

Chapter 12. Reflections on a Hip-Hop DJ Methodology

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What are Black digital writing practices? What does it mean to center on Black digital writing epistemologies when engaging within discourses of writing? These two questions serve as the foundation to my research portfolio and have at their core the desire to participate in the conversations held by scholars such as Adam J. Banks and Regina Duthely in claiming that Black culture has a history of remixing and reimagining writing practices technologically, digitally, and aesthetically, and such remixes and reimaginings are worth our serious attention. But what does it mean to take Black digital writing seriously? What does it mean to center on Black digital writing methodologies in institutions that are not often receptive to the same Blackness in which these methodologies and methods originate? My wager is that serious attention to Black digital methodologies and methods requires a commitment to praxis; it demands a relationship where Black theories and critiques are reflexively remixed and realized through Black practices and actions. It is my hope that by the end of this chapter, readers join me in thinking about the ways in which a Black digital writing methodology might live out its beautiful Black destiny by building space for further Black intellectual activity to impact further digital writing scholarship and participation.

In this chapter, I reflect on my experiences utilizing a Hip-Hop based methodology within research situated on the intersections of race and digital writing to explore issues of ethics and visibility when conducting culturally sensitive digital writing scholarship. Specifically, I consider the complexities of a DJ-based Hip-Hop methodology within a project that analyzes writing studies discourses and argues that the Hip-Hop DJ offers a culturally attentive position from which we might continue realizing digital writing practices. I first investigate Hip-Hop as a methodology within digital writing scholarship, noting what types of questions the culture seeks to address as well as situate myself within Hip-Hop to illustrate my proximity to the culture. I then reflect on the practice of theorizing through the Hip-Hop DJ to define and unpack mixing, remixing, and sampling as digital writing research methods. I end the chapter with implications for considering Hip-Hop DJ digital writing practices as valuable sites of inquiry, thinking specifically about the DJ's potential to transform digital writing pedagogy and digital writing research ethics.

Hip-Hop as Methodology Within Digital Writing

My dissertation, *Breaks, Samples, and Sites for Cyphers: Remixing the Administration of Writing*, sought to exist alongside scholarship that defines Hip-Hop as an entry point to rhetoric and digital writing as I argued for Hip-Hop methodologies by looking towards the Hip-Hop DJ as a model for administering writing. Specifically, I argued that the field should seriously consider DJing as a type of writing as it demands that writing practices be theorized, taught, and practiced through technology and identity. My main task was to uncover the field's mishandling of technology and identity through assumptions of what one might call "neutral" writing systems that ignore the impacts of the bodies and technologies involved, when Hip-Hop specifically demands an embodied definition of writing.

To get a little more specific, my project utilized what I called a Hip-Hop discourse analysis, a remixed research method realized through the analytical and performative functions of the Hip-Hop DJ to both analyze the relationship between identity and technology within a text and extend the analysis to imagine new opportunities and new possibilities. My analyses also centered on practices that resist hegemony and called for continual recognition of and resistance towards the power relations that inform institutional identities, interpretations of spacious programmatic definitions of writing, and articulations of writing curricula that are critical and inclusive. Rather than focusing on a relationship between writing, identity, and technology that is rooted in a view of education as a tool that prepares bodies to be commodities for production, my project looked towards the aesthetic nature of Hip-Hop, described by Emery Petchauer to be, "the emic sensibilities, cultural logics, and habits of body and mind that are at work in hip-hop expressions and practitioners" (6), as a potential site to remix and redefine that relationship, ultimately demanding that we change the roles, responsibilities, and practices of and within writing pedagogy and writing scholarship.

