flash continues his explanation of “custom-mak[ing]” hip-hop equipment. He states, “For some reason the world seems to think the beat box is something you do with your mouth. The beat box was an attempt to come up with something other than the techniques I created on the turntables to please the crowd. There was this drummer who lived in the Jackson projects who had this manually operated drum box he used to practice his fingering. I begged him to sell it to me. Then I found a way to wire it into my system and called it the beat box. The drummer taught me how to use it. When my partner Disco Bee would shut the music off, I would segue into it, so you couldn’t tell where the music stopped and I started” (48).

information distribution as well as create spaces for marginalized communities to understand technology on their own terms, to suit their own needs, and in relation to their own rhetorical traditions. Finally, this chapter contributes to a decentered approach to understanding the fields of technical communication, rhetoric and writing, and hiphop studies as a rhetorical move to continue building alliances among Black, Indigenous, and Latino/a communities under the recognition of shared struggles against racism, colonialism, and white supremacy.

#### The Need for Decolonial Work in Technical Writing

Scholarship on rhetoric and technology often ignores race as a focus because Western discourses about technology render it neutral. The myth that scientific critical distance affords technology the privilege of objectivity argues that it is impossible for issues such as race and gender to influence how technologies are designed, used, and produced. The dominant history of technical communication argues that technical writing developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries out of the desire to move the field of engineering from apprenticeship to the academy (Kynell-Hunt 12). Involvement in two world wars created a significant demand for writing that clearly explained technology to soldiers and other workers (17). Kynell and Tebeaux offer a history of the founders of both technical writing as a discipline and the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW). They describe the early technical writing teachers and scholars as honest people who were invested in objectivity, practicality, and pedagogy. In a personal communication, they quote John Harris, the first president of ATTW:

To these founders, technical writing was a means of telling the truth—or its nearest veritable approximation... Those old hands were responsible people who had beliefs, causes, and political philosophies of their own. But in the Academy, in professional organizations, or on the job, they were diligently apolitical. (123)

The description of technical writing's "founders" as believers in a unified truth and "diligently apolitical" professionals in the field makes a rhetorical move to categorize these individuals as objective, impartial, and most importantly, scientific. Kynell and Tebeaux further establish the character of these early technical rhetoricians when they write, "These were people who believed that a reality that required descriptions of mechanisms, operations and instructions manuals, and proposals to launch projects did exist and could be captured in writing" (123-24). This statement makes the assumption that technical writing rhetorics and traditions capable of communicating technical information did not exist prior to the coming together of the founders of ATTW and that technical communication needed to be "captured" and theorized by scholars in the academy in order to legitimize it as an area of research and study.

This act of utilizing Western methods, to "capture" the rhetorics of technology, follows in the Western, colonial tradition of civilizing what is considered wild and/or untamed, often through narratives of discovery. Through her analysis of John Gast's 1872 painting, *American Progress*, Angela Haas provides a prominent, visual example of how manifest destiny informs Western discourses about technology and technological literacies by demonstrating how all non-Western people and their technologies are

relegated outside of civilization until they are re-imagined through the West. In the painting, an angel of progress moves westward while illuminating the land for white settlers while pushing Native Americans, animals, and the darkness of the frontier away. Behind the angel and settlers are signs of Western civilization made visible through symbols of technology, such as trains, ships, and housing. The angel also holds electric wire connected to a network of electric poles. This painting informs how colonialism and racism inform the narratives told about technology. Haas states, “Thus, God blesses only the invaders of the Americas with the cutting edge of technology and all others are left in the darkness of technological illiteracy and permissivity” (52). The land is not considered "civilized" unless it is marked by symbols of Western technology.

Technical writing, as documented by Kynell and Tebeaux, reflects a cultural context privileging Western notions of objectivity. The development of curriculums, textbooks, and the discipline also contribute to a narrative of Western progress that moves in a linear line, leaving behind what it considers to be outdated and no longer valued. Thus, as this locomotive of technological history progresses across the academic landscape, those traditions standing in its way are run over, left by the wayside, and left behind. Whether bodies are forgotten, ignored, and erased does not matter as long as the train keeps running further and further into the future.

The development of technical communication as a field privileging alphabetic texts as the technology for “capturing” technical knowledge also ignores technical rhetorics existing before and beyond the written word. Walter Mignolo argues that the Western obsession with written alphabetic texts limits how we understand the ways

technical rhetorics are taught through oral traditions, performance, non-alphabetic texts, and the body. He writes that the spread of Western rhetorics in the Americas “was also a massive operation in which the materiality and ideology of Amerindian semiotic interactions were intermingled with or replaced by the materiality and ideology of Western reading and writing cultures” (76). Elizabeth Hill Boone talks about the use of signs as important and efficient communication that can make rhetorical moves that alphabetic texts could not. In *Writing Without Words*, Boone defines writing as “the communication of relatively specific ideas in a conventional manner by means of permanent, visible marks” (15). Her definition functions as a move recognizing Western writing theories as colonial because they narrowly frame histories of writing as the evolution from the use of images to alphabetic texts. Haas argues that traditional digital and visual rhetoric studies (dig/viz) continue to carry a problematic relationship to the written word. While the field claims to center digital and visual mediums, it still privileges work done through alphabetic texts. This preoccupation with the written word is a continuation of the colonial legacy established by European colonizers who felt that alphabetic texts represented ways to establish, maintain, and follow static, eternal truths and ideas. The supposed preservation of history and ideas through books also justified the barbarization of communities and cultures that did not privilege the written word, rendering them primitive and in need of civilizing.

Rather than understand rhetorical practices and technologies as fluid and dynamic in accordance to cultural context, Western discourses often establish the need to standardize communication by disciplining non-Western rhetorics and bodies to fit the

needs of the colonizer. For all these reasons, non-white subjects stand in a marginalized position when it comes to discourses about, and implementation of, technology as it is understood in the academy and in broader society.

Adam Banks argues that technology should exist at the center of social justice issues, rhetoric and composition, and technical communication for African Americans because “technologies are the spaces and processes that determine whether any group of people is able to tell its own stories on its own terms, whether people are able to agitate and advocate for policies that advance its interests, and whether that group of people has any hope of enjoying equal social, political, and economic relations” (*Race, Rhetoric* 10). He argues technology is a pervasive factor across an exhaustive list of social, political, and economic issues such as unemployment, the prison industrial complex, inequalities in the education system, and the digital divide. He warns, “[w]ithout systematic study of our relationships with technologies and technological issues, we remain subject to those technologies and the larger patterns of racism and racial exclusion that still govern American society” (10). I argue that the ways technology exists to reinforce and maintain white supremacy exists for not only African Americans, but for all people of color in the spaces occupied by the United States. In a decolonial and anti-racist move, more rhetoric scholars need to center technology as it relates to cultural rhetorics if we are to continue making spaces that honor non-Western rhetorical traditions and ways of knowing.

In joining the call to center technology in rhetoric and composition, Haas argues that, “contemporary dig/viz rhetoric scholarship is currently positioning the field to

make an interesting decolonial move that will impact all of rhetoric and writing studies” (84). Haas states that instead of defining dig/viz rhetoric through one rhetorical history, we must make room for listening to various traditions. Haas, through her analysis of indigenous digital rhetorics, dispels notions that the technologies and rhetorics employed in digital spaces are completely new. Rather, they have been rhetorically placed in a linear line of progression that is inherent in Western frames of thought and history. Haas makes an important call towards a more inclusive approach to digital rhetorics:

Consequently, building on the work of these scholars, I call that we resist the dominant notions of what it means to be technologically “literate” or “advanced” (with roots in manifest destiny), and to critically reflect on struggles for and engage with discussion on dig/viz rhetorical sovereignty, or the inherent right for indigenous communities to claim and shape their own communication needs (as well as the rhetoric of their identities) in dig/viz spaces. (109)

Haas calls for a decentered approach to understanding dig/viz rhetoric and rhetoric, and composition in general, that makes room for listening to multiple traditions. Adam Banks echoes Haas’s call when he states:

Any attempt to foster meaningful access to communication technologies or to a working education system must include theoretical frameworks or conceptual models that build from the traditions and truths of a people and assume their agency and ability. Black people must see themselves in the digital story. (*Digital Griots* 5)



Banks refers to the ways that Black folks and other people of color have been marginalized by digital technologies and rhetorics because dominant understandings about both inherently ignore them. He also makes a rhetorical move that emphasizes agency as an important factor in influencing discourses about technology. Haas and Banks both call for people of color to “see themselves in the digital story,” which, under Haas’s decolonial move to culturally situate what counts as digital and technological, listens to traditions continued and established through hip-hop digital rhetorics.

#### Why Hip-hop Matters to Technical Writing

Technical rhetorics matter to hip-hop studies because hip-hop’s birth and explosion largely depended on particular technologies. One only needs to hear Afrika Bambaataa’s “Looking for the Perfect Beat” to hear the futuristic, robotic sounds that early hip-hop explored. Listening to a DJ scratch and sample shows the ways that technology was essential towards creating hip-hop music. DJs adapted record players into musical instruments as both an innovation and a response to the lack of music programs and musical instruments in poor communities. These rhetorics have had a profound societal impact, including in how people practice rhetoric. Ridolfo and DeVoss write, “Remix is perhaps the premier contemporary composing practice” (“Composing for Recomposition”). Their concept of “rhetorical velocity,” or how people compose with an understanding and anticipation of recomposition by others, shows how digital communicative practices are profoundly impacted by hip-hop rhetorics.

