UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

And

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Pleading the Fifth Element: Disaesthetics and Hip Hop as Black Study

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Drama and Theatre

By

WIND DELL WOODS

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Frank B. Wilderson III, Chair
Professor Julie Burelle
Professor Nadine George-Graves
Professor Tiffany Willoughby-Herard
Professor Jaye Austin Williams

2018

DEDICATION

To
My family, folks, and friends.
And to all the “shiny men” and women
who have gone before and shown the way.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people I want to thank. First and foremost, my mother. Without her strength, wisdom, and perseverance, none of this would be possible. It certainly wouldn't be as meaningful. I want to thank my brothers A.J. and Adam and my sisters Lea and Jacquelyn. If each of their names do not appear in the manuscript itself, I assure you, their spirits radiate throughout the dissertation. I want to mention my father C.B. Woods whose songs still echo in my heart and in my soul. I want to thank J.P. Phillips, my mentor and father-figure, for guiding me to the world of theatre. I am who I am through trying to fill and walk in his shoes, as well as act on the knowledge and wisdom he imparted to me over countless fishing trips.

I want to thank my wife Akilah. It has been such a blessing to have her in my corner. She brought an invaluable aspect to my project, politics, and process. I am thankful for her keeping me grounded, keeping me honest, and encouraging me to "keep it real" when it mattered most. Her support and understanding, as I spent hours toiling away, leaving notes and books strewn about our home, is only matched by her love. My words, here, only scratch the surface of my appreciation.

I had to apply to UC Irvine and UC San Diego's Joint Doctoral Program twice before I was accepted. My persistence paid off. I entered the PhD program fully committed, knowing that this was a journey I wanted to be on, that this was the only path that made sense to me. Like any meaningful journey, there have been rocky trails, missteps, and severe weather. I had, perhaps, been a bit too utopic and idealistic about the PhD world and its inhabitants, too expectant about what a life of the mind might entail. I had imagined it as the Promise Land, but like a great many things, the promise lies in the individual and the Land is often riddled with unfilled and broken promises. Along my journey, I have had the chance to study with some truly incredible professors. I am extremely grateful for the guidance and training I received from the Drama and Theatre faculty at both U.C. Irvine and U.C. San Diego. Studying with them and observing how they approached the academic profession has assisted me in realizing what type of scholar and educator I want to be. One example (of many) that has enriched my training as a scholar and a professor was observing the way Professor Ian Munro would generously and generatively lead his graduate seminars. I want to also thank Gary Busby and the Drama Department's administrative staff. You all truly rock. The department would grind to a painful stop without your hard work and dedication.

Outside my own program there have been professors whose instruction, mentorship, and support has profoundly enhanced my scholarship. Professor Nahum Chandler is one of the most careful and rigorous thinkers I will most likely ever encounter; Professor Jared Sexton is an intensely fierce intellectual and theorist. I have often referred to him as the reverend of theory due to his ability to unpack and contextualize complicated ideas on the spot with both wit and style. Though Professor Sexton was not a member of my committee, his influence reveals itself in what I consider to be the most developed moments of my dissertation.

Upon entering the doctoral program, I was offered the Eugene Cota-Robles Fellowship and The Competitive Edge Summer Research Program through The Graduate Division. I am extremely thankful for the financial support, as well as the academic preparation I received as a recipient

and fellow. Special thanks go out to Nadia Ortiz and Daniel Fabrega for their ability to gracefully manage the logistics of the fellowship program. I also want to recognize the financial support and travel funding I received from DECADE, AGS, the Graduate Division (Dean Frances Leslie), and my home department (Program Head, Daphne Lei) in the form of TAships and co-curricular activities, such as Dramatic Transformation.

I want to thank some of my fellow travelers, friends, and colleagues. Letty Garcia was one of the first to welcome me to the program. Through the last five years she has been an incredible friend and resource. To Sonia Desai, Sam Kolodezh, Sarah Galloway, Anna Winget, Marketus Presswood, Nicholas Brady, Judy Rodriguez, Meredith Lee, Sarah Mellors, and many others, I would be hard pressed to find better company to travel and think with.

I chose U.C. Irvine for two main reasons: First, I was encouraged to go study with Frank B Wilderson III by a faculty member at another university I had applied to; and the second reason, was a phone call I received from Dr. Jaye Austin Williams. After I got off the phone with Dr. Jaye, my mind was made up to attend Irvine. A choice that I am extremely pleased with. I cannot thank Dr. Jaye enough for her love and support. I am honored to have followed in her footsteps and grateful that I can call her a fellow artist/scholar, mentor, dissertation committee member, and, most importantly, a good friend.

Finally, my wonderful dissertation committee. What can I say about this stellar group of people? As many of my colleagues have informed me: I have a "powerhouse committee." I couldn't agree more; nor, can I thank them enough. Nadine George-Graves encouraged me to bring my creative background to bear in my project by reminding me that the dissertation can make both a critical and creative intervention. Julie Burelle's feedback was like gentle rain, nourishing the roots without damaging the delicate peddles of expression. In an independent study class where we read Sylvia Wynter, Tiffany Willoughby-Herard reminded me that courage takes many different forms, and that serious critical rigor can (and should) exist alongside self- and community-care. Jaye Austin Williams invested a great deal of time/energy closely and carefully reading drafts of my manuscript; it was a true honor to have her work so hard to think with and alongside my ideas. For their hard work and dedication, I am deeply indebted to the members of my committee. Any errors that might remain in the manuscript are my own.

I want to give special thanks to my advisor, professor, and committee Chair, Frank B. Wilderson III whose guidance assisted me in augmenting my creative writing background with a critical theory disposition which has improved both my artistic work and my scholarship. Professor Wilderson's insight, sense of humor, and encouragement has been invaluable. Though I will take away a great deal having studied with him, I will always remember that it is okay to pose questions that might not have evident answers, and that it is acceptable and often generative to expose a problematic without offering a quick prescriptive gesture.

What I attempted to do in my dissertation was to, like a DJ, bring a constellation of ideas, theories, and questions into a percussive encounter. Admittedly, I envisioned myself as Grandmaster Flash, digging in the archival crates of Hip Hop Studies and Hip Hop Theater and rocking with the samples, putting them and their fields of study on dis-play. If I was at all successful, it is due to my committee's astounding support, openness, and guidance.

Another way to put it is, if I was Grandmaster Flash, then, Professors Wilderson III, George-Graves, Burelle, Willoughby-Herard, and Williams, were my Furious Five. And they are, indeed, some *furious* (energetic and passionate) intellectuals.

There are so many people I wish to thank that to acknowledge them all would require much more space than I have here. To those I didn't mention by name, I hope that I will be able to offer my gratitude later. If not in person, then in prayer and meditation.

In closing: for me, writing this dissertation and wrestling with the ideas within it has been like a good many other struggles; once I reached the end, I became aware of how much further I could (and needed to) go. I am thankful to God for each day I am able to keep pushing further and higher.

CURRICULUM VITAE
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EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Drama & Theatre, U.C. Irvine and U.C. San Diego Joint Program, Dramaturgy Emphasis and Critical Theory Emphasis, 2018
Dissertation title: "Pleading the Fifth Element: Disaesthetics and Hip Hop as Black Study."

M.F.A. in Playwriting, Arizona State University, 2008

B.A. in English, Southern Oregon University, 2005

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS / TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Associate Faculty 2013 – Present
Saddleback College, Department of English
- ENG 200 Fundamentals of Composition, (12 sections).
- ENG 300 Beginning Writing, (4 sections).
- REFRESH English Workshop

Instructor 2011 – 2012
Coleman University, Liberal Arts Division
- ENG 351 Creative Writing, (3 sections).
- ENG 200 Introduction to Communication & Public Speaking, (4 sections).
- SOC 325 Interpersonal Communication, (3 sections).
- HUM 410 The Art of Film, (3 sections).

Instructor 2010 – 2011
East Stroudsburg University, Department of English
- ENGL 162 Literary Analysis, (1 section).
- ENGL 103 English Composition, (4 sections).
- ENGL 090 Developmental Writing, (3 sections)

Adjunct Professor 2009 – 2011
Hudson County Community College, Department of English
- ENG 101/ENG 096: College Composition and Writing Lab (8 sections)

GRADUATE TEACHING APPOINTMENTS

Teaching Associate 2014 – Present
University of California, Irvine, Department of Drama
- DRAMA 40, Development of Drama, responsible for all aspects of the course (10 sections:).
- MUS 148/AFAM 143 Hip Hop Philosophy, (Guest Lecturer), Winter 2018

- DRAMA 16 Performing Culture (assisted Professor Bryan Reynolds with class administration and grading), Winter, 2018.
- DRAMA 10 Introduction to Production Theory (assisted Professor Joel Veenstra with class administration and grading), Fall 2014, 2015, 2017.
- DRAMA 20A Culture in Performance (assisted Professor Ian Munro with class administration and grading), Spring 2016.
- DRAMA 126W African American Drama and Film (assisted Professor Frank Wilderson III with class administration and grading), Winter 2016.
- DRAMA 112W Restoration Drama (assisted Professor Ian Munro with class administration and grading), Spring 2015.
- DRAMA 11 Rock & Roll Spectacle (assisted Professor Vincent Olivieri with class administration and grading), Winter 2015.

Teaching Assistant 2005 – 2008

Arizona State University, Theatre Program & Dept. of English

- THP 260 Introduction to Playwriting (responsible for all aspects of the course)
- THP 262 Introduction to Screenwriting (responsible for all aspects of the course)
- ENG 101 First-Year Composition (responsible for all aspects of the course)
- ENG 102 First-Year Composition (responsible for all aspects of the course)
- Graduate Workshop Leader, Emeritus Writing Workshops

PUBLICATIONS

Forthcoming:

"Bonding over Phobia: Restaging a Revolution at the Expense of Black Revolt," *Reframing the Musical: Race, Culture and Identity,* ed. Sarah Whitfield Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

"Close Edge: Hip Hop and Miranda's *Hamilton*," *Know (the) Ledge: Critical Essays on the Limitation of Hip Hop Studies*, eds. P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon Woods, Lexington Books, 2018.

Published:

"Breaking Through Hegemony: The Multicultural Perspective in the Composition Classroom," Web resource annotated bibliography, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, 2005

"Brown Oak," (fiction) SPEWS, Southern Oregon University Online Publication Southern Oregon University, Ashland, OR, 2004

SCHOLARLY PRESENTATIONS AND CONFERENCES

"Tarrying With(in) Death: The Spookiness of Hinds' *Dreamscape."* Extra/ordinary Bodies, ASTR/TLA Conference, Atlanta, GA, 2017

"Bonding over Phobia: Restaging a Revolution at the Expense of Black Revolt." The Black Theatre Association's Emerging Scholars Panel, Association for Theatre in Higher Education Conference, Las Vegas, NV, 2017

"Dancing with Ghosts: Black Death and Haunting in Hinds' *Dreamscape."*
Department of African American Studies' Eighteen Hundred and More: Mourning the needy dead in the chaos of protest conference, Princeton University, NJ, 2017

"Rapping Identity, Constructing the Other"
Gender, Sexuality, and Hip Hop Conference, Tulane University, LA, 2013.

"He Got Game/Flow: Competition, Dominance, and the American Masculine Ideal."
Summer Research Program Research Symposium, University of California, Irvine, 2013

"What is Knowledge?" Keynote Speech
Ronald E. McNair Orientation Ceremony, Southern Oregon University, 2013.

"Black Is" (poem)
From Bourgeois to Boojie: Black Middle Class Performances Obermann Humanities Symposium, University of Iowa, 2007.

ACADEMIC AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

University of California, Irvine

The Claire Trevor School of the Arts Medici Scholarship	2017
The Claire Trever School of the Arts Graduate Research & Travel Award	2017
African American Alumni Council's Joseph L. White Scholarship	2017
The Eugene Cota-Robles Graduate Fellowship	2013

Arizona State University

Virginia Piper Center International Writing Residency Fellowship	2007
Virginia Piper Center New Play Development Fellowship	2006

Southern Oregon University

The Southern Oregon University Diversity Scholarship	2003-2005
The Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program	2004-2005
The Catherine Molinar Knapp Multicultural Award	2004

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

- African American Theatre
- Playwriting
- Black Radical Thought
- Hip Hop Theatre
- Dramaturgy

SERVICE

University of California Irvine

Planning Committee Member for The UC Consortium for Black Studies in California Autumn Research Conference, Nov. 2016
Planning Committee Member for UCI Irvine Black Urban Music Conference, 2015-2016.
Editorial Staff for Trans-Script an Interdisciplinary Online Journal in the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2014-2016.
Writer, researcher, and creative consultant for the annual research-performance project Dramatic Transformations, 2014-2015.
School of the Arts Representative, Associate Graduate Students, 2013-2015
Representative for the School of the Arts, Diverse Educational Community and Doctoral Experience (DECADE), 2012-2013

Coleman University
Committee Member, Liberal Arts Curriculum Development Committee, 2011-2012

Southern Oregon University
President, The Associated Students, 2004-2005
Executive Assistant, Multicultural Executive Council, 2003-2005
Director of Multicultural Affairs, Associated Students, 2004
President, Black Student Union, 2003-2004

Other Service
Board Member, Oregon Students Association, 2004-2005
Board Member, Oregon Students of Color Coalition, 2002-2003

OTHER TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Performing Arts Instructor
Inspire Academy, Southern Oregon University, summers 2014 and 2015.

Assistant Teaching Artist
The Old Globe, San Diego, CA, 2012-2013.

Senior Teaching Artist
The Shakespeare Society, New York, NY, 2008-2011.

PLAYS

FULL-LENGTH

- *Star Alarm (A Musical),* Hands Together Collective, Brooklyn, NY, 2011.
- *233a Play (A Theatrical Happening),* Hands Together Collective, Brooklyn, NY, 2011.
- *BeBopShubang,* Arizona State University, Tempe AZ, 2008.
- *Jonny May's Soul Kitchen,* Directed by Patrick Demers, Herberger College of Fine Arts, Arizona State University, 2007.
- *Giving Voice to the Dream*, commissioned and produced, The Black Theatre Troupe of Arizona, directed by David J. Hemphill, 2007.

- *A Bronzian Tale,* directed by Toussaint Jeanlouis, Student Production Board, Arizona State University, 2007.
- *Skylark Dreams*, directed by William Partlan, Herberger College of Fine Arts, Arizona State University, 2006.

ONE-ACT

- *Big Block Letters,* Street Art Prophets, Circle Circle Dot Dot Theatre, San Diego, 2012.
- *The Black & White Minstrel Show,* The DC Black Theatre Festival, Warehouse Theatre, Washington, DC, 2011; Striking Short Play Lab, The Roy Arias Studios, New York, NY, 2010; Vignettes of the Apocalypse, EndTimes Production, New York, NY, 2010; SlamBoston Ten-Minute Play Festival, Another Country Productions, Boston, MA, 2008; The Fifth Annual North Park Playwrights Festival, San Diego, CA, 2007; Kingsborough
- Community College's 10-Minute Play Festival, Brooklyn, NY, 2007; Five of a Kind Ten-Minute Play Festival, Prism Theatre, Arizona State University, 2005.
- *The Last Applause*, Beyond Convention Festival, Hunger Artist Theater Company, Fullerton, CA, 2009.

STAGED READINGS

- *The EnterView*, Midnight Project, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Ashland, OR, 2013
- *Star Alarm*, Mud/Bone Collective, Brooklyn, NY, 2011
- *Skylark Dreams*, New York City Repertory Theatre/NYC Rep, Brooklyn, NY, 2010
- *3 Sistas*, The Pen 'n' Pad Reading Series, Brooklyn, NY, 2009
- *(Re)Working Wilson*, Phoenix Theatre, Phoenix, AZ, 2008
- *The Waiting and Unseen*, Three Roots Cafe, Tempe, AZ, 2007
- *Desert Hills*, Phoenix Theatre, Phoenix, AZ, 2006

DRAMATURGICAL EXPERIENCE

- *These Shining Lives* by Melanie Marnich, Directed by Sarah Butts, The Claire Trevor School of the Arts, U.C. Irvine, 2016
- *The Liquid Plain* by Naomi Wallace, Directed by Jaye Austin Williams, The Claire Trevor School of the Arts, U.C. Irvine, 2015
- *Two Trains Running* by August Wilson, Directed by Lou Bellamy, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Ashland, Oregon, 2013
- *Taming of the Shrew* by William Shakespeare, (Assistant Dramaturg), Directed by David Ivers, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Ashland, 2013
- *We Lost it at the Movies* by Guillermo Reyes, Directed by Erma Duricko, Herberger College of Arts, Arizona State University, 2005

DIRECTING EXPERIENCE

- *A Live Mixtape* by Tahirih Moeller, Theatre Arts Department production, California State Long Beach, 2018

- *Master of the Keys* by Susan C. Hunter, Scripteaser's Short Play Showcase, San Diego, CA, 2012
- *The Biggest Secret* by Janet S. Tiger, Scripteaser's Short Play Showcase, San Diego, CA, 2012
- *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare, The Hunts Point Children's Theatre Ensemble, Bronx, NY, 2010
- *An Awkward Customer* by Mark Petrie, Playwrights on Campus Second Annual 10-Minute Play Festival, Arizona State University, 2007
- *Statement* by Gregory Farber, Playwrights on Campus First Annual 10-Minute Play Festival, Arizona State University, 2006

ASSISTANT DIRECTING EXPERIENCE

- *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare, The Hunts Point Children's Theatre Ensemble, Bronx, NY, 2011
- *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare, The Hunts Point Children's Theatre Ensemble, Bronx, NY, 2009
- *The Vine* by Jose Casas, Teatro Bravo, Phoenix, AZ, 2005

ACTING EXPERIENCE

- Jacques, *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare, directed by Jordan Dann, Hunts Point's Children Ensemble, Bronx, NY, 2010.
- Lucian, *Scribblin' at the Automat* by Arthvr Alleyne, directed by Ira Kip, Kumble Theatre, Long Island University, Brooklyn, NY, 2009.
- Ensemble Member, *Water Music* by Josh Gelb, directed by Barrie Gelles, Union Drama Club, Brooklyn, NY, 2009.
- Levi, *Bernice The Skunk* (reading) by Johnny Culver, Brooklyn, NY, 2009
- Babu, *Big Cats* by Katie May, directed by Blake Wilson, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, 2006.
- Ensemble Member. *The Vine* by Jose Casas, directed by Carlos Manuel, Teatro Bravo, Phoenix, AZ, 2005.
- Malcolm X, *The Meeting* by Jeff Staton, City of Ashland Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration, 2004.
- Rueben, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* by August Wilson, directed by Clinton Turner Davis, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Ashland, OR, 1993

Other Theatre Experience

- Playwriting Judge, Artists of Promise Program, The Maricopa Community Colleges, 2014, 2015, and 2016.
- Artistic Member, Brown Bag Theater, UCI, CA, 2014-present
- Artistic Member, Scripteasers, San Diego, CA, 2012-present
- Assistant Artistic Director, Hands Together Collective, Brooklyn, NY, 2010-2011
- Playwright-in-Residence, Mud/Bone Theatre Collective, Brooklyn, NY 2010-2011
- Artistic Member, The Union Drama Club, Brooklyn, NY 2009-2011

- President/Artistic Director, Playwrights on Campus, Arizona State University, 2007-2008
- Submission Reader, Phoenix Theatre's 10th Annual New Works Festival, Phoenix, AZ, 2006
- Submission Reader, Arizona Playwrights Competitions, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, 2005
- Director and Producer, Student Playwrights Short-Play Festival, Rogue Community College Medford, OR, 2002

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Since 2015	Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas
Since 2007	The Dramatists Guild of America

REFERENCES

Available upon request

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Pleading the Fifth Element: Disaesthetics and Hip Hop as Black Study

By

Wind Dell Woods

Doctor of Philosophy in Drama & Theatre

University of California, Irvine, 2018

Professor Frank B. Wilderson III, Chair

This dissertation makes three main interventions into the fields of Hip Hop Studies and Hip Hop Theater to rescue and restore Hip Hop's radical potentials from its cooptation by (neo)liberal multiculturalist agendas both inside and outside the academy and mainstream theater. The first is a metacritique of the limitations found in the literature of Hip Hop Studies due to its inability to interpret the ways in which Hip Hop's expressive content is already engaged in a process of study. Since the field of Hip Hop Theater derives its theoretical archive from Hip Hop Studies, the second intervention extends into the ways Hip Hop is employed in contemporary theater. Here, I expose similar problematics, one of which is how the scholarship and dramatic work find their "coherence" and "legibility" by ignoring the anti-Blackness that animates Western humanism. In both fields, Blackness remains a problem for thought (pace W.E.B. Du Bois and Nahum Chandler) resulting in two main analytical limitations: 1) an inability to consider the specific ways Black people suffer under the hydraulics of global anti-Blackness and 2) an inability to recognize and incorporate the Black radical critiques offered by Hip Hop artists and dramatists. These limitations result in a theft of Hip Hop and a suppression

of Black radical thought. Within the context of hegemonic multiculturalism, Blackness becomes a force that animates other people's agendas while Black ethical demands are forcefully quarantined. These problematics lead me to my third intervention: a call for investigators and artists to consider Hip Hop as a radical *method* of study rather than solely as an *object* of study. Such a method joins Sylvia Wynters' critique of Western Man with Tupac Shakurs' lyrical-political call to "fuck the World."

This dissertation disrupts the traditional tendency to freeze Hip Hop as an object, and reemploys it as a methodology: layering, sampling, and remixing theory and analysis into a meta-critical cypher, while never losing sight of what is truly at stake in a project that is attentive to Black ethical demands. In this pursuit, the dissertation's introduction defines and elaborates on the intervention and its importance. Disc One brings the Hip Hop Studies and Hip Hop Theatre's scholarship into a critical cypher, exposing their limitations, while defining the parameters of Hip Hop as a form of Black radical critique through the concept of the "dis". Disc Two applies critical force to Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*, and interrogates the ways the musical turns a (color)blind eye towards Black suffering, employing black bodies as refugees in a project that works against their political and liberatory interests. Disc Three analyzes the work of Rickerby Hinds, isolating moments in his dramaturgy where his use of Hip Hop theorizes on Black "social death" and structural violence. Disc Four brings the work of playwright Suzan-Lori Parks into the cypher, tracing her use of layering and sampling as a method of *dis*rupting the traditional "grammar" used to make legible the "ghosts" of Black suffering. Disc Five, the concluding section—like a vinyl record spinning to a close, its critical needle producing an eerie, repetitious crackling sound as it maneuvers into the dead wax—returns to the spectral questions lingering with(in) the entire project.

DISC 1 (Intro): Allow me to Re-Introduce myself

Track 1: Don't Forget Where You're Goin'

Hip Hop found me
A face // "at the bottom of the well"//[1]
the echoing sounds of black noise all around
fell on deaf ears, for my soundings
//"existed outside the parameters"//[2]
Speech was to be //"my hammer, bang the world into shape"//[3]
No strategy, no plan of remedy…
All I caught was a fleeting //"blurred glimpse of a dark held world"//[4]
Murmuring melodies of a dis-arrival
The death-canal
a plantation
They gave me a tongue, trade for my mother
I craved mud rich water
Flowing into the afterlife
Tales of a frozen future
//"What is justice for [ ] anyways?"//[5]

Track 2: So, When Did You Fall in Love with Hip Hop?

In an introduction like this, it is conventional for a Hip Hop scholar to describe their connection to the music and the culture, to, essentially, answer the question posed by the character of Sidney (Sanaa Lathan) in the film *Brown Sugar* (2002): "*So, when did you fall in love with Hip Hop?"* Often the answers to this question expand far beyond the temporal (when) into the spatial (where) and explanatory (why/how) realms. For me, the time and place, as well as the rhymes and reasons are (Black and) blurred.[6] Let me begin, then, with the information that comes readily to mind and see what I might *dis*-cover[7] in my Morrisonian "re-memorying"[8].

I was born in 1979, the same year The Sugar Hill Gang released "Rapper's Delight," thrusting a music and culture into the mainstream. Depending on who you ask, Hip Hop either died or was immortalized with the rhyme: "now, what you hear is not a test, I'm rapping to the

beat / and me, the groove, and my friends are gonna try and move your feet."[9] Now, I…was too young to remember its arrival or to have a stake in the debate that it caused. My encounter with Hip Hop occurred much later when I was about ten and could identify or at least put a name to the rhyming and rhythmic vocalizing coming through the speakers: Rap. Which song, by which artist, I cannot recollect.

Around that same time, I recall flicking through the TV channels and landing on a music video: a group of heavy-set guys rapping. The Fat Boys, perhaps.

> // "Now, falling in love ain't all that great / love is def, there's no doubt / but this is what love is really about." //[10]

Maybe Run-DMC.

> // "You know I'm proud to be black y'all / and that's a fact y'all / and if you take what's mine / I take it back y'all, it's a fact." //[11]

The "when" of my first encounter, had to have been around 1987. As for the where: I know I was in rural Oregon, a galaxy away from any recognized Hip Hop hotbeds. This remoteness is most likely why I didn't quite "fall in love" with Hip Hop. Rather, our relationship grew out of a far-off friendship; in the lyrics of Marvin Gaye, Hip Hop was a "distant lover [so many miles away]."[12] Even in its distance there was something about Hip Hop that felt too close at times.

As for the why (I fell in love with Hip Hop): well, that wouldn't become apparent to me until much later. And, truth be told, my love for Hip Hop, or Hip Hop's love for me, has always ensued on a battlefield.[13] In Hip Hop, the (life of the) playground *is* the (death of the) battleground. It has been within this liminal space that I have confronted and gone to war with myself and the World.[14] I have forged forward and retreated, moving in and out of love and hate. It's a thin line between. Hip Hop's love is a percussive encounter; it is love on the run, a roaming

romance, a fling of fugitivity, an enduring force that I "might not know if it were not pushing back" (Sexton, "Ante-Anti").

// "I've got to keep on pushin' / I can't stop now."//[15]

// "I'm your pusherman / I'm your pusherman." //[16]

This remembering, then, is a type of pushing back to push forward…

Most salient to my memory of Hip Hop is not the when or where, but the how. I was introduced to Hip Hop by my two older brothers. Though the eldest of the two was only four years my senior, my older brothers seemed to belong to a different era. The fact that they were white with blond hair and blue eyes, and I was Black with a thick mound of curly hair that couldn't decide if it was going to stand proud in an Afro or fall into cool Michael Jackson curls, made my older brothers seem as if they were from a different World as well.[17]

// "Out of this world / Are we alien?"//[18]

I recall that on their side of the room (which I was forbidden to go to) they possessed an impressive collection of cassette tapes. Some of the tapes were originals, tucked neatly into their assigned cases, their colorful album covers identifying the artists and the contents. Some were self-made copies (mixtapes) composed of a variety of artists and songs. Titles like "Sick Mix," "Party Hits," and "Real Shit" were scribbled on the bodies of the cassettes; those mixtapes were my favorites because I never knew who I would hear, what new styles and ideas I would encounter. The songs spoke to each other in and through their anonymity and unpredictability. At times, it would sound as if all the songs were by the same artist; other times I could hear a thousand different voices weaving together a complicated and contradictory tale.

> //"I'm Ms. Melodie and I'm a born again rebel / The violence in rap must cease and settle / If we want to develop and grow to another level / We can't be guinea pigs for the devil."//[19]

Years later I would realize that those were the voices and ideas of Boogie Down Production, Public Enemy, Eric B. and Rakim, Slick Rick, De La Soul, Big Daddy Kane, Queen Latifa, MC Lyte, Run DMC, LL Cool J, Young MC, DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince, The Beastie Boys, Tribe Called Quest… Artists and albums from what many fans and scholars call Hip Hop's Golden Age: 1987-1993. But I remember distinctly the introduction of Kool Moe Dee's "Wild Wild West," its synthesized drumbeat, the staccato, almost comedic sounding gun shots, the deep melodic repetition of the phrase "wild wild west / wild wild west," and then Kool Moe Dee's voice dropping in: "I used to live downtown, 129th Street / Convent, everything's upbeat" (*How Ya Like Me Now,* 1988). I had no idea where 129th Street was or that the "west" he was referring to was west Harlem, New York, and not the West Coast. Still, somehow, I felt connected to this location where I'd never been. For some reason, I felt these mixtapes were speaking to me, speaking *for* me.

One day my oldest brother caught me with his cassette copy of *How Ya Like Me Now*. Rather than scold me, he pointed to the red Kangol placed under Kool Moe Dee's white Jeep on the album cover and stated: "You see that? That's supposed to be LL Cool J's hat. They have mad beef."

What is beef? I might have asked and years later, rapper Mos Def would reply:

> //Beef is the cocaine and AIDS epidemic / Beef don't come with a radio edit / Beef, it comes with a long jail sentence / Handed down to you in a few short minutes"//[20]

I realized then that there was a whole planetary system of Hip Hop that I didn't understand. It was later that day, or week, or month (time blurs) that my brother and I watched L.A. burning on T.V. I realized that there was a World I didn't understand. The vinyl was already spinning. Hip Hop had found me, but I had arrived too late.

Track 3 (Scene)[21]: On Arriving Too Late, Gangsta Rap and Existing Triply

This is 1993. I peg my stone-washed jeans even though it is out of style. This is the era of Gangsta Hip-Hop. Compton is where it is at. All my white friends are walking around in tan Khakis, flannel jackets, and white undershirts. In the backwoods of Oregon, we generally caught on to trends, especially in music, a year or two late.

I'm at a party. "Ain't Nothing But a G-Thing" is playing in the background. Snoop, with that soft mellow voice: "One, two, three and to the four / Snoop Doggy-Dogg and Dr. Dre is at the door."

Nearby an altercation breaks out; a couple of rowdy teenage boys drunk from five of them sharing one forty, start to cause trouble. It is quickly resolved. My best friend (Ryan) still amped from seeing the brief incident leans over to me and says, "man, Wind, I wish I was black like you, and could carry a gun…I would have blasted them fools." This causes a stir, as people begin to ask me what kind of gun I had.
"Dude, have you ever shot anyone, man?"
"What's it like, yo?"
"Where'd you get the gun?"

I am speechless. I don't think I had ever seen a gun up close, never held one in my hand, never owned one. I had certainly never shot anyone.

The boys continue:
"Yo, you should have got up in their faces."
"Got all gangsta on them, man."
"Ahh, but Wind isn't like that," Ryan said, adding "He's all like hippy or some shit. Yo, Wind if I was black like you'd I be more gangster."
"Hell, yeah, I'd be like: what up, nigga, you want to start some shit?"

[I am re-woven "out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories"][22]

"Wind ain't *really* black."
"I mean he's black, but he ain't black-black."
"Shit, I'm blacker than Wind is."
"If I was black, nobody would fuck with me."
"Hell, yeah, black people are always packing. People know that and leave them the hell alone."

Their voices blend into the music. I sit looking into the piss-colored liquid in the bottle. I think about the books on Blackness that my white mother had given me to read.[23] I come from kings and queens, I say to myself, from a rich and beautiful ancestry. A people that predate what these white kids think of me, or think I am. I must predate Compton, California. I escape the party early as track eight "Nigga with a Gun" fades away in the distance.

Track 4: Taking it B(l)ack / Taking it Forward.

I blame(ed) Gangsta Rap for my not having listened to Hip Hop from 1994 -1998. It wasn't a protest or a boycott, really. Rather, my abstinence was a way of avoiding conversations with my white friends about the newest Too $hort, Ice Cube, or Dr. Dre song. I could not reconcile the troubling irony that in middle school, just a year before, many of my white schoolmates would hurl the word "nigger" at me as an insult. Now, a year later, in high school, many of these same kids would attempt to befriend me with the phrase: "What's up, my nigga?" The former call or "interpellation" was easier to fight. And if my sister—who, for most of our childhood, was bigger and stronger than me—was present, we'd fight until exhausted and then wonder what it accomplished when the next day we were confronted with the ugly wor(l)d again.[24] The latter was more difficult to combat. Often, I'd let it slide. After all, how does one fight back against such a violent acceptance, a brutal embrace.

It was Gangsta Rap's fault. I had convinced myself. If these "Gangsta rappers" would just stop promoting bad stereotypes, rapping about violence, and making all of us look bad, I might, well, in the words of Fanon, develop a type of "ontological resistance" to white people. When someone would yell "nigger" at my sisters and me out of a passing car window, I blamed Ice Cube. When a store clerk at 7-11 warned that I'd better buy something or get out before she called the cops, I blamed Snoop and Dre. When my friend's mom asked me to stay in the car

because the people they were visiting were "a little funny about black people," I blamed Eazy-E. When I was pulled over twenty-two times in one year while driving my mom's 1970 Oldsmobile, I blamed N.W.A. And when the chief of police later told me, I was 'profiled' (not because of my race but) because the car I drove was the number one choice of drug dealers in Oakland, California, I blamed Too $hort, The Click, and Mac Dre. For some reason, I didn't blame MC Hammer.

//"U Can't Touch This"//[25]

I wanted nothing to do with the World these rappers lyricized. Gangsta Rap had awoken an *imago*, one that anticipated and preceded me, that forced me to appear when I was trying to hide. In this re-appearance, I arrived too late, always already tethered to deathly narratives. I was overtaken or overdetermined, as Fanon describes in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Out of rage, I pushed back. I cursed and denied these tales, these images. If these stories and this World *did* exist (I had wished they didn't), I was certainly not part of them. I was different. If Hip Hop was engaged in "the challenge of analytical description," I was caught up in "the desire for political prescription" (Sexton, "Ante-"). My prescription: an adamant disavowal of "the nigga [the World] loves to hate"[26] with the "hope" of moving closer to acceptance, health, and sociality.