This project was imagined out of dissonance; since the way I experienced the field of rhetoric and writing studies was messy and often clouded. The definitions of writing provided by the discipline seemed incomplete, which led to conversations about writing feeling hollow. So, my project was partly one of healing, as I knew that I felt a connection to writing spaces, but my identity within those spaces was fractured. The dissertation became an opportunity to set some of those fractures to see what the whole frame might be. The same forms and functions that the field gave to writing also existed in other aspects of my life, but those aspects did not have the same presence in scholarly discourses. My work simultaneously became a bridge to connect those areas that I was disciplined to believe were separate. Black culture largely, and Hip-Hop culture specifically were the spaces that were disconnected from conversations of rhetoric and writing, and I was grateful for scholars in our field such as Elaine Richardson, Gwendolyn Pough, Kermit E. Campbell, David Green, and Todd Craig who have done the work of exploring the connections between Hip-Hop and rhetoric as it acted as a

blueprint, informing me that such connections can exist. My mission was to then find, name, and bridge some of the specific aspects of my own Hip-Hop identity to my connections with rhetoric and writing. The first task in realizing those connections through my research was to plot out and argue for methodologies that originated from the cultures I identified with. An especially important task, since a main purpose was to recover and reclaim the logics and practices within Black culture as already intellectual and already complex. So, I started by researching, remixing, and unpacking a Hip-Hop methodology.

As I just mentioned, our field has amazing Hip-Hop scholars of whom I'm indebted to since they laid the foundation for many aspiring Hip-Hop rhet/comp scholars like myself, but I'm of the opinion that scholars in education have a little more Hip-Hop methodology swag from which our field can learn from when thinking about Hip-Hop's transformative potential in the classroom. Many conversations I've had or witnessed that try to think through Hip-Hop and writing within our field often slip into the realm created when curious teachers and scholars ask the famous "what does this look like in my classroom" question, which assumes Hip-Hop can be neatly placed within current writing curricula, but I love how some Hip-Hop Based Education (HHBE) scholars disrupt those ideals. HHBE scholars center on Hip-Hop's potential to transform the foundational and fundamental aspects of academia, most of which stems from an understanding that Hip-Hop's aesthetics can speak to students' life experiences and cultural logics (Hill; Hill and Petchauer; Love; Jennings and Petchauer). A turn to the aesthetic recognizes that Hip-Hop is more than a culture that produces texts to be analyzed according to the logics of other epistemologies (Hill and Petchauer). Rather, Hip-Hop itself is a methodological force from which practices are informed and through which knowledges are built.

In utilizing Hip-Hop as a methodology, I had to acknowledge and work through popular definitions. Hip-Hop has a global appeal and every clash and interaction inevitably changes the culture. But my methodology had to acknowledge the lived realities of the Black and Brown youth who first imagined and realized the culture. To do that, I had to focus once again on what an aesthetic approach to Hip-Hop scholarship means by directly challenging popular definitions of the culture.

Rap music has historically stood out as the metonym for Hip-Hop culture within the academy (Hill and Petchauer). While it has undoubtedly been the most marketable aspect of the culture, which would then make it the easiest accessed aspect of the culture and in turn make it a window in which a larger public might view Hip-Hop, rap is only one aspect that has its own idiosyncrasies. As Hill and Petchauer argue, this narrow view of Hip-Hop overlooks the role of knowledge within the culture and limits insights on the ways in which the culture's boundaries are continually challenged and expanded (2). The move towards an aesthetic understanding of Hip-Hop thus challenges scholars to move beyond literary analysis of rap songs and into spaces where, for example, we might question what

the logics and stylistics of rap itself suggest about processes of identification and location within social structures (Petchauer). Continuing this example, rather than focus exclusively on the *narrative* of urban Black adolescence presented in Kendrick Lamar's "GOOD Kid, MAAD City," an aesthetic emphasis asks that we engage the Black tonal semantics layered within the album to investigate aural aspects within verses that extend from legacies of Black rhetorical practice. This type of emphasis can highlight a compelling story or social statement while simultaneously creating a sonic landscape for listeners to inhabit, both of which are then accomplished according to the logics and practices of the culture that created the content.