Hip-hop scenes during the 1970s and 1980s developed communication methods reflective of their social and material realities. DJs, and later rappers, needed to attract

audiences to the next performance, whether it was in a park, a home, or a dance club. Gang culture taught posses and crews to adopt mutual methods of communication to establish territorial lines and protocols for beefs and battles. Graffiti artists built art networks by making do with existing transportation grids to create moving canvases. This happened in the context of the post-industrial city, where the hiphop generation was being criminalized and discriminated against by the government, the police, and other citizens. Extending from hiphop culture's ability to make do, communication methods and practices developed that not only gave voice to a youth subculture and resistance movement, but it also demanded an understanding of all aspects of communication and meaning making that affected their goals, practices, and daily lives.

Hiphop culture has revolutionized the way that music is made, the ways people communicate, and contemporary popular culture, and yet, it is often not recognized as one that retooled and repurposed discarded technologies while combining cultural traditions from Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas. Tricia Rose warns in *Black Noise* that understanding hiphop as purely derived from Afro-Diasporic traditions is a mistake. She argues that technologies and economic conditions played essential parts in hiphop's birth. Rose writes that many of hiphop's founders worked as technicians and repairpersons who “were trained to repair and maintain new technologies for the privileged but have instead used these technologies as primary tools for alternative cultural expression” (63). Instead of only using these technologies for their intended purposes, these technicians recycled, repurposed, and “significantly revised in ways that are in keeping with long-standing black cultural priorities, particularly regarding

approaches to sound organization” (63). Youth movements around the world have adopted hip-hop rhetorics and practices because hip-hop teaches how to make do by combining what is readily available to create resistance and agency.

Understanding hip-hop technical rhetorics as grounded in Black, Native, and Latino/a traditions is also important if hip-hop rhetorics are going to be responsibly understood and used in the field of rhetoric and composition. Banks explains how well-meaning scholars will use and theorize concepts based in hip-hop without actually doing the kind of ethical and responsible work that recognizes how hip-hop is grounded in cultural traditions coming from Black traditions (*Digital Griots* 13). I would add that we need to find ways of having this conversation as also inclusive of traditions rooted in the Americas, since as Joy Harjo has long argued, Native and Black communities have influenced each other’s cultures since the arrival of African bodies to the Americas. Harjo talks about African American music genres as influenced by Native traditions, and Native traditions being influenced by African cultures. In an interview with Eugene B. Redmond, Harjo states, “But when I hear our music, I always think of Africa announcing itself as part of the mix. And it also goes the other way” (29). Genres like the blues, R&B, jazz, and rock & roll feature techniques, sounds, and aesthetics Harjo finds in Native traditions.

This conversation presents the opportunity for some radical decolonial moves. Black and Native communities have long shared conversations, alliances, and conflicts, which are often most visible in discussions about who gets to claim what on the cultural landscape. In many ways, this is a move established and maintained by colonial logics,

and easily works to keep any potential bridge building efforts ossified. Rather than encourage a colonial land-grab for who gets to claim hip-hop, let's make a move that recognizes mutual and poly-mutual influence, allowing for multiple centers to exist in hip-hop's roots and culture. This move also opens up conversations recognizing the influences of other communities that have been around since the first DJs, bombers, b-girls and b-boys, rappers, and other knowledge producers. Voices from the Caribbean, Pacific Islands, Asia, and yes, white people, contribute to the rich history of hip-hop.

To return to Banks's point, there is much appropriation happening in rhetoric and composition without scholars doing the ethical work that understands hip-hop on hip-hop's terms. Banks theorizes the DJ as a digital griot who combines rhetorical traditions from Africa, sensory knowledges, the local, and her/his own aesthetic in composing music, sets, performances, mixtapes, etc. This means DJs have to pay attention to a variety of issues, combine them, and make something dope. Banks states:

In other words, DJs are not mere ventriloquists, playing or telling other people's stories for us; rather, their arranging, layering, sampling, and remixing are inventions too, keeping the culture, telling their stories and ours, binding time as they move the crowd and create and maintain community. (*Digital Griots* 24)

Banks explains that good DJs recognize their subject position as composers and expert cultural rhetoricians. They must consider their responsibility to the various histories and cultures they use to produce art. Any DJ can compose a set using easy choices and cheap

tactics to move the crowd. Great DJs accept the challenge of engaging with an audience by weaving sounds, culture, and history.

If we are to make vital moves thinking about the ways that hip-hop rhetorics have changed the field and society at large, we need to listen to hip-hop on hip-hop's terms. We can't expect our students and colleagues to use hip-hop rhetorics if they are still using traditional composition methods. It just won't translate. It just won't work.

### *Hip-hop as Risk and Emergency Communication*

Joel Dinerstein's concept of "survival technology" provides a conceptual intervention towards how technologies are defined. He writes:

Survival technology consists of public rituals of music, dance, storytelling, and sermonizing that create a forum for existential affirmation through physicality, joy, and sexuality—"somebodiness"—as some African American preachers call it—against the dominant society's attempts to eviscerate one's individuality and cultural heritage. (22)

The concept of "survival technology" is important because it opens up the discussion of how we talk about technical communication. It also recognizes that there is no one technical communication tradition or method. Survival technologies are employed as a direct response to colonial efforts to discipline colonized bodies through dominance and erasure.

Survival technologies, by their very nature, are made do technologies for two main reasons. First, power relationships in a white supremacist society work to maintain a sense of loss and depravity for those groups it seeks to dominate and erase. In other

words, the oppressed must deal the hand they're dealt and make something to create that "existential affirmation" mentioned above. Secondly, the use of public rituals, specifically the kinds detailed by Dinerstein, is an example of making do because they take what is given in the public sphere and change it. A group struggling to survive must develop methods and methodologies that ensure resistance with the hope that survival will lead to growth, and growth will lead to increased agency and social transformation.

Hiphop rhetorics employ survival technologies in struggles against dominant authority figures such as teachers, principals, and police looking to keep people down. As technical rhetorics, they include performance, language, and art. All of these survival technologies affirm one's existence by proving that the oppressed can respond, trick, and fool the oppressor.

For example, in hiphop communities, wordplay is an important rhetorical and linguistic practice. According to H. Samy Alim, language shifts and changes constantly in hiphop because people need to stay a step ahead of those institutions watching them, i.e. the police, teachers, the government, etc. Alim quotes Ghetto Boys rapper, Bushwick Bill, and his thoughts on signifyin as protection from the police. After listing a variety of changing terms, such as "5-0s," po-pos," and "one-time," Bushwick Bill states, "But you got to be in there to know that the police might know these words already. So they got to change up their dialect so that way it sounds like Pig Latin to the police" (82-3). The term used to identify police will change often in neighborhoods because people need to communicate police presence to others for both legal and illegal reasons. Geneva Smitherman writes that hiphop language practices, as derived from African American

Language (AAL), “disturb the peace” by “deliberately and consciously employ[ing] the ‘antilanguage’ of the Black speech community” (274). She argues that even in rap music that “does not overtly speak to racial resistance, the use of the Black speech community’s syntax covertly reinforces Black America’s 400-year rejection of Euro-American cultural, racial—and linguistic domination” (275). As a survival technology, the dispersal of language among networks in neighborhoods and across hip-hop communities could be crucial factors in avoidance of arrest, harassment, and even death at the hands of police.

This survival technology also works as a medium for communication that can navigate dominant communication channels and reach intended audiences right under the eyes and ears of censors, politicians, etc. This constantly shifting language use also allows those employing it to go back to older terms, change their meanings, or decide if they are useful. One has to stay engaged with groups, communities, and networks to know the scenario. Again, this alters who gets to control the meanings of words, what language is employed, and how people communicate within communities.

#### *Rap Music as Technical Writing*

Hip-hop music can function as technical communication. In *Decoded*, Jay-Z shares how the business world applies the lessons he teaches in his lyrics. He states, “My friend Steve Stoute, who spends a lot of time in the corporate world, tells me about young execs he knows who say they discovered their own philosophies of business and life in my lyrics. It’s crazy” (295). Jay-Z’s music often tells stories about drug dealing, including business practices. While the violence and misogyny is what often receives the

most attention, Jay-Z's music also details the pitfalls of selling dope as well as how business is handled.