> // "Rather than hiding from the ugliness of the world, perhaps we can discover how best to withstand it" //[27]

> // "Critics have often mistaken a depiction of the world for a *choice* about our future, as if [rappers] had rejoiced at the decline and decay that they described"//[28]

It wasn't until I heard Tupac Shakur's *Me Against the World* (1995) album for the first time that I thought there might be something else going on in the lyrics of Gangsta Rap. Shakur's (or Pac's) "Fuck the World," provided me with a new way of thinking and being.

> // "Who you callin' rapist? Ain't that a bitch / You devils, are so two faceded / wanna see me locked in chains, dropped in shame / And getting' stalked by the crooked cops a-gain." //[29]

It was my sister Lea who came to me and said: "Wind, I know you don't listen to rap anymore, but you will really like this." I was skeptical at first, but in listening to Tupac it made me realize that it wasn't Gangsta Rap that subjected me to, what Jaye Austin Williams describes perfectly in an interview with Frank B. Wilderson III, as "the overt *and* covert aggressions black people consistently confront in attempting to live in the world" (Wilderson and Williams, para 2). I had wanted to believe that the anti-black micro-and macro-aggressions that combatted me were caused by Gangsta Rap. This would give me an orientation, a causal logic to my vertigo experience of being overdetermined by these, the "deadliest [of] fiction[s]."[30] If that was the case, there would have been a plentitude before Gangsta Rap where my life was free from anti-black aggression. But this was not the case. Gangsta Rap did not bring about the condition. Rather, it was actively involved in the painful and troubling act of describing it. But how does one describe a paradox? Perhaps, we must descend into it.[31]

I decided to return, to listen to the music I had missed during my "breakup" with Hip Hop. I found there an insightful and critical outlook that worked to interrogate and sometimes make sense of the World. It is this *stylistic* approach of "break(ing) up to make up,"[32] this method of looking/pushing back (in dis-order) in order to look/push forward that my scholarship attempts to enact. It is a type of listening in and through discomfort. To walk and talk the paradox. To resist the "rage for order."[33] In going back and re-listening, my project avows the Black study of Hip Hop, Gangsta rap, so-called "conscious," "pop" or "underground." In the flow of Rapsody:

//"Look, nigga this some marvelous shit / Before the politics, arguing real vs radio hits / It's all Hip Hop, you can't divide what ain't different"//[34] (Rapsody "nobody")

The invitation and invocation is one of return that allows for a push forward, forward towards the edge. The real leap, both Baldwin and Fanon remind us, is a peculiar commitment to the impossible. Baldwin: "the leap demanded that I commit myself to the clear impossibility of becoming [a thinker]."[35] Fanon: "the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence" (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 204). How to make such a leap from this *ground on which I stand*,[36] to leap from this rotating *narrow now*?[37] It may require leaping out of familiar grooves (orders of knowledge). It may demand a type of skipping the needle off the record, a radical commitment to search for the absent presence, to seek out the unthought position (Hartman and Wilderson), to wake the dead from the archival crates.

// "Don't push me, cause I'm close to the edge…it makes me wonder / How I keep from going under."//[38]

To do this, we might just have to lose our heads…hahahaha ha.

Track 5: (Scene) On the Ruse of Analogy

In 1999, I moved to Oakland, CA in search of something. I didn't know if I would find *it* there, but it was worth looking. I moved with a longtime friend of mine who "happened to be" white. The only place that we could afford to live, being full-time students, was Emeryville. Each night on our way home from work or school, we had to walk past a certain corner. There, almost every evening, was a group of older Black men sitting on a porch.

"Fucking white boy!" they would shout.
"You believe this shit?"
"What you doing with that white boy around here?"

It happened so often that it became a bit of a joke for us.
Some evenings I would even join in: "yeah, you fucking white boy!"
The men on the porch would laugh.

It was a strange game, something that is "done" as a substitution for…something else.

One evening, after we were past the ritualist barrage, I noticed my friend was really upset. He turned to me and said:

> "You know what? I think I know how you felt growing up in Oregon. This really sucks. I wish they'd stop."

We walked in silence the rest of the way home.

The next day we took a different route, avoiding that corner altogether. An unspoken agreement. The privilege of only having to avoid one street corner in Emeryville, CA.

Track 6: Once the needle finds its groove, track how it spins.

To close this introduction, I return (with difference)[39] to ponder again an answer to the original question: *when did you fall in love with hip hop*? In a sense, the answer might be today, back in the days, or I'm still falling in (and out of) love. What's love got to do with it? Nothing. Everything? Hip Hop is that Black sound(ing) that I love to hate, but that I will always avow for what it dis-avows.[40] It's about love, but a love of and for study. The goal is to study it, with(in) it—this "thing called Hip Hop,"[41] in order to create a radical Hip Hop-ology.

This dissertation might, then, be an attempt at re-asking and re-answering the question. Its *aim* is to recuperate Hip Hop, to re-position it as a way of thinking, to reanimate as way of, what Hip Hop artists term, "dropping science". To this end or opening, I offer four more Discs (digital records) that theorize while creating theory on (and as) Hip Hop. Each of the Discs is comprised of an assortment of tracks, totaling 36 in all.[42] For me, a "track" is a generative concept-metaphor. One lays vocals and instrumentation on a track. A track is a path one might take to explore. One might be forced to backtrack. One can track something down. Track the similarities and differences between a "racial contract" and racial slavery, between the walking dead and those forced to walk "dead in their tracks".[43] We may get off track, and a D.J. (Disc Jockey) might bring the track back or "'pon de replay" as Rihanna might say.[44] One is given a

tracking number to follow the journey of a package. Animals leave tracks in snow. Ships leave tracks on the water, what Christina Sharpe terms, the wake's "purposeful flow."[45] Some needles play tracks, while others leave colorful tracks in arms. Tracks can be played in full or skipped over. Tracks are complicated. Saul Williams says:

> // "I won't rhyme on top no tracks / Niggas on the chain gang used to do that (huh), way back"//[46]

The tracks I offer here are filled with ample samples which always keep (more than) two trains running in search of Hambone's ethical demand. Where you been Hambone?[47]

> // "Round the world and I'm going again."//[48]

The Dis is a type of mental grindin' "on or off the track."[49] Each track can be read (listened to) separately. But keep in mind that songs are compiled of multiple tracks/channels, mixing different signals: rhythm section, lead guitars, and vocals. Some of the tracks are made up of scenes and samples in which I work to interpret and provide contexts for the reader; others, I leave for the reader to tarry with on their own. One c(l)ue I provide is to read these scenes and samples together and in tension. This will offer the richest (Black) noise. The trick is to listen with(in) the mix.

The total 36 tracks, bring the fields of Hip Hop Studies and Hip Hop Theater into a creative and critical cypher,[50] exposing the limits of the scholarship, while defining the parameters of Hip Hop as a form of Black radical critique through the concept of the "dis". Disc 2 outlines Hip Hop as a method of study and then subjects the archival crates of Hip Hop Studies to a creative analysis. This "critical gaze"[51] puts on dis-play the sources these scholars bring to rock the intellectual party with, as well as who they leave in the crates, and more importantly, whose records are absent from the crates altogether. Disc 3 applies critical force to Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*, and interrogates the ways the musical turns a (color)blind eye towards

Black suffering, employing black bodies as refugees in a project that works against their political and liberatory interests. Disc 4 analyzes the work of Rickerby Hinds, isolating moments in his dramaturgy where his use of Hip Hop theorizes on Black "social death" and structural violence. Disc 5 brings the work of playwright Suzan-Lori Parks into the cypher, tracing her use of layering and sampling as a method of *dis*rupting the traditional "grammar" used to make legible the "ghosts" of Black suffering.[52] Disc 6, the Outro and concluding section—like a vinyl record spinning to a close, its critical needle producing an eerie, repetitious crackling sound as it maneuvers into the dead wax—returns to the spectral questions lingering with(in) the entire project.[53]

Track 7 (outro): Don't Forget Where You've Been

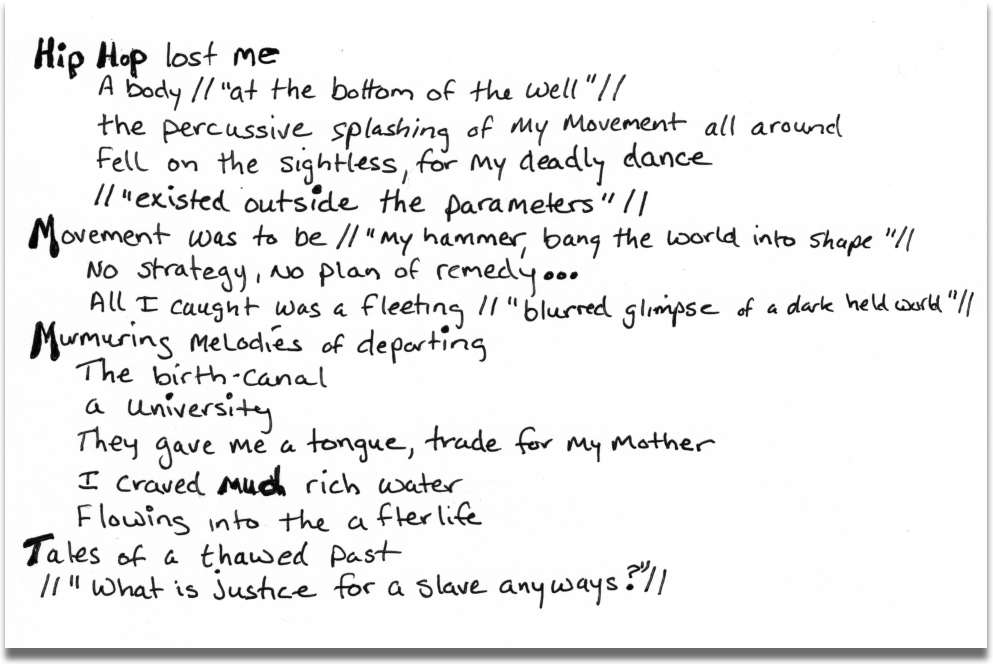

Fig 1: "Hip Hop Lost Me, a return" [54]

Section Endnotes

[1]Here is a good time to explain a technique at play throughout my dissertation. I am trying to on the page indicate the presence and effect of a sonic sample. I do this by placing the sampled text in between these markers //"sample"//. I am hoping to evoke the aesthetics of a DJ sampling in a source, layering into a track already in progress. The sample is a dis-ruption, sometimes in tension with what is taking place. It is also an addition, complementing what is being said. It may also serve as a type commentary, a side-eyed glance, an aside. The // // are the visual and textual (graphemic) indicators of a scratching sound marking an encounter with a source from some other time-space.
[2] Best, S. and Saidiya Hartman. "Fugitive Justice," p. 3.
[3] Mos Def. "Hip Hop," *Black on Both Sides*.
[4] Gumbs, Alexis P. *Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity*, p. 12.
[5] Best, S. and Saidiya Hartman. "Fugitive Justice," p. 3.
[6] I am playing with Fred Moten's notion of "blur" in his book *Black and Blur*. Two quotations are of great importance to what I am attempting to put at play and play with here. The first: "Blurred, unkempt, unkept time is when and where music accompanies, and discomposes, an already strained commitment to visual synchrony" (254); and two: "What whiteness seeks to separate, blackness blurs by cutting…" (281).
[7] Later in this project I will discuss in further detail my concept of the "dis". In this usage, I mean to suggest a type of un-covering that is aided by a "dis".
[8] I mean this in terms of Morrison's use of remembering a memory, and as she writes of Sethe in *Beloved* (2004): "remembering something she had forgotten she knew," p. 73.
[9] Much of the debate is centered on the fact that the first rap song to enjoy mass radio play didn't come from NYC but from a group that many refer to as illegitimate rappers from New Jersey. Some argue that "Rapper's Delight" marks the death of real underground Hip Hop as it gives way to mainstream control.
[10] Fat Boys. "Falling in Love," *Crushin'* . D&D Records, 1987.
[11] Run-D.M.C.. "Proud to Be Black," *Raising Hell*. Profile, 1986.
[12] Marvin Gaye. "Distant Lover," *Let's Get it On*. Tamla, 1973.
[13] By way of the Hip Hop duo Dead Prez's remix on Pat Benatar's song "Love is a Battlefield." See, Dead Prez. "The Game is a Battlefield," *Turn Off the Radio Vol. 4: Revolutionary but Gangsta Grillz.* Unknown, 2010.
[14] I capitalize the W in world to draw attention to its construction, the bios and the logos, the material and the myths that structure and sustain the World and the process of World making. It may need to be said that I mean the World that Western modernity has wrought. I am thinking here also of Suzan-Lori Parks "thuh worl usta be *roun* they put uh /d/ on thuh end of round makin it roun*d.* Thusly they set in motion thuh end" (Parks, 102). It is this (W)orld that I am referencing by the capitalization; the world that modernity has set in motion the end of.
[15] The Impressions. "Keep on Pushing." *Keep on Pushing*. ABC-Paramount, 1964.
[16] Curtis Mayfield "Pusherman," *Super Fly*. Cortom, 1972.
[17] I wish to evoke here what Frantz Fanon says to Jean-Paul Sartre: "There will always be a world—a white world—between you and us" (*Black Skin, White Masks*,101).
[18] OutKast. "E.T.," *ATLiens*. LaFace Records, 1996.
[19] Ms. Melodie on "Self-Destruction," Jive, 1988.
[20] Blackstar. "What's Beef."
[21] I am indebted to Jaye Austin Williams who encouraged me to use the term "scene" rather than "skit" in order to think with Saidiya Hartman's move to "look elsewhere and consider those scenes in which terror can hardly be discerned" (*Scenes of Subjection*, 14).
[22] Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*, 91.
[23] After a racial encounter on the playground where a fellow classmate called me the "N-Word" and told me to "go back to Africa," my mother bought me a stack of books by Black authors. The only one I can recall fully is

W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk*. I remember liking the title a great deal. The books were old, large, and intimidating. I was too young to really devote any time to reading them. On the rare occasions when I did attempt to read them, my reading skills were not strong enough to comprehend much of their content. There was something about Africa and kings and queens. I remember the titles had the word Black in them, maybe Black Rage, Black Power. To this day, I have no clue where my mother found these books. She has no memory of this event, yet it seems so fresh in my mind.

[24] Looking back, I find my passivity somewhat troubling. My sister Lea understood early on something that Audre Lorde reminds us, namely that, "Your silence will not protect you" (to sample from the title of Audre Lorde's collection of Essays and Poems, 2017).

[25] MC Hammer. "U Can't Touch This," *Please Hammer, Don't Hurt 'Em*. Capital, 1990.

[26] A riff on rapper Ice Cube's track "The Nigga You Love To Hate" (1990).

[27] Dienstag, J. *Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit*, x.

[28] Quoted in Sexton, "Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word," para. 7. Sexton does a similar interjection with his use of the word "scholars" in place of the word "philosophers". It should be noted that rappers are often referred to as street scholars or street philosophers.

[29] Tupac. "Fuck the World," *Me Against the World*. Interscope, 1995.

[30] Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*: "What is this thing called "race"? Our deadliest abstraction?...Not fact, but our deadliest fiction that gives the lie to doubt about ghosts?," 379.

[31] I am following Jaye Austin Williams lead when she states: "As we descend into the paradox, I pose this two-part query: Does the floor of the Atlantic meet the ceiling of Plato's cave? If so, what does that suggest about the escape hatch?," 67.

[32] A riff on the Stylistics' "Break Up to Make Up," 1973. I am also thinking of style as a technique in line with what I will term later as *disesthetics*. A central component of the dis of disaesthetics is the technique of destroying and rebuilding, or breaking and remaking.

[33] Sexton, "Consequence of Race Mixture: Racialized Barriers and the Politics of Desire," 241.

[34] Rapsody. "Nobody," *Laila's Wisdom*, 2017.

[35] Baldwin, *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, 503.

[36] I am purposefully evoking both the Stand-your-ground law and August Wilson's 1996 speech "The Ground on Which I Stand" (Wilson 1996), but also Rapper/Professor A.D. Carson's lyrics: "It's probably the most irresponsible, conscious, decision I've made to say this… / But I'm thinking shoot back" ("Second Amendment [Shoot Back]", *Owning My Masters*)

[37] Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk*, 174.

[38] Grandmaster Flash. "The Message," *The Message*. Sugar Hill Records, 1982.

[39] I am thinking the concepts of "return" and "difference" through Suzan-Lori Parks jazz influenced dramaturgical notion of "Rep&Rev," as well as, George Yancy's notion of "the phenomenological return of the Black body" (Yancy, "Whiteness and the return of the Black Body,"215).

[40] I am thinking this in line with William Eric Perkins (*Droppin' Science*, 1996) reference to "Rap music and hip hop culture's ongoing and bewildering love/hate relationship with American society," 1.

[41] Mos Def. "Hip Hop," *Black on Both Sides.*

[42] Why thirty-six? It is a circular number, a cypher, a rounded off number. Wu-Tang's Album *Enter the Wu-Tang, 36 Chambers*; Frantz Fanon and Bob Marley died at 36; the 1970 Kung Fu film, *36 Chambers of Shaolin*; Thirty-six black keys on a piano; AD Carson's Hip Hop album and dissertation is comprised of 36 tracks; 36 the atomic weight of Krypton, from Ancient Greek word *kryptos* "the hidden one"; 36 Dramatic Situations; The *Tzadikim Nistarim* in Judaism, "hidden righteous ones".

[43] Willoughby-Herard. "More expendable than slaves? Racial justice and the after-life of slavery," 508.

[44] Rihanna. "Pon de Replay". Roughly translated as play it again.

[45] Sharpe, C. *In the Wake*, 3.

[46] Saul Williams. "Twice the First Time," 1997.

[47] See Hambone in August Wilson's play *Two Trains Running*.
[48] "Hambone" the folk song.
[49] Clipse. "Grinding," *Lord Willin'*.
[50] Or "cypha".
[51] Morrison. *Playing in the Dark*, 11.
[52] Wilderson III, "Grammar & Ghosts: The Performative Limits of African Freedom."
[53] I am thinking here, perhaps, of Lenin's question of "what is to be done?"
[54] This is a return to the poem that opens this section. Some of the poem's content has changed, but more importantly the form or medium has been altered. I am interested in the vulnerability of a handwritten text. For the samples used in the poem, refer to footnotes 2-5.

DISC 2: On Hip Hop Studies

Track 1 (Scene): When the table is long, your chair-less spot is by the door; an oversight I'm sure.[1]

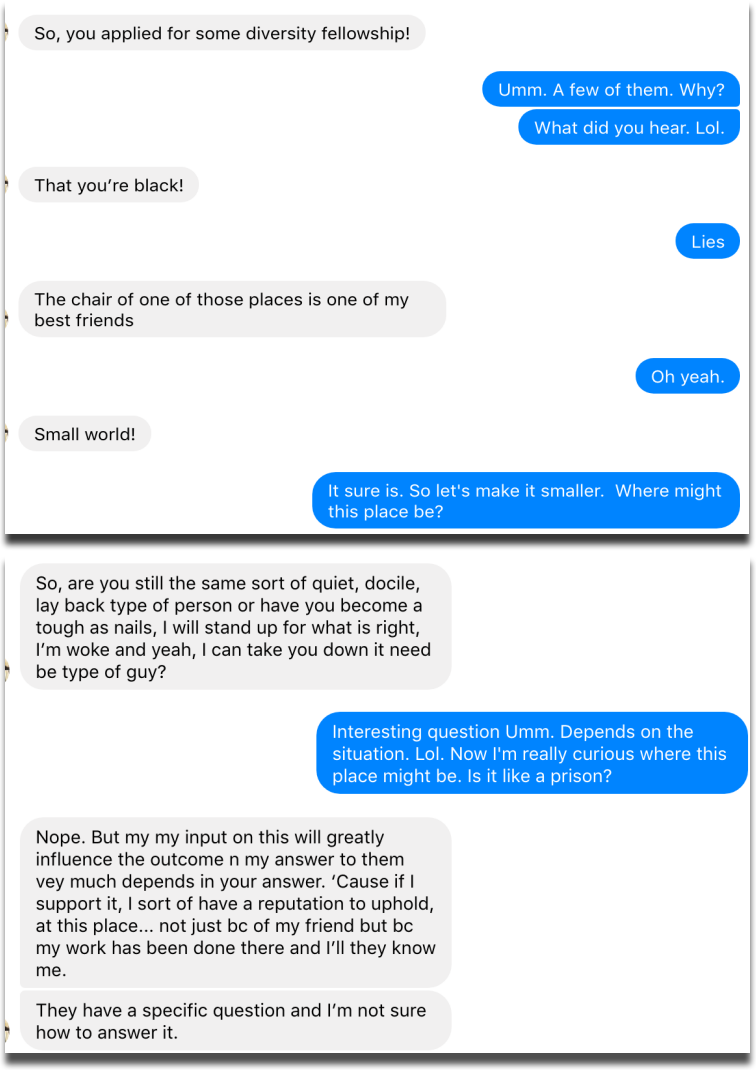

Fig 2: "A Text Untitled" [2]

CHRISTINA: A: Doc-doc-doctor Prentice…I'm so pleased to meet you.
JOANNA: He thinks you're gonna faint because he's a Negro.
CHRISTINA: Well, I don't think I'm going to faint. But I'll sit down anyway. [3]

//Sometimes they invite you to the table and you find your name on the fucking menu.// –Delsoul[4]

FREEMAN: This is not about hating white folks. It's about loving freedom

enough to die or kill for it if necessary. Now, you're gonna need more than hate to sustain you when this thing begins. [5]

Track 2: All Black Everything[6]…well, not everything.

> This ghost town was once rare grooves and shattered snare drums
> Cramped basement jams, suburbia wouldn't dare come
> The death of an era gave birth to a phase
> Frantic crowd calling "nigga" till we surrendered the trade
> (Nigga?)
> Now 'who stole the soul' became the phrase
> When only eight niggas at the show and six of 'em is on stage.
>
> –Lifesavas [7]

> They have always tried to erase the Black presence from whatever Black thing They took a shine to: jazz, blues, rock and roll, doo-wop, swing dancing, cornrowing, anti-disimanation (sic) politics, attacking Dead Men, you name it.
>
> –Greg Tate [8]

> The emergence of the Black Studies Movement in its original thrust, before its later cooption into the mainstream of the very order of knowledge whose "truth" in "some abstract universal sense" it had arisen to contest, was inseparable from the parallel emergence of the Black Aesthetic and Black Arts Movements and the central rein- forcing relationship that had come to exist between them…The paradox here, however, was that despite the widespread popular dynamic of the Black Arts and Black Aesthetic Movements, they disappeared as if they had never been.
>
> –Sylvia Wynter [9]

The three epigraphs that open this section speak to a similar phenomenon, namely, the coinciding embrace of Black cultural production and the rejection of the "melaninated" bodies and voices that produce and perform it.[10] To spin it in riff with rapper Ice Cube, while Black music is the sound that many love to take, Black people remain the "nigga(s) [the World] love(s) to hate."[11] In the first epigraph, the Oregon-based rap group Lifesavas calls attention to two examples of Black dislocation: on one hand, the gentrification of Northeast Portland, and, on the other, the changing racial demographic of Hip Hop audiences. Both gentrification and the

"whitening" of Hip Hop engage in a type of selective pilfering which takes "everything but the burden" (to sample from Greg Tate). Lifesavas' lyrical observation problematizes this type of ingesting and erasing of Blackness that renders Black people absent from the sight and site of consumption, posing, perhaps a rejoinder to Alex Weheliye's (2005) question: "What happens once the black voice becomes disembodied, severed from its source, (re)contexualized, and (re)embodied and appropriated"[12] with no, or few Black bodies in/sight? Lifesavas' lyrics point out the troubling irony of these two types of "displacement"[13] while evoking the theme of death in both circumstances: one type of death renders a neighborhood a "ghost town" through the "death of an era," while the other describes the process of having a soul stolen or losing a soul.[14] Lifesavas bring into critical relief the philic relation to (some) Black art and the phobic reaction to Black bodies.

The Greg Tate sample also attests to the tendency for Black erasure once the larger non-Black society gets ahold of the expressive forms (jazz, blues, rock and roll), the cultural practices and stylizations (cornrowing) and the political dispositions (anti-discrimination politics and attacking Dead Men). Where Lifesavas and Tate, when read together, mark the contradictory nature of an appetite for Black (musical) tracks and an apathy for Black traffic (Black bodies moving through non-Black spaces), Jamaican novelist and critical theorist Sylvia Wynter zeros in on a similar type of theft and cooptation. Wynter explains that the Black Studies movement "in its original thrust…was inseparable from the parallel emergence of the Black Aesthetic and Black Arts Movements" ("How we Mistook…" 108). As Black Studies found a "home" in the academy, it was coopted and used to bolster the same orders of knowledge it sought to trouble and dismantle, namely, those of universal humanism. "The paradox," Wynter explains, "is that

despite the widespread popular dynamic of the Black Arts and Black Aesthetic Movements (that worked in tandem with Black Studies), they disappeared as if they had never been" (109).

Wynter's interrogation of Black Studies' "re-invention as 'African-American Studies,' and as only one 'Ethnic' Studies variant among a diverse range of others," attests to an ethical demand and political disposition integral to Black Studies "in its original 1960s conception" that resisted incorporation into the academy without its manipulation. Wynter explains that the Black Arts and Black Aesthetic movements "by the very nature of their self-definition as black particularisms, which called into question the mainstream art and aesthetics together with their 'monopoly on humanity'—were not amenable to such pacification and reincorporation" (114). Why is it that Black Studies, in its original 1960's conception, can only be reincorporated into the academy in and through its pacification and cooptation? What disappears when Black Studies is transformed into another variant of ethnic studies or in our modern times a multiculturalist framework? What is lost in terms of Black politics and Black ethical demands? What remains?

In their essay "Against Hip Hop Studies," P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon Woods extend Wynter's critical line of inquiry into the field of Hip Hop Studies. Saucier and Woods ask: "Why is hip hop studies so popular while black studies is constantly in disrepute and tokenized—even within the very academy that now markets the study of hip hop (*On Marronage* 156)? Layering on this query, I ask, has Hip Hop reached a point where it no longer "needs" Black people? Has the study of it in the academy reached a point where examination no longer needs to reference (even if in a footnote) Hip Hop's beginnings in Black communities?[15] Is Hip Hop now truly for "everyone"? Will the Blackness that ignited and sustains its performance, perspective, and politics disappear as if it had never been?

> //"the danger exists that as we move against race we may just unconstruct ourselves out of existence or out of any coherent sense of group identity"//[16]

Hip Hop in the academy exposes a deep anxiety about Blackness and being. Is Hip Hop Black? Should the study of it be a Black study? In "Basic Black" (2005), Nadine George-Graves observes that, "[t]hough blackness is ubiquitous (maybe *because* blackness is ubiquitous), we now hear that we are "post-Black" and that post-Black is the new black" (611). Is Hip Hop being so ubiquitous part of its perceived "post-Black" universalism? "I can dig being post-Black," George-Graves marks, "if I weren't constantly reminded—for better and worse—of how black I am." A similar statement might apply to Hip Hop in the academy. Everywhere there is a move to un-Blacken it, one is reminded of how Black it is. In other words, the attempts to shed Hip Hop of its skin, of its illicit appearance, one is confronted with the cold, hard, and unreasonable "facts of Blackness" (by way of Fanon).

Hip Hop, after all, is one of the few (if not the only) locations, "cultures," "movements," "artistic communities," "nations," "generations," where a truly "diverse" group of people are attempting to think the World through an expressive form/force that is tethered (for better and worse) to modes and methods of expression and survival of people positioned in an anti-Black World as Black. The question is how to keep Blackness in play. To remain radical to The Roots, with our Black Thought(s)[17] and theories, to stay on the move, to cast "creative critiques"[18] from the underground where our struggle flows like crude oil resisting extraction and exploitation, only emerging from the "undercommons…where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still black, still strong"[19] to level "Blows To The Temple,"[20] as rapper Common might have it.

The question of Blackness in Hip Hop, Hip Hop in the academy, Hip Hop as a form of Black Studies (specifically in the form of "Hip Hop pedagogy") must tarry and come to grips with rap duo Dead Prez's assertion that:

> // "They schools can't teach us shit / My people need freedom / we trying to get all we can get"//? [21]

Track 3: We Need a Method so They don't Sweat the Technique[22]

> My idea has always been to make Hegel speak my language. That's what I like to do…That's the game. That's cool. It's a kind of masquerade, right? That you take continental philosophy or anyone else that got something to say and subject them to your fire, your heat, your imagination, your tongue. –Hortense Spillers[23]

The tracks that make up this Disc are concerned with the study of Hip Hop and the ways in which Hip Hop studies. Since the object of this *Dis*c (Hip Hop Studies) is also its aim (to study Hip Hop), as well as its method (to study *with* Hip Hop), it is important that I outline the methodology, to check the techniques of what I call *disesthetics* and the Critical Dis.

> // "I'mma diss you over fast, slow track or no track / If your shit wasn't so whack, I dissed you to your track." //[24]
>
> //"Now I'm out to diss the whole Boogie Down / Just a featherweight crew from that part of town"//[25]

The "dis" marks the ways in which Hip Hop's elements engage disaesthetics to acknowledge (and act-on-knowledge of) an original object without either over-privileging it or being limited by it. The dis is a citational and (re)creational gesture, an always more than double move(ment) that is both generative and deconstructive. The dis is displayed when a graffiti writer approaches a "public" wall (the original) and tags or bombs it (the dis), rendering the original, in a Derridean sense, "inadequate yet necessary,"[26] forcing a type of artistic *sous*

rature.[27] Further, to this "original" dis, another writer may go up over the "first" creating a palimpsestic reworking of space and meaning.

The dis is employed in rapping and rhyming when an emcee uses a lyric from another rapper, citing and rewriting it through a type of lyrical upcycling.[28] The dis flips recognition and respect to dis-recognition (recognition and revision; one needs to recognize to revise) and dis-respect (reverence and reappraisal). To be dis-respected, you must be good enough to receive the dis-honor of the dis.[29]

The dis is also employed in the fifth element of Hip Hop: the knowledge, which I extend to the scholarship on Hip Hop (in and outside the academy). Applying the act of knowledge creation and dissemination to disaesthetics permits a creative and critical synthesis to take place. This constructive-cum-deconstructive epistemological approach allows for a type of contradictory and dis-orderly thinking that embraces change, ambiguity, and fluidity. In the dis, nothing is left unquestioned, not even the assumptions of the questions. It is through a skeptical questioning and rewriting of the dis, the antisocial grilling of the "gift horses"[30] of inclusion and recognition that the dis becomes a continuous act of negative criticism and revision (as Adorno might have it) or a radical act of "Rep&Rev" (as Parks might have it).[31] Professor Jared Ball suggests that Hip Hop academics need to engage in a similar type of "rap battle" that emcees do.[32] This would be a type of dis-knowledge, what Hortense Spillers in the sample above illustrates when she discusses reimagining and reigniting someone else's thoughts, and subjecting them to one's own heat, imagination, and fire.

// "We don't need no water—Let the motherfucker burn!"//[33]

"My idea," Spillers explains, "has always been to make Hagel speak my language." This is a type of critical dissing, a dis-articulation of an original, a writing over and through: "That's the game."

Finally, the critical dis also employs all the implications evoked by "dis-" as a prefix, in that it critically *dis*rupts, *dis*turbs, *dis*orders, *dis*regards, *dis*plays, *dis*orients and so on. It must be stated, however, that the dis is not a way out but a way to be with(in). The aesthetics might move us into a dis-place[34] in which to work, but this is not an escape. Like Yasiin Bey says of the artforce from which the dis emerges:

> //"Hip Hop will simply amaze you / Praise you, pay you / Do whatever you say do / But black, it can't save you."//[35]

The dis is not a corrective; it is not a prescription. Its power is in opening a space to resist and go to work while in the *wake* of ceaseless violence and antagonism. In groove with Christina Sharpe, disaesthetics is "wake work."[36] A radical unserious seriousness as sincere as it is sardonic. Its movement rides the (break) beat of an untimely tempo, moving fugitively to the //underground// and into //outer space.//[37] Not a way out. A way with(in).[38]

> //"My lyrics represent liberation. Mainly, because they understand that representation is not liberation."//[39]

Track 4: Diggin' in the Crates & Record Hatin'

> I'mma set it straight
> If you do your hist. I exist through Diggin In The Crates
> Bringin in the ace, had to stay up late
> Playin the corners but never seen a day upstate –Fat Joe[40]
>
> The way I'm sampled speaks for itself. –Roxanne Shanté[41]
>
> I will cite anybody, everybody, all the time, but it's gonna be mine when I get through with it. –Hortense Spillers[42]

This is a "percussive" encounter[43] with the field of Hip Hop Studies, in order to *dis*rupt and *dis*articulate its methods and knowledge. To this end, I dig in its archival crates to reference and "resurrect" the sonic scratches, "scraps," the secrets, the sounds and noises which are lost in the archive.[44] The goal is to dis-cover (reveal what is covered) who and what the discourse samples, as well as how and why it samples from those sources. This is a tracking and tracing of what is absent(ed) from the crates. In short, this is a critical dis of the *records* scholars and artists bring to rock with, the sonic samples they use to "drop science," the rhymes, the reasons they go to work with. My work in the archival crates of Hip Hop Studies, the way in which I dig (and dis) is in groove with Saidiyia Hartman's approach (a no doubt percussive one) to the slavery archives she works through, over, and in. I too attempt to locate the "silences in the archive(s)"[45] of Hip Hop Studies. To inspect the decks, to set the record(s) straight. In this task, I am also guided by what French and African Studies scholar Kaiama Glover observes in the footnotes of Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake* (2016), namely, as the presence of an "outraged archive."[46] My goal, then, is to turn up the sound, to "crank up," as Dr. Brittney Cooper and the Crunk Feminist Collective dub it, the unruly and rageful archival fragments that are often ignored, overlooked, and under-listened to.

