

Chapter 4. “Tell Virgil Write BRICK on my brick”: Doctoral Bashments, (Re) Visiting Hiphopography and the Digital Discursivity of the DJ: A Mixed Down Methods Movement

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**“Lemme Start from the Beginning at the Top of the List”:
The Needed Introduction Before We Get Started . . .**

In true Hip-Hop DJ fashion, it’s important to start with shout outs.

These words were originally birthed in locations
that should be recognized.

With that, I would like to give a respectful shout out,
acknowledgment and offer of deep gratitude to
the Onondaga Nation, firekeepers of the Haudenosaunee,
as well as the Lenape people,
the original custodians of the land and water
that supported these words.

When engaging in equity and social justice work,
I feel it’s always critical to discuss historical aspects of land
and the shift of people in any given space’s demographics.

At the time this piece was first conceived,
it was birthed sonically on
Onondaga Nation ground, then continued to grow on
Lenape ground—thus, this shout out is mandatory . . .
Not to be footnoted, endnoted or sidebarred.

In thinking about culturally relevant and equitable teaching and research practices, I always find it useful to identify the intermingling of these ideas in my own groove. My research constantly informs my teaching and vice versa; because I rarely see a distinction between strong research and pedagogical practices, “‘Tell Virgil Write BRICK on my brick’: Doctoral Bashments, (Re)Visiting Hiphopography and the Digital Discursivity of the DJ,” reflects on research methodologies that emanate from my personal classroom praxis. In envisioning the vital nexus of contemporary research theories and methodologies in my own teacher-researcher processes, this chapter (re)views the idea of hiphopography alongside raciolinguistics as a way to both interrogate the presence of Hip-Hop pedagogy specifically within my teaching, as well as (re)envision and (re)illuminate hiphopography and raciolinguistics as an avenue by which to spotlight Hip-Hop participants and

practitioners in order to avoid the stereotypical “NatGeo” perspective of Hip-Hop research and scholarship as wax poetic motions. And to be clear, I define “the NatGeo perspective” as the feeling I still get when I happen to be skimming through TV channels and land on an episode of National Geographic. You know the feeling: there’s video of an animal landscape, that’s usually accompanied by a voice, typically of the British or Aussie-sounding persuasion. Said voice functions in semi-golf-announcer whisper and serves as the “silent observer” aka “the innocent bystander” aka the “videographic voyeur” who “reports” on the “climate” of a subject’s “life and culture” from a distance that makes these real lives and real lived experiences feel implicitly and blatantly judged by the referential of the speaker/viewer/voyeur.

Be clear—we ain’t about that NatGeo life here . . .

During this journey, we will think about a young boy named King Johnson and his connection to my students, and Hip-Hop artists Jay-Z and the Notorious B.I.G. This will bring us to the importance of hiphopography in research via DJ Rhetoric. We will then make a turn towards hiphopography in scholarship creation via DJ dissertations, bouncing to Griselda and embracing aspects of raciolinguistics through the lens of Hip-Hop aesthetics. This chapter also intends to demonstrate how all these research and pedagogical methodologies are aligned with culturally relevant and culturally sustaining approaches in their best ways.

Moreover, because my work is rooted in DJ Rhetoric (Craig), I approach this chapter as DJing on the page. Like any good DJ set, it requires that the listener has enough faith in the DJ to embark on a sonic journey. The listener never truly knows where the DJ will go but has the faith and trust to know that, by the end, the DJ will have served as a tour guide on a fantastic voyage that’ll always be Coolio (Big Pun intended, and intended). Note that part of the theory here unfolds in the praxis encompassing not only *what* words are on the page, but *how* they are placed, sequenced, and programmed. Thus, I ask you to embark on a digital-rhetoric research-methods journey with me, DJ style. If you can hold fast and follow along, I promise you’ll pick up some jewels along the way—by the end, you’ll be happy you took this trip with me, word.

“Everyone, Meet King Johnson”: How Do I Envision and Imagine Teaching in the 21st Century?

We start this chapter with an introduction to the young homie named King. King Johnson is a Chicago public school student. He was around eight years old when he wrote this journal entry in January of 2018, which probably puts him in third grade. I came across King when I first saw an image of his writing. A picture of his journal entry was posted on Facebook by King’s mother, but quickly went viral. I found it shared as “The 10 Blackest Things About This Kid’s Journal Entry Roasting His Teacher for Lying About Christopher Columbus” in a blog written

by Damian Young days before the semester started; I immediately included it into the second-day fabric of my Intermediate Composition course. I projected it onto the board, and upon first glance, most students simply recognized it as a funny meme. If you have never seen it, I will quote it below so you can follow along:

Today was not a good learning day. Blah blah blah I only wanted to hear you not talking. You said something wrong and I can't listen when I hear lies. My mom said that the only Christofer we actnokedj is Wallace. Because Columbus didn't find our coun-try the Indians did. I like to have Columbus day off but I want you to not teach me lies. That is all. My question for the day is how can white people teach black history?

The reader, who we mostly assume is King's teacher, responds in red ink writing: "King I am very disappointed in your journal today." The final response is written by King . . . one word: "Ok."

King is an example I use in my writing classes when I want to introduce the concept of research. I have a student read the entry aloud, then I give everyone a chance to write quietly on what they see, think, and feel about the text. Then, students are paired and given about ten minutes or so to discuss what they've written based on three questions:

1. Tally up the similar points you and your partner made.
2. What would you and your partner tell King?
3. What might you and your partner tell King's teacher?