Jay-Z's predecessor, the Notorious B.I.G., also raps about the drug game. In his classic song, "Ten Crack Commandments," Biggie speaks to the audience as an expert drug dealer/hustler. He raps:

I been in this game for years, it made me an animal  
It's rules to this shit, I wrote me a manual  
A step-by-step booklet for you to get  
Your game on track, not your wig pushed back  
Rule numero uno, never let no one know  
How much dough you hold, because you know  
The cheddar breed jealousy, 'specially  
If that man fucked up, get your ass stuck up

Biggie portrays himself as an expert in a volatile business by virtue of his longevity and presents a "step-by-step booklet" detailing the secrets to his success. Biggie proceeds to lay down ten basic principles for conducting business on the streets with the constant warning that the losers pay with their lives. Like Jay-Z offering business advice to young executives, Biggie's commandments are no different from free market, hyper-capitalist business practices employed by "legitimate" business. The first rule cautions against flaunting wealth because it attracts jealous and aggressive competitors. The other rules include keeping one's moves hidden, trusting no one, and the risks of lending and borrowing resources and money. The song prescribes the speaker's formula for success,



but it also carries a constant and implied critique of drug dealing as an aggressive, dangerous line of work that creates jealousy, aggression, anger, paranoia, and violence. Again, these are not business practices that only happen in the drug game.

This song offers business survival practices and tactics through music. Biggie creates an auditory booklet and quick reference guide for people working in the drug business, but as stated earlier, this booklet is applicable beyond selling drugs. The aggressive nature of capitalism as practiced in the United States depends on establishing and maintaining power and competitive advantages through business practices that keep one person on top while eliminating the competition. It also means that businesspersons and businesses must always be on alert for possible threats. This audio booklet—concise, clear, and compelling—is the kind of educational tool that can be carried and distributed much easier than textbooks or actual booklets. Imani Perry lists Biggie’s music as a reason she and her fellow Harvard law school colleagues survived final exams. After her friend remarks, “I wouldn’t have been able to get through it without Biggie,” Perry writes, “The generated energy, the adrenaline rush, and the rhythm of the Biggie Smalls music he listened to while writing his exam all motivated him as he expressed his knowledge and skills of argumentation in text” (1). This law student utilizes music as a survival technology that powers him through the difficult exam. The combination of compelling lyrics and beats shows how hip-hop can transmit technical knowledges, from person to person, in ways not dependent on traditional means. In this light, it makes sense that business people would thank Jay-Z and Biggie for their wisdom.

### *The Pass-Along Rate*

Dominant technologies for measuring hip-hop sale and distribution are highly problematic because they inaccurately produce numbers and figures about what groups and demographics listen to hip-hop music. Bakari Kitwana in *Why White Kids Love Hip-hop* details the inadequacies of Soundscan, the dominant way of tracking record sales, and the highly-influential 1991 essay, “The Rap on Rap,” written by David Samuels, that argued that hip-hop music was primarily consumed and produced for suburban white males (83). The implementation of Soundscan in 1991, over depending on self-reported sales by larger record stores, revealed that many more people were buying hip-hop albums than previously thought. Samuels asserts, “Although rap is still proportionately more popular among blacks, its primary audience is white and lives in the suburbs” (25). Samuels uses Soundscan to build the argument that hip-hop music had denigrated from the voice of the streets to commodified violent and racist fantasies for white consumers. He declares, “the more rappers were packaged as violent black criminals, the bigger their white audiences became” (25). While valid critiques exist of the kind of content that sells the most in hip-hop music, believing the story told by the technology behind Soundscan also erases how non-white bodies participate in hip-hop, from creators to consumers. This is another case of how technologies and their discourses privilege white people and marginalize the rest.

Other technologies tell a different story from Soundscan. According to *The Source*, considered by many as the authoritative hip-hop periodical, “the pass-along rate is approximately 1 purchase for every 11-15 readers,” which is much higher than the

average for most magazines (Rose 8). That means that people were actually reading the magazine at higher rates but were impossible to report through magazine sales.

Accompanied by statistics and record sales broken down by demographics, this argument has made the case that hip-hop music is problematic because it caters to violent, sexist, and homophobic white male fantasies, stripping all agency from the producers of the music, and feeding into the idea that hip-hop is morally corrupt. In other words, this music is ruining the country and hip-hop is blamed for everything from mass shootings, to terrorism, to welfare abuse, and the war on drugs.

This is not to suggest that hip-hop culture, specifically its music, does not share responsibility in the kinds of art and discourses in which it participates. There are certainly issues involving violence, sexism, misogyny, and homophobia that need to be interrogated, critiqued, and challenged. This also not to suggest that white consumers do not influence the kinds of hip-hop that sell the most. In fact, as long as wealthy, white executives at record companies, radio corporations, and television companies control the majority of money and resources, the kind of hip-hop that receives the most attention, advertising, and distribution will appear counter to the depth and breadth of the various hip-hop communities living through hip-hop culture.

What this does suggest is that the narrative about hip-hop being presented by these standard tracking practices tells a story that is incomplete. Kitwana uses *The Source's* discoveries about the pass-along rate to interrogate how hip-hop is consumed. Neighborhoods and communities that pass-along magazines at higher rates also do the same with other items, such as albums. Record sales cannot track how songs and albums

are being passed-along among friends, acquaintances, and family. Soundscan's demographic research depends largely on tracking sales based on location. This means that traffic in record stores, department stores, and shopping malls are tracked not by actual clientele, but by those who live in the surrounding area. Predominantly white areas, which typically house the majority of popular and corporate stores, shut out the shopping habits of people who traveling from other neighborhoods. The decision to build a store is significantly determined by race, ethnicity, and class, meaning that people of color living in lower-income neighborhoods are less likely to see a shopping mall, a Target, and/or a Best Buy close to their homes (Kitwana 93). Finally, Kitwana argues that Soundscan fundamentally does not understand the listening habits of the hip-hop generation because it cannot track the purchase, consumption, and acquisition of music through mixtape culture and/or digital file sharing. People buy hip-hop through bootleg sales and mixtapes. Soundscan has no way of tracking or understanding these large distribution markets.

All of this suggests that these technical practices within hip-hop are significant and difficult to track because they are not understood nor contained by conventional means. It also speaks to politics of representation and its pitfalls. Rather than develop methods of information-gathering that understand how different communities engage with the consumption of music and other forms of entertainment, institutions of surveillance and information-gathering, like Soundscan, impose a structure that normalizes a narrative running counter to actual reality. The cracks in the structure tell

an entirely different story that reveals how hip-hop communities communicate with each other in ways not dependent on sales numbers published by Billboard.

The danger of allowing dominant tracking technologies to tell the story of hip-hop is that it names predominantly white consumers as the inheritors of hip-hop. Kitwana argues, “The implication is that, as David Samuels wrote in 1991, Blacks, over a decade later, aren’t the driving force behind the music, neither on the creative and business ends nor on the consumption side” (102). Divorcing Black people, and other people of color, from hip-hop discourses carries damaging consequences that strip hip-hop culture from its promise as a radical tool for change. Kitwana sees this as a crucial issue to the status of hip-hop studies, especially since any academic work done in hip-hop should center young people of color. Considering this a debate over the soul of hip-hop, he writes, “It is a battle that will define the history of hip-hop, the place of Blacks and browns in the United States at the start of the twenty-first century, and also whether or not this generation through hip-hop will live up to its promise to change America” (106). If hip-hop scholars do not interrogate how technologies help determine how hip-hop is understood, then it will fail as a survival technology.

#### Graffiti Art as Technical Rhetoric

The ability to make do through survival technologies such as wordplay, rap music, and the pass-along rate show that hip-hop rhetorics are interrelated. A worldview that actively looks at several possibilities for technologies beyond intended uses make it possible to adjust, re-purpose, and innovate. Graffiti art, as both visual and technical rhetoric, offers a deeper understanding of how hip-hop literacies are inherently multi-

modal. The appearance of graffiti art during the 1970s on train and subway cars in New York antagonized city officials, the police, and concerned citizens. The city government spent millions of dollars to deter and prevent graffiti, which failed for most part (Castleman 146). Mayor Ed Koch wanted the city to believe that graffiti artists were on the losing end of the struggle, but city officials, journalists, and the artists knew otherwise. In 1981, aide to the mayor, Jack Lusk, presented an anti-graffiti strategy under the slogan, “Make your mark in society, not on it” (Castleman 147) that featured fencing train yards, tougher spray-paint purchasing laws, and a media campaign. Lusk, the mayor, and other opponents of graffiti could not see that these artists were marking up subway trains and walls as a way of creating their place in society. The transformation of monotone train and subway cars into reclaimed spaces for graffiti artists meant that these artists could create and expose works of art through a pre-established network of capitalistic exchange. As reclaimed spaces, these moving cars would tell everyone that they no longer belonged to the state or the commercial owner.