H. Samy Alim's discussion of emic practices within Hip-Hop studies also cannot be ignored within conversations of a Hip-Hop methodology. In referencing James G. Spady's term hiphopography, Alim calls for Hip-Hop scholarship from an emic perspective to ensure scholarship that is for the advancement and edification of the culture (970). For Alim, scholarship strictly from an etic perspective is harmful to the culture's sense of identity through its over-simplification and reduced complexities (970). As such, a necessary practice in utilizing a Hip-Hop methodology is to state where exactly I fit in within hip-hop in order to illustrate my positionality in the culture.

Hip-Hop has always been a part of my home life ecology, starting back to my pops always playing west-coast rap records like Dr. Dre and Above The Law when I was young. Those younger years would also include some immersion into the likes of artists such as A Tribe Called Quest, Wu-Tang Clan, Outkast, Nas, and Jay-Z by way of my older cousin and brothers, but it wasn't until the high school and college years that I was able to start making personal connections. The lyrics would start to hit a little harder, and the tempos seemed to sync with my heartbeat more often. But I never really had the opportunity to claim that I was a practitioner in the way that I wanted to. I've written rhymes before, freestyled with friends, been involved in a few informal dance offs, but couldn't really say that I was a practitioner. H. Samy Alim does note that participants do not always have to own a traditional role of artist since the majority of those who interact with Hip-Hop, and in those interactions continually (re)create Hip-Hop, do so as they go about their everyday lives (Alim). Alim's statement sums up my location within Hip-Hop, yet I still was eager to deepen my engagement. Call it intellectual curiosity, or simply just a desire to do more.

Fortunately, situations led to an opportunity to learn the craft of the DJing, initiating the occasion to further explore my location and identity within hip-hop. My first official interaction with DJing then began:

The turntables are set up in a back room, walls painted dark blue. Records fill up most of the space. Of the records, I only recognize a few. That speaks to the depth of DJ Alias's collection, but also to the limit of my own knowledge. DJ Alias is a local

DJ who spins for my cousin, a local artist emcee, Big Meridox. Meridox introduced us, and Alias was gracious enough to introduce me to the art form. Throughout my time, we reviewed turntable vocabulary such as the platter, slipmats, headshells, cartridges, and stylus, then talk through the vocabulary of the mixer, such as faders, treble, bass, and cue settings. The first task is juggling, which is looping to the same part of a record back and forth between the two turntables, all while keeping in the appropriate cadence.

DJ Alias picks a song I'm familiar with, Method Man's "Bring the Pain," and I officially take my first step in DJing. I try to match the cadence each time I juggle, but I lack dexterity on the turntable and occasionally bump the record when I should be gliding. The bumps mess up the stylus placement. I get frustrated and turn everything off to reset. That's when DJ Alias gives me some of the most important advice when it comes to DJing, "Regardless of what happens, you have to keep the party going."

I still have yet to go public with my DJing, but my time spent learning the craft was and continues to be informative and influential in imagining the potentials for digital writing when realized and practiced through Hip-Hop. It is from this experience of learning the craft that my methodology for digital writing comes to life. It is the moment where my relationships with both Hip-Hop and writing scholarship collide, positioning me in a sort of liminal space; I was raised in Hip-Hop, but I was disciplined through the academy. Rather than choose one over the other, the methodology had to be one of synthesizing and mixing.

A Hip-Hop methodology, one that centers on process of identification through methods that are sensitive to social locations, thus asks us to synthesize and re-imagine. It asks that we think digitally by going beyond conceptions of Hip-Hop as a trendy lesson or set of practices for surface-level interrogations about writing definitions and programmatic articulations and into spaces of networks, mixes, and assemblages. Through this methodology, my goal was to explore what happens when we ask writing to play in time with the beat established from cultural difference. I ask, what happens when you throw some 808 beats with classical music and see if that mixing can change our conceptions of how writers participate and interact with the mix. How would "Canon in D" sound if we looped the intro a couple of times, sped the tempo up and threw in some boom-bap? How might that change what we know about writing? How might that change what we know about discipline and race? How might that change what we know about culture and digital writing?