Afterwards, we engage in a longer class talkback session, where I ask pairs to share their take on King Johnson, on the teacher's response, on King's final response, and other issues they might deem relevant to the conversation.

Over the past few semesters, I've used this text and I have accumulated what I will label here as a very unscientific poll consisting of responses students give from their experience and initial reactions to King's writing. The responses have emanated from courses I teach in first-year writing, intermediate composition, and Hip-Hop worldview. And depending on the student demographic, the responses vary. It's also important to recognize that I see these students as the future scholars in the field, so they hold such value in this moment. Many of them will be the practitioners who will inevitably be teaching the K-16 versions of King Johnson.

These moments become paramount in how perspectives can be interrupted, disrupted and even altered for the sake of the students who are being engaged, and the future Kings that these student-scholars-as-educators will engage. For example, in my intermediate composition class (which is a mix of both English and education majors), students describe how they felt King was "disrespectful", "kids say unfiltered things", "you can tell he doesn't care about his teacher (and thereby, authority)." In other discussions, I've heard students say that King situating

his mother as the source of knowledge seems to be the way he can validate his connection to and the cultural relevance of Hip-Hop. While we address these comments as a class, I use this journal entry to shift students to my overarching argument about King: he’s an extraordinary researcher and writer. I’d love to take King under my wing and explore some of his thoughts and ideas. Here’s why . . .

Most of my students do not understand the reference that King makes when he states in his journal that the “Only Christofer we actnokedj is Wallace.” This is a quote from Shawn Carter, who we all probably know as Beyonce’s husband . . . but sometimes we know him as Jay-Z. It is a quote from his song “Oceans” featuring Frank Ocean. In this discussion, I walk students through the song, which is an interesting take on the waters that serve as a puzzle piece in what we consider to be a luxurious lifestyle, while those same waters serve as part of the vehicle that brought Africans to the Americas as slaves, in addition to the environmental contexts of exploitation for big business’ sake (“the oil spill at BP ain’t clean up”). When Jay-Z describes it, he states:

It’s like, me now, no matter where I go in life, and the things I accomplished, right? You walk in that room and your past still come in with you. You know, people talk, like “that guy who used to be the dealer from the projects and” do-do-do-do-do-do! Then back again to that duality, the sound of like a celebration of where we are now, you know, on some big yacht and throwing champagne in the water, but the undertow of the thing is like this same water is the water that brought us here, you know, originally as slaves. So it has this whole duality, and how we write history. You know, even the stories we were told about the history of America. “I’m anti-Santa Maria” —talking about these stories. “Only Christopher we acknowledge is Wallace” —Biggie Smalls. “Silk and fleeces, lay on my Jesus, oh my God I hope y’all don’t get seasick” —You know, playing with the theme now: being seasick, or seeing these things and being jealous of it.

After walking through Jay-Z’s commentary, the rich and deep context that emerges from Jay-Z’s lyrics can truly be helpful in getting students to (re)envision and (re)imagine what “text” and “writing” look like in the 21st century. Furthermore, it demonstrates how Hip-Hop permeates a younger generation and can be harnessed as a teaching tool when educators are willing to be open and receptive to the cultural capital students bring with them into the classroom on a daily basis.

In addition, this pedagogical wrinkle in time marries both methodology and digital practices. This teaching technique is a method that, in and of itself, involves culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogical sentiments. The conversation around “research” is on my students’ terms. It meets them where they are in a contemporary fashion, while it simultaneously models approaches

they can employ and deploy as rising educators. Just look at the lesson materials: a meme, a video, a song and potentially a digital article (if you want to take the next step and review how King's mother assessed and analyzed this situation). In fact, all these tools are digital. There is not a print-based textbook to be found, not a single white page with black alphanumeric symbols in hand. This lesson is virtual, as every material interfaces with either the digital or sonic world.

I hope students walk away from this conversation with a sense of how we see aspects of research, student language, literacy, citizenship and participation, and composing strategies, especially when thinking about Hip-Hop culture as the lens through which our students speak, write and interact with us in formal and informal settings. And when I think about Hip-Hop language and literacy in our current times, I'm immediately drawn to Griselda.

“Everyone, Meet Griselda”: The Fashion Rebels of Cloth and Linguistic Textures in 2020

When I think about freedom from the formulaics of linguistic conventions, the first contemporary example that comes to mind is Griselda. I can clearly recall the day I was in the Classic Material store when the homie Carlos said to me, “Oh, you don't know Griselda? Nah, you gotta sit down and listen...” For those who are not familiar with Griselda, they are a Hip-Hop family (literally). The best ways to describe Griselda—which is the trio of Conway the Machine, Westside Gunn and Benny the Butcher—is to think about the first time you heard “Protect Your Neck” by Wu-Tang Clan. Couple that feeling with the feeling you get when you hear the song “Shook Ones Part II” by Mobb Deep. For those that don't know the song, think about the movie *8 Mile* with Eminem: listen to the opening credits and then the instrumental that comes on during the culminating battle scenes. The impact of those two feelings will bring you to the sonic experience presented by Griselda.