    Graffiti artists established networks with various communicative properties. Art produced on non-moving canvases, such as walls and street signs, also established networks of communication that offered a variety of meanings and knowledges targeted at specific audiences. If you didn’t know, you just didn’t know. Police battled (and continue to battle) graffiti artists by adopting strategies meant to discourage the practice, and while the police are successful at certain moments, graffiti art continues to happen anywhere young people and spray paint meet. In his study of gang culture, Ralph Cintron frames graffiti art as “tactics of action” and “tactics of language” (176). He

argues that people who practice this form of expression adopt a “metaphorical” sense of ownership over space that responds to dominant systems determining legal ownership. As a language tactic, Cintron explains, “that graffiti [is] an important narrative ‘tactic’ available to gang members for the public expression of their subjectivities, subjectivities that were constantly being suppressed by the public sphere” (176). Through this writing technology, people who are rendered invisible by dominant social power structures may exert their presence. Graffiti art teaches that although one may not own or control an institution, one can always mark them with their own meanings in ways that take power, as little or large as it may be, from the owner. Thus, a building owner may own the buildings, but the walls belong to the spray painter. The owner may cover the mark, but the artist can always return. The owner may hire security, but the artist will show up in the middle of the night. The owner may add a fence, but the artist will traverse the fence. The artist may build another wall, but the artist will simply paint over that one too. In all these situations, the public must also acknowledge the artist as a writer.

This is a powerful lesson hip-hop offers to marginalized communities. There are always places and spaces where one may use or manipulate power against dominant forces. What happens if we look at graffiti art as not only art, but as the deployment of a technical rhetoric that establishes and maps networks including communities, artists, meanings, knowledges, and spaces? What happens if we take a step back and see how these networks function in all kinds of rhetorical exchange? The appropriation of graffiti rhetorics profoundly includes how people utilize this technology for their own communicative purposes. Rappers understand the ability to write their name, signature,

and/or brand over symbols of wealth and prestige in order to build their credibility as ballers and shot callers. Guerilla marketers have realized that the ability for graffiti to capture people's attention through turning any space into a canvas.

### *Graffiti Rhetoric in the Rap Game*

In several songs, Jay-Z mentions Cristal champagne to denote his wealth and status as an MC. When Cristal's manager-director was asked in 2006 how he felt about the champagne's popularity with rappers, Frédéric Rouzaud responded, "That's a good question, but what can we do? We can't forbid people from buying it. I'm sure Dom Pérignon or Krug would be delighted to have their business" ("Bubbles and Bling"). Jay-Z responded by telling the *New York Times*, "Surely he meant to say, 'Thank you,' right? Anything but a 'Thank you' is racist." He immediately declared a boycott against the brand by no longer mentioning Cristal in his lyrics or purchasing the champagne. Jay-Z, in *Decoded*, states, "What a lot of people—including, obviously, *The Economist*, Cristal, and Iceberg<sup>13</sup>—think is that rappers define themselves by dropping the names of luxury brands. They can't believe that it might actually work the other way around" (84). To rappers, the visibility of brands presents an opportunity to exert their own subjectivities.

This moment reflects one way that hip-hop is able to utilize marketing to its own purposes. Jay-Z theorizes graffiti rhetoric when he writes, "Everything that hip-hop touches is transformed by the encounter, especially things like language and brands, which leave themselves open to constant redefinition" (84). As part of a larger hip-hop

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<sup>13</sup> Prior to the Cristal controversy, Jay-Z tried to set up an endorsement deal with the European clothing company, but was spurned. This rejection led to the development of Rocawear, Jay-Z's clothing brand (82).



rhetorical tradition, graffiti rhetorics recognize spaces as infinitely open to change. By redefining luxury brands, people may have access to them rhetorically, which causes a power shift. Folks may not be able to afford Dior, but they can own it in their raps, thereby transforming “Dior” into something different. This act both ruptures and reifies the power luxury brands seek. Luxury brands want people to talk about their goods, and they want people to covet them so that they may make more money. At the same time, when people excluded from participating in the consumption of luxury goods based on class and race talk about the brands as if they own and deserve them, companies are included in conversations and discourses that they probably don’t like. To them, it may seem that their brand will lose its draw and exclusivity if poor people talk about them.

Thus, the use of luxury brands in rap music creates a graffiti moment where the rapper places her/his name/sign/tag over the brand. The brand may try to clean it up, but the rapper can always place the tag again, and by the time the brand thinks it accomplished its goal, the meaning has already been changed several times. These shifts may be small, but they carry the potential for creating change. While rappers were once abhorred by brands, they are now very often participants in the direct marketing and creation of expensive goods. This certainly signals a rupture. At the same time, this act also reifies the power luxury brands enjoy, which includes the exclusion of individuals according to wealth, class, and privilege. The use of brands also describes a lifestyle and way of life that points towards consumerism, hyper-capitalism, and separation from values associated with social justice. The claiming of brands by poor folks still makes them feel less important and valued because they do not have access to them.

While graffiti rhetorics over popular clothes and jewels point not at possible solutions towards fixing the United States' obsession with bling, it does indicate the way people resist how that power is held over them or held from them. While this may be problematic as far as luxury brands are concerned, this does point to ways people can take other exclusive ideas, concepts, and subjectivities. People can imagine what they want, and ways they can begin to manifest that reality. We may not all wanna cop that Gucci, but we all want respect, opportunity, and equal rights.

#### *Guerilla Marketing as Graffiti Rhetoric*

The explosion of the digital age has changed how rhetoric exists in our daily lives. More than ever, we are constantly inundated with all kinds of information. Because we live in a hyper-capitalistic society, much of the information we are drenched with is urging us to buy.

One sign, that corporate interests have commodified hiphop marketing rhetorics, is the appearance of graffiti tactics in the kind of advertising we encounter. Prominent wall spaces are inundated with advertising. New York Times Square, a celebration of capitalism, is a walk among sign after sign, advertising Broadway shows, banks, public service announcements, fast food restaurants, and fashion brands. The placement of ads reflects both the goal of cramming as much advertising as possible in every space available to the eye, and the establishment of a sort of order that keeps eyes looking. The act of being able to see each ad or the ads interesting to each individual demand a trained method of reading that people living in the United States have been doing since they were children.

This practice achieves its best work on the internet, where advertisers look for ways to place advertisements in free spaces on your computer screen. Just like a graffiti artist may paint over a wall with an intent to agitate, understanding that this agitation may be momentary, pop up ads perform a similar function. When one plays a YouTube video, ads often creep up on the bottom of the screen with the discreet “x” to close the ad. Viewers may feel agitated by an advertisement appearing without consent on the screen, but the point is to agitate. At the moment the viewer has paid any attention to the ad, it accomplishes its goal. Some websites allow ads to take up all the empty space they have, such as their backgrounds and their borders. As one reads/views the site, the advertiser is always in the background, creating the direct connection between the website and the financial support of the company advertising in the background.

These practices now adopted and innovated by the most powerful advertising agencies borrowed heavily from hiphop culture. They understand that in the dominant places are leaks, slippages, and blank spaces belonging to anyone. Advertisers understand that bombing spaces offers the ability to tap into audiences in ways that traditional advertising cannot. They also understand how agitation functions to imbue knowledge against people’s wills in effective ways.

## Conclusion

Thinking of how hiphop culture utilizes technical communication and writing challenges dominant understandings of what “counts” as technical rhetoric. Hiphop practitioners were able to make do with available resources to retool and repurpose discarded technologies and knowledges of the post-industrial city to show not only the

ingenuity and brilliance DJs, rappers, breakdancers, and graffiti artists employed, but their responses to systemic marginalization as rooted in resistance movements and histories within their own communities.

Hiphop's interventions in technical writing and communication carry heavy implications, especially for Black, Native American, and Latino/a communities that have been historically marginalized from participating in dominant discourses about technology. Building technological access requires radically shifting how technologies are defined, their implementation, and their design. We may start with the question, "What does technical writing look like through the perspective of hiphop?" This chapter begins answering the question by showing how a hiphop worldview begins with the assumption that techniques, methods, knowledges, and technologies are as varied and adaptable to different uses as the user wants and needs. In other words, hiphop technical rhetoricians are always thinking of how they can make do. Adding hiphop's anti-racist, anti-white supremacist, and anti-colonial initiatives, possibilities open up for creating radical, transformative, and lasting community change. In the next chapter, I will begin by showing how this kind of change happens in the classroom as I demonstrate how hiphop pedagogies make powerful moves towards encouraging access and participation for all students. I will close by explaining the disciplinary implications of hiphop rhetorics in the academy and how they cause a productive ruckus for scholarship in rhetoric and composition.

## CHAPTER V

### DROPPIN' MADD SCIENCE: PEDAGOGICAL AND DISCIPLINARY IMPLICATIONS (SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS)

This final chapter explains the pedagogical and disciplinary implications of my dissertation. First, we will look at how hiphop pedagogies have worked over the past thirty years to create inclusive spaces and courses centering marginalized students' success. The art of making do in rhetoric and composition changes the classroom by making it a space for possibility rather than inevitability. Teachers understanding how to make do also recognize that students walk into the classroom with their own knowledges to contribute to the class and use as a tool for critical engagement.

Next, we will look at the broader disciplinary implications of this dissertation. This dissertation, by grounding the art of making do in non-Western rhetorical tactics responding to racism, colonialism, and white supremacy, links arms with cultural rhetorics scholars who argue for a constellated understanding of rhetorical histories and traditions that are culturally situated. In making space for non-Western rhetorics, this dissertation also joins the call for honoring alliances among Black, Red, and Brown communities to fight mutual oppressions. This dissertation also moves away from rap-centric studies of hiphop in an effort to make more spaces for hiphop-based academic work that understands hiphop as both a movement and a culture. Finally, and perhaps most important, this dissertation theorizes the art of making do as a vital hiphop tactic for communities seeking positive social change. To make do is not only a survival tactic.