> //"You sampling the sample / The same exact way it was sampled / an example of some really whack shit"//[47]

Track 5: Hip Hop in the Academy

When the Oakland rapper turned-reverend, M.C. Hammer exclaimed, "Yo, sound the bell, schools in, sucka" on his hit song "U Can't Touch This" (1990), he most likely could not have imagined the wide "embrace" of Hip Hop from behind the walls of the ivory towers.

Almost thirty years after Hammer's sounded, Hip Hop has proved to be something that the academy *can* certainly "touch" and often does. From Harvard's Hutchins Center Hiphop Archive and Research Institute[48] to The University of Arizona's Minor in Hip-Hop Studies,[49] from more and more books on Hip Hop pedagogy being published, to large conferences hosted by ivy league institutions, Hip Hop is undoubtedly in the (academic) building. But is it in full effect?

Hip Hop's roots in the city parks, community centers, and street corners of NYC, to its now global reach are often described by the phrase: *Hip Hop has come a long way*.[50] Whether the statement is followed by "from its humble beginnings in poor and disenfranchised communities" or "from a black urban expressive form to a global culture," every time I encounter this assertion, I am reminded of the Virgin Slims adverts of 1960s-70's.

//"You've come a long way, baby."//[51]

The cooptation and reimplementation of a feminist agenda into a commercial enterprise should not be lost on us. Nor should the problematics of the forced teleology in the phrase: "come a long way." A long way from where? A long way from whom? Or, perhaps *for* whom? Such a statement assumes that Hip Hop started out with the local and specific Black youth community of urban America but has now *grown*, *developed*, perhaps even, *matured* into a global culture belonging to everyone (all Humans). I meet the notion that Hip Hop was once local and is now global, once Black, but now "universal", with serious sable(d) suspicion.[52] If Hip Hop belongs to, and can be enjoyed by everyone, why not also the conditions that it seeks to describe, as well as some of the applications of its deepest theories for survival of, and liberation from, these conditions? What about Hip Hop permits it to belong to everyone, but the weight of its testimonies, its Black noise[53] emanating from the shadows of the "sovereign state of the have-nots" (to sample from Yasiin Bey),[54] belongs to Black people, *exclusively*? In terms of Hip Hop

in the academy, the question might be: why is there so much intellectual labor geared toward "proving" Hip Hop belongs to everyone? //"What work is that supposed to do for [a scholar]?//[55]

> // "black culture has always been a source of sustenance for non-black society"//[56]

There are upwards of fifty books on Hip Hop slated for release in 2018, alone. Granted, many of those books will likely not make it on to most Hip Hop courses' reading lists; however, Hip Hop has become a serious object of inquiry, as well as a commercial one. If Hip Hop can be said to have come a long way, its arrival has been somewhat lackluster. Its advent has been neither a radical confrontation, writing graffiti on and over the intellectual architecture:

> //"Kick in the door, waving the four-four"//[57]

nor a clandestine infiltration, staging guerrilla warfare from the inside:

> // National Guard Soldier: [after being shot] Why me?
> Davis: Cause it's WAR, Honky! //[58]

Rather, the Hip Hop of Hip Hop Studies has managed to cause little disturbance[59]; it has learned the customs of being invited in: follow the rules and don't complain about the food or your place at the table. Hip Hop (at least aspects of it) has been summoned within the confines of the academy, but it has left "the ruckus" (as Wu Tang might call it)[60] at the gates. It is curious that a music that has been deemed to be so offensive, backwards, off-putting, violent, and destructive to youth and society could make such a quaint visitor. Least we not forget, this is a type of (Black) noise often deemed so sonically obnoxious that if played at "ridiculously loud" levels, is "justification" to shoot to death seventeen-year-old Jordan Davis in a Florida gas station parking lot.[61]

> //"Rekia Boyd, Miriam Carey, Aiyana Jones… / All killed. We're all here. Their all gone / We ain't supposed to have fear? I'm thinking, 'Y'all, wrong.' / How many people gotta die before it's your song?//[62]

In "The Question of Normal," Sharon P. Holland shares a "primal scene" which illustrates the phobic reaction to the sonic collision that Hip Hop can have in public space. Holland describes an interaction she had with "an older (but not elderly) woman." While listening to a song by the rapper Tupac Shakur on the radio, she is met with the passive aggressive disapproval from the woman, who at one points says to Holland: "And to think I marched for you" (129). Holland draws attention to both the sonic disturbance that rap causes and how it can quickly turn white fragility and entitlement to hostility and antagonism. Holland observes that for the "woman in the parking lot, the civil rights struggle was not about freedom for us all; it was about acquiring a kind of purchase on black bodies" (130). Tupac's lyrics awoke the libidinal anti-Blackness that her liberal consciousness ("marching" for *good* African Americans) had successfully suppressed and concealed.[63]

I am reminded of an incident with my father figure and mentor where we were pulled over by the police. He turned up a Tupac song that was playing. I was overcome with fear and a strange embarrassment at the sonic presence of the music which made it necessary for the officer to speak over the "noise". After the "procedure" was complete, I mustered the courage to ask him why he had turned the music up. He responded, looking cautiously in the rearview: "Shit. I wanted Tupac to speak for me."

> //"It's war on the streets and war in the Middle East / Instead of war on poverty / They got a war on drugs so the police can bother me"//[64]

In the academy, who is Hip Hop speaking for? It is curious that Hip Hop, a music/culture known for its public enemy status and its tendency to "bring (in) the noise,"[65] has created barely a whispered echo through the halls of education.

> //"Reality is frisking me / This industry will make you lose intensity / The Common Sense in me remembers the basement / I'm Morpheus in this hip-hop Matrix, exposing fake shit"//[66]

How to account for Hip Hop's lack of radical sonic force, this muffling of Black noise?

> // "For Hip Hop, I dies off with a vengeance / My vocab blows doors off the hinges, with every sentence."//[67]

Has the academy, like the music industry, made Hip Hop lose its *intensity* (to riff on Common's lyric)? Why has the scholarship failed to function like The Lady of Rage's lyrics and blow the academy's "doors off the hinges, with every sentence"?

Professor/rapper A.D. Carson has observed that when Hip Hop enters the academy a prerequisite is, it must be "cut" or "mixed" with other fields of study.[68] Carson identifies the tendency to subdue, what he terms, the "dope" of Hip Hop through this cutting (out) process. "Dope," Carson describes by sampling rapper Talib Kweli:

> //"Yo, I speak at schools a lot cause they say I'm intelligent / No, it's cause I'm dope, if I was whack I'd be irrelevant"//[69]

Carson queries about academia: "is that world not ready for that (Hip Hop) dope in uncut form"? This cutting is both a type of validation and pacification of Hip Hop, a type of initiation that readies Hip Hop for a "life" in the academy. But what is cut out of Hip Hop? The course description from the Hip Hop syllabus below may assist in answering this question.

> "The 'Hip-Hop-Nation' is a global *community* that is grounded in shared *practices of language use, some of which have African and African-American roots* …hip-hop itself has become a universal idiom...Hip-Hop quickly transcended narrow geographical and racial confines to become the idiom of a multi-national, 'glocal' (sic) community of marginalized youth, especially the thinking part of the community…The course offers a diverse set of sounds and songs to listen to and think through. It takes you around the globe and lets you experience rap being made in "strange" places. It lets you probe into messages communicated by rappers and explore how these messages are put together, how they signify. It gives you concepts and methods to make sense of and analyze hip-hop culture as a "revolution' in global communication. (emphasis in original) [70]

The course description reads like an odd mixture of a slave narrative and safari travel brochure. At the opening of the description, the educator is quick to detach Hip Hop from its ties to the

Black community in pursuit of the course's global project. The global reach of Hip Hop has long been documented in texts like *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of language* (2009) and *The Global Cipha: Hip Hop Culture and Consciousness* (2006); however, one would be hard pressed to find such a dismissive statement about Hip Hop's connection to Black aesthetics in these books: "some of which have African and African-American roots."

The description grows more and more problematic as the educator would have the students believe that Hip Hop "quickly transcended narrow geographical and racial confines." It is curious that the course's designer would hone in on the ways Hip Hop—after it transcends the confines of, let us say it, Blackness—becomes central to the ways this "new international culture" thinks. This is not to be confused with a type of pan-African thinking, but rather, one that takes up Black aesthetics only by sifting out not only the lived experience of Black people, but the ethical demands they might seek to levy at an anti-Black World.[71] The move to the global, which is code for "universal," eclipses the potential for a radical way of thinking the World through a Black critique. In its place is a type of "pornotroping"[72] that eroticizes and objectifies Hip Hop, placing it in the exploratory service of the "strange" places that Hip Hop is used to build communities for others.

The course seeks to explore "how these messages [of rappers] are put together, how they *signify*." The author seems to be unaware of the double (perhaps shadow) meaning of signify in the form of *signifyin'*.[73] The latter would certainly guide the course's focus back to the Black aesthetics it seeks to "transcend." On the other hand, if the author *is* aware of the double meaning of signify/signifyin', then an odd irony arises. The assumptive logic of the course description suggests that Blackness is too "narrow" and confining and that it must be transcended or

universalized, while to *signify* is a universal concept that can be used to explore how rappers are making meaning globally. In other words, Blackness is narrow, yet the signifyin' which comes from Black expressive culture has universal applications. A project that interrogates the ways non-Black people use Hip Hop to *signify* might be an interesting project; however, the course seems uninterested in Blackness except as a rough starting point. Blackness must be left behind in pursuit of another "revolution"; one focused on "global communication." Sadly, this course description and others like it are the rule and not the exception, and demonstrates the academy's desire to have Hip Hop without either the social burdens or ethical questions that Blackness might produce.

A dismissal of the "fact of blackness" also emerges in scholarship that is obsessed with justifying Hip Hop as an art form. Here, the scholarship is preoccupied with "raising" Rap to the level of other Westernized poetry in order to validate it, such that it overlooks (rather, under-listens to) the politico-poetics of Hip Hop. This is a problematic I find in Adam Bradly's *Book of Rhyme: The Poetics of Hip Hop* (2009). In the book, Bradly brilliantly outlines the poetic elements of Rap music, arguing that "reading rap as poetry heightens both enjoyment and understanding" (xiiii). The question becomes, though, enjoyment and understanding for whom? Bradly's attempt to justify rap as poetry ignores much of the more radical critiques offered in the lyrical content. His strictly text-based literary analysis loses track of the way lyrics resonate and resound differently depending on cultural settings, and the bodies that perform them. In pursuit of his central goal of proving that lyrics "do hold up on the page" and that "Rap wants to be understood" (again, by whom?), Bradly unfortunately loses sight of the ways structural and systemic realities impact melaninated bodies, and loses *sound* of the sharp critiques offered by Rap's melaninated voices.[74]

// "My emancipation don't fit your equation."//[75]

Hip Hop Studies might be better off engaged in a study of how it is that Hip Hop can be transformed into such a polite (house) guest.

//"It takes courage and not giving a fuck. Too many people in hip-hop say they don't give a fuck, but they really do."//[76]

The growing number of courses, the mounting syllabi, the continuous publications are manifestations of Hip Hop's theft by a host of other disciplines that seek to philosophically tweak, aesthetically adulterate, and politically dilute it.[77]

// "To dis-, that is, to dis-entangle, is to free it up, to *dis*abuse one of a structure, of a desire for order. It is to allow for some improvisational vulnerability to take place."//[78]

At issue here, is not how malleable these disciplines "find" Hip Hop, but rather, the ways in which they position Hip Hop as solely an *object* to be deconstructed. A central problematic of this disciplinary cutting and sampling is that it requires that the critical and political potentials of Hip Hop as a form of study itself, to be suppressed and quarantined. This type of engagement with Hip Hop as an *object* of study leaves the disciplines, the institutions, and their "orders of knowledge" unaltered. Hip Hop's radical potential becomes suppressed by its disciplining.

// "We must become undisciplined."//[79]

What facilitates this sifting out of Hip Hop's radical potential is the scholarships' intense focus on the four main elements of Hip Hop (DJing, Emceeing, Breakdancing, Graffiti writing), while Hip Hop's fifth element (knowledge) remains seriously under-theorized.[80] A thoughtful and sustained engagement with the fifth element of Hip Hop, what Afrika Bambaataa terms "street knowledge," "knowledge of self," or "cultural overstanding,"[81] and what I identify as Hip Hop Theory, would profoundly enhance the way Hip Hop is studied in the academy.

If Hip Hop Studies is to become an effective and ethical field of study, it must do two things: first, in line with P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon Woods, it must be reintroduced to Black Studies. If not, Hip Hop Studies will remain "a product of the liberal multiculturalist university," and inattentive to the Black struggle "that produced both the radical concept of black studies and hip hop itself" ("Hip Hop Studies in Black," 272).[82] Second, Hip Hop Studies' *object* must become its *aim*, in that it must employ Hip Hop as a praxis of study, not only of itself, but of the mechanisms and structures of the World which it emerges out of. It must connect the streets to the classroom to both transform and create new epistemologies. Hip Hop Studies must interrogate the ways in which Hip Hop, as Hip Hop feminist Gwendolyn Pough asserts, serves as "a worldview, as an epistemology grounded in the experience of communities of color under advanced capitalism" (I would add anti-Blackness).[83] Hip Hop Studies must stop assuming, as is too often the case, that Black urban youth have nothing to offer in terms of thought and theory, only in terms of performance and style. Its theories must become its practices.

> //"I want to actually rap my scholarship"//[84]
>
> // "I bomb atomically, Socrates' philosophies and hypotheses / can't define how I be dropping these mockeries."//[85]

Track 6: On *Owning My Masters*, AD Carson's Hip Hop Praxis.

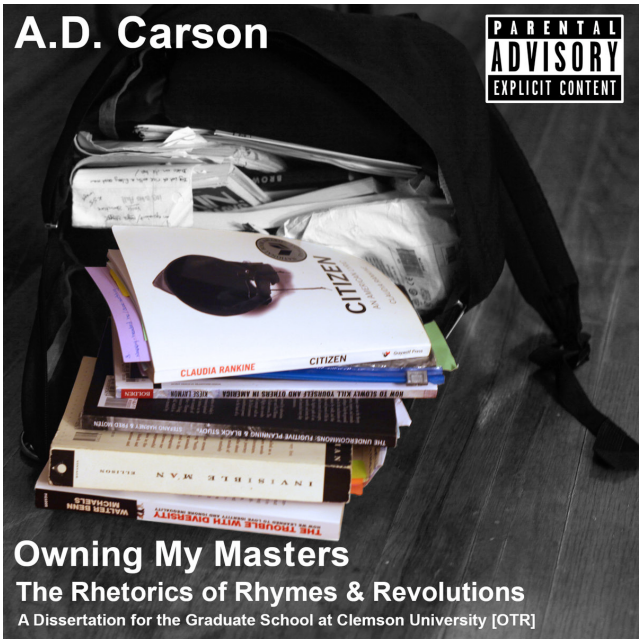

Fig 3: The Album Cover of A.D. Carson's Dissertation

A.D. Carson's Hip Hop album and dissertation *Owning my Masters: The Rhetorics of Rhymes and Revolutions* (2017) is an intervention into the field of Hip Hop Studies that works to reposition Hip Hop as both method *and* object of study. Throughout the 34 tracks, Carson blends thoughts and theories from the Black Studies and Black radical traditions with personal experience and social commentary. The album cover (complete with the parental advisory sticker) visually represents the "records" of his archival crates. The manuscripts seem to *spill* from the black space of his backpack, as if emerging from the mouth of a *cave*.[86] Visible are scraps of papers, notes, rhymes in the working. In the image, Carson offers up his archives, the texts he brings to put into play, to rock with. Clearly visible are the texts: Rankin's *Citizen*; Laymon's *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America*; Harney and Moten's *The Undercommons*; Ellison's *The Invisible Man*; and Michaels' *The Trouble with Diversity*. Hardly discernable is Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks,* from which some handwritten notes seem to be

bursting. Another book is hidden, only offering up the letters "b.r.o.w." (perhaps the word Brown). What else might be tucked away in the darkness, hidden in the archive?

Carson's record (in all sense of the word) is unique in Hip Hop Studies because he raps his dissertation, using the form of Hip Hop to rub the tradition and form(at) of the dissertation against the grain. It is a radical and refreshing approach. It is a dis. Carson explains about his project that, "The object of 'Owning My Masters' is the aim of 'Owning My Masters'"[87] Carson seems to suggest that this statement is a riff on Fred Moten, based on the citational proximity of where it appears in the dissertation.[88] Although Jared Sexton is not referenced or cited anywhere in the text, stifled like an "open secret,"[89] I want to put on dis-play that this is a riff with Jared Sexton's statement: "the object of black studies is the aim of black studies." It may be helpful to include what Sexton follows this statement with; he continues, "The most radical negation of the anti-black world is the most radical affirmation of a blackened world" (Agathangelou and Killian 73). My thinking with (and alongside) Carson seeks to keep him (and myself) accountable to this radical negation, this radical affirmation. It is a commitment to muster the strength needed to push through the fear, violence, and retaliation that occurs when one forces open, what we might call, "an imaginative field of inquiry" on and towards a Black(end) planet, if we were to layer Hortense Spillers and Public Enemy into a powerful mix.[90]

Carson's politico-poetics transforms and blends the textual and the sonic. One listens to an oral and aural Black study; one that requires a different way of listening in and for, \ Hip Hop through *its own hermeneutics*: Hip Hop hermeneutics. It is not dissimilar to what Spillers elucidates about the aesthetics of a Black church sermon, in which "the listening ear becomes a privileged sensual organ, as if the sermon attempts to embody the word" (Spillers 252). Carson explains in his introduction that his approach is "not a matter of simply rapping / [he] really

happen[s] to have a strategy being enacted." A method. Hip Hop as both object and aim. The first song on the album theorizes on and through the positionality of Black people in the World. In the song, Carson attempts to lyricalize his journey from rapper to professor, but the story is constantly interpreted by a layered sample from Spike Lee's *Malcom X* (1992):

> //"What would you call an educated Negro with a BA, or an MA, or BS or a PhD? I'll tell you. You call him a Nigga! That's what."//[91]

Hip Hop, as Carson explains, is "not a gimmick," but rather a way of "being in the world," a Hip Hop praxis. Carson's deployment of Hip Hop is a percussive encounter with the academy and its orders of knowledge, as well as the function and form of the dissertation (the demonstration of the mastery of said knowledge). Hip Hop allows him to dis, that is, write over and through knowledge, while dis-covering and producing new knowledges.

> //"I want to actually rap my scholarship"//[92]

Carson's approach employs what I term *disaesthetics* in the multiple meanings evoked in his title. On one hand, *Owning My Masters* speaks to his own Masters (as in the original copy of a recording, perhaps referencing the exploitation of Black musical artists who did not own their masters). On the other hand, *owning* gestures toward a type of dis of the masters (or teachers), a scenario where the teacher "gets owned" by the student.[93] Most provocative is the evocation of slave *masters*, a type of radical imagination that flips the Hegelian dialectic, Blackening it.

The praxis of Carson's theorizing takes place on the page, but more importantly, it appears in and through the sonic, "as the ear takes on the function of 'reading,'" as Spillers might have it.[94] This is accompanied by the bodily movement, a rhythmic head nodding (an affirmation) which might produce a type corporal knowledge, a thinking with the body. This level of experiential analysis is lost in a strictly literary investigation of lyrics on the page.

Hip Hop Feminists have long produced scholarship on embodied knowledge, theory as praxis, and the politics of pleasure and the erotic.[95] As Brittney Cooper explains, "Black women have the right to be mad as hell. We have been dreaming of freedom and carving out spaces for liberation since we arrived on these shores" (Cooper 2018). Hip Hop Feminism is often the site of the most radical approaches to Hip Hop Studies; however, in the major anthologies on Hip Hop, they remain under-cited.[96]

Rather than producing scholarship focused on the ways "hip hop has been a positive force for many, if at times a problematic force,"[97] as offered in the introduction of *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop* (2015), The Crunk Feminist Collective's theorizing of Hip Hop's radical percussivity is a more generative and insightful approach. The Collective's scholarship is less concerned with how Hip Hop can be blended harmoniously into things, but how it serves as a percussive encounter. Hip Hop Feminism is "percussive feminism" in that it "strikes together things that don't necessary go together."[98] Hip Hop feminism is a "creative critique" which allows for a type of 'embodied [color] contradictions" in its study. What Joan Morgan describes as "fucking with the grays" (Morgan 59)[99].

Hip Hop Studies in the main must find a way to "fuck with"[100] the Hip Hop Feminists and their interventions. There must be a space for the radical potential of Hip Hop's "dark pleasures" to inform the scholarship. The Crunk Feminist scholars make a call to "crunk up" the analytical engagements. To get *crunk* is to "force energy into a system so it operates at a higher level."[101] Crunk Feminism, Brittney Cooper explains, is "feminism turnt (turned) all the way up."[102] In groove with them, this is an invocation and incantation for Hip Hop Studies to get *crunk*. It is a dis that puts on dis-play how scholars "always say they going in" on some study, "but they never penetrating" any "orders of knowledge."[103]

Hip Hop Theory is a Black(end) *negative critique*[104] aimed at "rewriting knowledge," clearing space for new frontiers that can echo and extend "the need for the violent speech of the inner city streets" (Wynter, "No Humans Involved," 16).

> // In a sense, if there is no black culture, or no longer black culture (because it has "succeeded"), then we need it now; and if that is true, then perhaps black culture—as the reclamation of the critical edge, as one of those vantages from which it might be spied, and no longer predicated on "race"—has yet to come. //[105]

> // "What niggas need to do is start loc'ing up / And build, mold, and fold they self into shape / Of the nigga ya love to hate" //[106]

Track 7: Black Magic at the Cypher Café, a skit, part I

DELSOUL: I'm interested in that thing you were talking about last time we was kickin' it together.
WIND: What? Shoot, we talk about so many things.
DELSOUL: Something along the lines of Hip Hop being a new…I think you might have called it…way of knowing and being in the World.
WIND: Oh. Yeah. That's right. The whole thing about going beyond "The Human."
DELSOUL: Yeah. You were on some "end of the world" shit.
WIND: Haha. Yeah. Well, I think what I was hoping to convey is this idea that there's this concept…and before I continue, I must admit that I derive much of this line of thinking from the work of Slyvia Wynter. So…what I was attempting to get at, or get close to, is this idea of dismantling the concept of the Human. Pealing back the layers of this construct. Revealing its scaffolding. I guess. See, the notion of "Man" and all the Western-capitalist-bourgeoisie-subjectivity that constructs it has become overrepresented as the Human itself. My work, I believe, is to analyze this overrepresentation and destroy it.
DELSOUL: Like dude says, umm, "by analyzing we aim to destroy it," right?
WIND: Fanon. Yeah. Exactly. See I think if we take the ethical demands offered in Hip Hop seriously we might develop a language to think this type of dis-construction. So, in terms of what you referred to as the "end of the world"—
DELSOUL: Hold up now. You said it just like that.
WIND: I called it the end of the world?
DELSOUL: Yep.
WIND: Okay…yeah. As long as we are talking about the World as a construct, capital "W" world, not the earth, the bios…but the mythos/logos that shape it. Sure. But you know I'm an environmentalist. I value life; both folk and fauna. My name is Wind. I'm from Oregon…come on now…I can't help it. (laughs) But, yes, the end of the World as conceived and constructed by and through Western thought and the Humanist paradigm.

DELSOUL: And you're saying all of that—all of this shit here—is…parasitic on antiblackness?

Track 8: Drama Under the sign of Hip Hop

Since most the scholarship on Hip Hop Theater pick up on and forwards the ideas from the central texts of Hip Hop Studies, it suffers from similar limitations I have tracked in this Disc.[107] To put it plainly, inability or refusal to think from within the peculiar position of Blackness in an anti-Black World saturates the discourse. This limitation is the byproduct of three problematics: 1) the scholarship's conflation of racism as performance with structural racism, or "interpersonal discrimination" and "institutionalized forms of discrimination"[108]; 2) a substitution of ethnic difference for Black alterity that works to appeal to the hegemony of multicultural discourse and people of color politics, while mystifying Black suffering; 3) an obsession with individualism, self-empowerment, and appeals to Western bourgeois ideals as a form of social justice.

Many of these problematics are illustrated in Danny Hoch's article, "Towards A Hip-Hop Aesthetic: A Manifesto for the Hip-Hop Arts Movement," published in 2006. Hoch, one of the founders and artistic directors of the NYC Hip-Hop Theater Festival, outlines in his manifesto the function, aesthetic elements, power, and importance of Hip Hop Theater. Early in the article Hoch is preoccupied with making sure people understand that "hip-hop *is* art." This anxiety to correct Hip Hop's misrecognition as something other than "art", causes Hoch to leave unquestioned his own assumption of what art is. Why must Hip Hop be art? Whose art? Art for whom? are questions that elude Hoch's manifesto.

Where a radical Hip Hop intervention would most likely flip the script, and ask: "what is art?", Hoch's concern lies in the fact that hip hop is often thought of as "radical political

thought" rather than art. Whatever Hoch's notion of art is, it is somehow incompatible with the political. One cannot help but hear the absent qualifier "black" lurking beneath his use of "radical political thought."[109] Without reflecting on the question of art for who, Hoch asserts that if "hip-hop is to be discussed as art, then what are its aesthetics?" Hoch links Hip Hop aesthetics to the following "traditions, conditions and phenomena:"

- An African and Caribbean continuum of storytelling and art
- A polycultural community of both immigrants and migrants
- Appropriation of European cultural traditions and Japanese technology
- A legacy of political and gang organizing
- The bumpy transition from post–civil rights and militarized nationalist organizing to the supply-side economics of the 1980s
- The devastating effects of Reaganomics on urban America
- The age of accelerated technology.

Again, the descriptive term "black" does not appear in Hoch's formulation of the tradition, condition, or the phenomena of Hip Hop's "origin." Black positionality has no role here. Rather the violent antagonism targeted at Black populations at the hands of the State is veiled behind a broad statement concerning the "devastating effects of Reaganomics on urban America." His reference to Reaganomics is appropriate; however, it lacks the explanatory footing to track America's war on Black revolutionary movements and the relentless attacks on Black populations under the guise of a "War on Drugs," which did not solely effect "urban America." Hoch also leaves undefined which type of political organization he is referring to, while shifting his focus away from police brutality to the "legacy" of gangs in relation to Hip Hop. This shortsighted analysis of gangs or gang activity is often found in the Hip Hop scholarship. It is shortsighted because it does not address one of the most pervasive gangs that have shaped the lyrical-political content of Hip Hop, namely, the police. It is as curious as it is troubling that so much focus is given to "gang violence" in the scholarship. Especially, in relation to the fact that

Malcolm X remains one of the most sampled historical figures in Hip Hop and detailed descriptions of police brutality targeted at Blacks is one the most ubiquitous tropes found in Hip Hop lyrics.

Later in his manifesto, Hoch argues, "The notion that hip-hop is solely an African-American art form is erroneous." Interestingly, Hoch will allow Hip Hop to be part of the "African continuum," while admitting that, "if it were not for African-Americans there would be no hip-hop," but he is careful to reminds the reader that, "hip-hop would not exist if it were not for the polycultural social construct of New York City in the 1970s." Here is a common argument found in the Hip Hop scholarship that seeks to universalize Hip Hop by overshadowing its roots and rhythms in Black communities and the struggle those communities endure. Hoch's argument to Hip Hop's polycultural dimension, suggests that Blackness is somehow mono-cultural or homogeneous. The other side of this argument proposes that because Hip Hop samples and remixes from other cultural expressions that it cannot also be Black expressive form. The argument is surprisingly reminiscent of the multi-racial demand to be acknowledged as not only Black or more than Black based on some supposed quantity of mixture.[110] In terms of aesthetics, would one argue that Grandmaster Flash in sampling Queen's "Another One Bites the Dust," as he did in "The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash," has created a European track? Or when rapper/producer Wyclef Jean samples Kenny Roger's "The Gambler," it is not Hip Hop but now Country? Is it possible to imagine that Blackness is vast enough to riff and sample other music without becoming something other than Black music?

While Hoch's examination of the aesthetics of each of Hip Hop's four "original" elements (graffiti writing, DJing, emceeing, breakdancing) is both thorough and insightful, the absence of Hip Hop's fifth element is revealing. Recall, the fifth element of Hip Hop is what

Afrika Bambaataa asserts ties the other four elements together. An analysis of Hip Hop's elements that does not consider the element of knowledge is surely incomplete. Hoch's manifesto is in line with a good deal of Hip Hop scholarship which ignores the fifth element and refuses to take seriously the theoretical dimension offered in and through Hip Hop as Black expressive force.

Hoch's manifesto is important to the field of Hip Hop Theater because he works to think at the intersection of Hip Hop and theater. His aim is to draw the demarcating line of what is and is not Hip Hop Theater. A project I think is valuable to Hip Hop Theater Studies. But, here, I want to locate the problematics that Hoch's manifesto manifest regarding Blackness. I argue that Hoch's desire to "elevate" Hip Hop to the status of Western art and universalize its politics, erases the central importance of the fifth element of knowledge. I make a plead to a meditation on the fifth element to locate the Black thought, offered Bambaataa's notion of "cultural overstanding." It is at that sight/site where Hip Hop encounters theatre that such a radical Black praxis comes center stage.

If we consider that in terms of etymology, the word theory and theatre both derive from the Greek word *theorein* ("to see"). Hip Hop Theater, then, might be the place to see or theorize. The place for embodying the fifth element. Hip Hop as (or in) theatre becomes the ideal location where theory is made flesh, where theory is embodied and performed and where the performative is brought into question. In the words of Amiri Baraka Hip Hop Theater might be that location where Western thought is re-viewed as erotic, seen "from another landscape." [111]

As much as Hoch's manifesto desires to escape or transcend the Blackness of Hip Hop it appears in its absence. For example, as Hoch attempts to define and draw the line between theatre that uses Hip Hop and Hip Hop Theater, he argues that if Hip Hop Theater is done

poorly, "the feeling that results is of watching a hip-hop minstrel show." Hoch does little to justify or explain his use of minstrelsy, but it can be discerned that for Hoch, a Hip Hop minstrel show could mean a minstrel show set to Hip Hop or it could mean that an actor performing Hip Hop is not being read as "authentic," and the performance comes across as a parody. Hoch is provocative, perhaps not meaning to be, in his use of the phrase minstrel show because it is a moment where Blackness seeps through the seams of a performance in a similar way as it does through the words of his manifesto. As Lewis Gordon, asserts, "blackness as the absent term, even in its presence."[112]

Hoch attempts to suppress the Blackness of Hip Hop by thinking Hip Hop as a generational marker, like the "Baby Boomers," "Xers," and "Yers." For Hoch, Hip Hop is something that is best understood and defined as generational rather than racial. The term generation through vague is certainly not a racial designation. This abstraction allows Hoch's as a white Hip Hop Theater artist to find himself in Hip Hop through a membership granted on birth year and not birthright. The problem is, though, if Hoch wants to reimagine Hip Hop as an unraced generational category to define Hip Hop Theater, why does he feel it necessary to evoke W.E.B. DuBois to do so?

In working to define what constitutes Hip Hop Theater, Hoch explains that it, "must fit into the realm of a theatrical performance, and it must be *by*, *about* and *for* the hip-hop generation, participants in hip-hop culture, or both" (Hoch 5).[113] Hoch's careless conflation of a non-racialized, rather a multiracial and multicultural Hip Hop "generation" with Du Bois' notion of "Negro theatre," is illustrative of the simultaneous evocation and erasing of Blackness. Du Bois' is a call for a "center where Negro actors before Negro audiences interpret Negro life as

depicted by Negro artists," while Hoch's is a desire to bring Hip Hop Theatre into the mainstream as non-Black Western artform.[114]

A similar problematic is professed and performed in Daniel Banks' *Say Word!* (2014). There Banks, perceptively describes Hip Hop as, "an intricate interweaving of related aesthetics" with "overlapping circles of creativity" (9). Though I would add the word "critical" to the statement, most of Banks' insights in the introduction to his book are important contributions to the field. Even in Banks' careful analysis of hip hop and its aesthetics, however, like Hoch, he loses track of the power and importance of the fifth element. Banks tracks Hip Hop's "fervent connection to 'the word'" (9), but he does not connect "the word" to Bambatta's notion of, street knowledge and "cultural overstanding."[115] Banks connects hip Hop to the west African concept of "nommo". Cheryl Keyes describes *nommo* as "the power of the word," and expands upon this definition with Ceola Baber's description that, "nommo generates the energy needed to deal with life's twists and turns; sustains our [blacks'] spirits in the face of insurmountable odds [and] transforms psychological suffering into external denouncements…and verbal recognition of self-worth and personal attributes" (Keyes, "At the Crossroads," 234). Thinking these definition in relation to each other, *nommo* becomes as much about the word as it does about the theory of living life, a black praxis for a life lived in social death. Banks offers the definition by Black theater scholar Paul C. Harrison that *nommo* is "the creative force that gives force to all things" (Banks 9). I push this forward to suggest that in Hip Hop it is the theory. Banks brings in KRS-One who explains in his book Ruminations (2003), that "Your liberation and life success may be directly related to your knowledge of [the language a person uses" (10). The knowledge of the fifth element is not solely linked to knowledge of self, as Hip Hop Studies scholars seemed

obsessed with. Rather, it is based on knowledge of self, knowledge of the World, and knowledge of self in the world.