I invoke Griselda because they are one of the next Hip-Hop landmarks. If you let them tell it, Westside Gunn will declare “we didn't switch up and go South Paw.” Their main concern was not to chase financial wellness by bending their musical and artistic vision to that of the Hip-Hop money-makin' status quo. Let Conway tell it, and he gives it to you in rhyme: “I ain't bring New York back / I put Buffalo in the front!”—highlighting how other artists began to rhyme like they were from a southern state in the past ten years or so, even when they are from Brooklyn, or Manhattan, or one of the other five boroughs of New York City. What is most exciting about Griselda is they have not compromised their music or sound at all. Convention for Griselda is predicated on unconventional attitudes and approaches that don't just bump back against, but instead bumrush and bodyslam the expected norms and calculations. There are a few traditionally formatted songs, but for the most part, they rhyme until they're finished, shattering the whole “sixteen-bar-verse-eight-bar-chorus” blueprint we're used

to . . . and a brilliant shattering, it is. Their music is very gritty, grimy—ask Benny the Butcher and he’ll say, “you know Conway likes them spooky beats.” Whenever you’re listening to Griselda, you feel as if you are walking down a dark alley—the streetlights are flickering, you can’t see the end of the path. It’s that part of the movie when you scream at the screen, “Nooooooo . . . don’t go that way!!!”

So, in summoning Griselda, I’d like to take us to “DR BIRDS”—the first single off their debut album *WWCD* (What Would Chine Gun Do) with the video produced by Hype Williams. Hype Williams is the video director of Hip-Hop’s golden era of big-budget three-to-five-minute blockbuster visuals. Imagine the lush color palettes of *The Great Gatsby*, the intricate on-screen complexities of *Inception*—then, wrap those cinematic stylings into classic storylines like *Casino*, *Goodfellas*, *Titanic*, and *Bad Boys*. To help establish a particular context, Hype served as Hip-Hop’s Baz Luhrmann (“The Get Down”), Chris Nolan, Martin Scorsese, James Cameron and Michael Bay all in one, as he has directed videos for artists including Busta Rhymes, Kanye West, Missy Elliot, Beyonce, LL Cool J, Puff Daddy, Mobb Deep, Nas, Tupac, Jay-Z, TLC, Jessica Simpson, Nelly Furtado, Boyz II Men, Pharrell Williams, Travis Scott, Kesh’a, Jennifer Lopez, Janet Jackson, John Legend, Jamie Foxx and Drake. Finally, Williams directed the cult Hip-Hop classic film *Belly*, starring Nas, DMX and T-Boz of TLC.

Another notable distinction for Griselda is their ability to navigate language that runs the gambit. Westside Gunn’s alias is “Flygod”—he’ll basically tell you about the high-brow fashion pieces he has purchased right off the runway in Milan or Paris in one line, but then tell you the crack just finished cooking and needs a little more time to dry in the next line. The epitome of this moment in “DR. BIRDS” is the thread that loops the needle of the song between Westside Gunn, Conway the Machine and Benny the Butcher . . .

That moment: “Tell Virgil write BRICK on my brick.”

With those lyrics, Flygod is essentially telling Virgil Abloh (RIP), the Creative Director of Louis Vuitton, and one of the most brilliant minds behind the fashion line we all know as Off-White (which we’ve seen touch down on everything from Nike Sneakers to Ikea bags, rugs and other home decor,) to write the word “BRICK” on a brick (which is slang for a pound, or a kilo, of cocaine). On the surface, this juncture is a very clear marriage of street-corner politics and high-fashion couture. The best visuals to describe this intersection come from legendary fashion designer Dapper Dan: take a second and think back to Jam Master Jay in the custom-made Louis Vuitton tracksuit, Eric B. and Rakim in the custom Gucci sweatsuits for the *Follow the Leader* album cover, or Bobby Brown in the head-to-toe bright-red Gucci suit (Day; Mahon). The Dapper Dan aesthetics of the early-1980s to mid-1990s is simply unmatched in Hip-Hop fashion culture. Dap would take your favorite high-end luxury brand (Louis Vuitton, Gucci, MCM) and remix it (although we could argue that Dapper Dan was the Original Hip Hop Repurposing Fashionista) for anything from clothing to car interiors . . . sound familiar?

So, when Westside Gunn hits that lick with this lyric, he is evoking a historic Hip-Hop fashion flashpoint, but also invoking a long-standing Hip-Hop sentiment, merging multiple worlds to weave a snapshot of the times we live and breathe in; be very clear, if the new “War on Drugs” was aimed at crack, this line simply wouldn’t exist in 2021, when crack has been the scourge of the urban inner-cities since the 1980s. Thus, Westside would have nothing for Virgil to write on! It makes me think that maybe Big Meech should’ve *been* asking for organic soul food . . . but alas, I digress. . . .

But the importance of that phrase, “Tell Virgil write BRICK on my brick,” has more levels to it. Let’s leave it here for a second. But fear not, I’ll be right back to address it . . .

“A Quick Pause for the Cause . . .” aka “I Might Just Listen to This While I Transcend”

At this point, it is important to recognize that neither Dr. Craig, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, Medgar Evers College, the City University of New York at large, nor the editors of this collection, condone or promote the usage, distribution, or sale of crack cocaine or any other illegal narcotic. The analysis of the line, “BRICK on my brick,” however, is important for educational purposes.

I’m finished what I had to say, now we can continue on (Prodigy).

And now, back to the regularly scheduled program . . .