It is also the recognition that under any circumstance, Black, Brown, and Red communities hold the rhetorical knowledge to search and create solutions to problems, whether they are social, economic, and/or legal. The possibilities for alliance and coalition-building increase when people see oppression, depravity, and lack as obstacles to circumvent rather than halt.

### Pedagogical Implications

#### *The Need for Radical Pedagogies*

The education system across all levels shares a sad relationship with the history of colonization and racial oppression in the Americas. The idea that the educational process transforms young people from wild and misbehaved children into educated and refined contributors to society has dangerous consequences for non-white students. The history of genocide, erasure, and assimilation of people of color in the United States attests to their marginalization in the classroom. Gloria Anzaldúa's theorization of borderlands helps us see how the borders of the classroom are constructed to marginalize non-normative people. She writes:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them* (sic)... The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal.' Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they possess documents or

not, whether they're Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter, trespasser will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. The only 'legitimate' inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites" (25-26).

Anzaldúa speaks to how heteronormativity organizes the boundaries for acceptance as part of the continued colonization of the Mexico-US border. Her theorization of borderlands, especially the concept of "los atravesados" can be used to understand how these same boundaries and identities function in classroom spaces. Students of color, working class students, queer students, female students, and students with disabilities all must confront not being white, affluent, and male. These same students are often also first-generation college students who are navigating unfamiliar places, which emphasizes their status as atravesados. When students struggle to find their place in the university, the self-doubt they feel feeds into the model of hyper-individualism that also characterizes the educational experience.

AnaLouise Keating argues that Enlightenment philosophies about the individual from thinkers like Locke, Hobbes, and Hume ground ideas about the "self-made man" in US society (25). The emphasis on the individual creates a hierarchal relationship "between the self and other, where the individual and society occupy mutually exclusive poles" (26). This relationship "presumes and reinforces a model of domination, scarcity, and separation in which intense competition leads to aggressiveness and fear" (26). Education becomes a process of competition and dominance rather than creating the possibilities for community-building and social change. Education based on dominance

is especially damaging for students on the margins because they must compete on an already unfair playing field. Students with power and privilege dominate classroom discussions, expect to make the highest grades, and feel no obligation to interrogate their power and privilege as students and scholars. Unsuccessful students believe they deserve to fail. Keating writes that this model makes people believe, “Those people who do not succeed have only themselves to blame, and their failure has absolutely no impact on anyone but themselves... After all: if each individual is fully responsible for his or her own life, there is no need for collective action or systemic change. Just pull yourself up by your own bootstraps!” (27). In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa explains that Chicana@s engage in self-hate, self-blame, and self-terrorism that mostly “...goes on unconsciously; we only know that we are hurting, we suspect that there is something ‘wrong’ with us, something fundamentally ‘wrong’” (67). When forces seek to discredit students, and when they lack a community willing to listen, explain, and bear their burdens alongside others, what choices do students really have? These students know they are *atravesados* who must figure out how to “fit” into the academy, which often means assimilating into the hierarchy as best they can. Students practicing this model of success based on hyper-individualism and dominance continue applying these ideas as they participate in the workplace, their home communities, in their families, and in their roles as citizens and contributors to society. The possibilities for community change and social justice work ultimately suffer.

Pierre Bourdieu’s theorization of the *habitus* offers an understanding of how spaces function to produce practices and the organizing principles of that practice.



Bourdieu's understanding of the habitus as "structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices" is grounded on the idea that class distinctions strongly determine how practices are determined by taste, style, and preference (170). As a habitus, the classroom space presents a dangerous space for students who are not white and in the middle class or higher. For working class, queer, female, disabled, and non-white students this presents a difficult and intimidating experience. These students must find ways to conform to the college classroom habitus by adopting the right behaviors, voices, writing styles, tastes, appearances, and ideas. Hip-hop pedagogies grounded in working class rhetorics look for ways to break the habitus created by dominant education models by bringing wreck.

#### *What Radical Pedagogies Can Do*

In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks discusses her childhood, pre-integration classroom, as a space where teachers and students understood that education was a tool for social justice. She writes, "We learned early that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization" (3). She explains that her teachers were predominantly women who created the conditions for intellectual inquiry that made the classroom a fun experience. Teachers actively participated in the community and built relationships with students' families out of the mutual recognition that colonialism, racism, and white supremacy not only existed but actively worked against people of color. Her experiences in integrated classrooms were starkly different. She writes, "The classroom was no longer a place of pleasure or ecstasy. School was still a political place, since we were

always having to counter white racist assumptions that we were genetically inferior, never as capable as white peers, even unable to learn” (4). Although much has changed to promote better relationships between different students and teachers, and diversity initiatives are popular across college campuses, the stakes remain high and difficult for students of color. Departments, classrooms, and campuses still struggle and maintain power structures that marginalize students of color for the ways they look, speak, and think. The assumption still remains that students of color are to enter the academy to painfully shed aspects of their cultures and ethnicities in order to adopt the vestments of upward mobility.

Radical pedagogies that seek to build community and create alliances transform classroom projects, spaces, and relationships from reifying the status quo to interrogating it, deconstructing it, and imagining new possibilities. hooks writes,

As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence. Since the vast majority of students learn through conservative, traditional educational practices and concern themselves only with the presence of the professor, any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone’s presence is acknowledged. That insistence cannot be simply stated. It has to be demonstrated through pedagogical practices. (8)

According to hooks, to teach in ways that are inclusive and that promote the classroom experience as fun, is to deeply transgress the dominant educational model. Teaching

students to value the learning experience as the opportunity to enter conversations, challenge ideas, and create knowledge through a community-based approach demands more out of students, teachers, and the academy. It also chips away at the idea that education should be an elitist practice built on hierarchies that privilege white, male, heterosexual, wealthy, and able-bodied students.

By recognizing all students in the classroom as valid and important members, the possibilities for building meaningful relationships increase. A key component towards breaking barriers among everyone in the classroom is to make it possible for people to be vulnerable with each other. When students see the teacher as someone willing to be vulnerable in front of students, the teacher as an all-knowing authoritative figure collapses. It also means that everyone in the room does not have to strive for a level of perfection students often feel they must reach. Meredith Abarca states that teachers should be vulnerable in front of students as a radical way of engagement with knowledges as a way of interrogating how histories of trauma engage with our bodies. She writes, “Breaking the silence imposed by traumatic events by giving voice to our experiences is always difficult, particularly in ‘a society that does not do grief well or easily’” (“Fronteridad” 275). Abarca quotes from Aurora Levins Morales in *Medicine Stories*. Morales states, “Ours is a society that does not do grief well or easily, and what is required to face trauma is the ability to mourn, fully and deeply, all that has been taken from us” (19). In her classroom, students who grieve in the classroom make connections with the teacher and fellow students in ways that were previously impossible. This leads

Abarca to ask, “Without our memories, yes the painful ones, how can we honor the goodness that lives within us? (“Fronteridad” 276).”

In the chapter discussing food and deejaying, we talked about the ability for temporal rhetorics to make space and make room for inclusive practices. Hip-hop culture has offered people the ability to reclaim spaces in ways that create community, confidence, and more possibilities for advancement. Hip-hop pedagogies are very much aligned with the idea that the education process has largely failed marginalized communities, especially Black, Brown, and Red communities. Education in the United States often follows the conversion narrative of civilizing nonwhite bodies through the classroom. Mary Louise Pratt’s conceptualization of “contact zones” as “the space[s] in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” helps us understand how spaces we like to think of as safe are often times dangerous, threatening, and debilitating for students who do not walk into the classroom with privileges determined by systemic racism (6). The academy brings students from different backgrounds and perspectives into the room and asks them to interact with each other, the instructor, and knowledge while often ignoring that power relationships heavily influence what voices, ideas, and perspectives will dominate the learning process.

#### *What Hip-hop Pedagogies Do*

Scholars theorizing and writing about hip-hop pedagogies argue that hip-hop culture promotes social justice through its recognition of how oppression works against

people of color and its response through the five main elements (rapping, deejaying, graffiti art, break dancing, and doing the knowledge). The implementation of pedagogies based in the elements offers exciting possibilities for not only changing how knowledge is taught, but the methodologies employed in producing theories, ideas, and discourses. Hip-hop pedagogies run a broad spectrum of theories, tactics, and practices that are meant to engage young people, interrogate power structures, build communities, and grow hip-hop scholarship directly from grassroots efforts. Rooting hip-hop pedagogies, and hip-hop studies in general, in the communities it originally sought to benefit is an especially important point as hip-hop culture continues to be studied in the academy. Bakari Kitwana warns that if hip-hop in the academy does not privilege marginalized people of color—like the rest of the academy—it will only allow the most privileged students to study hip-hop (105). He argues that scholars will become removed further and further from the actual people and culture involved with hip-hop, which will affect how hip-hop will be understood, archived, and theorized. Black, Brown, and Red academics will fall behind, steeped in academic jargon and discourses that will fail to serve the communities that need it the most.