Nommo in Hip Hop, then, is as much about the "Word" as it is about the "World". What can we learn from the synaptic relationship, the interstitial gap between the Word and the theoretical knowledge? How can we hold off on Banks conclusion that Hip Hop is "dominated by the spiritual and revolutionary belief that we make our own world through the performativity of our words and thoughts" (10). Tupac argues "I was giving this world, I didn't make it". How to complicate this escape through the re-stylization of an anti-Black World? If one embraces Banks' notion that the word makes the World, and Hip Hop practitioners have the "ability to transform our circumstances through our thought and speech" (10), what happens to the structural realties that position Black people in the antiblack world? Is there a way to think performativity and structurally together?

I argue that Banks, like Danny Hoch, abandons a meditation on Blackness by abstracting Hip Hop's "community" to the generational, to people "born under the sign of Hip Hop" (10). It is this cosmic universalizing of the fact of Blackness that permits him effortlessly employ the terms of "we" and "our," terms that mystify Black positionality.[116] Banks explains, "In this worldview, the Word's power is that it creates Being, which, in this case, might be considered the process of coming back into being from the margins" (10). This reveals the limits of Banks formulation; though he can imagine the way the word brings being(s) from "the margins"; it cannot bring being(s) back from the dead. The hope found in his statement, "each of the performance elements of Hip Hop, like the Word, alter the world and reality for the artist" (10), must be qualified with: only if the artist is not Black. The absence of the Blackness of Hip Hop's

fifth element is the condition of possibility for both Hoch and Banks "to see" themselves in Hip Hop Theater.

Track 9: Black Magic at the Cypher Café, a skit, part II

Wind and Emcee Delsoul have been joined by rapper Verbal Assault.[117]

WIND: The question is, then, in what ways can Hip Hop Studies' investigation and meditations on and through Hip Hop expose the limits and limitations of Western bourgeois overrepresentation of the Human?
VERBAL: Yo, and you think Hip Hop is doing all that?
WIND: I think there is something going on that is lost without a type of radical Hip Hop Hermeneutics—
VERBAL: A Hip Hop what?
DELSOUL: Like…a way of interpreting and reading, right?
WIND: Yes. I mean we all know that Hip Hop's expressive force traffics through the figurative as much, if not more than, the literal, right?
VERBAL: I'm with you. Also, exaggeration and hyperbole.
DELSOUL: Doesn't Adorno say something about the truth being in the hyperbolic?
WIND: I think so. But my point is that even when rap appears to be doing one thing it might doing something else—
DELSOUL: Double voicing, signifyin'!
WIND: Yes. For example, you know the Clipse, right?
VERBAL: Of course. "Grinding!" I don't mess with them much. Every song is about cooking or selling crack.
WIND: That's part of it. But what if we engaged in a reading that was both symptomatic and interpretative. Like this, see…the rapper/drug dealer persona that they construct in their albums is a type of shadow figure of the Western "man," its alter-ego, subconscious? You remember Pusha T's lyrics on the track "Virginia"? The one about him making figures?
VERBAL: Yeah, he says, it's "Ironic, the same place [Virginia] where I make figures at / that be the same place where they used to hang niggas at."
DELSOUL: Oh damn, he does say that.
WIND: Okay, so the mechanism of his "figure" making comes at the exploitation and violent positioning of Black bodies in the present. For him to be in this mode of being he must be the lyncher *and* the lynched.
VERBAL: Okay. I think I got you. We gotta ask, then, what does that mean for a Black person to be successful in America?
DELSOUL: Wait! Du Bois said something like that…he said that he found it hard to be an American without being anti-negro, right?
WIND: Yes. There it is. Pusha T also has this other line where he says: "I see them pay for they fix when they kids couldn't eat / And with this in mind, I still didn't quit / And that's how I know that I ain't shit."
VERBAL: That's from the track "I'm not you" off the *Lord Willin'* album.
WIND: Yeah.

DELSOUL: So, you're saying that there is a type of creative criticism against this type of embodiment?
WIND: Yeah. This might be, in other words, a lyrical inhabitation not affirming this type of embodiment but drawing attention to its limits and limitation.
DELSOUL: As if he is thinking the Human from the edge and realizing that it's not shit.
VERBAL: Damn. I'm thinking of Melle Mele, "Don't push me because I'm close to the edge. I'm trying not to lose my head."
WIND: Yep. That's it. What would it mean to lose one's head in this context? There is great anxiety in losing that part of the body where we've been conditioned to believe is the only place where reason resides.
DELSOUL: To fall into madness.
VERBAL: A mad rapper.
WIND: Yeah. I'm thinking of what Jared Sexton says about Topsy's dance of madness in Wolfe's *Colored Museum*. A type of *mad* freedom.[118]
DELSOUL: That stood out to me too. A dance of madness that turns the world on its head.
VERBAL: Word, topsy-turvy. Crazy thing is they never stop pushing you close to the edge, right? And we never stop fighting *not* to lose our head. You know what they do to niggas that lose their head?
WIND: Whew. Yeah. There is that, too. There is great anxiety there—
VERBAL: Shit. Where there is Black thought there will be White fragility and anxiety—
DELSOUL: Don't forget violence.
WIND: Yep. You don't even have to lose your head. There is always the fear that you *might,* which always precedes you anytime you enter a space.

Track 9: Hip Hop Studies in Black or Fear of a Black Planet(ary) Aesthetic

The title of this track brings together P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon Woods' article "Hip Hop Studies in Black" (2014) with a riff on Public Enemy's album *Fear of a Black Planet* (1989) in order to isolate the phobic surge that such a critical disposition might cause. In a reference and extension deriving from Lewis Gordon's conception of "Theory in Black," Sexton asserts that "Blackness is theory itself, anti-blackness the resistance to theory" ("Ante"). Hip Hop as Black study, one specifically aimed at imagining the liberatory possibilities of a Black planet, would create a type of theory extending far beyond the political means of the moment. A method that would dis-enchant the discourse[119] by pushing b(l)ack "Against Hip Hop Studies," is central to what I am proposing as Hip Hop Theory. Such a theory must act-on-the knowledge of this Black planetary phobia, while producing politico-poetics that dis-rupt (cites and rewrites) the

World. I argue that at their core Hip Hop artists and dramatists are already engaged in such a politico-praxis. What is needed is a *hermeneutic* that captures and recuperates the Black noise that goes undetected in Hip Hop Studies[120].

My corrective educes and extends Saucier and Woods' criticism of the "twofold problematics" of Hip Hop Studies: First, Hip Hop Studies' "overemphasis on the conception of racism as performance" and second, "how the history of antiblack sexual violence is recast through both hip hop and hip hop studies as a matter of economic exploitation and racial prejudice" (270). I argue that a radical Hip Hop hermeneutics must be capable of analyzing Hip Hop's expressive content on a poetic, political, and performative, as well as symptomatic level. A symptomatic reading would be able to address the ways that even at its most political, Frank Wilderson reminds us that, "Black speech is always coerced speech, in that you're always in what Saidiya Hartman would call a context of slavery" ("We're trying to destroy the world"), as well as the fact that though Black bodies perform and create a good majority of Hip Hop expressive content they do not control the means of distribution. As Jared Ball reminds us, "the hip-hop nation is a colonized extension of a predating and continuing colonization that engulfs its progenitors and governs the process and necessity of the theft of soul or the grossest forms of distortion of communication" (Ball 20).

A radical Hip Hop hermeneutics must hold in tension the lyrical testaments to identity formation which may contradict the realities of structural violence. In other words, an interpretive praxis that tracks where notions of identity percussively encounter notions of identification is central to wading through the murky waters that join Black social life and social death. Zakiyyah Jackson points out that a focus on the ways individuals identify which relies heavily on Cartesian forms of consciousness are limiting because such work, "focuses on black

people's identities or stops at what black folks say about their experience without interrogating the conditions that make such speech possible and without interrogating the limits of consciousness itself" ("Waking Nightmares" 358).

Hip Hop Theory may be best defined and elaborated by its encounter with an object. A times it may be necessary as Fanon explains to "leave the methods to the botanists and the mathematicians" (Fanon 1967, 12). Rather the theory must be skeptical of everything, at times even itself. It is theory on the run, in search of a stick, brick, the next sick lick. At times its method is akin to a vehicle in the videogame *Grand Theft Auto*, a dis-posable tool to get job done. It is theory ridden it to the ground, to its limit, abandoned before it explodes. The search for a method is the method. Hip Hop's critical disposition may be dis-orderly but it is not arbitrary. It is a cynically serious method that seeks out truth through the hyperbolic as Adorno might have it, but it is a Black(end) negative critique of those who experience the World through violence and captivity. A radical Hip Hop hermeneutics seeks to read and interpret Hip Hop's lyrical-philosophical attempts as, what Hartman terms, "a blueprint for disorder, a disruptive poetics, an unthinkable narrative from the confines of the hold."[121]

Section Endnotes

[1] In echoing Wilderson *Incognegro*, poem, 440.
[2] From a personal text message exchange February 2018.
[3] *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. Dir. Stanley Kramer. Perf. Spencer Tracey, Sidney Poitier, Katharine Hepburn. Columbia Pictures, 1967.
[4] Personal conversation 12 November 2017
[5] *The Spook Who Sat by the Door.* Dir. Ivan Dixon. Perf. Lawrence Cook, Paula Kelly, Janet League. United Artists, 1973.
[6] I borrow this track title from "All Black Everything" by Rapsody and "All Black Everything" by Lupe Fiasco. Both songs were released in 2011.
[7] Lifesavas. "Skeletons," *Spirit in Stone*. Quannum Projects, 2003. CD.
[8] Tate, Greg, ed. *Everything but the Burden: What White People are Taking from Black Culture*, 2.
[9] Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory…," *Not Only the Master's Tools*, editors Lewis Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon, 108-109.
[10] I sample the phrase "melaninated" bodies from Tommy Curry's Forward to *Philosophy and Hip-Hop* (2014). There Curry states: "Hip Hop suffers, and like the melaninated voices that sing its song, like the dark bodies that dance its rhythms, their Black pains are often unheard in the academy" (ix).
[11] Ice Cube. "The Nigga You Love to Hate," *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted*. Priority Records, 1990. It is important to track the double meaning here: "Loves to hate" (as in enjoys hating), but also "loves (in order) to hate"
[12] Weheliye, Alexander. *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*, 37. I want to layer into Weheliye's question, Hortense Spillers observations regarding Black intellectual thought when she states, "we appear to be at a crossroads in trying to determine who 'owns' African-American cultural production as an 'intellectual property,' who may 'speak' for it, and whether or not 'possession' itself is the always-exploitative end of kinds of access, even when the instigator looks like me" (*Black, White, and in Color*, 377).
[13] Here the quotes matter since I think it would be a stretch as well as inaccurate to suggest that Black people have a place to be displaced from or a music to be stolen. I am reminded, though, of an eerie scene I encountered the last time I was in Portland, Oregon. Already shocked by the complete removal of the Black population, I found myself in a little hipster coffee shop somewhere on NE Killingsworth. I overheard two young white men talking about the condo they had just purchased. "The neighborhood is perfect now," one said, adding, "the best part is I get to live in what used to be the hood."
[14] The quote "who stole the soul" is sampled from the title of Public Enemy's song. Stealing of soul means also a type of theft of the heart of a music here, but I am thinking about it in terms of the way "soul" is often used in Hip Hop to signify a death or a taking of life. For example, "Tell the man he better slow his roll / Our guns'll make James Brown lose his soul" (Clipse, "Please Don't Mind").
[15] This is a troubling tendency in Hip Hop Studies where a scholar, artists, or investigator will briefly mention Hip Hop's connection to Black youth, only to move quickly on to another agenda. Often the agenda never returns to the plight, politics, perspective or pain of Black people.
[16] George-Graves, Nadine. "Basic Black" (2005), 612.
[17] I couldn't help this play on words, referencing the Philadelphia Hip Hop group The Roots and its lead emcee Black Thought. The Roots band appeared in Spike Lee's satirical film *Bamboozled* (2000) as the house band, The Alabama Porch Monkeys, for *Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show*. The Roots are now the house band for NBC's *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon.*
[18] I get this term from Dr. Brittney Cooper and the members of the Crunk Feminist Collective.
[19] Moten and Harney. *Undercommons*, 10.
[20] See Common's "Blows To The Temple," *Can I Borrow a Dollar?*. 1992.
[21] Dead Prez. "They Schools," *Let's Get Free*. Loud Records, 2000.
[22] Eric B. & Rakim. "Don't Sweat the Technique," 1992.

[23] "Left of Black with Hortense Spillers and Alexis Pauline Gumbs," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ui-EZQ1BTfE .
[24] Masta Ace. "Acknowledge," *Disposable Arts*. JCOR Records, 2001.
[25] Roxanne Shante. "Have a Nice Day," *Bad Sister*. Cold Chillin', 1989.
[26] Sarup, Maden. *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism.* The University of Georgia Press, 1993, p. 33.
[27] I sample, rather "jack," the term *sous rature* from Heidegger byway of Derrida to describe the act of putting something "under erasure" (Derrida 1977, xiv). Here I mean that the dis of "going up over" another work of art, references and revises the original. New meaning is created and displayed by the layered dis.
[28] "Upcycling" is best understood as a creative reuse of something that might otherwise be discarded.
[29] Though I find some of Paul Butler's arguments in his article "Much Respect: Toward a Hip-Hop Theory of Punishment," insightful, I vehemently dis-agree with his assertion that, "to dis someone is worse than to insult them—it is to deny his or humanity" (Bridwater, et al., 31).
[30] In the videoed presentation titled "Hortense Spillers: The Idea of Black Culture," Spillers uses the phrase looking the gift horses inside the mouth to describe a type of "critical disposition toward the world" that Black Culture might offer. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1PTHFCN4Gc&t=1780s.
[31] Adorno's continual revision or "unending processual overcoming of illusions" (Bernstien, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, 337); Suzan-Lori Parks' "Rep&Rev" (Parks 1994).
[32] "Hip-Hop in the HBCU Academy." 30 March 2018. https://imixwhatilike.org/2018/03/30/hip-hop-in-the-hbcu-academy/
[33] A popular lyric and chant first popularized by Rock Master Scott and the Dynamic Three's single "The Roof is on Fire" (1984).
[34] By "dis-place" I am thinking of the meanings to take over a place, replace, or force someone or something to be moved from a place, but more specifically in terms of a different place. Something maybe akin to "the wake" (Sharpe), "hold" (Wilderson and Hartman), "cave" (Williams), or a Derridean "Crypt" or "no-place" (read: know place) (Derrida and Johnson, "Fors," 65-66).
[35] Yasiin Bey (aka. Mos Def). "Hip Hop," *Black on Both Sides*.
[36] In *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Sharpe describes wake work as "a mode of inhabiting *and* rupturing this episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives" (18) and "a theory and praxis of the wake; a theory and a praxis of Black being in diaspora" (19).
[37] Echoes of Sexton's "Black life is not lived in the world that the world lives in, but it is lived underground, in outer space…black life is not social, or rather that black life is *lived* in social *death*. Double emphasis, on lived and on death" ("Ante-Anti-Blackness: Afterthoughts").
[38] The "out" and "in" evokes the "the hold" (Wilderson), "the wake" (Sharpe), and "the cave" (Williams), but also the paradox of Black "being," what Sexton might term "the social life of social death."
[39] Personal conversation with rapper Verbal Assault 5 April 2018.
[40] D.I.T.C. "Way of Life," *D.I.T.C.*, 2000.
[41] "Roxanne Shanté Confronted KRS-One After "The Bridge is Over" Diss (Part 4), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deS0yXLONtA
[42] "Left of Black with Hortense Spillers and Alexis Pauline Gumbs," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ui-EZQ1BTfE .
[43] I get the notion of a percussive approach from Brittney Cooper and other members of the Crunk Feminist Collective. A percussive approach, Dr. Cooper explains, "strikes together things that don't necessarily go together." See, "We Can't Breathe: Making Black Lives Matter in the 21st Century," https://vimeo.com/122043158, as well as, "The End of Respectability: Black Feminism & Ratchet Politics," https://vimeo.com/121847236.
[44] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," p. 4.
[45] Ibid., p. 3.

[46] "In the Wake: A Salon in Honor of Christina Sharpe," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGE9oiZr3VM.
[47] J. Live. "The Incredible," *Reveal the Secret*, EP 2007.
[48] http://hutchinscenter.fas.harvard.edu/hiphop-archive-research-institute
[49] https://africana.arizona.edu/minor-hip-hop-studies also in terms of course offerings, An Ethnic Studies class at the University of Oregon has a Hip Hop class; a class titled "Hip Hop Culture" which is cross-listed under American and Music Studies at Skidmore College; and Melissa Harris-Perry teaches a Hip-Hop and Feminism class in the Department of Political Science at Wakefield University.
[50] See Soteriou, Helen. "Hip-hop: Love of music or money machine?" *bbc.com,* 17 Dec. 2012, http://www.bbc.com/news/business-20393347; Tardio, Andres. "Grammy Museum Opens Its First Hip Hop Exhibit, Featuring Tupac Artifacts." *Hip Hop DX*, 4 Feb. 2011, https://hiphopdx.com/news/id.13944/title.grammy-museum-opens-its-first-hip-hop-exhibit-featuring-tupac-artifacts#.
[51] See Ruth Rosen's "You've Come a Long Way, Baby (Or Have You?): The Womens' Movement, the Next Half-Century." Huffingtonpost.com, 02/21/2013 updated 06 Dec. 2017. Accessed 5 Jan. 2018.
[52] In response to Hip Hop's "new" global reach, H. Sammy Alim extends James Spady's assertion that "Hip Hop's been global" (Alim et al., 19). My concern is not with the validity of a statement about Hip Hop's global reach. Hip Hop is undoubtedly worldwide. My concern is that the statement poses an opposition to the "local" and "blackness" of Hip Hop, as if it cannot be widespread *and* Black.
[53] I reference the title of Tricia Rose's groundbreaking book on Hip Hop, and also evoke Saidiya Hartman's description of black noise: "the shrieks, the moans, the non-sense, and the opacity, which are always in excess of legibility and of the law and which hint at and embody aspirations that are wildly utopian, derelict to capitalism, and antithetical to its attendant discourse of Man" (Hartman "Venus in Two Acts"). In addition, "Black noise represents the kinds of political aspirations that are inaudible and illegible within the prevailing formulas of political rationality; these yearnings are illegible because they are so wildly utopian and derelict to capitalism (for example, ''forty acres and a mule,'' the end of commodity production and restoration of the commons, the realization of ''the sublime ideal of freedom,'' the resuscitation of the socially dead)" (Best and Hartman 9).
[54] Yasiin Bey (aka. Mos Def). "Hip Hop," *Black on Both Sides*.
[55] Echo of Hortense Spillers' question regarding the tendency or the desire for individuals to refer to themselves as mixed-race. See "Mama's Baby, Papa's, Too" in "Race: Theories, Identities, Histories , and the 'Post-Racial' Society," *Trans-Scripts* (http://sites.uci.edu/transscripts/files/2014/10/2011_01_02.pdf).
[56] Saucier and Woods, eds, *On Marronage*, 157
[57] The Notorious B.I.G.. "Kick in the Door," *Life After Death.*
[58] *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, 1973.
[59] I mean this only in reference to Hip Hop as a field of study. As Jaye Austin Williams pointed out to me, when Hip Hop does cause a disturbance on campuses throughout the nation, it is often when non-Black people coopt it in highly offensive and violent ways; for example, the infamous "Compton Cookouts" that took place on the U.C. campuses. See "Beyond a 'Compton Cookout,'"*Los Angeles Times*, March 01, 2010, http://articles.latimes.com/2010/mar/01/opinion/la-ed-ucsd2-2010mar02 and "Nothing has changed since the "Compton Cookout": UCI's continued support of institutional racism and the "Pilgrims and Indians" party," *Wordpress*, Jan 21, 2011, https://occupyuci.wordpress.com/2011/01/21/nothing-has-changed-since-the-compton-cookout-ucis-continued-support-for-institutional-racism-and-the-pilgrims-and-indians-party/. Another incident was UCI's Asian-American fraternity's blackface video to Justin Timberlake song featuring Jay-Z. See "UCI Asian-American fraternity's blackface video surfaces, sparks outrage (video/poll), April 25, 2013, (http://www.scpr.org/blogs/news/2013/04/25/13453/uci-asian-american-fraternity-s-blackface-video-su/).
[60] See Wu-Tang Clan, "Bring da Ruckus," specifically the lyrics: "And that's one in the chamber / Wu-Tang banger, 36 styles of danger / Bring da motherfuckin' ruckus."

[61] I am of course referencing the murder of Jordan Davis by Michael Dunn. Dunn testified that the music coming out of the vehicle containing a group of Black high schools students was played at a "ridiculously loud" level.
[62] Carson, A.D. "Second Amendment [Shoot Back]," *Owning My Masters.*
[63] It is interesting to note that Tupac's mother, Afeni Shakur's and Godmother Assata Shakur's affiliation with the Black Panthers and the Black Liberation Army point to an anxiety around what Hortense Spillers might term, an "invisible line," a line between the radical politics of the Panthers and the more "accommodationist" approach of the civil rights movement that the woman in Holland's story refused to walk or "march".
[64] 2Pac. "Changes," *Greatest Hits.*
[65] I am thinking here of Public Enemy's track "Bring the Noise" from the *Apocalypse 91…The Enemy Strikes Black* album and George C. Wolfe and Reg E. Gaines' musical *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk* (1995).
[66] Common. "The 6th Sense," *Like Water for Chocolate.* MCA, 2000.
[67] The Lady of Rage. "Necessary Roughness," *Necessary Roughness*. Death Row, 1997.
[68] "A.D. Carson: Owning My Masters Dissertation Intro," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4W3LrHlRnHw.
[69] Ibid. In the video Carson drops a lyric from Talib Kweli's song "Beautiful Struggle" from the *The Beautiful Struggle* album. I cite the lyrics in their lyrical structure.
[70] http://jurgenstreeck.net/downloads/Syllabus-CMS359-Hip-HopNationFall2011.pdf
[71] To clarify, an analysis of the ways in which Hip Hop employs a type of African diasporic or pan-African theory might be an interesting project; however, I argue that the creator of the syllabus is less interested in how Hip Hop produces theory and Black thought and more interested in how Hip Hop's style and expression can be applied to other non-Black populations.
[72] Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987), 67.
[73] For explorations of signifyin' in literature see Henry Louis Gates's seminal text *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988). For signifyin' in theatre and drama see Kim Euell's "Signifyin(g) Ritual: Subverting Stereotypes, Salvaging Icons" (1997). In Black culture and aesthetic traditions in general see *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', and Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture* (1999) edited by Gena Dagel Caponi.
[74] What also escapes a strictly literary and literal analysis of Hip Hop is Saidiyia Hartman's notion of Black noise: "the shrieks, the moans, the non-sense, and the opacity, which are always in excess of legibility and of the law and which hint at and embody aspirations that are wildly utopian, derelict to capitalism, and antithetical to its attendant discourse of Man." (Venus in two, 12). What would it mean to tarry with(in) Black noise, to listen to, and for, it, to respect "the shrieks," the utterance that cannot be uttered in words? This is a central problem with a good deal of the Hip Hop Studies scholarship, specifically, the brand that wants to solely analyze texts on the page. What is lost when the word is removed from Black bodies? A type of reversal of word made flesh, an unfleshing of the word. Reading rap as poetry on the page mutes the sonic vibration of Black noise. How to account for Tupac's menacing laugh in his songs? E-40's musical pitch inflections and modulations? This sonic world is lost not only in Hip Hop lyrics, but in Black music in general. One cannot transcribe to the page that subtle but weighty "hmm" sound Gladys Knight makes on *Midnight Train to Georgia* after she sings "So he pawned all his hopes / And he even sold his old car." Nor can a text-based reading of lyrics bring to life the ways in which Lauryn Hill's voice, on her unplugged album, seems to be in constant crisis, breaking in and out, a dark sounding at the limit of the inaudible and unthinkable. All this is what escapes literary analysis, or rather it is this that Hip Hop literary analysis avoids.
[75] Lauryn Hill. "Lost Ones," *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill.*
[76] Vernon Reid in *Everything but the Burden*, edited by Greg Tate, page 114-15.
[77] For some examples of this tendency see: postmodernist theories (Potter 1995), de Certeauian space theory (Faniel 2013; Wilkins 2000), transnational or global social theory (Malone and Martinez 2014; Mitchell 2002; Forman and Neal 2012;), Literary Theory (Bradley 2009/2010; Coverl and Lansana 2015; Pate 2010; Sitomer and Cirelli 2015), and teaching pedagogy (Dimitriadis 2009; Akom 2009; Hill 2009; Hill et al. 2014)

[78] Delsoul private conversation, 17 Jan. 2018.
[79] Christina Sharpe. *In The Wake*, 13.
[80] There are some important exceptions worth mentioning here: Saucier and Woods' "Upgrade and Upstage: Injunctions Against Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, 'Black Feminism,' and Hip Hop Studies at the Ledge' (A Response to Forster)" (2015); Nicholas Brady's "Bound 2 You: A Black Study of Kanye West's Yeezus" (2013); Greg Thomas' *Hip-Hop Revolution in the Flesh: Power, Knowledge, and Pleasure in Lil' Kim's Lyricism* (2009); Gwendolyn Pough's, et al. *Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip Hop Feminism Anthology* (2007); R.A. Judy's "On the Question of Nigga Authenticity" (1994).
[81] For references to Hip Hop's fifth element see (Haupt 2008, 168); (Price II 2006, 37-42); (Uno 2004); (Williams, Justin, 2015, Ch. 15); (Thomas 2009, 160, 195).
[82] This argument is also in groove with Sylvia Wynter's interrogation of Black Studies and its cooptation in and by the academy through disassociating it from the Black Arts and Black Power movements. My call here is to re-connect Hip Hop Studies in the academy with the (Black) study that Hip Hop is already doing in other settings.
[83] Pough, et, al, 2007, vii.
[84] "A.D. Carson: Owning My Masters Dissertation Intro," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4W3LrHlRnHw.
[85] Wu-Tang Clan. "Triumph," *Wu-Tang Forever*. See Inspectah Deck's verse.
[86] I am trying to echo Jaye Austin Williams' rich riffs and references on Plato's cave allegory (Williams 2013).
[87] See "Owning My Masters" digital copy: https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2887&context=all_dissertations
[88] There is a written component of the dissertation that accompanies the thirty-six track album.
[89] Here I am riffing on Fred Moten's notion (2008) of black studies an "open secret" which is "the aim of black studies," 1743.
[90] Spillers. *Black, White and in Color*, 254 and Public Enemy's *Fear of a Black Planet* (1990).
[91] Carson, A.D. "Dissertation [Part 1: The Introduction]," *Owning My Masters.*
[92] "A.D. Carson: Owning My Masters Dissertation Intro," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4W3LrHlRnHw.
[93] The urban dictionary defines the expression "getting owned" as getting "beaten" or "humiliated." For me, it is better understood in line with dis. Owning, then, a flipping of script where the top-dog, at least in that moment, becomes the underdog. In this case, the teacher is schooled by the student which renders the teachers "necessary yet inadequate."
[94] Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*, 252.
[95] Hip Hop Feminist often extend the rich tradition of Black feminist, queer, or womanist thoughts of Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Anne Moody, Alice Walker, Barbara Smith, bell hooks, Cheryl Clarke, Patricia Hill Colins, and many more. Absent from much Hip Hop feminist writing is the work of Sylvia Wynter and to a lesser extent Saidiyia Hartman and Hortense Spillers.
[96] Again, I am speaking specifically of scholarship that challenges Western epistemes and ways of embodiment by using Hip Hop as critical praxis. This, then, is a call for scholarship at the critical and creative intersections of rappers like Lil Kim, Lauryn Hill, and The Lady of Rage and scholars like Joy James, Sylvia Wynter, and Christina Sharpe.
[97] I am skeptical of statements like this because it assumes a clear sense of what is positive and negative. My thinking here is in line with something KRS-1 offered an interview. He suggests that people stop getting caught up in the question is good for or constructive in society. What if society is the problem? What if it is unjust? Hip Hop should not be a positive element of that society.
[98] "Race, Hip Hop and Feminism," 13 April 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=couCJ5spAfU
[99] In short, Morgan's statement refers to the ability for Black women to be feminist and enjoy or derive pleasure from Hip Hop music. It is a more nuanced take on Hip Hop, politics and humanity.

[100] The expression "fuck with" or "fucks with" is a complicated one with many meanings. I use it to mean mainly here to enjoy, listen to, or utilize, as in I "fuck with" Azealia Banks. I don't "fucks with" Iggy Azalea. To "fucks with" can also mean to be in line or agreement with something, as in I can "fucks with that." It can also mean to tweak or alter, as in "do you like the way I fucks with the horn section on that track?" Or as I heard one time in the Bay Area when a barber yelled out the open door of his shop: "hey, come in here and let fucks with your head." I want to make sure that the act of "fucking with" something is not gendered. Everyone can "fucks with" this concept. If you're skeptical, well, "fucks with" me a little longer.
[101] "Race, Hip Hop and Feminism," 13 April 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=couCJ5spAfU
[102] ibid.
[103] I am bringing into this statement two samples: 1) some rappers "always say they going in but never penetrating" (Gifted Gab & Blimes Brixton, 2017) and 2) Sylvia Wynter.
[104] Riffing with Adorno.
[105] Spillers, "The Idea of Black Culture," 26.
[106] Ice Cube. "The Nigga Ya Love to Hate," *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted.*
[107] The key texts in the emerging field of Hip Hop Theater Studies are Daniel Banks' *Sayword! Voices from Hip Hop Theater* (2011); Kim Euell and Robert Alexnder's *Plays from the Boom Box Galaxy* (2009); and Nicole Hodges "Sampling Blackness: Performing African Americanness in Hip-Hop Theater and Performance" (Diss 2009). The *urtexts,* offered from Hip Hop Studies, for these previously mentioned sources are Chang 2005 and 2006; Forman and Neal 2004; George 1998; Hoch 2004; Watkins 1998; and Williams 2015. Some of the sources cite Tricia Rose's groundbreaking book *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994). Few, if any, of the central texts in either fields cite scholars like Saidiya Hartman, Sylvia Wynter, Hortense Spillers, or Joy James. My work seeks to insert these Black women scholars into the Hip Hop archives, specifically regarding the research on Hip Hop's fifth element of knowledge and knowledge creation.
[108] Saucier and Woods, "Hip Hop Studies in Black," 274.
[109] It is important to recall that Malcolm X is one of the, if not the single most, sampled historical figure in Hip Hop music.
[110] For a much more in-depth critical intervention into the political discourse of multi-racialism see Jared Sexton's *Amalgamation Schemes*.
[111] See Sylvia Wynter's recounting of the Black Arts Movement and its relation to Black Studies in "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory…" (Gordon, Lewis and Jane Anna Gordon 2007, 107-108),
[112] Gordon, "Race, Theodicy…," 729.
[113] Amiri Baraka would also sample DuBois' "for," "about," and "near" formulation to describe his own Black Arts aesthetics (Elam and Krasner, 6).
[114] I find a similar problem in the Q Brothers' assertion that Shakespeare was the first rapper and Lin-Manual Miranda's claim that Alexander Hamilton is Hip Hop.
[115] See Price III 2006, 37; Levinson and Pollock 2011, 233; and Universal Zulu Nation website (www.zulunation.com).
[116] It is important to note that both Banks and Hoch are white artists and thinkers attempting to position themselves into a Black expressive culture.
[117] In my early twenties, I tried my hand at emceeing with a group called the Triphonix. My rap name was Delsoul. Occasionally, I would produce lyrics that were much more explicit than I felt comfortable with, so I created another rap name or alter ego, Verbal Assault. In a sense this is a conversation with my alter egos, perhaps (id, ego, superego) In a Fanonian sense I am speaking through tripled perspective here.
[118] Wind is refereeing here to (Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death").
[119] Wynter, "On Disenchanting Discourse: "Minority" Literary Criticism and beyond."
[120] I include the expressive content of the culture, as well as the theoretical writings from the field of Hip Hop Studies.
[121] Hartman, "The Dead Book Revisited," 209.