“Ayo, you ever ate burgers on a Wednesday? You ever ate chicken on a Thursday?”: The Doctoral Bashment is in Full Effect in the Galaxy of Queens

In April 2020, Hip-Hop media personality Peter Rosenberg interviewed Westside Gunn for the release of his album *Pray for Paris*. During their discussion, they talk about the importance and the background behind Westside Gunn’s song with iconic DJ/Producer, the legendary DJ Premier, entitled “Shawn vs. Flair.” As they listen to the beginning of the song, and the opening chorus, Rosenberg stops and asks Westside the importance of the line: “you ever ate burgers on a Wednesday? You ever ate chicken on a Thursday?” (Gunn). In this moment, Westside Gunn chuckles and then explains how this language is a frequency geared specifically towards his Griselda fans that have been incarcerated in a federal penitentiary. Westside details those lyrics as:

. . . well, when you in the Feds, they feed you burgers on Wednesday and chicken on Thursdays. So when I was in prison, you

know what I’m saying, that was the line that if you was locked up in the Feds, you get this automatically, you know what I’m saying? It’s like I was talking to them...that was just for the homies that was locked up behind the wall, in case they hear it. And just people that’s fresh home or did a bid, they can relate to it automatically.

This moment in conversation continues to push forth the range within which Westside Gunn and Griselda have been able to oscillate when it comes to language and literacy practices. Moments like this contribute to my analysis of Griselda, which builds upon my ruminations around DJ Rhetoric and literacy.

The idea of DJ Rhetoric began to really percolate with me on March 5, 2013: the day I defended my dissertation. After writing three hundred pages, I honestly had nothing else to say. So, what made the most sense was connecting all the songs from the first chapter of my dissertation, so my committee could see and hear the discursive elements I spent all that time writing about. And yes—the majority of my doctoral defense was a DJ set that would’ve been a great party if we did it later in the day! To imagine what my work means and represents in real-time, it *must* start with the DJ. I’ve been a DJ longer than I haven’t been a DJ, and my work has consistently focused on the rhetoric and literacy of the DJ. As well, the common mantra I learned in my creative writing experiences has always been “show, don’t tell.” So, I’ve been fine with telling by simply showing people about the telling. This has been my normal modus operandi; I’ve attended many a Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), many a National Council of Teachers of English Assembly on Research (NCTEAR), many a Watson conference with two portable turntables and a mixer—and shown the room as the telling. I did do some talking, but I mainly let the sonics of the songs show my telling. It is also critical to note that digital methodologies were present in my DJ work. At the time of these conferences, Serato Scratch Live was a software that allowed a DJ to interface with any iTunes playlist with two digital control records. With a small convertor box, the outcome was the ability to transform a mp3 in your iTunes catalog into a record on a turntable, manipulated by the control vinyl. This showing has always been forward-thinking, in conversation and interaction with digital interfaces. Know that “DR BIRDS” is the latest song in my DJ set, which stems from an intellectual research roadmap. It’s also important to note that this chapter, in fact, started *solely* as a DJ set.

The thinking around my research on DJ Rhetoric and literacy (Craig) emanates from the space of not being able to find enough Hip-Hop DJ scholarship that not only adds onto, but also simultaneously includes experts and practitioners of the culture. I have been a DJ for over twenty years; my research interests come from having knowledge of the discursive forms and operations of DJs, and stem from a love of Hip-Hop culture and a genuine desire to represent Hip-Hop DJ culture thoroughly. Specifically, my knowledge of DJ discursive modes serves

as the construct of Hip-Hop aesthetics introduced by Emery Petchauer. In his article, “Starting with Style: Toward a Second Wave of Hip-Hop Education Research and Practice,” he labels “the word *aesthetic* to signal that one would find these ‘ways of doing and being’ in the sonic, kinesthetic, linguistic, and visual practices/expressions of hip-hop” (Petchauer 79).

Throughout the landscape of academia, many academics have been placed at the forefront of conversations around Hip-Hop culture, yet these same people were never able to dictate what Hip-Hop is in any circle beyond limited academic ones. By allowing this alternate spotlighting, two critical issues become apparent. First, the alternate spotlight shifts the focus away from the cultural practitioners and organic intellectuals who have truly contributed to the historic narrative of Hip-Hop culture. Second, it diminishes the cultural capital and felt senses of students who enter our classrooms with innate and, many times, inherent knowledge of the music and culture. Thus, educators who engage in this practice are in effect rejecting the students they claim to love working with so much via “Hip-Hop in the classroom.” This is not to say that only an elite few can participate in meaning making; it is to say we should be thoughtful and deliberate about who is “chosen” to tell the story or speak for the culture, so that knowledgeable voices are not marginalized or ostracized from academic conversations around Hip-Hop.

The DJ Rhetoric Juggle: How the Culture and Academia Mix on Two 12s

In order to define and identify DJ Rhetoric, I use English scholar Carmen Kynard’s work as a springboard. When discussing African American student protest history, she recognizes rhetoric as a concept that stretches beyond stylized speech and language. Instead, she envisions rhetoric as a culmination of cultural and historical knowledge, and ways of knowing that are perpetually communicated in the written and spoken word, as well as visuals, physical movement, banter, and other aspects of social and cultural community participatory activities (Kynard). In pushing towards a DJ Rhetoric, it is here where I add onto Kynard’s definition; part of a DJ’s language extends beyond just the “language, oral and written.” It is also about what gets said “sonically” by a DJ as well. The ways in which a DJ decides to express herself and communicate that expression amongst members within and outside of DJ culture via turntables and the sounds she creates with her highly researched archive and collection of music has everything to do with the sonic quality and kinesthetic actions of the choices she makes.