One of the most visible examples of how hip-hop culture has influenced U.S. society is through the classroom because students bring that influence with them through the ways they dress, speak, and act. A.A. Akom argues that classrooms--starting in the 1990s—have been affected by the ways hip-hop aesthetics merged with youth cultures, yet critics of hip-hop culture characterize it as encouraging anti-intellectualism and detrimental lifestyles (53). He writes, “the fact that hip hop as an academic field of

inquiry has been historically marginalized—particularly, however not exclusively, by our cathedrals of ‘higher’ education that we have anointed with the task of training teachers for urban and suburban communities—speaks volumes to just how ‘mis-educated’ our society has become” (53). Akom locates the relationship between hip-hop culture and critical pedagogies in the ways that hip-hop culture is rooted in Black struggles for freedom and social justice.

Akom introduces the concept of “Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy” (CHHP) as a framework that builds on previous student-centered pedagogies that promote social justice in the classroom (54). Students are seen as active knowledge producers who interrogate how knowledges affect their lives and provide practical application to problems and issues in their communities. Akom suggests that the most important aspect of CHHP is that it “challenges the role that schools play in reproducing social inequality” by “the creation of pedagogic spaces where marginalized youth are enabled to gain a consciousness of how their own experiences have been shaped by larger social institutions” (63).

Akom roots much of his framework in Paulo Freire’s work, which has played an important role in how critical pedagogy as a field has developed and the ways it has created spaces for more radical teachers to develop their own practices. Akom’s use of Freire, and his language of enablement should also signal caution against the idea that teachers are exceptional people with exceptional knowledges that will convert students into better people. After all, this same concept sounds exactly like Christian conversion narratives that have fueled the colonization of the Americas and other non-European

places. While we want to offer students a better classroom experience, we should also be careful to not rehearse the same actions that have students believing that they will leave the academy as superior citizens.

Akom and Freire do get it right when they want to create inclusive spaces where students are acknowledged as knowledge producers. Akom's use of hip-hop as a critical tool offers marginalized students a familiar space for intellectual engagement. Kermit E. Campbell writes, "And after ten years of teaching this class, I gotta say that the oral-literate art of Hip hop is one of the few things that inspire me to teach writing" (149). Campbell refers to a composition course based on the art of rap he created as a way of trying to engage with African American students. He also is building off of Geoffrey Sirc's comment, "I really don't know what to do in a writing class anymore, what makes real sense, except to play 2Pac records, all those songs where he talks about 'no future' and how 'my attitude is shitty...'" (106). Sirc's comment reflects his cynicism and frustration with how both punk and gangsta rap appear futile when taken up in rhetoric classrooms. Sirc believes students, teachers, and scholars ultimately must still succumb to the academy's demands and expectations of how academic work is defined. Sirc laments, "I just don't see any more interesting theorizing being done on a level where my students and I (hell, all Americans) have common ground. Oh sure, I can teach someone to write an academic paper that will pass..." (107). Sirc offers an excerpt of a student's paper on Tupac Shakur that Sirc feels is "awfully nice work, but it's not really enough; her immersion into college prose feels almost dutiful, as if I were teaching her now to be thick, rather than how to flow" (108). These are alarming and important issues

to think about, especially if cultural rhetorics scholars are interested in pushing the boundaries of how to understand writing and rhetoric studies. Too often, the use of non-traditional rhetorics in the classroom run the risk of unethical appropriation for the sake of novelty and an opportunity to publish. Still, where Sirc is frustrated, Campbell offers solutions.

Campbell's previously mentioned course has helped him think of the ways that Black students engage with how academic writing is defined. He concludes that these experiences unexpectedly helped him think of his own pedagogical practices and how they work with and against the academy. He writes, "Along with playing Pac records (and many others, of course) in a writing class, I would also want the class to bust a few moves, to get students completely out of traditional classroom mode" (149). He presents a rap he wrote called, "Hip-hopology 101" that he has performed for students before as a way of practicing what hip-hop pedagogies look like beyond using traditional classroom practices (150). After having performed this rap for one of his classes, he writes, "Much like Erick Sermon spoke of in 'Music,' I guess the rhythm just got me in a zone. Maybe if we treated writing more like rapping, taught writing like it was something you felt and got a groove to, then students like the E<sup>14</sup> could really show us how much game they got" (152).

Hip-hop pedagogies require a holistic approach to teaching that asks much more from teachers and students. In order to create the kind of space of where students of color are validated, the teacher must enact the kinds of pedagogical practices that

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<sup>14</sup> "E" is a student Campbell uses as an example of students who engage intellectually in ways that are not recognized by the academy, and thus, label him as at-risk and unproductive.



decenter the teacher as the most important person in the classroom. S/he must also design a curriculum that is inclusive and aware of how power and privilege affect the classroom. Teachers and scholars, especially those of us who are people of color, must recognize that we are often students who struggle with what we want to get out of a classroom, and we too struggle with rhetoric and writing. Those of us who achieve M.A.s and Ph.Ds followed through the tracks set by the academy, and we should not lose sight of how our bodies have been disciplined by the academy, whether we resisted or not. Even the most radical scholars are still working in the academy. We must face this reality not as an indictment or reason to give up, but rather something that influences our work. Being aware of that influence can help us make the kinds of strides that we dream of.

Students must push themselves to engage with their own subjectivities as members of a community of learners to listen to all voices as deeply as possible before making a judgment or forming an opinion. Everyone in the room must be willing to be vulnerable in front of each other in order to interrogate knowledges, opinions, and each other. Paulo Freire suggests:

The radical committed to human liberation, does not become the prisoner of a "circle of certainty" within which reality is also imprisoned. On the contrary, the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them (39).

In order to create the conditions for engaging classroom experiences where students can offer, create, test, and interrogate knowledge, they must feel willing to take intellectual risks with each other. The teacher must feel this way as well. Failure, mistakes, and errors should be valued as much as agreements, successes, and strong arguments. Everyone in the room must be committed to making the space a safe, fun experience for everyone. Aya de Leon, who has worked primarily with young people in the Oakland Bay Area states, “Hip hop culture, with its emphasis on personal expression and noisy, high-energy interaction, requires a different level of chaos-tolerance on the part of the adults in charge” (5). In a rhetoric and composition classroom at the college level, this means bringing the noise and the funk to the wack, quiet classrooms where all the bodies in the room must sit, well-behaved as the teacher lectures. We must find ways of breaking the norms and makin’ noise all through the halls of the academy—if merely to remind ourselves that we are entire human beings in the room and not just floating heads consuming knowledge.

Similar to Kermit Campbell, I have busted a flow for my students before—mainly as a display of how much I like them. I’m not gonna lie: I got madd love for my students. Entering the classroom is the best part of the job for me because I get to meet, listen to, and learn from some of the most brilliant young minds around. I tell them that I got love for them, and I tell them often. I also look for ways to show them that I am willing to be vulnerable, and that I genuinely believe in the power of community building and hiphop in the classroom. In my classroom, we use the elements of hiphop to strive for the kind of learning experience I envision and theorize throughout this chapter.

It began with me rapping for students, which is detailed in the following case study. Since then, we have done more activities. We regularly work out of the cypher to practice freestyle rap sessions about something we read or a relevant topic. Out of that same cypher, we'll play music and dance in order to remind ourselves of the importance of our bodies in learning and to break down the barriers that prevent us from making community. With each experience, the possibilities for disrupting traditional classroom practices increase.

#### The Realest Thing I Eva Wrote

The decision to create, and perform a rap song occurred during a meeting with Qwo-Li Driskill, but the desire for this project extends years before this agreement. One of my dearest friends, poet Roberto Santos, freestyled often in the graduate office during our years studying at UTEP. Rob would invite me to join his cipher, but fear always deterred me. Anxieties about spitting rhymes off the top of my dome froze me from trying. One night, after too many drinks at our favorite bar, Rob randomly spat flows out into the air. Suddenly two more MCs showed up, firing up the cipher. Someone slammed a beat off a truck's bumper with the back of a lighter, and hiphop magically commanded the space of the parking lot. Clearly drunk, I started making a repeating "OoooooohhhhhWeeeeeee!" noise to coincide with the beat.

I hear Rob say something like, "And now I'm going to puff puff pass this to my homie Marcos," and I started rapping. Did it make any sense? I don't remember. Somewhere in the brief freestyle, I said a few clumsy, wack rhymes I memorized, then passed it back to Rob. The palpitations in my heart and the adrenaline running through

my veins sent me to a state of joy higher than any high in my life. I do not remember what I said, only that I said it, and that I participated in the cipher. Every day, I secretly fiend for returning to that space.

The creative process involved in the practice of the freestyle and the cipher creates the opportunity for expression, story, intellectual labor, and wit. The practices of the body, creating a beat, moving to the beat, speaking to the beat, and having the beat speak back to you create a moment where the temporary community of MCs, beat boxers, and spectators take over that space to perform transcendence. Thus, when Qwo-Li offered the opportunity to create a rap, I jumped at the chance despite any fears, and believe me, I was shit-scared every day leading up to my performance.