A Hip-Hop methodology offers an opportunity to explore these sorts of questions. This approach to methodology allows a specific type of leeway that often

isn't granted through other approaches in that Hip-Hop has historically favored purposeful selection. We give credit where credit is due, and I attempted to do my due diligence in the naming and analyzing, but the ultimate test in whether my methodology is sound rests in the same way anyone measures Hip-Hop performances and productions: Was it dope, or nah? Did it give me life, or did I barely recognize it? Does it inspire, or will it be forgotten?

Theorizing the Practices of the DJ: A Definition of the Mix, the Remix, and the Sample

The moment when the dancers really got wild was in a song's short instrumental break, when the band would drop out and the rhythm section would get elemental. Forget melody, chorus, songs—it was all about the groove, building it, keeping it going. Like a string theorist, Herc zeroed in on the fundamental vibrating loop at the heart of the record, the break.

– Chang (79)

My Hip-Hop methodology demanded that my approach to rhetoric and writing studies place the concept of digital writing as a point of entry into all discussions of rhetoric and writing, rather than considering digital writing as a derivative or a subsection to a larger Writing studies (emphasis on the capital W). Heavily influenced by Adam J. Banks' *Digital Griots*, my work considers DJing as writing,¹ which recognizes that conceptions of writing should “consider what the DJ offers . . . when we move beyond a few mentions of individual writing practices completely lifted from context, from tradition, from social, cultural, political, and technological networks” (153). Banks' argument for DJing as writing recognizes that our scholarly and pedagogical pursuits are already taking place in a multimedia age, and to talk of rhetoric and writing without considering the impacts of the technological and multimodal would be to decontextualize our work. Considering DJing as writing is to acknowledge the realities of our multimedia world, and that demands that we take seriously the writing practices that have already been theorizing and practicing through the digital, through multimodality, and through technology. Like Banks' work, my usage of a Hip-Hop methodology suggests that Black and Brown people *been* doing the work of digital writing, and it's about time the rest of the field catch up and pay attention to lessons that our elders have been teaching us.

After having established the questions that a larger Hip-Hop methodology is seeking to unpack, as well as establishing a Hip-Hop methodology as a necessary

1. Banks uses the phrase “DJing as writing AND writing as DJing” to illustrate a conflation of the two. My research purposely only uses DJing as writing in recognition of my history as being disciplined as a writing scholar before learning the language of the turntable. I will return to this point when considering the implications for my research.

and legitimate approach to research in digital writing, my next task was to illustrate how Hip-Hop DJ practice and methods do the work previously mentioned. All of what I argued about a Hip-Hop methodology came from a cyclical relationship between practice and theory; I sampled, mixed, and remixed a Hip-Hop methodology through my own practices learning the craft of DJing, through attending DJ sets in my community, and through immersing myself in scholarship invested in DJ logics. When I practiced and developed my own DJ skills, I would sit and reflect on the ways in which I try to work my way into a mix, think about my process for finding a break and consider how those sorts of logics synthesized or disrupted what I thought about writing. While at DJ sets, I would pay attention to the energy emitted in each mix, scratch, sample, and think about the ways in which DJs made the mix accessible to all the participants. And when working through scholarship, I would try to find the language and images to help me make sense of it all. And through these steps, I found strong connections to notions of the mix and the sample as concepts to help realize my bridge between Hip-Hop and rhetoric and writing.

A brief note answering the question why DJs and not any other Hip-Hop practitioner: while a variety of Hip-Hop identities offer critical insights into rhetorical practices and composing processes, I was more interested in the Hip-Hop DJ's functions as writing facilitator and manager. DJs present spacious definitions of writing and foster interactive writing situations where a multitude of people might collaborate and create, a practice which might make the act of administering, teaching, and researching writing more critical of difference. These specific functions also provide occasions to craft strong arguments about the ways in which DJs approach texts as non-linear and networked, approaches necessary when discussing writing in our digital worlds.