Because DJ Rhetoric centers the DJ in both definition and practice, I contend we must do this work in a way that responds to how Hip-Hop scholarship within English studies has excluded community members of the culture in that scholarly conversation. This approach will require a change in the typical “NatGeo ethnography” perspective that runs throughout English studies, and instead needs

to privilege a different set of voices in this integral cultural conversation. Even though I am a researcher and English scholar, my DJ peers know, understand, and trust my commitment to the DJ community, to Hip-Hop culture and to ensuring DJ Rhetoric, pedagogy, literacy, and culture is presented in a way that is objective, while still serving as an honest portrait of the cultural, communicative, and discursive principles of the Hip-Hop DJ.

I place the DJ and DJ Rhetoric squarely in the midst and the tradition of Hip-Hop literacy, Hip-Hop rhetoric, and Hip-Hop pedagogy. While Hip-Hop may currently serve as global popular culture, it was birthed, nursed, and raised by African American culture. There’s also an argument to be made that since the DJ is the ultimate creator of Hip-Hop culture, that Hip-Hop literacy sits underneath the umbrella of the DJ, which sits within the umbrella of African American rhetoric and discourse.

Since the inception of Hip-Hop, DJs have always done work that is rooted in the Black feminist tradition. Ask any of the founding fathers or first-generation Hip-Hop DJs, they will tell you they borrowed from their mothers’ multi-genre record collections; in fact, it most oftentimes is the feminine figure in their lives who have cultivated their sonic sensibilities and curation skills. For example, in “Crate Digging Begins at Home,” Jennifer Stoever outlines how pioneering DJs such as Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash, Grandwizard Theodore and Larry Levan pulled their first tunes from their mothers’ record collections. In exploring and highlighting the details of a “feminist listening praxis,” Stoever identifies the concept:

Particularly when understood as a method of critically listening to the past, feminist historiography bears striking resemblance to record collecting and selecting as innovated by Bronx mothers. Black and Latinx women collecting and selecting records manifested new forms of listening—to themselves, to history, and to their present surroundings—what I am calling a feminist listening praxis . . . Bronx mothers freed these sounds to create new contexts, audiences, and meters, particularly when changed up, back spun, and cut by their DJ-ing sons and daughters. (11)

Pushing back against the dominant narrative that all things Hip-Hop flowed from a male-dominated perspective, Stoever pinpoints the connection with each of these foundational DJs and how they have learned to listen, apprehend, and manipulate music from their mothers, sisters, aunties, and the likes; this connects the origins of the Hip-Hop DJ directly to the Black feminist tradition, as

there is something specifically feminine and radically black/brown about hip hop’s sonic labor—DJing in particular—and such work often begins with a woman’s hand dropping the needle, spinning another-worldly soundscapes of radical love, politics, affirmation and care. Both record collecting and hip

hop are more gender diverse and multigenerational than previously understood, and women's living room selecting functioned as an important practice in its own right, congruent with and intimately related to public DJing. (Stoever 9-10)

This Black feminist labor culminates in Grandmaster Flash's understanding of the power of music to viscerally change the human emotion, Bambaataa's acknowledgement of sonic and visual influences, or Larry Levan's technical ritual of placing a needle on a record at age three. All of these skill sets were birthed and taught by women and feminist praxis, thus influencing the ways that the progenitors of Hip-Hop would bring the sound, the visuals and the technical sentiments to the forefront.

Ultimate Breaks and Beats (UBB) co-founder Louis "Breakbeat Lou" Flores also discusses the importance of both his mother's records and his sister bringing him to his first Hip-Hop jams. Hip-Hop's foundational DJs will tell you they learned music from the various records their mothers and grandmothers and aunts and sisters would play on Saturdays and Sundays, or would play at times when certain emotions needed to be induced, maintained or soothed; these tunes were not the background or the backdrop—they were the soundtrack to life, the score to childhoods, and the planted seeds that would grow the sonic roots of what we now know as Hip-Hop culture. This concept is keenly documented by Stoever. In the spirit of UBB and as a homage to the work Breakbeat Lou and Breakbeat Lenny did, take this moment as me pointing you to one of the numbered compilations in citing Stoever—she hits a series of critical tracks integral to this conversation (including Tricia Rose, Elaine Richardson, Toni Blackman, Joan Morgan and Gwendolyn Pough). This is where I'm sampling from the volume with all the funky joints on it.

So now, as we think about DJ Rhetoric and literacy, and situate it in African American rhetoric and literacy, why mention King Johnson and Griselda? King's ability to cite references that help us to understand his innate cultural capital, or Griselda's deft maneuverings between elite class fashion talk and straight gutter crime slang reflects the ideas presented by Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa. In their article "Undoing Appropriateness: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Language Diversity in Education," they highlight the idea of raciolinguistic ideologies, "that conflate certain racialized bodies with linguistic deficiency unrelated to any objective linguistic practices" (150).