The process of creating the rap allowed for practice-based insight into certain rhetorical practices one can only experience through the body. For example, since high school, I wrote poems and listened to hiphop, so I held a certain kind of knowledge about what makes a good song. If one writes a song based on meter and rhyme scheme, like we are taught in school, one risks sounding like a formulaic novelty. We hear that rap in local television commercials and parodies. In fact, my first drafts of the song, “MWF” sounded very much like a high schooler reading a poem.

What changed the sound and flow of the song, besides much practice and revision, was the beat. I chose “Bergamot<sup>15</sup>,” a beat produced by producer/rapper Doom because after searching through beat collections, I found “Bergamot[’s]” pace and sound

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<sup>15</sup> I found it interesting that Doom would name all the beats on this 3-disk set after herbs. While I did not pursue this idea enough, there appears to be a sort of connection between his thematic use of herbs and Morales’s use of herbs and plants in *Remedios*, but that is for another paper.

to match my attitude: even tempered and friendly. When I started rapping over the beat, I found that a relationship exists between us: my voice moves in spaces where the beat allows, and vice versa. I ride the beat and the beat rides me. In places where we clash, it is my job to figure out how we can work together. This knowledge helps me understand how much more talented MCs know how to manipulate, trick, maneuver, and move the beat. Thus, within the actual composition of a song, certain rappers utilize what de Certeau would term as “tactics,” especially because “it [a tactic] does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing’” (xix). In other words the conventions of a rap song can and often are subverted by the tactics employed within the place of the song occupies. In my opinion, most rappers know how to follow the beat, and if you listen to my performance, I let the beat dictate my pace. Rappers like Lil’ Wayne can occupy the space of the beat in ways where they assume more control, but like de Certeau states, it is always temporary because the beat dominates the “place” of the song. This alone, I find invaluable in understanding rhetorical practices in hip-hop because it reflects on the complicated nature of how all these factors contribute towards making and transporting meaning beyond, but also including, words.

The content of the song comes from my desire to pursue, develop, and implement my own radical politics as a force against colonialism, white supremacy, heterosexism, queerphobia, racism, injustice, and oppression. A common thread running through all the material I covered over these weeks was the urge for contesting, rupturing, deconstructing, and challenging the academy to move away from Western-dominated

epistemic practices and building places that complicate what rhetoric means. Malea Powell, in talking about the colonial, genocidal nature of the academy against Native folks, states that while we may not go back in time and correct the atrocities of the past, “[b]ut we can begin, by consciously and explicitly positioning our work within this distasteful collection of narratives, to open space for the existing stories that might run counter to the imperial desires of traditional scholarship, stories that have been silenced by its hegemonic drone” (4). My conscious effort to base my rap song within traditions outside what the academy deems traditional, accepted, or better directly contests and subverts what counts as academic, thereby creating my very own rupture. Ruptures like these are important and vital towards creating viable spaces and places for people before, beyond, and outside the Greco-Roman tradition, which actively continues to erase, silence, discredit, and imprison marginalized people and their forms of rhetoric.

Orlando Taylor explains that within studies of African American rhetoric, until recently, “[e]ven such eminent scholars as H.L. Mencken, along with countless others, typically portrayed African American communication as being primitive, backward, and childlike” (x). He goes on to explain that critics traditionally have portrayed African American communication “as a form of mumbo-jumbo” which fell into the binary of either being forms of entertainment like minstrel shows or displays of “White supremacy and Black inferiority” (x). Ronald L. Jackson and Elaine B. Richardson build on Taylor’s arguments by pointing out that maintaining the Greco-Roman tradition at the center of rhetorical studies “leave[s] the less knowledgeable reader with the impression that European and European American culturally generic paradigms are fully sufficient

tools for examining culturally specific phenomena and artifacts” (XIII). Studying rhetorical practices *on their own terms* rather than by imposing the Greco-Roman tradition allows scholars to root and base rhetorical practices specifically within the communities in which they are practiced. Lipson and Binkley state, “If classical Athenian rhetorical principles continue to be reified as *the* (sic) rhetorical principles, then those whose grounding involves differing approaches remain seriously disadvantaged” (2). Without paying attention to alternative forms of rhetoric, we risk creating narrow, insufficient, and lacking work that often rehearses Western colonialism and dominance.

Reading work by scholars like Malea Powell and bell hooks asked me to question how much social responsibility I hold within my personal life and my profession, which are not mutually exclusive. Villanueva states that within the academy, and society in general, “there are attitudes from those we have revered over the centuries which we inherit, that are woven into the discourse that we inherit” (656). As a scholar of color, my practices should always/already interrogate and critique what keeps peoples and communities marginalized. At a university like Texas A&M, the urgency feels higher than ever.

My message comes from personal experience as a student of color and my experiences as a teacher, especially while teaching a predominantly conservative and white class for the very first time. I noticed the arrogance and superiority white males performed, while female students, regardless of racial and ethnic identification, would silence themselves. One student of color, an African American male, would speak up

frequently as soon as he aligned his politics with mine. A student who "passes" for white confided that he rarely reveals his ethnicity to others, but proudly wears a beard as a sign of his Lebanese heritage. He also battles against internalized self-hate created by family and friends telling him that as someone with dyslexia, he is not as intelligent as other people.

In witnessing all these scenarios, I wanted to write a song that spoke to those students feeling marginalized, oppressed, silenced, and doubted. In class discussions, the white males could not understand why words hurt people. Like Malea Powell, "I listen for unheard stories, counter-stories, which are usually silenced by the narratives that construct 'life' in these United States" (2). Two of my largest academic influences, Meredith Abarca, and Aurora Levins Morales, taught me about the medicinal power of our work as scholars. In the preface to *Remedios*, Morales states her work "move[s her] by an urgent sense that in order to invent new strategies and ways of living together [...] we must come to understand the nature of these blows..." (xxvii). She refers to the nature of abuse, torture, rape, marginalization, and other forms of violence against the women in her work. The chorus in my song is meant to emphasize the repetitive process of returning to these questions, complicating them, and moving towards deeper understanding.

This idea of teachers serving as sorts of healers creates an interesting moment where I discovered that I was working within several rhetorical traditions. Morales feels her duty is to develop medicinal work meant to heal traumas extending from the body, to the mind, to the heart, and the spirit. A similar tradition exists among many MCs



growing up on the East Coast, primarily New York, who believe they serve as teachers through their lyrics. Felicia Miyakawa's essay on Five Percenter rappers argues that many rappers who fall under the "conscious MC" genre use rhetorics developed by the Five Percenters, and traces a genealogy back through other movements of Black nationalism, race pride, and Afrocentricity. Miyakawa states, "The average rap fan probably is not aware of the doctrinal rhetoric embedded in Five Percenter lyrics, but it is not the average rap fan that the Nation hopes to reach" (176). Miyakawa explains that the aim of the Five Percenters is to provide spiritual enlightenment and self-knowledge by moving away from material worth. Miyakawa concludes:

Even though the commercialism of hip-hop music may seem to hide lofty motives, Black nationalist tropes have found a new voice through Five Percent rappers. Through the medium of hip-hop music, Five Percenters clearly show us their commitment to teaching knowledge of self to those who are lost, and take pride in the color of their skin and in their heritage. 'Knowledge of self' in this doctrine demands an awareness of history and civilization, a willingness to effectively teach 'truth' and lead the masses, and an interest in racial solidarity, three tropes deeply embedded in Black nationalist rhetoric. In other words, Black Nationalism is part and parcel of Five Percent doctrine. (183)

While I am careful not to appropriate or steal from this rhetorical tradition, as soon as read this essay, I started thinking about the hip-hop I listen to the most: Mos Def, Talib Kweli, Nas, and Wu-Tang Clan. The only other rappers I listen to more are Kanye West

and Tupac, but they also ground their work in Black Nationalism and Afrocentricity. Again, while I am not a Five Percenter, rappers utilizing Five Percenter theories and rhetorics have heavily influenced my political and ideological practices. Drawing upon earlier social justice movements and African American practices, Five Percenter rappers teach their audiences about the need for educating oneself about systemic white supremacy, pride in one's own community, and the need for resistance. They also shift understanding the education process by imagining the possibility for anyone to be a teacher to one's own community and audience.

The line "Twenty students 'n several forms of oppression" was the seed of the entire song. The first stanza reflects how ingrained these problems are, while "taking attendance" of them, rendering the invisible, visible. On speaking towards solutions to rupture ingrained colonialism in the academy, Victor Villanueva believes "it will be through our journals, the journals on library shelves or online, with people of color writing frankly, sympathetically about matters concerning racism, and all of us writing about what matters to students of color today" (652). Although Villanueva's specifically outlines published works in academic journals, I would build on that idea by stressing that through our rhetorical makings, we will effect change. Hip-hop studies demand that academic work must be inclusive of written texts, but must occur in a variety of forms. Otherwise, it will remain trapped in the confines of the academy. My performance as a moment of experience for those students will accomplish certain rhetorical aims that only the moment could provide. Because one of my students agreed to post my performance on *YouTube*, the moment enters a digital archive, which I could use in later

instruction. While certainly fulfilling our duty to publish textual rhetoric in journals, we should not ignore other forms.