DISC 3: "Bonding Over Phobia: Restaging a Revolution at the Expense of Black Revolt"[1]

Track 1: "Lighter Is Better" the bitter truth of an Anti-Black World

And now this. "Heineken pulls "Lighter is Better" Ad after outcry over racism."[2] In the commercial a white (or light skinned Latino) actor playing a bar tender eyes what appears to be an Asian woman through a set of (absurdly over-sized) binoculars. What does he see in such a gaze? What does the audience see him seeing? Cut. Aroused, he slides a green bottle of Heineken along the bar counter. The camera cuts as the bottle, as if propelled by a magic force, slides *past* a dark-skinned Black woman with short hair. A reggae song plays, "ohh, it's another scorcher" in the background. Cut. The bottle continues, making its way under the legs of a Black man seated, playing a guitar. Cut. The bottle slides *past* another Black woman, dark-skinned (again with short hair). She is walking in the opposite direction of the bottle's path; her head turns, her eyes track the bottle. Cut. The bottle arrives at its "destination," resting side by side a glass of white wine. White text appears: "SOMETIMES, LIGHTER IS BETTER." Cut. The Asian (-looking) woman, surrounded by a group of white men (colleagues perhaps), picks the bottle up. Cut.

The journey of the bottle is laden with symbolism, spoken secrets. The same symbolic opening haunts the final scene of *Dear White People* (2014); however, in the latter it is a bridge and not a bar, and the journey belongs to Samantha White (Tessa Thompson) and not the bottle. Anti-Blackness (a moving away from, *past*) is the condition of possibility for multicultural alliances; Blackness the interstitial remains pushed out of sight/cite/site and out of mind, a visible invisibility at once "nowhere but nevertheless everywhere."[3]

There is a rhythmic thumping (sound)
The World is water.
An eerie reimaging, // bones rising up//[4]
A return to the //*Scenes of Subjection*//[5]
That never left, always happening
Lapping, rhythms…a World of water.
//Can we come in? You've never left.//[6]
We have entered the subconscious of the World.
Now, how to teach Freud and Lacan the Dozens?[7]

Track 2: Exposing Exposition and (Up)setting the (St)age

> I have never heard any singers, any actors, capture the fire and passion of the American revolution in the way that these young Black and Latino performers did…After a couple of minutes I completely stopped thinking about what color or ethnicity they were –Ron Chernow[8]
>
> I was interested, as I had been for a long time, in the way black people ignite critical moments of discovery or change or emphasis in literature not written by them. –Toni Morrison[9]
>
> I wrote this opus,
> to reverse the hypnosis. –Lauryn Hill[10]

In 2017, I attended a conference which was assembled to recognize and mourn the all too present and untimely deaths of Black people at the hands of State, and State-sanctioned, forces. During a needed break from the weighty topic, I wandered outside where I noticed a small group of conference attendees gathered around two young Black boys who were in the middle of a lively and impressive rendition of the song "Alexander Hamilton" from Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical *Hamilton.* This was a *peculiar* setting—amid investigations of Black death and structural violence—to encounter the figure of Alexander Hamilton, to hear the lyrics, "when America sings for you / Will they know what you overcame?"[11] sung by the young duo.

On the other hand, perhaps, Hamilton's presence, as conjured through the young black bodies of these performers, wasn't all that peculiar. After all, Miranda has turned "the ten-dollar founding father without a father" (as the musical describes) into nothing short of a pop icon with

his hit musical. The nation appears to have fallen in love with (and been *hypnotized* by) this retelling of the country's first Secretary of Treasury turned immigrant Hip Hop hero, so much so, that a diagnostic term has been created to describe peoples' engrossment: "Hamiltonitis."[12] This excitement (or affliction) seemed to be illustrated in the applause from the conference onlookers as one of the boys turned to the other and asked, "What's your name, man?" to which the other, as well as serval members of the crowd, sang in reply, "Alexander Hamilton." As I wandered off to find the next conference panel, I couldn't help but wonder what was the connection between what "we" had just seen in the performance and the problematics being investigated at the conference. This essay seeks to interrogate the socio-political space between a project like *Hamilton* and the ethical-political task of meditating on Black suffering and the ways it is tethered to structures of violence both historically and in our current times.

Despite *Hamilton*'s immense success and recognition, historian Annette Gordon-Reed points out that, "one of the most interesting things about the *Hamilton* phenomenon is just how little serious criticism the play has received" ("Hamilton: The Musical"). Gordon-Reed's observation is an ideal starting point for investigating *Hamilton* and the critical discourse (or lack thereof) that surrounds it.[13] Serious and sustained critical analysis has, indeed, been scarce; however, *Hamilton* does have critics who have worked to problematize the role of race and ethnicity in relation to the musical's larger political framework. The historian Lyra Monteiro argues, for example, that simply plugging in "people of color" does nothing but continue a tradition of glorifying "the deeds of 'great white men'" (Monteiro, "Race-Conscious Casting"), while at the same time erasing the contribution of black and brown people who were *actually* around during that era (Onion, "A *Hamilton* Skeptic"). Similarly, the poet and essayist Ishmael Reed critiques the deployment of Black actors in the musical, while taking to task the lack of

attention paid to slavery's role in America's founding. Reed is critical of Miranda's representation of Alexander Hamilton, claiming that in Miranda's hands' Hamilton has been "scrubbed with a kind of historical Ajax" (Reed, '"Hamilton: The Musical:" Black Actors Dress Up Like Slaver Owners…").

Another criticism focused on the musical's revolutionary limitations comes from James McMaster in his article, "Why Hamilton is Not as Revolutionary as You Think." Here, McMaster evaluates the role and representation of women in the musical, as well the musical's reliance on the bootstrap narrative and the myth of meritocracy. The logic of these American myths, McMaster argues, "neglects and obscures the material obstacles and violences (structural racism, predatory capitalism, long-burned bridges to citizenship) imposed on racialized immigrants within the United States in order to celebrate the (false) promise of the American dream and the nation-state" ("Why Hamilton is Not…"). A similar criticism is brought forth by theater scholar Donatella Galella in a sober review in which she applauds *Hamilton* for its artistic brilliance, yet laments the fact that the musical adheres to a conservative political orientation. The myth of meritocracy, Galella argues, serves to "rationalize the oppression of immigrants, people-of-color, poor and working-class people, and women" (Galella, "Racializing the American Revolution").

Monteiro, Reed, McMaster, Galella, as well as a small handful of others, have offered important critical contributions, earning them the title "Hamilton-haters" by many who feel the need to protect the play from criticism. David Marcus, for example, in his article, "Hamilton Haters Are Why We Can't Have Nice Things," takes to task the way "social justice warriors" (a term he uses pejoratively to target Monteiro and others) for always finding the problematics of everything, as well as "holding art to unattainable standards of race consciousness." In the

article, Marcus's inability to think racism as a structural reality and not a private or personal experience, causes him to grossly oversimplify Monterio's critical intervention. An example is his rebuttal to Monterio's argument of Black historical erasure in *Hamilton.* Marcus responds by stating that Monterio's analysis, "might seem odd, given that almost everyone on stage is either black or a person of color" ("Hamilton Haters").[14] The implication being that socio-political "erasure" or "whitewashing" cannot transpire if people of color are holding the paintbrushes. Or, put differently, a political project that works against the interests of Black people cannot be headed (at least on representational level) by people with Black and brown faces.

Marcus's inability to think about the complexity of anti-Black racism, claiming that when discussing "the question of race, our society ties itself in knots over issues that should be rather simple" ("Hamilton Haters"), profoundly limits his attempts at analysis. His approach to the question of race, which society makes more complicated than need be, facilitates his move to defend *Hamilton* at the expense of critical analysis. For Marcus, his feelings that, "there's no such thing as a pop culture that isn't biased and hugely problematic in all kinds of ways" (Marcus, 2016) is reason enough to leave the problematics of race in the musical untheorized.

Unfortunately, this trend toward racial-blindness, as well as the tendency to substitute criticism for sentimental assertions is the norm rather than the exception in the critical discourse surrounding *Hamilton*. That is why I find the analytical interventions I mentioned above so important. Along these lines and critical tracks, however, there must *also* be a deeper interrogation, not necessary of what the play does *with* the past, but what it does *for* the present. The phenomenon of *Hamilton* cannot be analyzed effectively without a grave meditation on three conditions which animate our current times: first, the ongoing brutality and murder inflicted on black bodies at the hands, batons, and guns of police officers and their deputized

"Junior Partners"[15]; second, a dismissal of, and deafness toward, Black suffering which has been amplified by what some deem to be a "post-racial society" in the wake of the Obama era; and third, a reemergence, in response to these conditions, of Black radical thought/movements that are incompatible and incommensurable with (neo)liberal progressive multicultural orientations and agendas.[16]

Considering these three conditions, which are constitutive of the historical moment that *Hamilton* emerges out of, allows us to get to the root of the central problematic of the musical, as well as trace how it derives its political and ideological assumptions that are the cause of its "revolutionary" limitations. The problem is that at the foundation of *Hamilton*'s political and ideological structure is a false analogy that the musical (and the discourse that surrounds it) cannot reconcile. This logical fallacy occurs when the musical and its critical commentators conflate "immigrantness" with "slaveness". This conflation serves as the ideological glue that holds the musical together, as well as the base ingredient for not only the coherence of the project, but for its praise and reception. To be clear, what I'm not saying is that *Hamilton* is "unworthy" of praise, nor am I evaluating its quality as a work of art. What I am saying is there might be something else *in the air*.[17]

Returning to the epigraphs that open this essay, I am guided by the following questions: first, what is it about the historical moment that *Hamilton* emerges out of that makes Black and Latino bodies able to "capture the fire and passion of the American revolution" in ways that no *other* bodies can? Second, in what ways does this American musical employ (in the full sense of the word) black bodies to "ignite critical moments of discovery or change," while concurrently enabling a type of forgetting or blindness toward the peculiarity of Blackness on and off the

stage? And finally, what type of motion or movement might "reverse" the theatrical hypnosis and open space for more revolutionary possibilities?

What I offer, then, is a meta-analysis that seeks to interrogate the presence and problematic of the "immigrant(ness)" and "slave(ness)" conflation. To do so, I make two analytical cuts into *Hamilton's* discursive terrain. The first cut takes place in Track 4, and intervenes into the rhetoric surrounding the musical's use of multiracial/multiethnic casting, and brings to light a type of blindness that occurs in regards to black bodies. The second is made in Track 5, and investigates the ways that Miranda's dramaturgy must leave the violence of racial slavery and its afterlife *unthought*[18] in order to keep intact (and add coherence to) a romanticized notion of American (neo)liberal multicultural progress centered on the figure of the non-Black immigrant. The other accompanying tracks work to compliment and complicate the analytical cuts.

Track 3: Dear White People, P.S. People of Color

Fade in:

BLACK FEMALE STUDENT
I had a friend that was recently shot by the cops.
It's something that I can't really get my mind around.

PROFESSOR OF COLOR
Yeah, well, no one likes cops, right?

Fade out:

Track 4: Colorb(l)inding: Now You See it, Now You Don't, critical cut 1

> With these performers, some descended from slaves, portraying the eighteenth century founders, many of whom were slave-owners, Hamilton, in effect, signals a new generation saying: We're America too. –Jonathan Mandel[19]

> And though I applaud *Hamilton* for its use of race-revolutionary casting, let us not forget that brown bodies are still being used to further mythologize and perpetuate the narratives of dead white men, historically and currently the most privileged group in American society. –Katori Hall[20]

> The system break man, child, and women into figures /
> Two columns for "who is" and "who ain't" niggas. –Mos Def [21]

One of the most praised features of *Hamilton* is its use of, what many commentators term, "colorblind casting." While it is undeniable that "actors of color" are playing white historical figures, colorblind casting is a misnomer. *Hamilton's* casting, as only a select few have identified, may be *non-traditional*, however, its "colorblindness" is a more complicated story.[22] Though much of the discourse uses the terms "colorblind" and "nontraditional" casting interchangeably, thinking them separately opens space for a sharper analysis. Here, noted Shakespearian Ayanna Thompson is helpful in teasing out the difference between the two terms. Thompson explains, nontraditional casting is an "umbrella term for different types of casting" and "colorblind casting" is one of the more familiar sorts. In colorblind casting, Thompson continues, the audience is "not supposed to notice the race of the actor or the character, and are just supposed to be blind to it on stage."[23] The container-like quality of the term is further illustrated by Clinton Turner Davis and Harry Newman's definition of nontraditional casting as, "the casting of ethnic, female, or disabled actors in roles where race, ethnicity, gender, or physical capability are not necessary to the characters' or the play's development" (Davis and Neman, cited in Catanese, 12).[24] All colorblind casting, then, is nontraditional, but not all nontraditional casting is colorblind. The function of colorblind casting, and this is key, is that the director, actor, and audience are supposed to remain *blind* to the race and/or ethnicity of the actors on stage.

It is not difficult to see the inherent problem in the concept of colorblindness. Being blind to race, would naturally lead to a *blindness* of the violence and inequalities resulting from structural racism. This is as true off stage as it is and on stage. Black performance scholar Lisa

M. Anderson asserts that, "the effort toward colorblindness has not reduced or eliminated racism; rather, it has reinforced whiteness as neutral, 'raceless,' and 'colorless'" (Thompson 101). Contrary to claims that "we" have "moved beyond" or are "post-race," race continues to have profound effects on peoples' lives and deaths; it continues to mean (and make meaning) even when one physically or theoretically looks away. On and off the stage, Anderson argues, Blackness "signifies race; blackness also carries with it three centuries of sedimented meaning" (202). To request a colorblind orientation to a black body is to ask the audience to forget by remaining blind to the "sedimented meaning" of racial Blackness, or what poet and theorist, David Marriott, terms, "the occult presence of racial slavery" (Marriott xxi). The desire to move beyond (let us say it outright) Blackness, is nothing other than a desire to have the afterlife of slavery no longer a haunting reality in our modern times. It is a willingness to be blind to the institutional and structural mechanism, from chattel slavery to (extra)legal murders, that continue to violently subjugate black bodies.

What is curious about the ubiquitous (mis)use of the term "colorblind casting" in the discourse surrounding *Hamilton* is that at the same time it applauds the musical for its *blind* casting, it recognizes "the power," "revolutionary approach," and "excitement" that arises from *seeing* Black and brown actors as the Founding Fathers. Claims like, "what makes "Hamilton" *especially relevant* is that it *purposefully uses color-blind casting* to…*subvert* the familiar story of the Founding Fathers" (Godinez; italics mine), speak directly to the purposefulness of the racial casting, as well as indicate the racial awareness needed for its efficacy. When much of the discourse demonstrates an awareness of not only race, but of the ways racially marked bodies shape the musical, what accounts for the persistent use of the phrase colorblind casting? Is the

discursive terrain simply unable to agree on what it means to be *blind* to race? What else might be afoot in these claims to a type of (color)blind racial seeing?

These questions become even more puzzling when one realizes that Miranda and his creative team have, from the beginning, expressed the conceptual and race-conscious nature of the casting.[25] In a 2015 interview with the Hollywood Reporter, Miranda affirms the "intentional" casting approach when he states, "In *Hamilton*, we're telling the stories of old, dead white men but we're *using actors of color*, and that makes the story more immediate and more accessible to a contemporary audience" (DiGiacomo; italics mine). Miranda's belief that casting "actors of color" influences his-story by making it more "immediate" and "accessible" demonstrates that the casting choices are not only conscious ones, but conceptual ones as well. Miranda also admits that race informed his creative process, even during the early writing stages. In several interviews, Miranda divulges that he "imagined" primarily Black rappers in the roles, so much so that it shaped the content, rhyme scheme, and style of the rap lyrics in the musical.[26] Race, one would have to assume, again entered the picture when deciding which "actor of color" would play which Founding Father.

To the credit of critics and commentators, *Hamilton's* artistic team is not always consistent about the type of casting the musical employs, possibly adding to the confusion. In the book, *Hamilton: The Revolution*, Miranda and Jeremy McCarter relay a story about how the musical's historical consultant, Ron Chernow, came to the realization that the play would "need" to employ "race-blind" casting.[27] Miranda and McCarter recount that Chernow, "[n]ot being a rap listener…hadn't given much thought to the fact that the *people best able to perform the songs* that Lin [Miranda] had been writing might look nothing like their historical counterparts" (Miranda and McCarter 33; italics mine). Here, Chernow's revelation appears to be at odds with

the tenets of conscious casting espoused by Miranda. Where Miranda has asserted that the casting choices were intentional, seeking to, as he explains, make the cast "look the way America looks now,"[28] Chernow seems to deploy a type of liberal humanist colorblind rhetoric by suggesting the casting was based on which actors were "best able to perform" the roles. In other words, Chernow's statement moves away from a race-conscious claim, one that will "eliminate the distance"[29] between the [white] past and the [multiracial] present, to a claim that the artistic team *had* to cast Blacks and Latinos because of their ability to perform rap. The fact that there are accomplished white, Native American, and Asian (not to mention female) rappers seems to elude Chernow, as does the fact that his comments here lie incongruence to statements he has offered elsewhere.

In a New York Times interview, for example, Chernow discusses the profound effect of seeing Black and brown actors playing the Founding Fathers when he states, "after a minute or two I started to listen and *forgot* the color or ethnicity of these astonishingly talented young performers. Within five minutes, I became a militant on the subject of color-blind casting" (Rosen; italics mine). If what Chernow claims to have experienced is, indeed, a "colorblind" experience, and if "colorblindness ultimately signifies assimilation," as Lisa Anderson argues (Thompson 91), did Chernow forget that the "astonishingly talented young performers" were actors of color by reimagining them as white, like himself, like the Founding Fathers?[30] Did the actors' incredible performance allow them to be (re)assimilated into the frame of whiteness, to racially disappear? If their performance was less than astonishing, would they have remained actors of color in Chernow's (inner) eyes?

These questions also trouble Miranda's own ideas, leading to contradictory statements about the casting. In an interview, for example, Miranda is asked about effect of Black and

brown actors playing white slave owners. His answer oscillates between a color-conscious and a colorblind casting approach when he states, "*[the casting]* was a constant conversation between me and Tommy [Kail, the director]." Miranda continues, "Our goal was: This is a story about *America then*, told by America now, and we want to *eliminate any distance* — our story should look the way our country looks. Then we found the *best* people to embody these parts" (Weinert-Kendt; italics mine). Miranda does not clarify if "best" refers to symbolic resonance and dramaturgical function or to the talents and skills of the actors. This raises the question: is Miranda being *conscious* of the role race plays in his re-writing, rather, re-pigmenting of America's Founding Fathers, but *blind* to the racial peculiarities of such casting within the musical itself? Does Miranda (and his artistic team) assume that *all* people of color will have the same symbolic function or *affect* if cast in any of the roles? Asked differently, is a racially Black Thomas Jefferson analogous to an Asian or Latino Thomas Jefferson? If so, what must be overlooked for this equivalence to be made (professed) and staged (performed)?

As an artist of color, Miranda aligns himself with the doctrines of multiculturalism. He recognizes the importance of "diversity" in the world of theater and film. He recognizes that his casting uses ethnic difference to make a statement; however, his unwillingness to, as he states, "differentiate between Black and Latino actors,"[31] at least when it comes to casting, is a restriction to his racial politics. Miranda cannot reconcile his multiculturalist orientation (that wants to fetishize difference) with his traditional liberal values (that seeks to remain blind to difference). To settle these conflicting ideologies, Miranda replaces racial alterity (the positionality of the Black) with ethnic pluralism (the relationality of the ethnic minority), an ideological move that overlooks the way global anti-Blackness situates Black people and non-Black (people of color) in the World in vastly different ways. Such an analytical oversight is best

described by Jared Sexton's term, "people-of-color-blindness," which Sexton defines as, "a form of colorblindness inherent to the concept of 'people of color.'" This blindness arises when a discourse, "bears a common refusal to admit to significant differences of structural position born of discrepant histories between blacks and their political allies, actual or potential" ("People-of-Color-Blindness…" 47-48).

Much of Miranda's ideas on racism, when he does offer them, are afflicted with people-of-color-blindness. An example can be found in a curious comment Miranda makes about the function of *Hamilton*'s casting. Miranda argues, that the casting of people of color is "a way of pulling you into the story and allowing you to leave whatever *cultural baggage* you have about the founding fathers at the door" (Piepenburg; italics mine). What is this "cultural baggage" that "you" are invited to leave at the door, and do all people (of color) share the same cultural baggage regarding the Founding Fathers, or the "founding" of America, for that matter? Even more disconcerting than the potential answers to these questions is the ways in which the musical and the critical discourse labors to keep this "baggage" packed, tightly fastened, and tucked away, out of sight. Whether this concealment occurs at a conscious or pre-conscious register, the rhetoric that is deployed can be analyzed at the level of its assumptive logic.

The logic that undergirds the musical and its discursive terrain relies on (neo)liberal multiculturalist ideology. In the musical (and the collective unconscious that it stages), the presence of the black body can emerge as spectacle but the spectral politics of Blackness must be suppressed. If not, what the musical labors to perform and proclaim through its casting, namely, all people of color suffer equally under the structures and technologies of anti-Blackness, would be revealed as ruse. The musical is haunted by a conflation of specific structural position produced by the racial casting. It cannot reconcile the contradiction that the immigrant may have

"baggage" regarding their relationship to the Founding Fathers, but the Black captive is positioned in structural antagonism to America's founding. The former's ethnic diversity is incorporated into the story of American "progress," while the latter's racial alterity and the violence that creates it is the nightmare that adds coherence to the American Dream.

The problem, then, is not solely the supposed colorblind casting of the musical, but rather the people-of-color-blindness that animates the politics it professes and performs. The mainstream commentary on the casting epitomizes what playwright Katori Hall warns against when she states, "let us not *forget* that *brown* bodies are still being used to further mythologize and perpetuate the narratives of dead white men" (italics mine). Note that Hall references only "brown" bodies and their specific function in the political project. Here, she sets upon a problematic within the discourse's use of the term "people of color" within the context of American history. Because of chattel slavery, bodies marked as black differ from other ethnically marked bodies in their ability to "further" and "perpetuate" the myth of the white founders. A structural reality that is ignored when, *Hamilton*'s racial casting executes a visual and ideological ruse, where on the performative level it fetishizes racial difference (now you see), while on the ethico-political level it subverts a critique of structural anti-Blackness (now you don't). It is this sleight of hand that makes resurrecting the myths and narratives of dead white settlers on/through black and brown bodies appear to be a revolutionary act.

In this con-text, the phrases "people of color," rather than being a term of radical political solidarity, becomes a term to obscure the ethical demands that may be offered by Black people due to their specific structural position. This problematic occurs throughout the discourse, but most noticeably when the term "people of color" is employed to discuss contemporary racial inequalities, as well as historical violence under and after racialized slavery. To suggest that

casting "actors of color" as the founding fathers, re-inserts "them" into American history assumes that *all* people of color have been positioned into that history in same way. Such an inability to think with(in) these discrepant histories allows for undeveloped statements like *Hamilton* "is right in tune with today's debates about immigration and Black Lives Matter" (Schuessler, "Hamilton and History") to saturate the discourse, disguised as critical analysis. The quote forgets to remember that the structural realities that a movement like Black Lives Matter seeks to address, may not be congruent with "debates about immigration." The statement refuses to meditate on the reality that an "immigrant" can arrive to these shores, "settle," and be deputized by the State to control, police, oversee, and kill Black people. To put it plainly, it is the discourse's inability (or refusal) to not think like a settler, or to want to "multiculturalize" settler colonialism, that haunts *Hamilton* as a political project and plagues its constellation of criticism.

Track 5: A Negative Categorical Imperative [32]

"I'm Hawaiian, I'm not a nigger."
He offers an apology to the brown faced boy.
The leader turns.
Time moves even slower.
The short leader notices my gaze.
I keep my eyes on his face. Push.
My eyes plead with him.
He hasn't pushed me (yet).
He is in the back, his brown face.
It is brown, dark brown.
It stands out. Push.
I'm reminded of a pack of dogs.
A sea of faces turning red, all six…or was there seven?
I am *now* sure that I didn't.
I apologize anyways, automatically almost. Push.
"Why'd you trip him, nigger?"
Did I try and trip him? I don't remember.
He is white, freckled, shorter than I.
"The fucking nigger tried to trip me," the short leader hissed.
Another push.
We had been playing basketball, passing time.
I am pushed against the wall of the gymnasium.

There are six, maybe seven.
I can't recall what I did to upset them.
They have me surrounded. Push.

Track 6: Bringing His-story into the Light or "Playing in the Dark,"[33] critical cut 2

> It does not seem accidental that "Hamilton" was created during the tenure of the first African-American President.
> –Rebecca Mead[34]

> [W]e are living in the afterlives of slavery, sitting in the room with history, in a lived and undeclared State of Emergency. The ground of compromise, the access to "American freedom" and democracy, littered with black bodies.
> -Christina Sharpe[35]

> The China-men built the railroad, the Indians saved the Pilgrim and in return the Pilgrim killed 'em
> They call it Thanksgiving, I call your holiday "hell-day"
> ' Cause I'm from poverty, neglected by the wealthy.
> -Nas[36]

Where the critical discourse surrounding *Hamilton*'s deployment of racialized bodies (whether blindly or consciously) is restricted due to its "people-of-color-blindness," Miranda's dramaturgy suffers from a similar shortsightedness when he conflates "slaveness" with "immigrantness." In the musical, this conflation works to reference the suffering of the Black captives only to dramatically re-employ it into an alternative narrative project. More specifically, Black suffering under chattel slavery raises an ethical question, but the weight of that question must be quickly transferred away from the captives and into a narrative of white (settler) redemption. Like Ron Chernow's earlier explanation of *Hamilton's* "colorblind casting," as an act of forgetting, the musical requires that the violence of racial slavery be disregarded as soon as it serves its dramaturgical function. What facilitates this relocating of the musical's ethical dilemma is a "ruse of analogy"[37] that structurally and symbolically conflates the peculiar position of the Black captive population with that of immigrant populations. The conflation is

employed throughout the musical, but it is no more apparent than in the opening lines of the musical:

> AARON BURR: How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a
> Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten
> Spot in the Caribbean by providence, impoverished, in squalor
> Grow up to be a hero and a scholar?

Before one has time to contemplate the question or reach an answer, the character of John Laurens offers: "The ten-dollar Founding Father without a father / Got a lot farther by working a lot harder / By being a lot smarter / By being a self-starter" (Miranda, 2015). Laurens' answer proposes that it is due to Hamilton's incredible work ethic, intelligence, motivation and ambition that he could achieve "hero" status. This may all be well and "true"; it certainly is in accordance with the myth of the rugged individual, one of the prototypical figures of the bootstrap narrative. But one is left wondering who are these "others" who were unable to work hard, out smart, and self-start? What the character of Laurens, at least in Miranda's hands, fails to recognize is that Hamilton "got a lot farther" because he could utilize "the magic of skin color."[38] His whiteness endowed him with a body able to be viewed and valued as *his* body. This self-possession was not a byproduct of hard work, rather it was granted at birth. Nevis, where his-story begins, that "forgotten spot in the Caribbean," animated by the capturing, trafficking, and fatal laboring of millions of black bodies serves as an ideal starting point for *Hamilton* to "rise up" from; however, the analogy drawn between one's "humble" beginnings and one's enslavement is a ruse, a ruse that requires a violent forgetting of those who suffer(ed) "under and after slavery."[39]

Other critics have pointed out the ways the musical downplays, or whitewashes, the history of slavery and its role in the founding of America. To such criticism, Miranda's response has been twofold: On one hand, he argues that he does deal with the subject; he explains, "as for the *question* of slavery, which is the great original sin of this country, it's in the third line of the

show" (Weinert-Kendt, 2015; italics mine). I will return to the line Miranda references here later. For now, let us continue with the two-fold response. On the other hand, Miranda confesses it was hard to write about the subject (or question) of slavery because it is "this thing that keeps getting kicked down the field," and "there's only so much time you can spend on [slavery] when there's no end result to it" (Weinert-Kendt, 2015). What is interesting about his second response is that it reveals a certain limitation in the musical's assumptive logic. *Hamilton*'s artistic team relies on the liberal humanist assumption that America is, indeed, an "open-ended and universally available narrative" and that *Hamilton* can bring this "to life on stage" (Gopnik, 2015). Miranda supports (and supposes) the idea that (re)imagining America as a nation of immigrants has the capacity to incorporate enslaved and indigenous populations, rather than relocate and reject "the protocols of violence that undergirds the twin pillars of U.S. social formation: racial slavery and genocidal conquest" (Sexton, 2008, p.4). What Miranda's "no end results" to slavery statement reveals (even as it attempts to conceal) is the fact that the position of the Black captive troubles the notion of American progressivism so much so, that to reestablish narrative coherence the violence of slavery must remain "unthought" (Hartman and Wilderson, 2003), or, at least be, psychically and thematically, "kicked down the field."

Dramaturgically, then, Miranda is accurate in his statement that there is "only so much time you can spend" on slavery (read: it would be a waste of story and stage time), but for reasons that most likely elude him. In his statement, he discloses a cautiousness (we might say fear) of having the musical consumed by the subject of slavery. To avoid slavery (and its *afterlife*) overwhelming Hamilton (both the musical and the man), Miranda must relocate his-story where narrative can (actually) take shape, which is not within the space/time of the Black captive. The time of racialized slavery, as Calvin Warren explains, "is a temporality outside of

metaphysical time; it is time that fractures into an infinite array of absurdities, paradoxes, and contradictions" (Colbert, Patterson, Levy-Hussen, 2016). This is "time" in which the grammar of narrative collapses. Since the descriptive phrase, "slave narrative" is oxymoronic (pace Frank Wilderson), Miranda must only reference slavery's "untimely" Blackness, and then quickly abandon it for the temporal coherence offered by Hamilton's whiteness.

In his New Yorker article, Adam Gopnik arrives, granted circuitously, at a similar critique of the musical's treatment of slavery. After offering up the statement that *Hamilton,* "shows previously marginalized people taking on the responsibility and burden of American history" (as if the "marginalized people" he references are no longer marginalized, and if Black people haven't always taken on, and suffered under, the burden of American history), Gopnik does get something right in his analysis of the character of Thomas Jefferson. Gopnik contends that the musical's "version of Jeffersonian liberalism involved, obviously, mixing the Jefferson music in a *peculiar* way: turning down the track on the slavery side and bringing up the sound on the libertine one" (Gopnik, 2016; italics mine). Though Gopnik fails to mention the other "peculiar" racial (re)mixing in the form of a Black Thomas Jefferson (symbolizing an outdated politics tethered to slavery) and a Latino Alexander Hamilton (the forward-looking, "ambitious immigrant hustler"), his observation about "turning down" the sounds of slavery can be extended to the entire musical. For the immigrant-American success story to find its narrative (not to mention its "ethical") footing, it must forget both the wakes of slave ships (and the bound black bodies) and the tear-filled trails (and the murder of indigenous peoples). The ease in which these violent tracks can be turned down, says as much about Miranda's skill as dramatist as it does about America's historical amnesia. Miranda's dramaturgical forgetting allows him to re-member America as an immigrant nation, one where there are no structural impediments, rather,

as the musical suggests, “Ev’ry burden, ev’ry disadvantage” one must learn “to manage” (Miranda, 2016. p. 26).

We have explored the treatment of slavery through its omission, let us turn to the third line of the musical where Miranda says he confronts the subject head-on. The line that Miranda references is delivered by the character of Thomas Jefferson (Daveed Diggs); it reads:

> And every day while slaves were being slaughtered and carted
> Across the waves, he [Hamilton] struggled and kept his guard up
> Inside, he was longing for something to be part of
> The brother was ready to beg, steal, borrow or barter” (Miranda 16).

Slavery is, indeed, mentioned here, but its function is purely one of exposition. It is information that functions, solely, to set the stage and develop the character of Hamilton, as a “brother” who is ready to make something out of himself. Hamilton is re-presented as a rags-to-riches hero, who is “longing to be part of something.” In a footnote to the script, Miranda speaks to the function of this line when he says, “At the top of every musical, it’s essential to establish the world. Hamilton’s early life was marked by trauma and a firsthand view of the brutal practices of the slave trade” (Miranda, 2016, p. 16). Here the brutality of slavery (which must remain in the “forgotten spot in the Caribbean”) is transposed into the “trauma” of Hamilton’s humble beginnings. Hamilton’s proximity to slavery and the social death of the enslaved adds life to his narrative, and emphasizing his character arch.

Similar to the ways the musical fetishizes Black bodies and aesthetics, while ignoring the structural realities of Black suffering, Miranda dramatically conflates the position of the captive with Hamilton’s “firsthand view” of the institution of slavery. The question is not, as many critics have quibbled, whether Hamilton owned slaves; the question is how the gratuitous violence of chattel slavery produces “distinct and irreconcilable subject positions,” that of the Human and that of the slave (Wilderson, 2010, p.14). *Hamilton*’s revolutionary setback, as

illustrated in its opening lines, is that it answers the question about the "bastard, orphan" too quickly, to assuredly. Miranda refuses to meditate on the fact that *Hamilton*'s (the historical figure and the musical) "success" relies on the violent subjugation of black bodies. From a different vantage point, the answer to the question that opens *Hamilton* would acknowledge the most critical component of his success, his ability to wield the magic password: "I am not a nigger."