"Everyone, Meet Flores and Rosa": So Get Down, Get Down with The Raciolinguistic Foundation

What's particularly interesting about Flores and Rosa, is when they describe the effect of raciolinguistic ideologies on Heritage language learners, long-term English learners and standard English learners, and when they mention Tamara—a long-term English learner who fluidly adjusts her language based on her listening public—they state the following:

We find that these so-called long-term English learners are adept at using their bilingualism in strategic and innovative ways—indeed, in ways that might be considered quite appropriate and desirable were they animated by a privileged white student . . . were Tamara a privileged white student engaging in English linguistic practices in the ways that she did in this interview, her linguistic practices would likely be perceived differently. In fact, were she a privileged white student who was able to engage in the bilingual language practice that she described, she might even be perceived as linguistically gifted (Flores and Rosa 158).

There is a leap here that I am making, where I am clearly putting Latinx theories around bilingualism in solidarity with theories around both Hip-Hop literacies and African American Vernacular English (AAVE)—which is work that Flores and Rosa also do in their article. Where this moment resonates with me, is where we might think about both King and Griselda. Let’s return to my very unscientific study about student responses to King from the start of this chapter. Many students felt King’s dialogue with his teacher was inappropriate, even though no one realized the research-filled savvy in his youthful assertion that the “only Christofer we actnokedj is Wallace” (Johnson). And very few students would even acknowledge what King said is actually truthful from a historical perspective. Let’s use a different lens to approach this idea: some might be appalled to hear any Griselda member talking about cooked crack cocaine drying, yet somehow, we feel a little bit better when our good friend Marshall Mathers used to talk about poppin’ pills and committing violent acts against his daughter’s mother, while his daughter served as his accomplice. In no way is this an attack against Eminem, who is an extraordinary lyricist. But this is a commentary that hopefully helps us to look at the double standard that exists around language usage, linguistic dexterity, and who is privileged as “savvy” (aka “worthy”) versus “elementary” (aka “indictable”) users and communicators.

Subsequently, what about the potential implications of the raciolinguistic ideologies that label DJ Rhetoric inadequate to stand alone (as this chapter stemmed from a DJ set that could speak to all these issues with two turntables and a mixer), and required me to type these very words to you in a privileged academic alphanumeric type of font? At this point, the methodological approach that serves to (re)introduce and center cultural participants and practitioners is hiphopography.

“What We Gon’ Do in Ninety-Two, Even Though We Had Fun in Ninety-One . . .” aka “Everyone, Meet Spady”: The Importance of Hiphopography in Research Methodology

In order to have a clear view of the importance of a contemporary spotlighting of hiphopography, it makes sense to push towards its definition, into its past ap-

pearances, and then towards its timeliness in 2021 and beyond. The initial introduction to the methodological approach known as “hiphopography” comes from scholar and independent researcher James G. Spady. In *Nation Conscious Rap*, the first of Spady’s three-book exploration of Hip-Hop, he and Joseph D. Eure are clear on their approach in thinking about the cultural and scholarly importance of Hip-Hop participants and practitioners; in talking with those “Hip-Hop visionaries” who are responsible for making various aspects of Hip-Hop music and culture grow and thrive, Spady and Eure identified the connection with these early Hip-Hop tastemakers as

necessary to realize that the interviewers/editors were as interested in the rap artists’ narrative discourse as its historical context. An interview is a speech event. You should have been physically on location as these visionaries/knowers rapped . . . that is why we decided to do a HipHopography of the Bronx rather than an Ethnography of the Bronx. The crucial difference is the fact that in our case, we shared the cultural, philosophical values embedded in Black life stylings. HipHopography provides unique means of assessing and accessing the word/world realities found therein . . . as Hip Hop investigators we saw it as crucial to render the subject’s cultural realities as accurately as possible. (Spady and Eure vii)

This methodological approach is picked up most notably by H. Samy Alim throughout a series of texts worth mentioning here. In his early educational teacher-researcher experiences with middle and high school students, Alim came to a critical conclusion, one that brings us full circle back to my good friend King. In “‘The Whig Party Don’t Exist in My Hood’: Knowledge, Reality, and Education in the Hip Hop Nation,” Alim states that

I have frequently drawn upon Hip Hop Culture in educational practice, but I have also developed ways of using Hip Hop Culture itself as educational practice. It is one thing to view the culture of our students as a resource for teaching about other subjects, and it is quite another to see our students as the sources, investigators, and archivers of varied and rich bodies of knowledge rooted in their cultural-linguistic reality. (17)

Alim’s desire to extend value to his students’ cultural capital and ways of knowing, richly vast and deeply steeped in the knowledge frameworks lent to them via Hip-Hop culture, is the same line of thinking that informs his research when thinking about his approach to understanding his concept of Hip Hop Nation Language (HHNL) and Hip Hop Linguistics (HHLx). This approach is highlighted in Alim’s seminal text *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture*. In this book, Alim describes the importance of Hiphopography to his

own research, and its overarching relevance to making sense of the importance of communicative practices when thinking about ethical research with Hip-Hop practitioners:

The hip-hopography paradigm integrates the varied approaches of ethnography, biography, and social, cultural, and oral history to arrive at an emic view of Hip Hop Culture. It is hip-hopography that obligates [Hip Hop Linguistics] to directly engage with the cultural agents of the Hip Hop Culture-World, revealing rappers as critical interpreters of their own culture. We view “rappers” and “cultural critics” and “cultural theorists” whose thoughts and ideas help us to make sense of one of the most important cultural movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. (Alim 11)