The stanza transitions into the chorus where I connect the act of surviving as a marginalized student to how I have learned to resist and act. As an undergraduate student, I fell into a severe depression because I did not expect to face so much culture shock and racism. Through learning and teaching, I have developed a method for survival that has grown from my ability to make do in order to achieve my goals. The message is also meant to express the importance of building community with others as a vital life practice.

The second stanza critiques how the elitist, egotistical, and colonial pedagogy that dominates many classrooms hurts students of color, who are often fooled into going into deep debt in order to participate in a system promoting their tokenization and self-hate. This is primarily from my experiences as both a scholarship kid<sup>16</sup> and a holder of substantial student debt. This stanza connects to the final one because it expresses what I feel good pedagogy should do. It is revolutionary to create work based in love and healing. I learn this lesson over and over with each passing semester.

The final major aspect of this rhetorical making is the intent to perform for my students at the end of the summer session. Diana Taylor argues, “we learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, through cultural agency, and by making choices” (xvi). I understood early on that not every student (or viewer of the video) listens to

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<sup>16</sup> “Scholarship kid” alludes to Richard Rodriguez’s coinage of the term as describing minority students who are tracked from a young age as those designated as the ones who will be most successful in U.S. society. While I do not agree with Rodriguez’s endorsement of assimilation as the best way for Chicano/a students to excel in the United States, his explanation of how certain students are tokenized is useful when considering how many navigate through the academy.

hiphop as often or close as I do, but with their attention, I could offer knowledge. I also understood that after the performance, people may forget the lyrics to most of the song, but not the hook or the meaning behind the song. I knew this as soon as I created the lines “Monday, Wednesday, Friday/ Teaching Surviving.” It would not leave my mind, and my wife said the song kept playing in her head all day long. People who listen will practice this hook over and over again, allowing them their own performance, which will carry that cultural, political, and radical knowledge with them. This use of performance affirms Taylor when she says, “By taking performance seriously as a system of learning, storing, and transmitting cultural knowledge, performance studies allows us to expand what we understand by ‘knowledge’” (16). Within the boundaries of my performance, I also make an important rhetorical move that centers--through my body, my voice, my words, and the beat—students, scholars, and teachers of color. This shift speaks directly to both students of color and white students, but in different ways. My goal is for my students of color to experience validation, encouragement, and understanding towards their experiences. For white students, I believe this performance works towards helping them understand how they are implicated and complicit in the continued oppression of students of color. This may be a hope on my behalf, but Gilyard critiques conventional methods of the interrogation of race because they “[lead] students to pedestrian interpretations and constructions inside a bankrupt race-relations model, thus leading to a sort of King to King solution, students dreaming and all getting along—rhetorically” (48-9). Although my performance seems harmless, the lyrics make statements and ask important questions we normally fail to pursue out of fears and anxieties. The meaning

imbued in my performance offers more than one way of absorbing the stories and knowledge I offer.

When Qwo-Li and I decided on this project, I immediately thought about announcing it to my class. I mentioned it to them as a gambit, knowing that they would not let me off the hook. I knew the performance mattered for reasons beyond completing a requirement. If I want to research and teach hip-hop, I should not be afraid to practice its art forms or utilize this practice in the classroom. Also, I believe that in order to foster a strong sense of community in my classroom, I should not hide from vulnerability. I explained to my students that I chose to perform for them as a way of communicating how much I love them. Cheesy I know, but the rapport I developed with this class allowed us to challenge and rupture barriers too often present in academe. I intend on continuing this practice and implementing my hip-hop pedagogy in the classroom. After I write a few more songs to beats by others, I will eventually move towards learning to make my own beats in order to further understand the rhetoricity of sounds.

#### Conclusion

Kendra Hamilton, in reflecting on the development of hip-hop scholarship since the early 1990s, states that hip-hop scholarship has spent much of its time legitimizing itself as a field for academic inquiry. A sizeable chunk of hip-hop scholarship centers rap music (specifically lyrics) and the record industry. Hamilton sees the current moment as a pivotal one for opening more avenues of hip-hop thought. While interviewing Kyra Gaunt about the future of hip-hop studies, Gaunt states, “I believe that makes hip-hop an area where we might see theory and practice coming together inside African American

intellectualism, where we might see an attempt to develop innovative approaches to using hip-hop as a method for organizing African American youth around issues that are important to their survival” (35). The current moment offers an exciting time in hip-hop scholarship as innovative and ground breaking scholars bring a hip-hop centered epistemology to the academy.

At the heart of this dissertation, and my academic work in general, is the desire to build communities. As a scholar, I want to build bridges and alliances across disciplines, scholars, and knowledges as a way of interrogating injustice and oppression. As a teacher, I want to do the same in my classroom, especially with students. I want students to walk out of my class having built meaningful relationships with myself and fellow students as well as carry with them knowledges that help them use rhetorical practices for doing good in the world—however they choose to define what “good” means. As a hip-hop head, and a member of the hip-hop community, I want to build theories that honor the people, voices, traditions, and rhetorics from which hip-hop culture draws in a respectful and ethical manner that always remembers the bodies that are present whenever I use hip-hop in my work. As a person, I want to contribute to my communities in ways that foster growth, success, and happiness, primarily by adding more voices to this theoretical cypher I have built for myself that keeps growing larger and larger each time I complete another cycle. All of these wishes, dreams, and desires are absolutely a part of the disciplinary implications of this dissertation.

Understanding the art of making do as a set of complex practices rooted in African and Indigenous histories of resistance and survival argues how non-Western

rhetorics are practiced extensively in spite of social and material deprivation. Racial, colonial, and white supremacist oppression may try to erase and destroy people of color, but these oppressed communities find ways to make meaning, write, communicate, and produce art. In a hip-hop context, the art of making do continues the tradition of resistance in the search for liberation and social justice. The founders of hip-hop combined the knowledge available in their cultural memories and vocational training to transform technologies and spaces into the elements of hip-hop. Hip-hop rhetoricians continue these traditions by looking at material objects, knowledges, and spaces as multivalent and always in flux. Just like a cardboard box can go from trash to a technology for breakdancing, today's hot technologies can be repurposed, redirected, and recycled to serve another purpose.

The ability to look at objects and knowledges as something that can be changed to serve one's needs continues to be an invaluable skill that deserves considerable study. Although hip-hop has always carried a social justice concern since its inception, many of the communities it represents and seeks to serve continue suffering from poverty, crime, drug epidemics, socioeconomic marginalization, racism, and other injustices. The art of making do as a theory reminds communities that the weapons to combat oppression are made best at home. Drawing upon what is available offers a good starting point towards healing communities, resisting oppression, and creating the conditions for agency. The ability to build communities and create and sustain alliances among many communities presents the possibilities for collective struggles for liberation.

The second chapter offers a critical understanding of how bodies are labeled against their approval by dominant social forces. The ways that our subjectivities are used as grounds for social control and discipline remind us that the everyday plays a strong role in how we may live our lives. Through the art of making do, the hip-hop generation has not only transgressed but transformed the ways that non-white bodies are seen. Through hip-hop stylin' practices that include clothing, accessories, and performance, people can refashion their subjectivities and imagine something different, something fierce, and something transgressive.

Building off the ability to reimagine, thinking of the role of temporal rhetorics in cooking and deejay practices offers the ability for people to redefine spaces in the moment. The moment of cooking, deejaying, dancing, and eating provide nourishment of the body. Considering that food and music have played essential roles in helping feed and build social justice movements, we need to pay more attention to how these temporal-based rhetorics can be some of the most powerful ways of fostering inclusion, meaning making, and change.

Hip-hop rhetorics are often concerned with wrecking spaces for the purpose of provoking a reaction that is meant to call attention to something. Under the lens of technical communication, we see that hip-hop rhetorics achieve—sometimes more effectively—the ability to share technical knowledge. Technology, at its heart, is about sharing knowledge about technique, and hip-hop technical communicators don't sweat the technique by making do with available resources such as blank walls, discarded technologies, community networks, and street teams to achieve their goals. While the



dominant Western tradition keeps people of color marginalized from technology and knowledges, the hip-hop generation finds its own way by stayin' on its grind and hustlin' to get ahead.

In a sense, all people make do constantly since the ideal resources and knowledges are not always available. I see this in my students' work when they do not have all the answers, but find a way to make it happen. I have seen this throughout my young academic career as my fellow first-generation, lonely academic fellow gangstas traverse the academy and all its pitfalls by making do with what we got to challenge the academy. The real gangstas in the academy are the ones who remind us that when they want, they can roll up and put a stop to our work. Since I was an undergrad, I felt the heat of the academy. I know it's been trying to keep a good Chicano down by telling him that he don't know enough, he ain't smart enough, and he just don't got what it takes. I'm still here. My peeps are still here. And although the more we struggle, the less of us are at the higher levels, and the gangstas pay more attention to us, we won't back down. We know we got plenty at hand to bust under, through, over, whatever it takes. We got the community behind us. We ain't scared.

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