Track 7: Been Jamin' Theory into my w(e)ary Mind

> I am finally getting my head around Benjamin's notion of the angel of history. The state of emergency is always the here and now, the rule not the exception, for Black ~~life~~. How to keep with/in this insight, this end-sight? How to hold it, to keep it in the hold? The angel is facing the past and seeing destruction. It would "like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed."[40]
> It would like to stay in the hold, in the wake, with the potent(ial of the) dead…but, and this is key, violence has filled its wings; it can no longer close them. It is forced to fly forward, to take flight: "this storm irresistibly propels him in into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward."[41] Is this not the multicultural movement in the academy when it comes to Black radical thought? Cannot Hip Hop offer a praxis for staying in the hold, looking for and after the Black bodies left in the wake of bureaucratic business as usual. Benjamin adds, *this* storm is called progress.

Track 8: The Sound(ing) Below; what lies beyond?

> The success of "Hamilton," and of the color-conscious casting that accompanies it has been undeniable. It's almost as if America needed these young, ethnically diverse characters to tell the nation's history.
>
> -Dakota Buhler[42]

> I'm not as interested in plot as I am in the *absences* within it—the absences in story lines and constructs.
>
> -Jaye Austin Williams[43]

> We survived genocide we a testament
> To the pride of who lies in the sediment
> So I remain too aware of all my melanin
> Cuz Uncle Sam don't really care that I'm a relative.
>
> -Sammus [44]

In her seminal publication, "Do Not Call Us Negroes: How Multicultural Textbooks Perpetuate Racism" (1992), Jamaican poet and critical theorist, Slyvia Wynter, criticizes the California school system's decision to adopt the textbook *America Will Be*. Wynter analyzes the textbook's multiculturalist tendency to restructure historical events into quaint happily-ever-after stories where people of all colors and classes work together to fulfill the dream of America. A central problematic of the textbook, Wynter explains is that it positions Black Americans as one more "ethnic group" in America and not its "alter ego," or the "boundary category" of Western Man (18). Reimagining America and its founding as a nation of immigrants, Wynter argues, "must ontologically erase the existence of the indigenous inhabitants of the continent, as well as the other founding population group who had come, not as immigrants in search of freedom, but as slaves in chains (8).

We can contextualize the politics of the textbook *America Will Be* within the debates that animated the 1990's: the criticism of Black Studies programs, debates on affirmative action, the rise of hegemonic multiculturalism, discussion of the myth of the "model minority," as well as the smoldering Los Angeles skyline in the aftermath of the 1992 L.A. Rebellion.[45] We can read the editors' revisionist tendency in terms of a burgeoning liberal colorblind ideology. We can even position the contributors' longing to forget slavery as a constituent element of this Nation's founding within the context of a growing fear of the emergence of "Gangster rap," and a reemerging disdain for the flesh of Black youth. *America Will Be* could be read, then, as an attempt to return the nation to psychic stability as well as a phobic response to these elements: the sound of urban Black noise, the presence of young Black bodies, and the politics of radical

Black thought. Is there a connection between the socio-political context that *America Will Be* emerges out of and the current moment that *Hamilton: An American Musical* appears?

Rather than offer a direct answer, I return to the young Black boys that opened this essay. In a never-ending moment where the list of murdered Black bodies at the hands of State, and State-sanctioned, forces keeps growing, what does it mean for them to sing the words: "My name is Alexander Hamilton"? What does it mean to perform this narrative? What is the nation seeing or needing to see in the retelling of America's founding on and through the bodies of people of color? Is not a multicultural Empire subject to the violent entrapments of any imperial project? The fact that Miranda's work aligns itself as an "ally" to people of color politics, rather than as a comrade to Black liberation struggles, is not my biggest critique. The World may bond over a "browning" of America, but only due to the persistent "fear of a Black Planet." My qualm is that the musical's politics are conservative and its revolutionary imagination limited. Rather than imagine a new world, a more ethical "Human" embodiment, Miranda glorifies the Western bourgeois conception of Man. It is his refusal to think and be with the captives which forces him to throw away his revolutionary "shot" in a time when it matters most.[46]

Outro: It's Bigger Than Hip Hop[47]

> Dear User,
>
> I am not here to "authenticate" your projects or your politics. I am not here to provide protection against criticism from white liberals, nor to be the scapegoat for conservatives' fears and anxieties. I am that black underground force, making moves, crude as oil. When you get to where we are standing, we'll be gone.
>
> In the rhythm of revolution,
> DBA Hip Hop

Section Endnotes

[1] I sample "Bonding Over Phobia" from a title chapter of David Marriott's book *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity*.
[2] "Heineken Pulls 'Lighter Is Better' Ad After outcry over racism," 28 Mar 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/28/business/media/heineken-racist-ad.html. See also "Heineken removes ad after Chance the Rapper calls it 'terribly racist'," 27 Mar 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/mar/27/heineken-racist-advert-chance-the-rapper-tweet
[3] Marriott, *Haunted Life* xxi.
[4]Sample: August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, where Harold Loomis describes his vision of the "bones people."
[5] Both the book's title and the scenes that Hartman references throughout the book.
[6] See "Irreconcilable Anti-Blackness: A Conversation With Dr. Frank Wilderson III," 25 May 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1W7WzQyLmI.
[7] A riff with Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*, 426.
[8] *Hamilton from Book to Play* C-Span American History TV Hunter College, 25 Feb. 2016.
[9] Morrison, T. *Playing in the Dark* viii.
[10] Hill, L. *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill.* [CD] Philadelphia: Ruffhouse Records.
[11] Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution* 17.
[12] The symptoms of "Hamiltonitis" are defined by one Reddit commentator as "an inescapable need to burst into song whenever a phrase or even a word from a *Hamilton* song appears in normal daily conversation" (https://www.reddit.com/r/hamiltonmusical/comments/40rvjk/hamiltonitis/).
[13] By criticism I do not simply mean being critical of the musical. Rather, I mean a serious critical engagement with the musical and the socio-political context it emerges out of. The book *Hamilton and Philosophy: Revolutionary Thinking* (2017) is emblematic of work that I consider un-critical. The edited book is weakened by its unwillingness to offer critique and analysis that extends beyond the writers' love and admiration for the musical. As earlier on as the introduction, where the book is described as "a love letter to Hamilton, and the hit Broadway show that shares his name," the way sentiment debilitates criticism can be observed.
[14] To Marcus's credit, he does in this statement do something that many commentators do not. That is, he separates Black people from the broader category of people of color. This gesture opens a place to think of the way non-black people of color are structured differently in society than Black people; however, Marcus analysis stops at the distinction.
[15] I borrow this term from Frank B. Wilderson III, "The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal," 18, 20, and 25.
[16] A fourth element might be the debate around removing Hamilton's face from the ten-dollar bill and possibly replacing it with an image of a Black woman, perhaps even the radical abolitionist Harriet Tubman. After protests and debates, Alexander Hamilton's face will remain on the ten-dollar bill. Some have even attributed the decision's results to the musical's success. I argue that all of these events illustrate a conservative pushback whose main focus is to squelch and quarantine Black movements and radical thought.
[17] Here, I am riffing on a statement made by Jeremy McCarter when he describes Miranda's 2009 White House performance. McCarter states, "The ovation owed a lot to the showbiz virtues on display: the vibrant writing, Lin's dynamic rapping, the skillful piano accompaniment from his friend Alex Lacamoire. But *something else was in the air*, something that would become clearer in the years to come. Sometimes the right person tells the right story at the right moment, and through a combination of luck and design, a creative expression gains new force. Spark, tinder, breeze (Miranda and McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution* 15).
[18] See Hartman and Wilderson III, "The Position of the Unthought" 185.
[19] Mandell, Johnathan. "'Hamilton: Five Ways Lin-Manuel Miranda's Hip-Hopped History Musical Breaks New Ground."
[20] Viagas, R. "Playwright Katori Hall Expresses Rage Over 'Revisionist Casting' of *Mountaintop* with White Dr. Martin Luther King."

[21] Bey, Y. (f.k.a, Mos Def) "Mathematics," *Black on Both Sides* [CD] New York City: Rawkus.
[22] For examples of analysis that work to trouble the claims to "colorblind" casting see: Marshal 2007; Gelt 2017; Gordon-Reed 2016; and Churnin N. 1989.
[23] From an interview "Casting Beyond the Color Lines" hosted by Lynn Neary, 5 Feb. 2008. https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18706620.
[24] Davis and Newman's definition poses the difficult questions of: when are such physical features "necessary" or not? Who determines if race/gender/physical capability influences the play's or character's development or not?
[25] In a New Your Times interview (Weinert-Kendt, 2015), Miranda affirms the race-conscious casting choice of the production and future productions when he states, "If this show ends up looking like the actual founding fathers, you messed up."
[26] The work that the Black body is doing on the creative and imaginative level for Miranda should not escape us here.
[27] Ron Chernow is the historian who wrote the biography, *Alexander Hamilton*, which the musical is based on. Chernow also served as a historical consultant for the musical's development.
[28] This statement has been reproduced in a variety of different sources for some of them see (Major, "7 Ways 'Hamilton' has Impacted America"; Delman, "How Lin-Manual Miranda Shapes History"; Weinart-Kendt, "Rapping a Revolution").
[29] From the Weinert-Kendt (2015) interview where Miranda states, "Our goal was: This is a story about America then, told by America now, and we want to eliminate any distance."
[30] Moving in a slightly different direction, Annette Gordon-Reed acknowledges a different set of contradictions and problematics in thinking *Hamilton* as a colorblind production. Gordon-Reed argues: "The difficulty [in colorblind casting] is that this suspension cannot be total. We *must* notice that the actors are black, or the play's central conceit does not work. We are asked to be open to their blackness so that the play's touted message—that the founding era also "belongs" to black people—gets through. At the same time, we are presumably not to be so open to the actors' blackness that we feel discomfited seeing them dancing around during the sublime "The Schuyler Sisters" proclaiming how "lucky" they were "to be alive" during a time of African chattel slavery" (Gordon-Reed, "*Hamilton: The Musical*").
[31] Miranda has stated this on several occasions. I reference an interview from Frank DiGiacomo's "'Hamilton's' Lin-Manuel Miranda on Finding Originality, Racial Politics (and Why Trump Should See His Show)."
[32] A sample from Sexton's formulation by way of Lewis Gordon: "In a world structured by the twin axioms of white superiority and black inferiority, of white existence and black non-existence, of a world structured by a negative categorical imperative—'above all, don't be black'" ("Ante-Anti").
[33] A sample, of course, from Toni Morrison.
[34] Mead, "All About the Hamiltons: Anew Musical Brings the Founding Fathers Back to Life—with a lot of Hip-Hop."
[35] From "Three Scenes" published in *On Marronage: Ethical Confrontations with Antiblackness,* edited by Saucier and Woods, 147.
[36] Nas. "What Goes Around," *Stillmatic*.
[37] Wilderson*, Red, White, and Black* 35-63.
[38] Spillers, *Black, White and in Color* 212.
[39] See Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace*, footnote 10, 242-243.
[40] Benjamin 257.
[41] Ibid., 258.
[42] Buhler, "The Success of Color-Conscious Casting."
[43] Wilderson III and Williams, "Staging (Within) Violence," para. 22.
[44] Sammus, "America," *M'other Brain*.

[45] Some might refer to this event as the Los Angeles Riots or Rodney King Riots. I use the term "rebellion" to mark it as a sight of Black's ethical demands on the move.
[46] See "My Shot" from *Hamilton* (Miranda and McCarter, 26).
[47] See Dead Prez's "Hip Hop" and "It's Bigger than Hip Hop," specifically the lyrics: "one thing 'bout music when it hit you feel no pain / White folks say it controls your brain / I know better than that, that's game."

DISC 4: Tarrying With(in) Death: the Spookiness of Rickerby Hinds' Dramaturgy

Track 1 (Scene): Two Trains on the Run, a re/membering

JP (as Holloway): People kill me talking about niggers is lazy. Niggers is the most hardworking people in the world. Worked three hundred years for free. And didn't take no lunch hour.[1]

He pauses and takes a sip of the red wine in front of him. The glass has left several rust colored rings on the script.

JP (as Holloway): Ha. That's the truth right there. Ain't it?

We continue.

JP (as Holloway): The white man ain't stacking no more niggers. You know what I'm talking about, stacking niggers, don't you? If you ain't got nothing…you can go out here and get you a nigger. Then you got something, see. You got you one nigger…

He pauses.

JP: You got a smoke?

Me: No.

JP: Shit. I shouldn't be smokin' anyways.

Me: You wanna take a break?

JP: Naw. Naw. Let's go on and keep moving. I gotta get these lines to stick. Where were we?

Me: Umm. You got…umm…"one nigger".

JP (as Holloway): If that one nigger get out there and plant something…get something out the ground…even if it ain't nothing but a bushel of potatoes…then you got one nigger and one bushel of potatoes…Then you take that bushel of potatoes and go get you another nigger…See…

He sips his wine slowly as if at the bottom of the glass he will stumble upon the next line.

JP (as Holloway): See, now you can go buy two more niggers. That's how you stack a nigger on top of a nigger. White folks got to stacking…and…they (*losing the lines. As himself:*) …shit! This is the part I can't ever keep in my head. My old ass mind. Shiit. What's the line?

Me: "I'm talking they stacked up some niggers."

JP (as himself): Nobody tells it like Wilson,[2] boy. Shiit. (*takes a sip of wine, emptying the glass*) Well, shiit, looks like we need some more wine. We'll pick up right there.

Me: Okay.

JP stands, slowly, and with great effort. I slide on my jacket. JP grabs his keys. Then pauses. He Grabs a plastic O.S.F. badge attached to a red shoelace like string.[3]

JP: So, they know you belong here. Somebody can claim you…you got a job.

Me: (laughing) You're crazy.

I check to make sure I have my badge on me as well.

Scene.

Track 2: Hinds' Hip Hop Drama-as-Theory

> Nothing may differentiate Hip Hop from "Hip Hop Studies" more than their differential relationship to the state
>
> –Greg Thomas[4]

> All art is political in the sense that it serves someone's politics.
>
> –August Wilson[5]

In Disc 3, I analyzed Lin-Manual Miranda's use of Hip Hop in his musical *Hamilton*. The goal was to take Miranda seriously as a Hip Hop dramatist, one that employs Hip Hop as dramaturgy, as opposed to, merely, aesthetic flare. In taking Miranda seriously, I interrogated the limitations of his multiculturalist disposition in relation to Black suffering both historically and currently. Central to my critique is the claim that rather than engaging in a radical Black studies (or a critical dis) of America's founding and its antagonistic relationship toward the slave/Black populations, Miranda's Hip Hop dramaturgy conflates *slaveness* with *immigrantness* and multicultralizes settler colonialism. While Miranda's project might seek to reimagine America through a Hip Hop-charged, color-conscious remix, he fails to theorize on the peculiar condition of the Black captive in and under the social death of slavery.[6]

This Disc tracks the ways in which Rickerby Hinds' Hip Hop dramaturgy in *Dreamscape* offers what might be a corrective to Miranda's theories.[7] Hinds' dramaturgy offers "a creative *and* a critical discourse"[8] capable of meditating (and mourning) the ways in which Blackness is tethered to structural violence. Besides Hinds and Miranda's different employments of Hip Hop, the central thing that separates their Hip Hop dramaturgy is the way they theorize the Black body's relationship to the State. Where Miranda seeks to mystify the social death of Blackness by analogizing it with the performative acts of discrimination targeted at non-Black people of color, Hinds uses the motif of death; rather, *deathliness*,[9] to track the antagonistic relationship

between The American Dream and the American "nightmare of unreasonable reason"[10] that continues to burden and position Blackness in an anti-Black World. In order to follow Hinds, we must do as he does and follow the dead to discover the secrets of what remains both exposed and hidden.

Such a task I take up in this Disc.

To this end, in Track 4: "Dreaming of Escape, A Deathly Opening," I outline the ways in which Rickerby Hinds (as a Hip Hop dramatist) abandons the confines of Western realism, a form that would foreclose on the possibility of witnessing Black suffering due to its reliance on narrative redemption.[11] In Track 6: "Hinds' Radical Hip Hop Dramaturgy," I argue that what makes Hinds' meditation possible is his employment of Hip Hop aesthetics as way to keep in step with what the script terms Myeisha's "life-death-dance" (Banks 56). The scenes that punctuate and separate the Tracks on Hinds' *Dreamscape* work to further illustrate the haunting quality of the play.

Track 3 (Scene): Slippin' into Darkness, When I Heard Someone Say…[12]

Late one evening, I was returning home after studying in the Hayden Library. I had crossed the dimly-lit circular park at the center of campus when I heard, off in the distance, the sound of Hip Hop music. As I rounded the corner of the building, I noticed a group of young people, about twenty of them, practicing dance moves. I had seen this before during my late-night journeys from the library back to my "home" on campus. As in most nights, I marveled not only at the groups' energy and precision which animated their dance moves. But, I also observed the fact that they could rehearse so late into the night and not be bothered by the campus or local

police. With the campus's student body being comprised of over 35% Asian students, such a group, even at this late hour, was inconspicuous.

As I approached, the group of students were wrapping up or taking a break. Some sat drinking water, some stretching, some still engaged in executing the dance moves of the routine. I noticed a group of boys, "playfully" pushing each other around. The "game" grew intensity. I was now only 15 to 20 feet away. Their postures grew more and more lively. I recognized the performance of masculinity right away. But was taken aback when one of the boys pushed the other, and shouted: "What now, nigga? Come on!" Something in me took over. My fist tightened in my pocket. A voice, that was both mine and not mine, rang out of the darkness: "What the fuck did you say!" There was a cold stillness in their bodies. They looked my direction. The boy who had made the threat to the other shrunk in size. "Dude, I'm sorry. No problem, man!" He apologized as if he knew me. I said nothing, and continued on my way, thinking about the strange yet familiar scene of this late-night encounter. I pondered, space, movement, Blackness, and performance, and of course the open secretes of the dark. All the while the question: "what now, nigga!?" ringing in my head.

Track 4: Dreaming of Escape, A deathly Opening

Rickerby Hinds' play *Dreamscape* (2004) opens with chalk outlines of bodies, materializing onto the stage. The outlines re/present the fatal outcome of Myeisha Mills', the play's protagonist, violent encounter(s) with officers of the Riverside police force. As symbolic objects, however, the chalk outlines gesture toward both the absent presence of her body and the violence it/she suffered. In general, chalk outlines are rich in symbolism and function. They locate and remember the position of a body in its absence, while connecting the violent event to

the violated and missing body/corpse. Chalk outlines turn absence into object and object into evidence, to make meaning out of the events that unfolded within the crime's locational mise-en-scène.

What is provocative about Hinds' use of the chalk outlines is, first, he employs several outlines to reference or re/member one body. And, second, even though outlines are usually temporary markers in a crime scene, Hinds' outlines remain throughout each scene of his play, lingering as (if) part of the set/World. What is the relationship between the haunting event(s) evoked by the outlines and the violence that the play attempts to re/present and reconcile in its dramaturgy? *Dreamscape*, after all, is based on a the real-*life* "event," the shooting *death* of nineteen-year-old African American Tyisha Miller.[13]

I use the symbol of the chalk outline as an opening, perhaps, a doorway,[14] to explore the ways in which the play *Dreamscape: A Play Based on True Events* tarries with/in the space-time of death in order to meditate on the *spooky*[15] relationship between Black bodies and structures of violence. I must begin where Hinds does, that is, with the death of the play's protagonist Myeisha Mills. As the play opens, "chalk outlines of MYEISHA MILLS materializes" on the floor, eerily marking an event, as well as its aftermath. One cannot help but assume that the outlines are connected to the presence of a body lying on an autopsy table: the body of Myeisha Mills. But why the use of multiple outlines to *mark* a single dead body? How to account, or begin to account, for this deathly excess?

To commence with(in) death, is a *spooky* place to begin. What type of *status quo* does death make? What type of story can a dead body tell? Who would listen? The audience might be lead to believe that it has arrived too late; is this the end? Is the story over? To open with, or

begin in, death one must expect a different type of tale, a different type of telling, perhaps, a different type of witnessing. One must anticipate a haunting.

The potency of Hinds' deadly beginning lies in the fact that he does not use death as, simply, an engaging exposition. That is, he doesn't start with Myeisha's death and then flashback to her "life", a plentitude before her deadly encounter with the four Riverside police officers. Instead, Hinds' dramaturgy forces the play to take place (that is: begin and remain) in the time of death. By time of death I mean two things: first, literally within the interval between the first bullet that pierced the skin of Myeisha's right arm and the last bullet (the twelfth one) that ripped through the right side of her back, piercing her lung. And second, I mean it figuratively, and also conceptually, as in death *as* time, a time grasping for, yet resistant to meaning—what scholar and poet David Marriot might refer to as, "dead time"—a time that "never arrives and does not stop arriving, as though by arriving it never happened until it happens again, then it never happened" (Marriott xxi). Hinds' reformulation of time invites us to be *spooked* by that which cannot be fully remembered; he challenges us to follow the ghost, and encourages us to listen to (and for) the dead. "The way of the ghost," Avery Gordon reminds us "is haunting, and *haunting is a very particular way of knowing* what has happened or is happening (Gordon 8; italics mine).

A sample of stage directions from *Dreamscape* illustrate Hinds' haunting circular use (or abuse) of time, as well as his suspension of traditional narrative progression as an alternative way of witnessing, re/membering, and knowing:

> *(Prologue) Otis Redding's "White Christmas" gently disquiets the darkness. Lights rise to reveal MYEISHA rising from an autopsy table/DJ setup. She dances the "Twelve Mortal Moves" as the music is spasmodically disrupted by twelve distortions—these are gun shots—each one finds its target in MYEISHA'S body, transforming her movement into a dazzling life-death-dance. She lands in the front seat of her aunt's Nissan Sentra, closes her eyes for a moment then awakens with a jolt.*

Note that the character of Myeisha rises from the autopsy table, performs the twelve wounds that cause her death, and then falls into the seat of her aunt's Nissan. This is the vehicle that she will later be shot in, or, has already been shot in, since the play opens with her already dead. In the play's conclusion, the stage directions indicate that: *"MYEISHA stops breathing. The CORONER wins the battle, "celebrates" by mixing the following while MYEISHA dances the 12 mortal moves to Otis Redding's "White Christmas""* (Banks 91). Moments later, after the Coroner reads off a list of her organs and their weights, the stage directions state: *"MYEISHA finishes her dance then quickly climbs into bed—the autopsy table—"she goes to sleep."* The play opens, then, in a ghostly return to the Black body, to the crime(s) that re/member(s) *her* body, rather than in narrative equilibrium (life), which will later be interrupted by a dramatic event (death). Throughout the play, Myeisha's body is haunted by a looming and overdetermined fatal future, a deadly denouement, however, void of resolution.

By tarrying with(in) the space-time of death, its peculiar circularity, Hinds' dramaturgy meditates on the difficulty of adding narrative coherence to a death perceived and positioned as "expected, anticipated, imposed and inescapable."[16] Hinds draws attention to the ways in which structural forces inflict violence on and toward Black bodies in ways that resist temporal logic both on and off the stage. The nature of this violence (gratuitous and repetitive) unhinges narrative coherence and troubles the logic of cause and effect, which is the engine of Aristotelian dramatic structure.[17] Rather than force Tyisha Miller's shooting into the confines of causal linearity, Hinds encourages the audience to listen closely to the ghostly whispers, to think on and with the dead, even if it is an affront to the grammar of narrative and dramatic structure.

This is not to suggest that nothing happens in *Dreamscape*. There are, of course, dramatic events, but Hinds seems more concerned with thinking with(in) the paradox of Myeisha's death,

rather than manufacturing narrative redemption. The audience encounters the character of Myeisha in the paradoxical state of pre- and post-mortem. Hinds' dramaturgy works with and within this ghosting by allowing for its rupture and repetition. For example, when Myeisha attempts to speak of her own death, the actual violence of the gun shots interrupt (from the future) her attempts at narrative coherency. These interruptions disturb the temporal logic of her story, her attempts at remembering, as each gunshot is both a rupture and a return which renders intelligible events into abstractions.

Some critics have argued that Hinds' use of abstraction might lose focus of, or even "prettify," the real violence surrounding Miller's shooting.[18] Although I am sensitive to the problematics that such criticisms seek to address, I feel that they might misinterpret Hinds' might aims in depicting violence at this level of abstraction. I suggest that he is situating Miller's death at the intersection of race and violence. Hortense Spillers reminds us, for example, that "'race' haunts the air where women and men in social organization are most reasonable" (Spillers 379). Through the deployment of abstraction, Hinds challenges the notion of reason and rationality that traditional dramatic structure might otherwise impose on the play. Western realism would fail to apprehend (or represent) such a comprehensive violence, as that which haunts Miller's death (and life). Hinds, then, when confronted with the *unreasonable reasons*[19] for racialized violence, recognizes the need to pursue alternative registers for storying: perhaps something akin to Myeisha's plead to "turn this [her] story into a dream fable" (Banks 87). The questions become: What evades the structure of dramatic realism that might be apprehended through a type dream "logic"? And, what can be learned about black death from the contradiction-embracing nature of a dream?

In dreams, the logic of cause and effect is often distorted, and Hinds works to suspend traditional structure and form, by employing this peculiar "logic." Poet and novelist Dionne Brand explains that, "[o]ne is not in control in dreams […] the dreamer is captive, even though it is the dreamer who is dreaming" (Brand, section10). Brand's notion of the imprisoning nature of dreams is echoed by the opening lines of *Dreamscape* in which Myeisha asks: "Ever have one of those dreams / where nothing comes out when you [try to] scream?" (Banks 55). Myeisha's question serves as a type of refrain throughout the play, a haunting reminder that she is held captive in a dream, the dream of her own death, unable to scream or articulate her frightening position. "First I can't holla / Now I can't move…Feel like a prisoner of war and I can't even move," Myeisha explains at one point in the play.

To re/remember Myeisha's (and by extension, Tyisha Miller's) story, to recover her body, to mourn her death, Hinds abandons traditional dramatic structure, and meditates instead on the "unthought position"[20] of Blackness in general, and Black death specifically. When the Black body, as Frank Wilderson argues, "magnetizes bullets,"[21] as it appears Tyisha Millers did, how does one narrativize about a body that is simultaneously the cause *and* effect of violence? How does one characterize a body that/who, even when unconscious, manifests twelve gunshot wounds? Rather than forcing Myeisha's story (read: her death) into narrative or temporal logic, and thereby eclipsing the "untimeliness" of her death,[22] Hinds forsakes the legibility of time in exchange for the obscurity of dreams that enable a meditation on the "deathliness"[23] that haunts her story and her body. In so doing, *Dreamscape* conjures the *spectral moments*[24] of Black death, which are unable to be fully incorporated into the grammar of woken life. After all, dreams are where one wrestles with their unconscious; with the unthinkable.

Track 5: On Black Noise, sounding, samples, a poetic attempt

How do we ~~exist~~ after slave ships?
A product of rapist and settler's pay slips
Standing on blocks butt naked
Some ain't make it – through the ~~travel~~
Second birth canal, resurrected as "~~niggers~~"
Thirty-second trial, resurrected as figures
and statistics, doubling my consciousness
13 amendments to my "right" to ~~live~~
separate but United in a State of (color)blindness
rendering me translucent
I'm hearin' Gil Scott,
Whitey still on some moon shit
Black flesh the original stock opt.
Now we on some Blue Chip
All the talk of training cops
Better be on some bullet proof shit,
Their progress is delusioned, the truth is
We've always had a problem, Houston! –Delsoul 2017

Track 6: Hinds and Radical Hip Hop Dramaturgy

I suggest Myeisha's "life-death-dance" in the play *Dreamscape* is the performative manifestation of a body being re/collected through ongoing encounters with violence. The recurring and gratuitous nature of this type of violence renders such a death illegible *and* illogical; exists outside of the space-time of the living. Hinds' radical use of Hip Hop aesthetics works to provide a possible space, or a(n) (e)scape, for mourning Black death, re/membering Black bodies, and remixing fragments of Black suffering into evidence.

Hinds' masterful use of layering, sampling, and remixing—all central components of Hip Hop—are what assist him in his working beyond traditional narrative structure and into the realm of dream "logic." I will isolate three key elements of Hinds' Hip Hop aesthetics; namely, minimalism, sampling, and layering, and discuss how they influence and inform his dramaturgy.

All I need is one mic -Nas[25]

Everybody's a rapper, but few flow fatal
It's fucked up, it all started from two turntables
-Nas[26]

Hip Hop, among many things, is a minimalist art form. With two turntables, a mixer, and a crate full of records, a DJ can rock a party for hours on end. The original Rap group arrangement was (and often still is) a DJ and an Emcee. As a Hip Hop dramatist, Hinds utilizes this minimalist aesthetic by using only two characters: Myeisha Mills and The DJ. The character of Myeisha speaks in a manner which moves fluidly from rap to spoken word poetry. She serves as a type of emcee, the one who will provide the lyrics or story for the evening, while The DJ will sample through a constellation of sonic texts to create the soundscape: This includes not only samples of outside texts (such as officer testimony and an autopsy report). S/he also becomes there samples through a type of performative manifestations, including a trickster figure or a conjurer. As the stage directions explain, *"All other characters in the play should manifest themselves through the DJ"* (Banks 55). Rather than have all the individuals involved in Miller's shooting represented by a character, Hinds employs only a DJ and an Emcee. This use of Hip Hop minimalism adds to the mythical and abstracted style of his dramaturgy. This is not realism and, as Myeisha says in the play, "This ain't gonna be one of them feel-good shoes." Hinds complicates the telling of Miller's murder by the four Riverside police officers, through its meditation by two Black actors.[27]

The minimalist approach also supports Hinds' use of the Hip Hop element of sampling. Sampling, scholar Nicole Hodges Persley explains, is "the practice of identifying and borrowing particular parts of a song and using them to create a new work" (Cheng and Cody 260). In *Dreamscape,* the Coroner/DJ samples from texts surrounding Tyisha Miller's shooting. Hinds

uses samples to comment on the events, adding and layering a type of meta-commentary. For example, when Toni (Myeisha's cousin) calls the police, Hinds has the DJ "drop" Public Enemy's "911 Is a Joke". This exemplifies Hinds' intervention into the way the story will be remixed and re/membered. Hinds, like The DJ in *Dreamscape*, "operates" on the tragic event and the discourse that surrounds it by cutting, splicing, and mixing the body of evidence to create new ways of knowing and witnessing.

In the play, evidence, events, and testimonies are not presented separately, but layered on top of each other. Hinds' use of layering holds event(s) and discourse in productive tension with each other. But more importantly, the use of layering challenges the ways the audience might interpret these events. Hip Hop has the abilities to work with fragments, function in contradictions, and generate (by use of sampling and layering) new methods and meanings. Hinds' dramaturgy, then, employs what Kodwo Eshun terms the, "onomatopoeic illogic called Hip Hop," to attempt to mourn and meditate on the violent excess that haunts Miller's death. In other words, through the character of Myeisha and the "illogic" of Hip Hop, Hinds is able to make visible that which spooks Miller's remains, namely, the excess of violence that precedes and anticipates Black life/death within the "logics" of an anti-Black World. Hinds does not offer a type of redemptive closure; rather, he presents a radical call to meditate on Black death, to agree to make all tales of Black death into "dream fables" (Banks 87). The question, then, becomes what is one to re/member from this specific dream fable?

The answer lies in the ways Hinds provocatively samples and layers the autopsy report, specifically towards the end of the play. Hinds presents the police's gunshots and the path of the bullets as a type of ceremonial performance. The DJ, sampling from the autopsy report, creates a narrative of the bullet's journeys from gun barrels to the victim's body. While The DJ constructs

the story of the bullets, Myeisha reacts to their violent affects by performing a dance named after each bullet's entry location into her flesh. Notice how Hinds ritualistically re/presents the trajectory of the tenth bullet that strikes Myeisha's body:

> *(DJ samples a series of "tens." MYEISHA does the "upper left forehead" move.)*
> CORONER: The entrance to gunshot number ten is located on the left upper forehead. right upper arm. This is a typical distant gunshot wound entrance. The course of the projectile is through the skin of the forehead, entering the cranium through the left frontal bone, through the left and right frontal lobes of the brain, through the right orbit perforating and rupturing the right ocular globe and exiting the right orbit. The direction of the projectile is back-to-front, left-to-right and downward 45 degrees. This is a fatal distant gunshot wound to the head. (Banks 87).

The difference between the narrative coherence imbued in the "life" of the bullet lies in stark contrast to the narrative disjointedness of Myeisha's death. The tragic irony is that only the bullets "enjoy" true narrative unity. Myeisha's "narrative," emerges as fragments and is continuously interrupted by the violence of the bullets.[28] It is as if her story exists outside the realm of narration; or, the narrative attempt arrives too late to re/member her, to render her death intelligible.

In one of the rare moments where Myeisha attempts to make "sense" of her death or of her dying, she does so by thinking it through Hip Hop. "I bet you ain't seen no female MC who's been shot as many times as me," Myeisha states, and later explains: "It's been a year since they shot Biggie / Since Tupac was killed it's been two / It just makes sense that this should happen to me now." The stage directions are even more telling:

> *(A red bandana/blood begins to ooze from MYEISHA'S headphones/ear. She stops rapping and tries to push bandana/blood back into her head. When she realizes she can't push it back in, she pulls out the bandana and ties it around her head TUPAC style—she becomes him […] MYEISAH re-ties the bandana BIGGIE style—she becomes him).*
> (Banks 89).