It is here where Alim connects the idea of hip-hopography as a research methodology that not only centers the cultural practices of Hip-Hop, but also the cultural participants and practitioners. In an effort to capture those conversations as accurately as possible, both Alim and Spady argue that it requires understanding the context of the language used by Hip-Hop cultural practitioners, and presenting those moments in conversation, from a researcher perspective, as raw and uncut as possible. This research methodology allows for a humanizing effect similar to that purported by other research methodologies so readily accepted in the academy:

Hiphopography began as the study of Hip Hop cultural practice, a Hip Hop Cultural Studies, if you will—not as a subparadigm within cultural studies, but as a movement lying somewhere between cultural studies and cultural anthropology. My own studies seek to reinvigorate cultural studies’ commitment to the people and put into practice what cultural anthropology espouses, that is, a nonhierarchical, anticolonial approach that humanizes its subject . . . hip-hopography humanizes Hip Hop. (Alim 12)

Thus, hip-hopography becomes a research-based methodology aimed at preserving the Hip-Hop aesthetics (Petchauer) as they are created, engaged in, and described by members of Hip-Hop culture.

Alim continues to dig into defining hip-hopography in his article “‘The Natti Ain’t No Punk City’: Emic Views of Hip Hop Cultures” when he states:

Hiphopography can be described as an approach to the study of Hip Hop culture that combines the methods of ethnography, biography, and social and oral history. Importantly, hip-hopography is not traditional ethnography . . . hip-hopography assumes that the culture creators of Hip Hop are quite capable of telling

their own story. (Alim 969-70)

It is here where Alim addresses the multi-faceted approach that is needed with hiphopography; this same approach requires that the weight of the research, the storytelling and meaning-making lies with the members of Hip-Hop culture, and not necessarily with the researcher's preconceived notions of what Hip-Hop "might" be, as "in hiphopography, the values, aesthetics, thoughts, narratives, and interpretations of the culture creators are our starting point" (Alim 970). This approach is far from another episode of NatGeo—feel me . . . ?

Years later, Spady would return to his definition of hiphopography. In his 2013 article "Mapping and Re-Membering Hip Hop History, Hiphopography and African Diasporic History," he reflects on his two-decade old methodology. In reflecting on the "insider-outsider" debate in field research, Spady revisits his methodology by stating:

What we do as Hiphopography, a paradigmatic shift away from 'insider/outsider' language and practice. We purposely embraced a non-hierarchal method that enabled interlocutors engaged in the old philosophical practice of conversation to be mutually present. Conversation presupposes that interactants are mutually present to one another. There is equanimity within discourse ciphers; or, at the very least, that is the goal. (130)

At its best, hiphopography serves as a mixed-methods formulated approach that neutralizes the categories of insider and outsider, and lends itself more to the sense of focused conversational happenstance. The knowledge of doing and being comes primarily from the Hip-Hop practitioner, who serves on an equal footing to that of the researcher, who aims to gain understanding of said cultural phenomena.

We see this idea germane to scholarship that identifies new and innovative approaches to understanding a second wave of Hip-Hop education and research (Petchauer). We also see this research methodology used by recent scholarship that addresses Hip-Hop communities around practitioners of Hip-Hop elements; most notable are scholarly pieces that submerge themselves in the conversation of knowledge and meaning-making from Hip-Hop participants (Craig; Baez and Craig; Castillo and Craig; Lacey and Craig; Craig and Kynard) as well as from Hip-Hop based communities and communicators (Del Hierro; Duthely; Stoever; Mckoy). These are just a few sources that not only align with the practices that emanate from hiphopography, but also research that makes both conscious and subconscious choices towards centering the voices of Hip-Hop community members in a way that reflects the importance of culturally relevant and culturally sustaining research and pedagogy. Think back for a second to the teaching conversation around King Johnson, who evoked Jay-Z through the life lessons given to him by his mom (who is clearly an avid Hip-Hop listener, evidenced by

her ability to quote a lesser-known Jay-Z album cut, as opposed to the larger-than-life singles that Jay has used to permeate radio, satellite, and popular culture airwaves). Both King and his mother are participants and not just observers. This is the type of connectivity that hiphopography can provide to classroom settings. Finally, the act of a dissertation defense that centers around two Technic 1200s fully displays my work as a DJ as methodological praxis from a Hip-Hop cultural participant; this cultural inclusivity is presented to us early by Spady via hiphopography. At this nexus, where King Johnson, DJ dissertation defenses, Griselda, raciolinguistics and hiphopography meet, we can find the heuristic for ethical and inclusive research that centers the participants and the intrinsic elements of the culture. To put it plainly, it's like Sy Sperling used to say in that old Hair Club for Men commercial: “I'm not only the Hair Club president, but I'm also a client.”