While DJs share logics and purposes across genres, it is the *practice* of Hip-Hop DJs situated within Black rhetorical tradition that sets them apart from other genres. The ways in which they enter each writing/composition occasion and the manners in which they interact with the crowd differ from other styles; those practices are worth emphasizing as they have social and political implications that cannot be assumed of every type of DJ. But as I mentioned, two specific practices of the Hip-Hop DJ, the mix and the sample, set them apart from their contemporaries, and unpacking those two practices not only illustrated the nuance of the Hip-Hop DJ, but also provided some moments to think more critically about DJing as writing.

Defining the Mix & Remix

One of the central assumptions within my research is that the practices of the DJ offer a critical position to reconsider the cultural and racial implications within digital writing. Hip-Hop's origin story offers plenty of insights as to how legacies of racialized oppression led to the creation of the culture, in which case Hip-

Hop itself might be defined as an embodiment of racialized resistance. But, like Joseph Schloss, my work argued that the historical emphasis of Hip-Hop that highlights oppression is just one part of the story. While the social and political situation undoubtedly was the catalyst from which the culture was realized, it is also important to note the ways in which the methods and practices themselves reflect an evolution of digital writing practices originating from Black and Latinx rhetorical legacies, practices which themselves have rich rhetorical histories.

One such discussion of a practice originating within Black rhetorical production suggests that the location of the Hip-Hop DJ exhibits complex mediation practices known as mixing and remixing, critical digital writing practices based in Black rhetorical practice that are necessary to question hegemonic ideologies. As a part of my purpose was to forward the histories of Black digital writing practices, my initial step in working through and understanding of mixing was to see what scholarship had to say to ground and contextualize. Through an investigation of Black cultural production and sound technologies, Alexander Weheliye theorizes the concept of “the mix” as a model of Black temporality and cultural practice, claiming that DJs manage a duality that is found in both the more concrete mixing of sonic information and in the mixing of DJ’s expectations and practices with those of the audience (89). It is within the managing of this duality that DJs illustrate tactics to bring together competing-yet-complementary beats as their weaving together of separate sonic material creates a location in which all associated identities might interact (92). For Weheliye, this mixing act challenges discourses of Western modernity in a Bhabhaian sense through disrupting grand narratives of reason and progress by adding marginalized cultures back into the mix, an act that then forces us to rethink the (im)possibility of universal and homogenizing discourses (23).

I want to emphasize here that the definition of mixing presented by Weheliye doesn’t ask for or produce some new, never seen or heard of type of writing practice. My work seeks to push back against the idea that conversations of digital writing must always be fresh and new, and instead I argue that Black and Brown rhetorical histories and legacies *been* doing the digital writing work. It is more so to say that we should take the practice of mixing seriously as a type of writing, understanding that mixing forces us to rethink linearity within texts. It asks us to pay attention to the competing-yet-complimentary as we write for a purpose of creating interactive locations. These are the sorts of lessons that we might unpack when we take mixing seriously as a digital writing practice.

The term “remix” is utilized in various ways and for multiple purposes both within and outside of Hip-Hop, and for that reason it was necessary to clarify how exactly I thought through the term in the context of my project. As one who relates to Hip-Hop from the 2000s, my understanding of remix was heavily influenced by Diddy and the Bad Boy Family who presented records that relied on knowledge of the original track or previous mix in order to deeply engage with the remix. I’m thinking specifically of the “Special Delivery,” “Bad Boys for

Life,” and “I Need a Girl Parts 1 & 2,” remixes, where part of the experience was in both valuing what was done before and dissecting what was new, all while staying within the same plane in which both records reside. Diddy and the Bad Boy family were able to mainstream and make “remix” into a product that is accessible to a larger audience, but my work is more so fascinated with the process that precedes. For these remixes to be visible and accessible to a larger public, there must be some form of analysis that breaks down and makes visible the energy that defines the track in the first place. Once that energy is known, options and opportunities follow. Expanding on that energy to imagine spacious and inclusive definitions of writing is the goal of the Hip-Hop-based analysis presented in my investigation of digital writing.