Hinds' use of the forward slash or *virgule* suggests a type of metatheatrical gesture that I read as an attempt to connect the theatrical (bandana) with the real (blood). It is as if the representation of death in the play cannot be separated from the actual deaths off the stage: Miller, Tupac, Biggie. What is also provocative about the Tupac and Biggie sample is that in order to add legibility to the violence that subsumes Miller's death, Hinds renders it analogous to two other deaths; two deaths which are equally haunted and shrouded in both questions and contradictions. Thought another way, for Myiesha to comprehend her own death, she must think it not from a singular subject position, but from a space of plurality. She must "become" the two slain rappers, not once but repeatedly.

Through his deployment of sampling and layering, Hinds raises the level of abstraction from Myeisha's (symbolic) death and Tyisha Miller's (real) death to Black people's (social) death in general, in order locate a register in which to address Black suffering. If mourning, as Derrida describes, "consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead" (italics from original, 9), Hinds' dramaturgy works to provide a space for localizing, identifying, re-collecting, and mourning what remains. Even if what remains cannot fully be re/presented or remembered. In a World where Black bodies are symbolically and materially tethered to violent *forces*, meditating on Black death, Blackness and death, requires that we find ways to access new, possibly unnerving, frequencies, to listen in (and for) the whispers from the shadows, even if what the dead utter, what they request, is too spooky, too unsettling for our (inner) ears.

Track 7 (Outro): On the Limits of Multicultural Theory, a visualization.

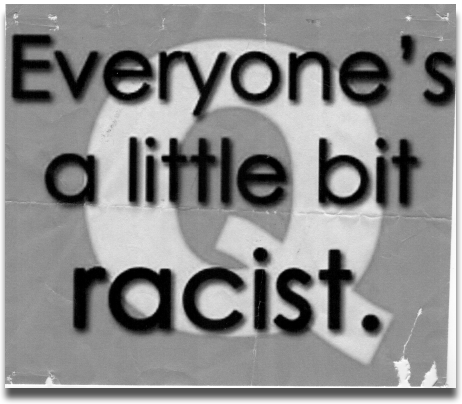

Fig. 4. "A Sign from the musical *Avenue Q*" [29]

Section Endnotes

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[1] See August Wilson's *Two Trains Running*, Act 1, Scene 2.
[2] A reference to the playwright August Wilson
[3] Company members at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival are given company badges and nametags. This grants access to the theatre buildings and other rehearsal spaces. It can also be used to get discounts at local business. Black actors have vouched that showing a police officer the badge upon an "encounter" was a tactic to avoid harassment.
[4] Thomas, "Mi Say War: Hip-Hop vs. The Bourgeois West…and Hip-Hop Studies?" *Imixwhatilike.org* (June 2010). https://imixwhatilike.org/2010/06/14/thomasvrose/.
[5] The exact source of the quote I cannot locate; however, see https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/august_wilson_575401
[6] Along with Orlando Patterson's constitutive elements of slavery and social death, namely, natal alienation, general dishonor, and gratuitous violence, I am interested in thinking with Saidiya Hartman's notion of "the figurative capacity of blackness" and her assertion that "the value of blackness resided in the metaphorical aptitude, whether literally understood as the fungibility of the commodity or understood as the imaginative surface upon which the master and the nation came to understand themselves" (*Scenes of Subjection* 7).
[7] I want to mention here that Suzan-Lori Parks offers a critically and creatively richer Hip Hopesque dis-play of America's founding in relation to Black fungibility in *The America Play*. A future project would be to read Parks and Miranda within a percussive encounter. The question might be, what does *The America Play* discover by digging in the "holes" that the music of *Hamilton* cannot hold?
[8] Williams, "Radical Black Drama-as-Theory…" 192.
[9] In the afterword, titled "Ice Cold," of his book *Haunted Life*, Marriott explains that *deathliness* is a type of death that "cannot be spiritualized or brought into meaning. This is death as nothingness, less than nothing; as such, this death is never assumable as possibility or decision, but remands the interminable time of meaningless, impersonal dying" (231).
[10] Lewis Gordon, "Race, Theodicy, and the Normative Emancipatory Challenges of Blackness," 731.
[11] In short, I am thinking here of a narrative based on personal redemption in which a character suffers a series of legible and coherent adversities, overcomes them, and is transformed for the better in the end.
[12] A sample from War's "Slippin into Darkness," 1971.

[13] The play is based on the actual shooting of Tyisha Shenee Miller. Miller was shot while unconscious in her car by four officers from the Riverside (California) Police Department. Hinds changed her name from Tyisha Miller to Myeisha Mills.
[14] I am thinking of Trinidadian poet and novelist Dionne Brand's notion of the door of no return as an absent presence, as well as her assertion that, "the door is a place, real, imaginary and imagined," and "it is a door that makes the word *door* impossible and dangerous, cunning and disagreeable" (Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes on Belonging*, section 3).
[15] The term "spooky" as I am using it here cites and riffs on two distinct samples. Sample 1: David Marriott's formulation of "spooks" as "blackness that haunts." Marriott explains that, "the spook speaks to us, and it speaks intimately to the terror within ourselves…the word *spook* reveals a connection between race and terror, magic and surveillance, idolatry and power; as a verb it makes visible the impenetrable unseen that our self-deceptions bid us master and so keep at a remove. In this way the spook fulfills one of its functions, which is to pacify, to humanize the unformed creatureliness floating toward us and whose existence reveals a reside of the human that cannot be incorporated" (*Haunted life*, 2). Sample 2: comes from Avery Gordon's concept of "Haunting." Gordon explains, "Haunting is not the same as being exploited, traumatized, or oppressed, although it usually involves these experiences or is produced by them. What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely" (*Ghostly Matters*, xvi).
[16] Hartman, Saidiya. "The Dead Book Revisited," 209.
[17] I am thinking with and alongside of some of Wilderson's arguments in his article "Close-Up: Fugitivity and the Filmic Imagination: Social Death and Narrative Aporia in 12 Years a Slave."
[18] See Ed Rampell's "Screamscape: The timely play 'Dreamscape' about police killings."
[19] I am riffing with Lewis Gordon's ruminations on a quote from Frantz Fanon in his article "Reasoning in Black." Gordon writes: "Yet Fanon's response to unreasonable reason was not to *force* reason to become reasonable, which would be *unreasonable*…" (italics in original).
[20] See Hartman and Wilderson III "The Position of the Unthought."
[21] Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black* 83.
[22] Murillo III, "Quantum Blackanics: Untimely Blackness, and Black Literature Out of Nowhere," chapter 1.
[23] Marriott, *Haunted Life*, 231.
[24] Derrida describes a "spectral moment" as "a moment that no longer belongs to time," *Specters of Marx*, xx.
[25] Nas. "One Mic." *Stillmatic*, 2001.
[26] Nas. "Carry On Tradition." *Hip Hop Is Dead*, 2006.
[27] The two productions I have seen, as well as the production photos available online, use two Black actors, one female and one male.
[28] I want to evoke here Frank B. Wilderson III's juxtaposed reading of the two poems "Sand Creek" (Simon Ortiz) and "Law Abiding" (Wilderson III). In his reading, Wilderson disabuses the reader of a desire to analogize the way the two poems express the suffering of two "oppressed" people. Where the contingent violent depicted in the poem "Sand Creek" can find cohesion and redemption, "Law Abiding" is "predicated on the absence of reciprocity, utility, and contingency." The latter, Wilderson argues "suggests that a family of murdering, inanimate bullets could have its grief and loss processed as grief and loss more readily than the family of a Black murder victim." Wilderson explains about the possibility for futurity and hope in "Law Abiding," that the "future belongs to the bullet" (Wilderson, "Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption" https://humanitiesfutures.org/papers/afro-pessimism-end-redemption/).
[29] A sample from a production board display for the musical *Avenue Q*, U.C. Irvine, 2017

DISC 5: Parks' Hip Hop Dramaturgy and Putting the Anti-Black World in Play

Track 1: Riffs and Disses on Blackness from Jazz to Hip Hop Aesthetics

> The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions that have been hidden by the answers. –James Baldwin
>
> A black play is double voiced but rarely confused…A black play is late…A black play is RIGHT ON and RIGHT ON TIME…A black play is a *bad* motherfucker. –Suzan-Lori Parks[1]
>
> For people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic…our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in the riddles the proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. –Barbara Christian[2]

In the first four Discs, I have worked to formulate a Hip Hop theory to critique by way of a Black Hip Hop study of the collection of plays and theoretical works in the fields of Hip Hop Studies and Hip Hop Theater. Taking a turn with Baldwin, I sought to, "lay bare the (dramatic and philosophical) questions that have been hidden by the answers." In analyzing what is a Hip Hop play, I have also encountered the difficult question of what is a Black play. Or more importantly, how does Blackness put the *is-ness* of things in (to) play? I've asserted that where Lin-Manual Miranda's *Hamilton* mystifies Black suffering and Black positionality by conflating, by way of a ruse of analogy, *slaveness* and *immigrantness*, Rickerby Hinds meditates on the circular and pre-logical violence that subsumes the police murder of Tyisha Millers by *theorizing*[3] through Black death (rather *deathiliness* as David Mariott might have it). By theorizing Black positionality, a life lived in (and as) social death (to follow Jared Sexton),[4] Hinds is able to track the *longue durée*[5] of slavery and anti-Black violence in ways that Miranda's theoretical dramaturgy cannot, or is unwilling to, bear.

In this Disc, I put an amplificatory needle on the works of Suzan-Lori Parks to examine the way she, like a DJ, digs for, and opens up, the records of history, providing a place to put into *play* the ghosts' stories (and ghosted stories) of both the past and the present. I argue that Parks dramaturgical theorizing creates a percussive encounter with historical figures, events, as well as the "holes" left in the wake of modernity's attempts to remember and cohere itself. I read Parks as a Black Hip Hop feminist who applies disaesthetics to both history and historiography. To this end, I bring into the creative and critical cypher Parks' plays *In the Blood* and *Fucking A* as both objects and aims of a of Black study. To this already aesthetically rich and theoretically generative mix, I layer in the works of Hortense Spillers, Christina Sharpe, Sylvia Wynter, Saidiya Hartman, and others to bring into relief the paradoxical and always more than double-voiced ("but rarely confused") theorizing of Parks' dramaturgy.

Track 2 (Scene): A Disavowal of Redemptive Closure, setting it off

> This government cheatin' us, so I'll cheat 'em back. –Ludacris[6]
>
> Ironic, the same place I'm makin' figures at / That there's the same land they used to hang niggas at. –Malice[7]

In early spring of 2018, I had the chance to see the production of Je'Caryous Johnson's play *Set it Off* at the Orpheum Theatre in Los Angeles. The play is based on the movie by the same name which is written directed by F. Gary Gray. It was one of those rare occasions, for me at least, seeing theatre alongside an all-Black audience. Overall, the production was solid, complete with deviations or riffs from the original script which the audience seemed very familiar with. There was something Hip Hop in the aesthetics and sensibility of the production. The film had a similar aesthetic, and it was thrilling to see the force of Hip Hop translated

seamlessly into the staged production. During the final moments of the play, something thrilling and unexpected happened, at least unexpected in terms of "traditional" Western theatre settings. During the final moments of the play, the character of the detective (one of the only white characters in the play) is caught at gun point when the character Stony (LaToya Luckett) gets the drop on him. In the movie version, the detective lets the character of Stony "escape" on a bus to Mexico after having all her friends, as well as her brother, gunned down by LAPD. In the film version, the scene is revealed through a long shot of Stony (Jada Pinkett Smith) seen in the window of a bus. Stony and the detective lock eyes and there is a subtle instant where the detective decides to look the other way.

In the play, however, the moment is made more intimate. Stony and the detective stand face to face; she has her gun pointed at his head, the bag of money is gripped in her hand. There is an extended pause. The detective tells her that it doesn't have to end this way. From the audience, there is a loud booing sound. The pause is held, extended; it is a provocative tableau, a truly liminal moment. Out of the darkness of the house a woman stands and shouts: "Shoot that motherfucker!". The audience laughs and applauds. For a moment, one is lead to believe that Stony will pull the trigger enacting an unfamiliar type of justice. There is silence. Finally, Stony hands the gun over to the detective, who then grabs the bag of money and points his gun at her. A booing sound erupts from the audience. Then a familiar dénouement occurs: the white detective, lowers his gun and kicks the bag of money to Stony, telling her to go. Some of the audience members cheered, while others continued to groan and boo.

Even in what felt like an all-Black space, there was still this peculiar need for white redemption, even worse, white police, white State redemption. The subtext of the closure is that, though, the police "accidently" shot your brother and all your friends are dead, Stony gets to

"escape," run, and continue to run. What would have happened if the playwright gave into the request from the woman who stood up behind me and shouted: "Shoot that motherfucker"?

My question, here, is not simply about the ethics of revenge, or the shooting of police officers as some type of "justice." Rather, I wish to probe the ways Hip Hop can radically re-imagine other alternatives than white liberal redemption. In what ways might Hip Hop challenge, what Larry Neal termed, the "white thing with in [Black folks],"[8] which convinces us that white life is always-already redeemable, valuable, that white ignorance is something to be gently corrected, and that white notions of "freedom" are universal enough to include the very bodies whose "unfreedom" serves as the bloody defining parameters of freedom as such.

> //I don't write towards anything called justice but against tyranny and towards liberation.// –Dionne Brand[9]

Track 3: Parks' Theorizing, from jazz to Hip Hop

> Where's jazz going? I don't know. Maybe it's going to hell.
> You can't make anything go anywhere. It just happens. –Thelonious Monk
>
> People talk about Hip-Hop like it's some giant living in the hillside
> Coming down to visit the townspeople. We are Hip-Hop.
> So, Hip-Hop is going where we going. –Mos Def [10]
>
> Jazz is a white term to define black people.
> My music is black classical music. –Nina Simone
>
> Hip-Hop isn't just music, it is also a spiritual movement of the blacks.
> –Lauryn Hill

Much has been written about Suzan-Lori Parks' use of Jazz aesthetics in her dramaturgy (Geis 2011; Kolin 2010; Omi, Moore, Bridgforth, 2010). In her essay "Elements of Style," Parks describes the structure of her plays as one that, "departs from the traditional linear narrative style to look and sound more like a musical score" (9). Parks attributes her signature "Rep & Rev"

aesthetic to a concept that is "integral to Jazz esthetic in which the composer or perform will write or play a musical phrase once and again and again etc.—with each revisit the phrase is slightly revise" (8-9). Such an approach, Parks suggests, "creates a weight and a rhythm" culminating into a "drama of accumulation." Parks' use of repetition and revision found in both jazz music and the Black cultural practice of *signifyin* is central to the way she thinks of the form and structure of her work. As she explains, "'form' is not strictly an 'outside' thing while 'content' stays 'inside,'" rather "form is inseparable from content" (8).

Repetition and revision also influence Parks' notion of time and dramatic structure. Time, for Parks is circular in shape, folding back on itself, citing and revising along the way. If one is to keep time, one must understand it not in terms of linear progression but as a type "tricky" spiraling forward, a motion that collects "residue that, like city dust, stays with us." Because of this conception of time and structure, Parks does not "take established shapes for granted" (10). Both the "Standard Time Lime" and "Standard Plot Line" are, Parks argues, "in cahoots" (11). I am interested in Parks notions of the "tricky"[11] circularity of time and its relation to Black life. Parks' sense of time might be best understood as Black, or Black(ened) time, a time caught in *the wake* of, what Saidiya Hartman terms, slavery's *afterlife*.[12] An untimely-time that explodes the logic of clockwork, as well as the sundial, perhaps exemplified by rapper Nas's line:

> //"When was the last time you heard your boy Nas rhyme? / Never on schedule, but always on time."//[13]

This might be thought of in terms of a type of time that arrives unscheduled, a time that arrives too late and, therefore, plays tricks on itself. Parks states elsewhere, a Black play "is late," as well as "RIGHT ON and ON TIME" ("New Black Math," 576). With this dis-formulation of time and history, or time *as* history—after all, Parks explains that, "History is time that won't quit" (15)—there is more at stake in Parks' work than the ticking of a clock, or the looming and

rotating hands of time. “If I could turn back time,” Cher’s lyrics suggest, “If I could find a way...” Parks reworking of time must be read as a type of untimely way-finding.[14]

In Parks’ dramaturgy both narrative and history are brought profoundly into question. Parks’ concept of time *dis*rupts the coherency of liberal progressive temporality. “We are not moving from A→B,” Parks asserts, but rather “from A→A→A→B→A” (9). One can certainly hear the way jazz assists Parks in her riffing with(in) time. However, Parks’ aesthetic also resembles a Hip Hop DJ’s ability to manipulate time and tempo. A temporal DJ dis, that can be likened to the way rapper Ludacris calls for the DJ to stop and reverse time in his track “Stand up,” when he hollers “Hey DJ bring that back!” Both Parks and Ludacris call to bring back what has recently been played, to return to a prior moment in time, a prior sound(ing) that is gone but not forgotten.

Linking the work of a DJ to Parks’ notion of “spadework,” might help to clarify what I am wanting to point out about the dissing of time in her dramaturgy.[15] A DJ manipulates the unfolding of time, controls the tempo which animates the bodies on the dance floor. By digging in her crates, the DJ locates records and samples, isolating the most engaging sections and putting them at play. For the DJ, a record is not a closed thing. Rather, it is an object that can be, in the words of DJ Grandmaster Flash, taken apart and put back together.[16] The DJ controls time, playing tricks with it, revealing its “tricky” nature. The DJ layers meanings and rhythms through the sampling of sources (sonic, textual, and visual), manifesting them through the music, as well as through the dancing sweat-covered bodies of the crowd. The records play, spin, follow sonic grooves, but they can at any moment be interrupted, paused, mixed, crossfaded, and reversed. The DJ can extend and sustain the crowd in a sonic climax until fatigue takes over. The methods in which a DJ can disarticulate traditional conception of time and movement is a powerful

metaphor for exploring ways to meditate on Black positionality in an antiblack World.[17] I argue that this is another way to read Parks' dramaturgy. But, what else can be revealed by trying to keep time with Parks' jazz aesthetic, however, this time through the rhymes and rhythms of Hip Hop's politico-poetry in motion?

There is much to warrant considering Parks as a Hip Hop dramatist. She was, after all, born (Black) "under the sign of Hip Hop," to cite and revise Daniel Banks' phrasing.[18] Granted, Parks is born in 1963, which is at the early end of the Hip Hop generational spectrum, putting her alongside Hip Hop's earliest pioneers who were born in the late 50s and early 60s, for example, Clive Campbell (DJ Cool Herc) born 1955; Russel Simmons born 1957; John Saddler (Grandmaster Flash) born 1958; Sharan Green (Sha-Rock) born 1962. Another interesting fact is that rapper Mos Def has appeared in the productions of her plays *Topdog/Underdog* and *Fucking A.*[19] However, the central reasons I position Parks as a Hip Hop dramatist are 1) much of her work employs rich, rhythmic, and lyrical language and depicts themes and conflicts that resonate with Black urban America, and 2) her propensity for riffing and revising on "original" works in ways that open them up and carve out space for new speculative possibilities.

As mentioned earlier, like a Hip Hop DJ, Parks digs in the crates of history, resurrects samples, and plays on and with them. A technique that Kevin J. Wetmore Jr. astutely observes (building on Parks) as, "rev(ision), rep(etition), and ref(erence)" (Wetmore and Smith-Howard 129-30). Parks uses theatre as a lab-like space for historical citation and re-creation, so she can, as she states, "figure out how the world works" (4). She scratches and samples the records that she digs up to question the "history of History" (4). For example, in true Hip Hop fashion, her play "Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2, & 3)" is a dramaturgical remix on Homer's *Odyssey*. Parks' dissing (writing over and through the "original") disorders and dislocates the

ancient Greek epic poem, reimagining it within the contexts of the American Civil War. Parks blends the past with the present, in that, as she explains, characters in "Nike sneakers and hoodies" play runaway slaves (Smart, "Suzan-Lori Parks on 3 a.m…"). Such an aesthetic disabuses the audience of the notion of racial slavery as an event. Rather, the percussive encounter of the past and the present exposes slavery as a relation of power,[20] rendering the concept of emancipation indicated through a date (in time) like 1863 into a *non-event*, as Saidiya Hartman would have it.[21]

One of her tasks as a playwright, Parks suggests, is to, "through literature and the special strange relationship between theatre and real-life—locate the ancestral burial ground, dig for bones, find bones, hear the bones sing, write it down" (4). Here the image of the DJ digging in the crates for fragments of records and sonic events, and re-playing (and dis-playing) them is very apparent. Since fragments evoke a type of incompleteness or absence, by putting them in play, Parks' dramaturgical praxis becomes an "incubator to create "new" historical events" (4-5). Parks' use of the quotation marks around the word "new" indicate that the thing created is a dis of the "original." Parks recognizes and revises the "original" texts in her plays, rendering them necessary yet inadequate, making them speak her tongue.[22] Her dramaturgy is in line with my theory of disaesthetics in that it produces a type of dramaturgical dialectical writing over and through which produces a radical Hegelian *aufhebung,* preserving and altering, while advancing, keeping and cancelling at the same time.[23]

By reading Parks as a Hip Hop dramatist, I am not disavowing the way jazz influences her dramaturgy. I do not wish to substitute jazz for Hip Hop as an either-or proposition. My intervention is not one of replacement, but one of supplementation. The question at stake here is, what can be revealed about the poetico-political elements of Parks' work as both jazz *and* Hip

Hop? I argue that Hip Hop can assist in getting to the core of some of the radical political interventions that Parks is making in terms of Black positionality, particularly regarding the Black female. To get to the root of the intervention offered in my Hip Hop study, I will focus on the ways in which her *Red Letter Plays* work to dis (in all sense of the prefix) Nathanial Hawthorne's "original" text *The Scarlett Letter*.

Track 4: *In the Blood, dis-posing the Question of Being a Problem*

> Between me and the other world there is even an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty for right framing it…How does it feel to be a problem?
> –WEB DuBois [24]

> Blacks are often studied as problems instead of people who face problems.
> –Lewis Gordon[25]

> the problematic core construct was that in order to be sane, which is to live in one body, which is to live one lifetime at one time, which is to disconnect from the black simultaneity of the universe, you could and must deny black femininity…they thought that escaping the dark feminine was the only way to earn breathing room in this life. they were wrong.
> –Alexis Pauline Gumbs [26]

An interesting parallel can be drawn between the prologue of Parks' *In the Blood* (1999) and the opening of rapper Lil' Kim's music video "Lighters Up" (2006). Both *In the Blood* and "Lighters Up" begin with a group of people (a chorus, perhaps) engaged in highly critical gossip aimed at Hester, Negra and Lil' Kim, respectively. The group, "all clustered together," from *In the Blood* hurl judgments at Hester: "she don't got no skills," "who the hell she think she is," "she knows shes a no count," "burden to society," "slut." Relatedly, in "Put Your Lighters Up," the faultfinders are no less scathing in their criticism of Lil' Kim: "I heard she dead broke," "I heard she going to jail," "I heard she out on bail," "She done fucked up now," "Why she get her

nose fixed?" In both scenarios, the onlookers scorn the Black women in question, positioning them as a problem.

The Hip Hop connection can be drawn further regarding Parks' use of what may be deemed stereotypical depictions of Black women and Black motherhood. Hester, Negra, after all, as Cheryl Black points out, is "a homeless, black, welfare mother" (Black 32). Lil' Kim, on the other hand, has often been criticized for her "hyper" sexualized and "vulgar" performances, as well as her unwillingness to "snitch" which led to her serving time in jail. Time, which she explains in her song "Suck my Dick," that she is both able and willing to serve, when she raps: "Now the D.A. wanna give me time in the feds / I'm from Brooklyn: I could do that time on my head."

Since Hip Hop is a *signifyin* art force, one that employs what I term a non-serious seriousness, what "appears" to be a stereotype must be read into.[27] If Hester seems to be a stereotypical Black "welfare mother," Parks, as a Hip Hop dramatist, writes over and through this trope, creating something much more provocative and complicated. Parks' dramaturgical dissing on what "marks" Hester and her five "bastard" children is after something more radical, perhaps something akin to the questions evoked in the epigraphs above, namely, what does it mean to be thought of as a problem, or a problem for thought. Where Lil' Kim in her song is more direct with her response to the criticism that positions her as a social problem, telling her critics to "shut up, bitch," Parks' reply must be excavated out of her play.

From the beginning of *In the Blood,* it is apparent that Hester inhabits an antagonist position in society. She is without a home, in the traditional sense of the word, living under a bridge. She has five children which she refers to as "treasures" and "joys," yet others deem "burdens," "five brats," and "strikes against her." Throughout the play, she is treated as an object

rather than a subject of discourse. Halfway into Scene 1, titled "Under the Bridge," Hester's best friend, Amiga Gringa, whose name clearly "denotes 'whiteness' but within a Spanish linguistic context," as Cheryl Black points out (Black 37), greets her by calling her "old Mother Hubbard" and "the old woman that lived in the shoe" (Parks 23). Even her "best" friend references Hester by stories that anticipate, over-determine, and proceed her. The character of the Doctor and Welfare also position Hester within a narrative or statistic that defines her. She exists only in relation to exchange, only as a problem for society (as well as sociality). Being illiterate, Hester can only recognize and utilize the first letter of the alphabet; it could be said that she exists outside the chain of signification (by way of Lacan).[28] Rather, she is the negation that makes signification possible. Positioned as that degraded and abject figure or position in which the institutions derive their bearings, Hester lacks discursive capacity, while being the lack that animates others' capacity for discourse.

The medical institution, as represented through the Doctor, defines its notion of care and "proper" sexuality and reproduction on and against Hester. The Doctor informs Hester that he has been asked by the "higher ups" to remove her "lady parts" or "spay" (a term reserved for female animals) her. The Welfare system, represented through the character of Walfare, exploits Hester under the guise of State care. Amiga Gringa, who could represent the network of kinship, coheres her sense of self against Hester's inability to claim her children as her own, as well as turn her children into some type of financial benefit. During an exchange between Gringa and Hester, Gringa speaks of the profit she can make off the "white" children of her "white" womb. In terms of the grammar of civil society, the whiteness of Gringa's womb produces the possibility for social life, where Hester's produces the position of social death. As Hortense Spillers suggests, under slavery, the Black woman becomes, "the principle point of passage

between the human and the non-human world" (Spillers 155), that which produces the non-human, or "the paradox of non-being" (156). The reverend, who represents the institution of the Church, eroticizes Hester's suffering, while offering her nothing in terms of an entry point into the World. Nor does the character of Chilli, in his extended and then quickly retracted offer of marriage. Marriage, here, symbolizes another type of institution or social position that might bring Hester into the realm of recognition and sociality. In short, all the institutional structures shame and disavowal Hester, yet they all rely on her symbolic absence, as well as her sexual exploitation.

Theatre scholars have analyzed the sexual exploitation of the character of Hester;[29] however, I have not located any sources that acknowledge the interesting connection to the birth of Hester's children and the institutions that position her as a social problem due to the "excessive" nature of her reproduction customs. For example, Harvey Young in "Choral Compassion: *In the Blood* and *Venus,*" astutely points out that Hester lacks (or is denied) a certain ability to "confess" or "testify," a type of discursive utterance that all the other characters have access to through their "confessions" (Wetmore and Smith-Howard 36-37). Each character is granted a scene of "confession" that punctuates Parks' play. These moments, which seem to be delivered to the audience as arbiter, reveal a much more sinister story about Hester's sexual exploitation.

In the play, The Doctors, The Welfare, The Reverend, Gringa, and Chilli all have moments of confession; however, what is profound is that each of the confessions reveals some type of sexual encounter with Hester that connects her children to "exploitation." The audience becomes aware throughout the play that Hester's oldest child, Jabber, is the product of her first time with Chili, an encounter that takes place in the back of a Buick. Her youngest child, Baby,

is the product of a sexual encounter with Reverend D. The "fathers" of Hester's other children (Bully, Beauty, and Trouble), however, are only revealed through a type of mythology about five brothers who fall in love with a princess (Hester). I propose that Bully, Beauty, and Trouble are produced out of a type of sexual violence from the characters (and the institutions they represent) of Welfare (the Walfare System), Gringa (White affiliation), and Doctor (the medical institution), respectively. Bully, then, is born out of a threesome with Welfare and her husband in which her and her husband needed a little "spice" (Parks 61). Beauty comes to be during a moment where Hester and Gringa put on a sexual show for a group of "guys who took advantage" and raped both Hester and Gringa (72); The Doctor reveals, also, that he had used Hester sexually, admitting, "we did it once in that alley there, she was phenomenal (rest) I was lonesome" (44). The Doctor also reveals that Hester, met his "need" to "cumm inside her" (45); I am arguing this encounter produced her child, Trouble.

Though these backstories or Blackened birth stories are only hinted at through the confessions *scenes,* the double-casting further supports my reading. For example, the character of Welfare is double cast as Bully; Amiga Gringa as Beauty; and the Doctor as Trouble. This doubling symbolically links the absent "fathers" to the bastard offspring. Parks, here, links the institution's ridicule of Hester, Negra to the sexually exploited acts committed by those very institutions. In other words, they despise her but their actions are the cause of her reviled position in the social order. This paradoxical and antagonistic sexual relationship throws into relief the earlier question, regarding *what it means to be a (social) problem*.

In Parks' dramaturgy, the question is dissed. Rather than Hester as a social problem, it is the social (civil society) that is positioned as the problem. It is the World that is parasitic on Hester and not the other way around. The important thing to note is that when Hester is finally

given her opportunity to confess, she does not appeal to the social order; she does not seek to redeem herself through an admittance of guilt, a disavowal of her children. Rather, she states, "I shoulda had a hundred / a hundred / I shoulda had a hundred-thousand / A hundred-thousand a whole *army* full I shouda! / I shoulda," (107). Such a radical claim can be thought alongside H. Rap Brown's assertion to the "inherent threat" of each and every Black birth. Brown argues that, "America doesn't know which Black birth is going to be the birth that will overthrow this county" (Brown 1). Hester's unimaginable desire, her statements to a "shoulda," are gestures toward a Black(end) planet and the "fear" (as Public Enemy would have it) that attends it. This is not the liberal hope of inclusion and recognition. Rather, it is more akin, to what Jared Sexton terms, "the motive force of a singular *wish* inherited in no small part from black women's traditions of analysis, interpretation, invention and survival" ("Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word," para. 35).[30]

Such a rereading (a dis-reading, no doubt) of Black birth as a praxis of dis-rupting "the existing social order" (Brown 1-2) allows one to hone in on the way Parks employs Hip Hop's Fifth Element (knowledge, theory, and Black study) in her dramaturgy. It requires a type of Hip Hop hermeneutics that assist one in interrogating Hester not in terms of a stereotype, welfare mother or Black victim. Rather, one might think Hester as a figure, a messenger, *sent* (as Fred Moten might have it) to serve the function of the message.[31] Hester is the impossible subject position which throws into critical relief the "ocean of violence"[32] that constitutes Western subjectivity. How, then, might Hip Hop Theory allow one to read (think) Hester from within a chain of spectral violence that links her back through time, back, even to another Hester? Perhaps, Douglas's Aunt Hester, or Wilsons' Aunt Ester (ancestors)? How can this repositioning of Hester as the force of a specific manifesto that references what such Blackening can manifest,

to connect her to that specular, and spectacular, figure who marks the bloody exchange at the heart of slavery and its afterlife?

Hester might appear (only to disappear) as that unthought position (by way of Hartman and Wilderson) in which Parks seeks to think (theorize) with(in). In relation to the institutions, that her suffering is mystified by in order to add coherence to, Hester re-presents the site and sight of violation. A type of violation Christina Sharpe describes as, "being, or being positioned to be, fucked over and across time," which "is freighted with signifying access to a freedom narrative" (Sharpe 9). At stake, then, is not the ways Hester can cease being a social problem. Rather, in her objectification, she sheds a Black feminist light on the ways in which the larger institutional bodies' ability to obtain and frame their own subjectivity is parasitic on the sexual violence of Black flesh. As Christina Sharpe asserts, "subjectivity is largely borne by and readable on the (New World) *black* subject" (Sharpe 9). Hester's is a disavowal of the World, a radical call for an un-imaginable and *exorbitant* (pace Nahum Chandler)[33] birthing praxis that invites a way to reimagine an unhinging of the World by refusing the desire and hope for it.

My reading challenges Harvey Young's when he states that Hester's "repetitive, wandering statements (in her confession) appear to be more a vocalization of her fragile mental condition than a persuasive, direct appeal for absolution or forgiveness" (36). I agree with Young that Hester might be unable to find an arbiter for her suffering, that she is unable to confess; however, I want to listen in more closely to what Young deems to be incoherent rambling (37).[34] Hester is unable (perhaps unwilling) to deliver a confession because her ethical demands lie outside of the grammar of the social and its possibility for redress. There is no one able or willing to listen to her suffering. Just like there is no way testimony can provide her with any

compensation in the World as it is. Like the condition of Harriot Jacob's, as Christina Sharpe argues, for Hester, "there is no position that she can occupy that will stop this violation" (10).