The Chapter's Cipa: When All the Ingredients in the Pot Come Together

As we come to the close of this mix, it's important to spend some time recapping the journey. Marley Marl used to do it with Mr. Magic, as did Pete Rock with Marley, as did Prince Messiah with KOOL DJ Red Alert and, of course, as did Bobbito with Stretch Armstrong. Where Spady and the (re)introduction of hiphopography become paramount is in thinking about our young friend King Johnson, and the moment that his teacher has missed out on. Instead of being able to elevate King's cultural capital around Hip-Hop culture and use it as the basis by which they can have a student-centered conversation around historical fact-checking and meaning-making via research and referencing, King is simply diminished and not taken seriously for the researcher and scholar that he is. This is a conversation I pushed my students to (re)think; as English and education majors, how are we missing the “teachable moment” that has presented itself? Consequently, what message are we sending to faculty and students of racialized and marginalized communities when we don't examine, interrogate, and address these missed moments right when they appear? Flores and Rosa offer the following remedy to confront these ideologies:

The question of whether members of racialized communities are accepted as appropriately engaging in these linguistic practices continues to be determined by the white listening subject, not by the speakers' actual practices. Therefore, antiracist social transformation cannot be based solely on supporting language-minoritized students in engaging in the linguistic practices of the white speaking subject but must also work actively to dismantle the hierarchies that produce the white listening subject. (167)

So how does this work for us in this moment? I think what Flores and Rosa are

calling for is, similar to Spady and Alim, a (re)examination as well as a restructuring of these oppressive and exclusionary hierarchies. So there is something quite disruptive in knowing that Griselda initially signed to a distribution deal with Shady Records. Interestingly enough, Eminem had a sense of disrupting the status quo when he signed Curtis Jackson at the turn of the century in 2002. He has followed the same disruptive strategy by signing Griselda, and letting them not go Southpaw.

While this chapter starts from a lesson that focuses on King Johnson, it also comes to life from a doctoral dissertation DJ set. While I am not able to share that set with you as the offering of this chapter in and of itself, I was fortunate enough to have a mentor and a diss committee who could see that my discursive practices as a DJ were more than enough in defending the theoretical framework I had created in writing around DJ Rhetoric and literacy. Not only was it disruptive, but it was also rhetorically savvy and communicative in a visceral way that cannot always be conveyed or even transferred onto the page. And often, the work required of or transmuted by digital tools cannot always make that leap. However, digital resources can become extraordinarily helpful in the ways they allow us to engage in timely and on-time, contemporary inquiry, while they also align with the Hip-Hop mantra of “making something out of nothing.” What started off as a very Hip-Hop meme-inspired comedic moment was flipped and remixed into a culturally relevant teaching tool that speaks to research sensibilities in a tangible and digestible conversation.

Furthermore, hiphopography is invaluable in showing educators, researchers, and students a path of inclusion that overtly rejects the NatGeo posturing of older research positionalities. For example, look at how Temptaous Mckoy and her clever construction of Amplification Rhetorics led her social media charge to connect and engage with Hip-Hop artists with her hashtag #IssaTrapDissertation. Her weekly IG postings led to fruitful discussions with Trap rappers because her intention was to engage with members of the culture; not pontificate about it from a distance (Mckoy). I see this cultural acumen as much more aligned with hiphopography as opposed to other scholars in the field who show up to conference presentations talking about various Hip-Hop artist’s work from afar, but when asked, they reveal that they didn’t even try to send a DM, a tweet, or a homer pigeon to said rapper they’re analyzing (in this particular moment, I was able to contact said rapper before the person finished reading their conference paper *talking* about said rapper). By nature, digital ecologies allow us to reject various NatGeo moments at all costs, as the world has now become infinitely more connected and connective. Incorporating this type of cultural inclusion philosophy is a valuable lesson to be learned, and digital resources can sit at the forefront of this methodological blueprint.

Similarly, a look at A.D. Carson’s most recent academic project with the University of Michigan Press entitled *I Used to Love to Dream*, finds Carson fully immersed in Hip-Hop aesthetics and cultural rituals, deftly rhyming his way

through an album that serves as the primary sonic scholarly text that spawns an accompanied textual writing to make sense of the sonics. Carson, a long-standing lyricist, enacts that ethical heuristic of hiphopography in word, rhyme and deed; his engagement with the culture as a participant and practitioner marries his theoretical musings with his participatory embodiment of the culture. Both Carson and Mckoy are exemplars for the roadmaps one might use in deploying digital resources to intermesh ethical practices rooted in cultural communities, where the community members become the stakeholders who dialogue in the assessment of cultural production.

Spady very clearly rejected the NatGeo move, which in 2021, serves as a problematic power dynamic clearly erected by white hegemonic academic structures to privilege certain “research voices” and diminish others. Hiphopography by nature functions as an anti-racist methodology in that it invites, invokes, involves, and invests first and foremost in the participants of Hip-Hop culture. It does not stand off at a distance and then later wax poetic about what the culture “might be.” Hiphopography serves as the roadmap by which a heuristic for ethical research is illuminated in that it only functions properly with the culture and its participants both in mind and in the forefront of conversations; to stand back and talk “of” or “about” without direct engagement most often leaves that vocal twinge that might come with that British or Aussie-sounding announcer’s voice. And no disrespect to my Brit and Aussie sisdren and bredren, I’m just saying . . . or as the youth say, “I ain’t even gon’ hold you!”

I hope this chapter helps you and (re)invigorates you to push back against the oppressive ideologies of the status quo, to embrace those students whose work and linguistic practices you may not get just quite yet: allow them the space to grow, the space to share, the space to learn and the space to teach. I hope it allows you to really (re)think how your teacher-researcher praxis might lend itself to not only including, but also embracing and fostering the brilliant mind we know named King Johnson.

And I hope it allows you the space to ask your students to tell Virgil to write BRICK on their bricks, in their own ways.

...Rest in Power to James G. Spady and Virgil Abloh—thanks for the paths you’ve left for us...

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