Defining the Sample

Joseph Schloss presents one of the more comprehensive investigations of the process of sampling and beat-making practices that are foundational to DJ culture. While Schloss is more so interested in the practices of Hip-Hop producers, his investigations do note that practices of Hip-Hop producers’ stem from the logics and legacies of the DJ, in which case most of what producers do is informed by DJ practices (37). The biggest difference is found in the context; Hip-Hop producers similarly sample, loop, and mix sounds in the creation of a track to be recorded, while DJs utilize the same techniques for live functions. Schloss names four specific aesthetic values that guide the process of sampling: understanding the structure of a beat, naming the internal characteristics of individual samples, thinking through the relationships of samples when they are juxtaposed, and understanding the shared assumptions and context cues that imbue any sample choice with significance.

As rhythm is arguably one of the most important aspects within Hip-Hop, the practice of understanding beat structuring stands as a foundational requirement in DJ practice. Schloss suggests that Hip-Hop compositions are often cyclical, in which case practitioners would make use of looping to repeat aspects of sampled tracks for an intended effect (136). The loop then defines the underlying rhythmic structure from which any sort of movement or deviations must interact (136). Schloss also highlights looping within the legacy of African American rhetorical practice, naming it to be a form of signifying.² Looping as a practice that helps realize underlying structure thus also reflects a rhetorical prominence through its extension to Black rhetoric (138).

The next two aesthetic values (naming internal characteristics of samples and thinking through samples relationships when juxtaposed) build off each other

2. Mitchell-Kernan (qtd. in Alim) defines signifying as the practice of encoding messages or meanings within natural conversations, typically through elements of indirections.

through a recognition of interactivity. Schloss connects the interactivity of samples to legacies of and affinities for collage within African American art practices. Within these practices, the vibe of the beat begins to unfold as the DJ or producer adds in parts. Schloss quotes collage artist Romare Bearden to make parallels between collaging and sampling, as Bearden states, “You have to begin somewhere . . . so you put something down. Then you put something else with it, and then you see how that works . . . Once you get going . . . all sorts of things begin to pop up. Sometimes something just falls into place, like piano keys that every now and then just seem to be right where your fingers happen to come down” (153). Sampling, like collaging, recognizes a unique form of textual agency by disrupting ideas of the subject as the sole creator from which discourse flows. Instead, it recognizes a reciprocal relationship where samples inform the mix just as much as they are informed by the mix.

Lastly, a definition of sampling must take into consideration the context in which a beat will exist. Schloss mentions that the choices of producers, and their successes or failures, is dependent on a complex mixing of variables. On one hand, the beat-making process is competitive; producers want to flaunt their skill as they participate in Hip-Hop’s legacies of toasting and dueling. On the other hand, they want to make sure their compositions are digestible for audiences who may not be as interested in the aural battles between producers. The act of sampling might then be described as highly rhetorical in that it requires recognition and negotiation across contexts through understanding that one choice cannot satisfy all parties, yet each choice should be purposeful.

The Hip-Hop DJ can set themselves apart from other styles of DJing through practices that are rooted in Black and African tradition. Almost every DJ is involved in some aspect of mixing, but Hip-Hop DJs, as Weheliye mentions, ask us to rethink the (im)possibility of universal discourses through their play with time and audience expectation. Sampling is not unique to Hip-Hop DJs, but the way in which Hip-Hop DJs transform sampling into an art is reminiscent of African and African American collaging practices, all of which are founded within a Black rhetorical excellence. As a practice placed in a Black cultural tradition, my discussion on Hip-Hop DJ methodology argued that Hip-Hop DJing is an illustration of digital writing that has the capacity to critique discourses of whiteness and cultural exclusion since it was created within the very discourses in which it seeks to be critical.

Tying it all Together: DJing as Writing/ DJing as Digital Research Methods

My research was a practice in digital writing informed by the logics of Hip-Hop; it placed the DJ as a writer, turned writing theory and scholarship into tracks, and allowed for the logics of the turntable to analyze, mix and remix in order to forward different findings, conclusions, and implications. My goal was to place

competing-yet-complementary tracks on separate turntables, mixing them all together to create a space where multiple identities can participate and interact. I wanted to find and sample the proverbial break within the scholarship, looping it and adding it to the mix. And I wanted to utilize a Hip-Hop based digital writing practice to illustrate the value in digital writing practices rooted in Black rhetoric.