In an attempt to conclude this section, I ask, what happens if one interprets the "climatic" moment where Hester kills her eldest son, Jabber (the only child possibly born outside the structure of capital exchange), not in terms of a type of rage against being positioned outside of the social order, but as an embrace of her own position of dis-order. Let us remember that Jabber reveals the word "slut" that haunts the play to his mother after the scene where Reverend D. scolds Hester, stating: "Slut! (Rest) Don't ever come back here again? Ever! Yll never get nothing from me! Common Slut. Tell on Me! Go on! Tell the world! Ill crush you underfoot" (103). Jabber, "wide awake, watches" all of this. Can this scene be read through Sharpe's description of Douglas' account of the beating, as "a sight that approximates (Douglas') mother's rape and his own monstrous conception and birth, his rebirth into a new subjectivity in which subjectification equals objectification" (6)? How to read Hester's killing of her "son" from outside the causal analysis offered by Young when he states, "eventually, poor nutrition, poverty and the weight of societal ridicule prompts Hester to kill her eldest child, Jabber" (Wetmore and Smith-Howard 32)?

Returning to the comparison between Lil Kim's track "Put Your Lighters Up" and Parks' *In the Blood*, leads us to another type of discourse, that of gossip. Where Kim tells her critiques to "shut up, bitch," Hester's reply is a type of truth that must remain as an impossible gesture toward a radical embodiment. Hester's "wish" is the finger pointing at the moon; the former should not be confused with the latter. If both Lil' Kim and Parks are responding, talking back to the verbal attacks railed at them, their different creative and critical replies are a result of the looming hand of power. Where the "ensemble" in Kim's video may be gossiping, Hester's critics

are protected and licensed by the political and libidinal economy of State power. Power which is animated by white desire, desire that imbues scolding gossip with objective value.[35]

Track 5 (Scene): It's Not a Tan; this is the real thing

ACT 10, Scene 10
A Black couple sits in a restaurant.

MAN
I knew it! I knew you would order that.

WOMAN
What? It's not like I always get the shrimp.

"WELL-MEANING" WHITE WOMAN enters. She stops. Looks at WOMAN for a moment, then approaches.

"WELL-MEANING" WHITE WOMAN
Oh my god. You are so beautiful.

WOMAN
Well, thank you.

"WELL-MEANING" WHITE WOMAN
No. Like…really beautiful. I love your skin.

WOMAN
Oh. Umm—thank you.

"WELL-MEANING" WHITE WOMAN
I mean I would have to tan all summer to get skin like that. It's just—I'm jealous.

WOMAN
Thank you.

"WELL-MEANING" WHITE WOMAN
I just wanted to tell you that. (To MAN) She's just so beautiful. That skin.

"WELL-MEANING" WHITE WOMAN exits.

MAN
WOMAN
MAN
WOMAN[36]

MAN
That's the second time that happened.

WOMAN
I know.

MAN
I should have said something to—that must have bothered—

WOMAN
I wanted to say something.

MAN
What?

WOMAN
I wanted to say: "Bitch, this isn't a tan. This is the *real* thing!"

They laugh. Beat.

MAN
The *real* thing. Doesn't just up and leave you in winter.

WOMAN
Hell no. (Beat) But…she was well-meaning, you know?
Setting the menu down
I think I'm going to get the shrimp.

MAN
I knew it! I knew you would order that.

WOMAN
What? It's not like I always get the shrimp.

"WELL-MEANING" WHITE WOMAN enters. She stops. Looks at WOMAN for a moment, then approaches.

End of Scene.

Track 6: *Fucking A, Hip Hop and Radical Black Mothering*

> I write because I love black people…
> that in itself will take me a long way. –Suzan-Lori Parks[37]

In an interview with Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., Suzan-Lori Parks describes how the idea for her play *Fucking A* came to her first as a type of joke. "I was in a canoe with a friend," Parks explains. "We were paddling along a river or lake…I was in the back the canoe and I said to her, 'I'm going to write a play called Fucking A, and its going to be a riff on The Scarlet Letter. Ha, Ha, Ha…'" (Wetmore and Smith-Howard 124). A joke can be thought of as a type of dis in relation to Hip Hop's non-serious serious aesthetics. A jokes serves as a type of conception for several of Parks' plays, for example, the idea for her *365 Days/365Plays* projects came from a similar non-serious statement where Parks told her partner that she will write one play a day for one year. The joking theme is also a ubiquitous motif in Parks' dramaturgy. Recall that the character of Brazil in the *America Play* gets his name from a "bad joke about fancy nuts, and old men toes" (Parks 162). The two brothers in *Topdog/Underdog* derive their names (and fate) from a bad joke about Abraham Lincoln and the man who kills him, John Wilks Booth. Parks explains the importance of humor or laughter when she describes, "my plays start in different ways—but often with laughter."[38] Parks extends the metaphor of creation and procreation through the physical force of laughter when she offers a unique reading of the biblical story of Abraham and his wife, Sarah. Parks explains,

> God says, 'You're going to have a baby'. And [Sarah's] like, 'Ha! You've got to be kidding!' And God says, 'You laughed!' And she's like, 'No, I didn't'. And he says, 'Yes, you did'. And she says, 'OK, I laughed'. And the laughter is a kind of handmaid to her conception. The birth comes from the laugh. OK, maybe biblical scholars would differ, but it seemed like that to me.[39]

Parks' provocative linking of laughter and birth is in line with her theories of writing with the body. She argues that "language is a physical act—something that involves yr whole bod" (Parks 18). For parks, writing is a type of bodily knowledge that can birth things into the World. Birthing is a central theme in Parks' discussion on her play *Fucking A*. As she explains, "*Fucking A* started as *Fucking A* and then split into two plays "*Fucking A* and *In the Blood.*"[40] Cheryl Black further describes the "difficult gestation period" of one play birthing another by tying it to a reference Parks makes elsewhere. There, Parks states that *In the Blood* popped out of the other play like a type of "alien baby" (Black 35). Parks assertion that the *Red Letter Plays* are not simply "based on *The Scarlet Letter* but *The Scarlett Letter* is one of its parents,"[41] is a generative metaphor for thinking disaesthetics' relation to the "original" put under a dis.

I want to think of this concept of birthing, a violent reproduction that produces a type of "alien baby" in terms of the two characters of Hester, La Negra (*In the Blood*) and Hester Smith (*Fucking A*). The goal is that in thinking these characters as a writing over and through each other will assist in getting to the question of whether or not Hester Smith is a Black woman. Where Hester, Negra's Blackness is obvious, Hester Smith appears (at first glance) to be racially unmarked. The fact that there is not a clear reference to Smith's race has sparked a debate in the critical discourse. I argue that both the Hesters, when read layered on top each other, reveal the complexity of racial Blackness, in terms of both racial maker (phenotype) and social positioning. Hester Smith is certainly positioned in the World of the play as Black. Rather than reading them separately, I want to interpret the characters as "alien babies" of each other. In other words, as citations and recreations of each other that may bring to relief some ideas on Black motherhood in an antiblack World.

Parks describes the aesthetics of *Fucking A* as, "an otherworldly tale involving a noble Mother, her wayward Son, and others. Their troubled beginning, their difficult end. 19 scenes with songs."[42] I want to track Parks' account of the "otherworldly" nature of this tale, with the hopes that it will clue me into how to read the character of Hester Smith. Parks admits that she, "writes for the figures in the play" (Parks 3). I want to think with Parks' desire to write *for* the play's figures, a gesture that I read, also, as a writing *against* or towards an otherworldliness. To this end, I seek out the ways Parks offers a grammar for a different order of knowledge, a way to think other-wise. I want to define this as a Black (m)otherly wisdom which Parks asserts through the figures of Hester.

Earlier, I worked to trace how Parks' Hip Hop aesthetics operate as a sight of an embodied praxis that disavowals normative belonging, specifically, regarding Black women. Parks' writing in and through the figures of Hester might serve as a practice of, what Saidiya Hartmen terms, "critical fabulation." Hartman explains that, "by playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story," she attempts to "jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done" ("Venus in Two Acts," 11). Hartman's historical remembering works to throw into crisis the traditional methods of historical recollection and representation, in order to "reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance" (12). Merging disaesthetics with a practice of "critical fabulation," I want to read the figures of Hester as spaces in which Parks radically imagines a different type of embodiment, possibly a counter-embodiement. It is from within the characters of Hester, what they gesture to but cannot fully represent, that I detect the "wish" for an other-World. To shine a blacklight on the terrain of this region, I focus on 1) Hester Smith's antagonistic relationship

with the State and its logic of "justice" represented by the Freedom Fund and 2) Hester's symbolic act of taking the "life" of her "wayward son," Monster.

Before becoming an abortionist, Hester cleaned houses for the rich. After her son is caught stealing from the Mayor and his wife (The Rich Lady), Hester is forced to make her "living" as an abortionist. Her new occupation forces her to be branded with an "A," a bleeding and crying scar that never heals, yet it is unlawful to cover the wound up. Without a doubt, both Hester, La Negra and Hester Smith are marked women, the former marked epidermally (overdetermined from without), the latter, marked (or branded) with a festering A on her left chest.

Over the thirty years, Hester Smith has been paying an undetermined amount of money to the Freedom Fund in the hopes that one day she will buy her son's "freedom." It is unclear how much money has been paid or how much is outstanding. The Freedom Fund seems to be plagued by illogical bureaucratic red tape. It is a system that loses track of "inmates." It is so unorganized that it cannot distinguish between one "prisoner" and another when it sends the character of Jailbait out to the picnic with Hester in place of her son. The system is so contradictory that calling it Kafkaesque does nothing to describe the way it violently positions Hester and her son. It can only be analogized to slavery, but only if slavery is theorized through both the political and libidinal economy. The name Freedom Fund gestures toward this comparative reading, as does the symbolic act of Hester buying her son's freedom. The system's larger effects on the "family unit" resemble a system that is, in the words of Frank Wilderson III, so violently "comprehensive it is beyond comprehension."

Hester's own social position is one of a violent exchange or substitution. Her "choice" was either become an abortionist and be branded or go to jail. A decision resembling, in James

Baldwin's words, one "between amputation and gangrene" ("Notes on *A Native Son*"); or, as Orlando Patterson explains of the institution of slavery, that "the most distinctive attribute of the slave's powerlessness was that it always originated (or was conceived of as having originated) as a substitute for death, usually a violent death" (Patterson 5). Hester's "life" as an abortionist ("a necessary evil" as the character of Canary terms it) can be described as a type of living death. If the "A" which is branded into her chest, is a type of "hieroglyphics of the flesh," as Spillers might have it,[43] marking Hester's "livelihood," it also marks her as socially dead person. Hester imagines that her position in society might change as soon as she is able to "free" her son.

Once she has paid for her son Monster's release, her dream is that she will move from a woman marked as socially dead to a mother. Hester states, "not until my Boy Comes home. Im not a true mother otherwise" (Parks 120) and later, "I'll get back at [First Lady]. Im not a mother otherwise" (194). Hester's "motherhood," which she believes is a promise for futurity, relies on paying an undefined amount of money and having her son returned to her. This is a dis on the prodigal son myth. This paradox is compounded because Monster cannot serve time that cannot be accounted for. Rather, his sentence is like political prisoner George Jackson's sentence of one year to life. Under these conditions, time loses coherence and offers no bearing for either Hester or Monster. In the world of *Fucking A,* Hester's motherhood cannot be recognized. She is caught in a state of internal grieving, of unmournable mourning. This is because both her and her son are not subjects of the state. Rather, they are captives of it. Blacks in the afterlife of slavery, "whether understood as slavery or debt peonage or the enclosure of the ghetto or incarceration," as Hartman points out, are positioned in an unending captivity.

The final moments when Hester kills Monster before the Hunters get at him, takes on new meaning when theorized through the concept of captivity. The Hesters of *The Red Letter*

Plays are not "failed" mothers. Rather they gesture to the failure of kinship in slavery's afterlife. We might, then, read the killings as radical acts of filicide, as altruistic killings that point out that the World is too cruel to "live" in for Black children. It is important to note, that Parks argues that her plays are about the figures of the past, but they are plays about (or playing on) the now. "In the wake," Sharpe explains, "the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (*In the Wake*, 9). The always now of the past in Parks' work is akin to what Hartman describes in her own attempts to a history of the present. Hartman states, "to illuminate the [monstrous] intimacy of our experience with the lives of the dead, to write our now as it is interrupted by this past, and to imagine a *free state*, not as the time before captivity or slavery, but rather as the anticipated future of this writing" ("Venus in Two Acts" 4).

As when I sought earlier, to link Hester, Negra with other Hesters, namely, Douglas's Aunt Hester, or Wilsons' Aunt Ester (ancestors), I want to link Hester Smith's filicide to the unbearable "choice" that Sethe faces in Morrison's *Beloved*. Thought through this type of radical alternative, Hester Smith's "A" that marks her flesh, might stand for "abject," as Cheryl Black points out.[44] However, it might gesture towards a type of radical 'A'bolition by way of Black maternal altruistic filicide. The Hesters might be figures *sent* by Parks to tarry with the unimaginable possibility of inhabiting a truly otherworld. As praxis, Parks' dramaturgical digging, remembering, and reimagining, is in line with Hartman's own archival work. As she states, "I am engaging the slave past in order to understand the future that we inhabit" (Saunders, "Fugitive Dreams of Diaspora" 9).

Track 7: The Limits of "Man," Black Radical Feminism, a visualization

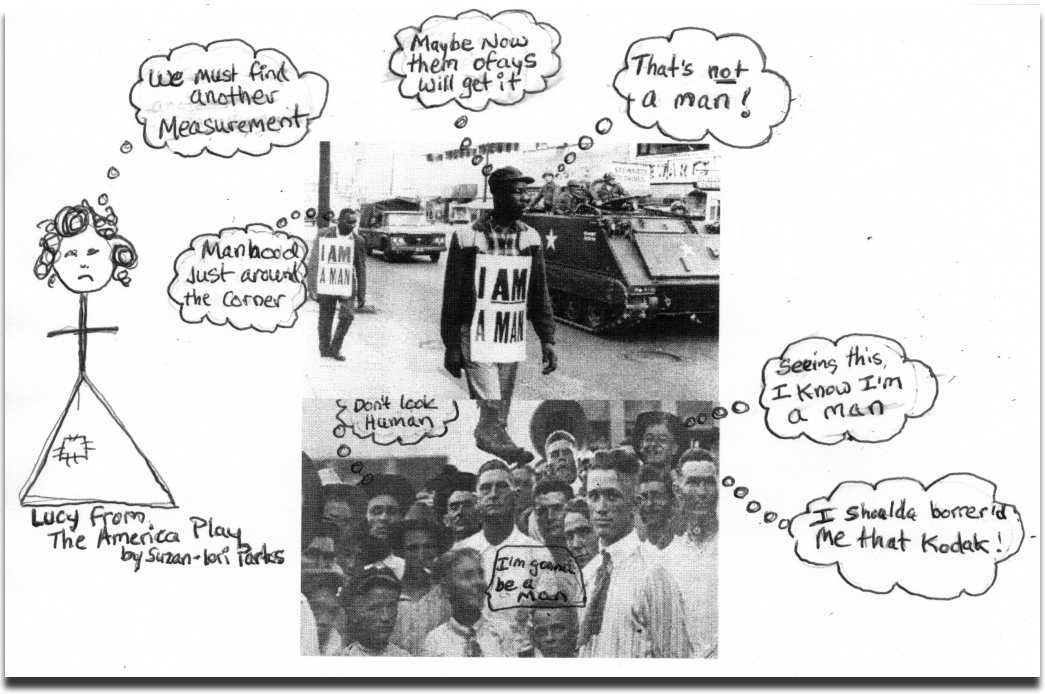

Fig. 5 "The Limits of "Man," Black Radical Feminism, a visualization" [45]

Section Endnotes

[1] Parks, "New Black Math," 576.
[2] Christian, Barbara. "The Race for Theory," 52.
[3] In groove with Barbara Christian, I "intentionally use the verb rather than the noun" to reference the ways Black theorizing, specifically in Hip Hop, is "often in narrative forms," revealed "in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language" ("The Race for Theory" 52).
[4] See Sexton, "Ante-Antiblackness." I am also arguing that Hinds' dramaturgy opens up a space to reveal and wrestle with, along with Sexton again, the ways in which questions of black life "cannot be pried apart from that thorniest of problems: 'the problem of the Negro as a problem for thought' (Nahum Chandler pace DuBois), that dubious and doubtless 'fact of blackness' (Fanon), or what I will call, in yet another register, the social life of social death" ("Ante-Antiblackness"). I want to argue that Hip Hop is a place and praxis for theories of blackness to emerge and be contested. In Hip Hop we locate the embodied praxis of a life lived in and as social death.
[5] See Bogazianos, 2012, 140; Sharpe, 2016, 22; Willoughby-Herard, 2014, 508; Williams, 2018, 194.
[6] Ludacris, "Diamond in the Back."

[7] Clipse, "Virginia."
[8] Quoted in Sylvia Wynter's "How We Mistook the Map for the Territory," 115.
[9] "Dionne Brand: Writing Against Tyranny and Toward Liberation," https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=dion+brand
[10] Mos Def. "Fear Not of Man."
[11] I want to sample in here also the lyrics from Run-D.M.C: "This speech is my recital, I think it's very vital / To rock (a rhyme), that right (on time) / It's Tricky is the title, here we go / It's Tricky to rock a rhyme, to rock a rhyme that's right on time / It's Tricky, it's Tricky (Tricky) Tricky (Tricky)" ("It's Tricky").
[12] I am thinking with two samples here: 1) Christina Sharpe's concept of the "residence and hold time of the wake" and 2) Calvin Warren's notion of "Black time" as "time without duration; it is a horizon of time that eludes objectification, foreclosing on idioms such as 'getting over,' 'getting through,' or 'getting beneath'" ("Black Time: Slavery, Metaphysics, and the Logic of Wellness," in *The Psychic Hold of Slavery*).
[13] Nas. "Can't Forget About You."
[14] I am thinking of Calvin Warren's statement that, "slavery exceeds the frame of the historical event that we are so eager to get over and indeed provides the condition of possibility for the liberal grammar of humanism that undergirds the compulsion to get over in the first place" (Colbert, Patterson, Levy-Hussen; chap. 3). If slavery and emancipation is, as Hartman asserts, a *non-event,* then, a different "grammar" is needed to understand how time moves in and under slavery and its afterlife. Western concepts of time as linear progression fall apart here. What I am suggesting with Parks' dis-articulation of time is that an opening a space occurs which allows for the possibility of speculating on different ways of navigating through an antiblack World, as well as its epistemes. Perhaps, something akin to what Dionne Brand suggests when she asks, "what if the cognitive schema is captivity?" (Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*).
[15] The term "spadework" comes from a section title in Parks' play *The America Play*. I am working with her multiple meanings of the term spade: 1) a tool for digging, 2) a derogatory term for Black people, 3) and the tendency to "tell it how it is" as used in the expression to "call a spade a spade." From the second usage, "spadework" might be understood as a type of Black work. I want to connect the aesthetics of DJing in Hip Hop, in that the DJ digs and works with samples, to spadework. What I am getting at is a type of working in and through Blackness as samples. In Hip Hop, most of the samples brought into play derive from other Black cultural, political, and artistic traditions. Spadework, then, is similar to layering a James Brown horn solo over a sampled speech from Angela Davis, bringing them into conversation, and creating something "new".
[16] *Big Fun in a Big Town*—Dutch TV Hip Hop Documentary (1986): https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=big+fun+in+a+big+town
[17] I want to note here that I am thinking this, solely, in terms of an aesthetic praxis. A DJ or Hip Hop Dramatist cannot escape the violence that Western conceptions of time wreak on Black life. My specificity to the performative moment is guided by Hortense Spillers' work on the Black woman blues singer. Spillers states that if, "we can draw out the emphasis on the female vocalist's art, rather than her biographies, then we gather from the singer that power and control main an ontological edge. Whatever luck or misfortune the Player has dealt to herm she is, *in the moment of the performance*, the primary subject of her own invention" (Spillers, 167; italics mine).
[18] Banks*, Say Word!*, 10. Banks uses this phrase to indicate those of the Hip Hop generation. Since the Hip Hop generation in this usage is extremely vague, I find it necessary to include the racial marker Black to highlight the specific circumstances of Black youth culture born between 1965-1984. For a more detailed definition see Bakari Kitwana's *The Hip-Hop Generation* (2002).
[19] Rapper Mos Def aka Yasiin Bey appeared in the Off-Broadway production of *Fucking A* at the Public Theatre in 2003 and the 2001 Public Theater production of *Topdog/Underdog* directed by George C. Wolfe. Wolfe received a Tony Award for his collaboration on the Hip Hop influenced *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk*.
[20] See Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (1982); Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (1997); and Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death" (2011).
[21] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 56-57.
[22] I am thinking here of an earlier sample from Hortense Spillers when she states: "My idea has always been to make Hegel speak my language. That's what I like to do…That's the game. That's cool. It's a kind of masquerade, right? That you take continental philosophy or anyone else that got something to say and subject

them to your fire, your heat, your imagination, your tongue," "Left of Black with Hortense Spillers and Alexis Pauline Gumbs," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ui-EZQ1BTfE .

[23] Borna Radnik explains Hegel's *Aufhebung* or "sublation" as a "twofold movement, a double transition, rather than simple one to one transition" (Radnik 2016). My use of the term focuses on a type of cancellation and preservation that occurs between the movement from and through thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. This concept could of course be thought through the African-American cultural practice of *signifyin'* (see footnote below), or Parks' own concept of "Rep&Rev." I bring Hegel into the mix not to privilege white Western philosophy but rather to dis it.

[24] Du Boise, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 3

[25] Gordon, *Existentia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought*, 23.

[26] Gumbs, *M Archive: After the End of the World*, 7.

[27] I am thinking with and extending Henry Louis Gates' famous formulation of *signifyin(g)* in his book *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988). My goal here is to link the act of *signifying*, its skeptical double-voicing, to what Hortense Spillers (pace DuBois) has observed about the critical disposition of Black culture. For me, signifying is a critical gesture like the dis of disaesthetics, in that it references, critiques, and revises on an "original" object. There is a non-serious serious aspect to signifying and dissing. But, they are also always radical and critical gestures. I am thinking in terms of rapper Redman's lyric, "if you gotta be a monkey, be a gorilla" (Redman, "I'll Bee Dat"). Here, we find a dis on the racist characterization of Black people as monkeys. This flips the racial characterization into a radical embodiment. Redman accepts that the World imagines him as a monkey. But, rather than say he is not one, that he is a "man", he affirms this in a way that writes through the symbol. Smashing Gates and Redman together, Gates notion of signifying might be expressed in Hip Hop as, if you gotta be a (signifying) monkey, be a (signifying) gorilla.

[28] Jacques Lacan's formulation of the *signifying chain* in which meaning is made and sustained through linking signfiers with a signified, does not allow Hester access. Rather, Hester's illiteracy serves as a type of missing link in the chain of signification. She cannot achieve recognition, incorporation, or subjectivity. My thinking, here, is that this is what "positions" Hester outside the realm of being; but also, what allows her to be a radical way of thinking the problems of being.

[29] See Cheryl Black, "'A' is for Abject: *The Red Letter Plays* of Suzan-Lori Parks" (2012); Harvey Young, "Choral Compassion: *In the Blood* and *Venus"* and Len Berkman, "Language as Protagonist in *In the Blood*" (Wetmore Jr., and Smith-Howard, eds., 2007); and La Tanya Rogers "Beyond the Binary" (2016).

[30] An extended quote from Sexton will illustrate what I am getting at. Sexton, explains that "the wish factor," a term he samples from comedian Cedric Kyles (better known as Cedric the Entertainer), is "born of a confrontational style that assumes a general antagonism, the wish factor contrast sharply with "the hope creed" characteristic of those engaging the politics of everyday life through the assumption of a general consensus disrupted by conflict" ("Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word," para. 35).

[31] See Fred Moten's Lecture "Manic Depression: A Poetics of Hesitant Sociology" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQ2k0dsmIJE&t=5542s. In the question and answer section of the audio lecture, Moten state something to the effect that the poet, soloist, artist, messenger, political leader serves the purpose of the poem, solo, art, message, political movement. It is an unattainable subject position. I am thinking Hester in term of Moten's formulation of the difference between the "characterological" and "the topological." Hester, as messenger in service of the message, is the unattainable position centered on "the preservation of space" rather than character or subject.

[32] Wilderson states, "it takes an ocean of violence to produce a paradigm," https://www.artforum.com/print/201707/red-black-and-blue-the-national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture-and-the-national-museum-of-the-american-indian-70457.

[33] I am of course thinking here of Nahum Chandler's rigorous work, *X—The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*, specifically Chapter 1: "Of Exorbitance."

[34] Here Harvey Young works through Giorgio Agamben's concept of "witness" in relation to the holocaust. I argue that something else might revealed by employing the plantation, slavery, and its afterlife as the conceptual metaphors to think through. Taking a turn with Saidiya Hartman, even if alongside Agamben might bring to relief what is unthought in Hester's declarations, specifically in regards to the failure of language surrounding the scenes of subjection that position her as this World.

[35] I am thinking, here, of Jared Sexton's warning about paying attention to white folks' desire because "tomorrow they will become legislation." In other words, the "gossip," imbued with white licenses, turns both uttered *and* unuttered desires into laws, regulations, and the scaffolding that supports the World.
[36] This is a nod to Parks notion of "a spell," a place of "great (unspoken) emotion. It's also a place for an emotional transition" ("Elements of Style").
[37] "Suzan-Lori Parks by Han Ong," *Bombmagazine.org*. Issue 47 1 Apr. 1994. https://bombmagazine.org/articles/suzan-lori-parks/. Accessed 2 Mar. 2018 .
[38] Wetmore and Smith-Howard, 125.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid, 134.
[42] Parks (2001), 113.
[43] Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*, 207.
[44] Black. "'A' is for Abject: *The Red Letter Plays* of Suzan-Lori Parks," 34-35.
[45] This, for me, represents a visual disaesthetics. What I wanted to do here is put in visual layered conversation the ideas of (Saidiya Hartman, 1997; David Marriott, 2000, 2007; Katherine McKittrick, 2006, 2014; and Suzan Lori Parks, 1995; Sylvia Wynter, 2015).

DISC 6 (Outro) Towards the Future of Hip Hop Studies and Hip Hop Theatre

Track 1: It's Been Made Blue, and Lied To, When will Hip Hop be Loved?[1]

To think of the future of Hip Hop Theater and Hip Hop Studies, I return the original question. But, this time I pose it to the academy and its scholars: When did *you* fall in love with Hip Hop? How deep is your love? What is required of Hip Hop for it to garner your love?

// "I love black people."//[2]

// "Show me the money"//[3]

Can the academy love the Blackness in Hip Hop? In these times and under these conditions, can Blackness be loved? Can the World love Blackness, while accepting that Black people will always be suspicious of the love it offers?

If so, there is a lot to be learned from Hip Hop's Black critical disposition; there is much to be gained from, as P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon Woods term, "A Hip Hop Studies in Black."

If so, there are grooves, rhymes, and reasons that can serve as blue prints for a radical avowal of a "Black Planet".

If so, there is a praxis for a radical liberatory imagination to be unearthed, not from within *this* paradigm or this World order but from the outer-and-under-side, from outer-space, where one accepts being a stranger to the World, as well as a strangeness *in* the World, where one theorizes (in Black) while estranged from the World and acknowledges that their strange estrangement is the condition of possibility for normality and belonging, and then, commits to creatively and critically reject it all.

If so, much is possible…

But in the words, of De La Soul:

//"if 'if' was a spliff, we'd all be high. But it's not so sober up."//[4]

Track 2: Into the Dead Wax

The center of a vinyl record, that interstitial space between the grooves and the circular zone that reveals the record's title, is called the dead wax. Where a Compact Disc (CD) records and plays information from the interior to the exterior, a record moves from the outside in, to the center, to the heart. With(in) these tracks, I have attempted to amplify and expand the ethical demands of Black noise, the sonic vibrations emanating out of dystopic landscapes, the underbelly of the World. These are the sounds and soundings which the *study* of Hip Hop often drowns out with the melodies of (neo)liberal ideals and bourgeois aspirations. I have sought to turn up the volume on the radical "Freedom Dreams" deferred by neoliberal ambitions (to dis with Robin Kelley and Langston Hughes).

Hip Hop is both a radical critique *and* a drastic blueprint for surviving the antiblack violence which is constituent to the World-making process of Western modernity. Hip Hop can be said to be the soundtrack, as well as the "dreamscape" of Black "life." But, as Jared Sexton asserts, "black life is not social, or rather that black life is *lived* in social *death.* Double emphasis, on lived and on death" ("Ante-Anti"). To deploy Hip Hop *as* study, I have offered the term disaesthetics and have worked to dis the form and function of the dissertation, to put on dis-play those radical possibilities that remain hidden in the archival crates.

If Black life is lived in social death, as Sexton would have it, then, Hip Hop is the site and sound of a that impossible possibility; its function, in the words of Sharon Holland, is to "tell the story of death-in-life" (Holland 4), but as rap duo Dead Prez state, "it's bigger than Hip Hop,"[5] and, as Mos Def reminds us, "Black, [Hip Hop] can't save you."[6] What is Hip Hop then? Well, Hip Hop is a location to think through and with a Black sensibility, as well as the Blackness that

challenges sensibility as such. "The most radical negation of an anti-Black world," Sexton argues, "is the most radical affirmation of a Blackened world" ("Ante-Anti"). I read this as a disavowal of the fear of a Black Planet and an avowal of a Black planetary aesthetic that moves one closer to a type of "gratuitous freedom." [7]

//"Out of this world, are we aliens?"// [8]

To think Hip Hop, to think with and within Hip Hop, is to think with(in) a Black dis. Hip Hop can empower us as much as it can make us complacent in our own suffering. But as Black artists, thinkers, students, activists, theorists, music *headz*, and practitioners, the ethical move is one towards the dead wax of this black vinyl terrain, a move that challenges us to hit the ground running while knowing that "we can't keep running away."[9] The rotation anticipates and proceeds us, that is why Hip Hop Theatre must remain theatre of the now, and Hip Hop Theory must find its truth through constant radical revisions, a continuous questioning of everything.

As we move forward against forces pushing back, our theories, to dis on poet and playwright Robert Browning, must exceed our grasp, or what are (liberatory) dreams for?[10] It is not a matter of pessimism vs optimism; it is a matter of both-and. As dude said, "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will."[11] As we push back and forward, however, we must not mistake the Wynterian map for the territory. In line with Tupac's lyrico-political call to wake up and "fuck the world,"[12] I am aware, as I'm sure he was, that the antiblack World may not be *all* worlds; the target, however, remains the Western World and the desire for it. *This* World may not be the only one, no more than the only gaze is a white gaze; yet, Fanon reminds us in *Black Skin, White Masks* that this violent and dissecting gaze, "the only valid one" (95), extends from "the white world, the only decent one" (94). We must *dis*abuse ourselves of the desire to be recognized by it and participate in it; we must be indecent.

Holding all this, I seek to move forward, resentful, and resistant of the gaze, the whiteness, the World, all the while fully knowing, yes, there might be another look, another World, another way to look at (and after) the World. We may dream "the impossible dream" of an outer/under/other World, one untouched, un-gazed upon, and unmolested by what the West has wrought, but we can also remain skeptical and pessimistic; this is "not repression but withholding," and that is, certainly, "something different."[13] We can refuse sleep while still dreaming, but we must stay awake, woke, in the wake. To this end, I refuse the theoretical escape hatch out of the hold, and I cling to the fleeting visions of an Earthy mud-rich liberation. It is this impossible possibility that enlivens my radical imagination and guides my *call* to wake up and "fuck the world" as a poetico-political praxis. I await the *response*.

Section Endnotes

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[1] A dissing on the Everly Brothers song "When Will I Be Loved" (1960) and Linda Ronstadt's 1975 cover of the song.
[2] A sample from a line from the film *Jerry Maguire* (1996).
[3] Ibid.
[4] De La Soul. "View," *Art Official Intelligence: Mosaic Thump*. Tommy Boy Entertainment, 2000.
[5] Dead Prez. "It's Bigger Than Hip Hop."
[6] Mos Def. "Hip Hop."
[7] In *Red, White and Black*, Wilderson writes that, "the Slave needs freedom from the Human race, freedom from the world. The Slave requires gratuitous freedom. Only gratuitous freedom can repair the object status of his or her flesh, which itself is the product of accumulation's and fungibility's gratuitous violence" (141).
[8] Outkast. *AtLiens.*
[9] A sample from The Pharcyde's song "Runnin."
[10] In his poem Andrea del Sarto, Browning writes, "ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, / Or what's a heaven for?" and later, "I know both what I want and what might gain, / And yet how profitless to know, to sigh / 'Had I been two, another and myself, / 'Our head would have o'erlooked the world!' No doubt."
[11] Of course, the "dude" I am referring to here is Antonio Gramsci and his well-known quote.
[12] Tupac. "Fuck the World," *Me Against the World* (1995).
[13] "People-of-Color-Blindness: A Lecture by Jared Sexton." 27 Oct. 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNVMI3oiDaI

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