The results of these methods had some interesting takeaways that I wish to unpack. I first want to acknowledge and highlight a research methods connection within this type of digital writing scholarship. The methods of sampling, mixing, and remixing position the Hip-Hop DJ as a discourse analyst as they often take note of the ways in which bodies are informed by and in turn inform the discourses that surround them. The discourse analysis operates through the DJ's presence as digital writers with the notions of sampling, mixing, and remixing suggesting that words exist across time and space, and the logics of the turntable and the mixer invite words and ideas to "become a series of interwoven networks [and a] mixture of fragments used to create a new whole" (Duthely 352). Based on this connection, I label my method Hip-Hop discourse analysis, and recognize it as a digital research method due its guiding logics and practices based in DJ practice.

I also want to acknowledge that my Hip-Hop and digital writing inspired read and remix is just one type of intervention situated within a specific culture that operates within its own negotiated logics and practices. But Hip-Hop is complex, and the way I utilize it cannot be the same way that everyone within the culture understands it. For one, my analysis and remix operated almost exclusively from DJ logics when Hip-Hop has a mixing and blending of styles, practices, and performances that all embody the culture. An analysis situated within emcee practices or graffiti logics all share Hip-Hop as a guiding discourse, but the specifics of the methods would have to change, which might then lead to differences in the outcomes (Hoch). I consider that to be a potential, instead of a weakness as it suggests that even Hip-Hop as the guiding force for this intervention has a multitude of possibilities that rely on one's positionality within the culture.

It is also important to reiterate that I am not a master DJ by any means; it would be more accurate to say that I'm still a beginner learning the fundamentals as I continually develop my own DJ identity. And while I loved Hip-Hop prior to becoming a scholar, I was disciplined in rhetoric and writing before I started learning to administer the mix. As a result, and as I've previously stated, my theories very much operate from the position of DJing as writing, rather than writing as DJing, an important distinction I think necessary to make clear. I agree with Adam J. Banks that DJing as writing and writing as DJing can be interchangeable when we focus on the practical application of the two (153). My distinction of DJing as writing instead of writing as DJing is only to signal that my reading and analysis comes from the acknowledgment that I've been disciplined in writing studies before learning the language of the turntable. As a result, my approach to this research places writing as the dependent variable.

The Complexity of Digital Writing in Pedagogy

An important finding that my DJ analysis uncovered within current writing pedagogy discourse is the need for a more critical handling of digital writing when considering the complexities of identity and technology. My analysis illustrated that what is often imagined within the writing classroom is a disembodied and static definition of composition, one that originates with the letter and is now evolving toward the digital realm, with “digital” only signifying the screen. To compose would then be to constantly move towards either the printed page or the screen with a specific affinity for the alphanumeric.

However, the practices of the DJ suggest that writing is a little more complex than that since it involves a constant mediation between identity and technology. Duthely suggests that hip-hop culture rejects a linear model of writing, instead arguing that Hip-Hop’s handling of multimodality might give us much to reconsider when we talk about the creative potential of digital writing techniques (352). Banks and Weheliye talk through DJs as illustrating this complexity, claiming that they recreate discourses of culture and technology through their composing practices, becoming a model of multimedia writing grounded in rhetorical excellence (28-29; 23). Banks specifically emphasizes the stakes for Black students as he notes that an emphasis of the DJ’s culturally based multimedia writing practices might help develop approaches in, “composition theory and practice that no longer consigns [B]lack students, writers, or scholars to token ‘colored day at the carnival’ status nor consigns digital theory, rhetoric, and writing as [W]hite by default . . .” (27). As we continue to think of and theorize through digital writing methodologies, I argue that we take Banks’ purpose seriously for the sake of those students who, through being subjected to homogeneous writing definitions and applications, are forced to culturally repress when discussions of digital writing could be an invitation for theory and exploration.

Further, I find it important that this implication is not forwarding Hip-Hop as the final solution. I rather am arguing against totalizing solutions, acknowledging that any one cultural location cannot account for the intersecting identities that inhabit digital writing definitions and applications. Both Banks and Weheliye’s theories of the DJ as cultural and technological composer may think through Black cultural tradition and production, but neither are exclusively Hip-Hop. DJing as a writing practice shifts when its cultural location shifts, illustrating a need for more DJ writing theory to understand how identity and culture impact writing practices. However, my explorations of DJ practice suggest that the cultural locations of those involved in the mix matters, especially those that have historically been denied access and visibility, and each needs the ability to positively impact the overall vibe. To that end, digital writing scholarship would do well to continue thinking through the complexities of culture and location in defining and articulating the parameters for writing.

A Question of Ethics

And then there's the conversation of ethics. There is a common practice in Black culture to be guarded and protective of what it is that we build and what aspects we choose to share out. And those practices are well-founded and well-understood when one considers histories of colonization and appropriation. It makes sense when we acknowledge that Black culture is loved more than the Black people who've created it and the Black bodies who continually live it. So, the questions arise as to whether it is even possible or responsible to bring in Hip-Hop and Blackness when trying to imagine digital writing scholarship when there remains the constant threat of cultural erasure and appropriation. We can make the argument that we must do better to serve Black and Brown students who are not imagined or represented in digital writing scholarship, or that we must call out white supremacy as a guiding logic in research and scholarship in rhetoric and writing. I would argue those are valid and immediate reasons. But my work has taught me that I must also pay attention to the effects and not just the intention. When sharing this work, it is almost always met with positivity and what I would call a generative curiosity, but it always falls to this question: "This sounds fun, but how can I use this in my classroom?"

The issue that I have with that question is that I often translate it to mean "how can I seem like I'm doing this type of work while still upholding my homogeneous view of writing?" Or, potentially worse, it translates to "how can I colonize your cultural approach and add it to my toolkit, repurposing it in ways that I see fit?" I'm not suggesting that anyone who has ever asked that question had a colonizing mentality; some ask that question with a genuine desire to forward non-marginalizing and anti-racist scholarly and pedagogical practices. But the effect often treats these Black intellectual endeavors as a subsection to the main field, or as an additive to foundational conversations. I argue we should do better.

And I think that's the beauty of centering on Black methodologies. It provides the occasion to center on Black scholarship by remixing the knowledge bases from which we justify our methods and draw our conclusions. It makes plain the claim that Blackness is intellectual. It suggests that claims of validity can be justified according to Black means, and that we should resist the need to acknowledge Black methods and methodologies as only visible and legitimate once they pass the test for white intellectual visibility and validity.

But the question remains, considering how deeply committed and engrained academia is in whiteness, is it still ethical to bring in Black culture when there is the constant threat of appropriation and erasure? Black culture and Black people are already there. And I have learned that a major issue is trying to pretend as if the oppressive boundaries that academia created and continue to uphold are normal and natural. My research has given me opportunities to rethink the sorts of methodology we utilize to explain and justify our work, and I would argue that the field has been assuming neutrality in methodology. Our cultural

orientations suggest that there are so many ways to have these conversations, and all these methods have within them justifications and ideals that, if we pay serious attention to, will not only shift the way we conduct our research, but also transform what we can even imagine as being a purpose of that research in the first place.

Final Thoughts

Black digital writing practices and methods have the potential for reflection and invitation; they ask that we pay close attention to how our bodies enact and are interpellated by our physical and social realities, and they encourage us to write and perform through those observations. They invite us to understand writing processes through networks and assemblages and recognize the opening and re-mixing of those networks as valuable intellectual endeavors. They demand that we research through the spaces and locations we inhabit, and demand that we acknowledge the differences that inevitably exist in our locations. Lastly, they unapologetically name Blackness, Black culture, and Black bodies as intellectual, visible, valuable, and beautiful.

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