Articles

"Stacks, Sounds, and a Record a Day": An Introduction to DJ Rhetoric and Sonic Lineage in Praxis

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Abstract

At the juncture where education meets technology and new media, Hip Hop can serve as one of the most transformative teaching tools. "'Stacks, Sounds and a Record a Day': An Introduction to DJ Rhetoric and Sonic Lineage in Praxis" harnesses this very energy: using personal narrative alongside scholarship in the field of rhetoric and composition, this article surveys a theoretical argument for DJ Rhetoric (Craig 2023) and sonic lineage. These innovative concepts can positively contribute to how we envision writing, rhetoric and the power of the DJ to serve as both cultural educator and changemaker.

Keywords: DJ Rhetoric, Sonic Lineage, Hip Hop Studies, DITC, DJ culture

At the juncture where education meets technology and new media, Hip Hop can serve as one of the most transformative teaching tools. "'Stacks, Sounds and a Record a Day': An Introduction to DJ Rhetoric and Sonic Lineage in Praxis" harnesses this very energy: using personal narrative alongside scholarship in the field of rhetoric and composition, this article surveys a theoretical argument for DJ Rhetoric (Craig 2023) and sonic lineage. These innovative concepts can positively contribute to how we envision writing, rhetoric and the power of the DJ to serve as both cultural educator and changemaker.

"'Stacks, Sounds and a Record a Day': An Introduction to DJ Rhetoric and Sonic Lineage in Praxis" moves similarly to a DJ mix show, down to the layout on the page: you may not know where the DJ is going or what the DJ will play, but you trust in the reputation of the DJ to take you on a sonic expedition. That's why you tune into the show regularly, isn't it? I ask that you walk with me, understanding there is an initial investment to be made in order to fully grasp the gist of this writing experience on the other side of the finish line. I also ask you to walk with me understanding my own reputation. I've been a DJ for over thirty years, and I've been writing about the DJ in academic spaces for over twenty years[1]; thus, I've been a DJ longer than I've been an academic. Furthermore, a significant key to this writing is that the perspective is part of the production; in this moment, my perspective as a DJ drives this conversation on the page.

There are a series of critical commitments this article will address. First – this piece should feel more like a conversation, and less like the "traditional" journal article you might be used to tackling. It will read as a snapshot of persuasive language. Trust me, this idea will come to light by the end of the piece. Second – because this writing aims to further explore and expand upon my previous introduction to DJ Rhetoric, it requires that certain areas are privileged over others. Storytelling is beyond important. In this space, the narrative components are not simply fictional anecdotes; instead, they are meaning-making elements, the skeletal framework that undergirds a theoretical and scholarly conversation. Thus, there is a story to be told by the author, which gives way to how some of the scholarship and theoretical concepts take shape. Furthermore, this storytelling does not wax poetic (although good stories about wax can be quite poetic, but alas, I digress…); it is real-time praxis, connecting the storyteller, the practice(s) of the DJ and how those practices might connect to, disrupt or even reject scholarly sentiments. Essentially, this article does not conform to the conventional paradigm of scholarship as the primary entrée with a story on the side. In *this* moment, the stories *are* the scholarship, the narrative is the archive and how they connect to Hip Hop and DJ culture is canon. Third – and most important – Hip Hop culture is *always* privileged. After all, without Hip Hop music and culture, there would be no narrative to tell. And I argue that without the narrative of Hip Hop culture and the DJ, there is no viable scholarship or sensible theory on this subject. I've now situated how this piece will move. So let's go on a journey in order to witness these concepts in praxis…

"When (T)hey (R)eminisce (O)ver (Y)ou, My God…"
The Reflective Recurrence of Origin aka How I Even Got Here in the First Place

In my early years, like many other kids my age, we worked off of a paradigm called "imagination" when we played. We didn't have "Cookie Swirl C" or "B2Cute Cupcake" or even Renegade and Gittin' Sturdy TikToks that my children now geek over! There was no internet advent for us to model our play after; this could very well mean that I'm pushing way past my youth…but I view it as quite simply, *we* were the model for our own play, and we'd get busy for real. Like most kids my age, I had a solid set of toys, but in other moments, our imaginations would take flight towards other unconscious aspirations.

One of the games I'd play with my cousins, and sometimes even by myself, was this version of school/work/life that was more like reenacting what we thought the adults around us were doing. As I think back, we were playing "adulting": what we envisioned as an adult life with all the perks, but without all the bills and underlying responsibilities. I would normally fall in line with the role of my father figure. All I knew as a child was he worked at a college, he was going to school, and he always dressed top-notch, for real. Now that I'm older, I recognize his work at the college was as director of a few different offices (most notably Financial Aid), his schoolwork was the completion of an MBA, and his clothing game was a straight part-time maneuver at *Lord and Taylor* or *Bloomingdales* – one of those big-name upper-end Manhattan stores that afforded him the discount that made his wardrobe possible.

Similar to him, I envisioned myself studying. There was nothing but textbooks all around and they wound up in the cabinets of the antique buffet in my bedroom. Even though I had my own books, I had already devoured those, a conscious act by both choice and force, because my mom did NOT play that "you gonna stop all schooling and learning when you not in school" mess. So in the summertime, my book game continued, whether I liked it or not. Since I ran through my own books like sprinters at a championship track meet, I'd start running through a collection of my dad's books. I always gravitated to the newer ones, and I can still see a few of those textbooks in my head now. There were a couple of business texts, but my favorite one was the upper level math text. The cover was a light-pale pea soup green – a few shades lighter than the Concepts x New Balance "Tannery" 998 – with red letters and the light grey graph-paper grid on the front. In retrospect, he was probably going to return it to the bookstore; it was most likely an expensive text because it had faint pencil underlines…my play may have jacked that plan up, though.

I'd walk around my bedroom with books under my arm like I was an older kid, going to some sort of important college class. I'd open the book, cracking the freshly uncreased binding, and with a separate notebook on the side, I'd do my best rendition of studying. Some of those pages I'd actually try to read, an endeavor in star-shooting: I'd get some of it, but some stood simply as jargon that, at the time, I thought I'd never be able to distinguish. I'd act like I was studying while the NCAA College basketball games were on; it was always a treat for me to see that navy and orange from Syracuse, even though my favorite was that Go Blue Michigan colorway. I knew I'd go to college, I knew I'd play basketball at Michigan (specifically to have access to the team sneakers since before the BTTYS Dunks and the Air Assaults), and I knew I'd study and obtain an advanced education.

But the thread that tied all of this together was always Hip Hop. On the days I played in my bedroom, the game on TV would be turned down, because a tape from the previous night of Hip Hop with Mr. Magic and Marley Marl or Chuck Chillout or Red Alert was the score of this playtime scene. I listened to the tape and absorbed the soundtrack to the culture that was growing through its adolescence alongside my childhood (Hip Hop was born in August 1973, I was born in April 1974). The last element of this trifecta was the sonics of Hip Hop; there were a slew of books in one cabinet, but on the other side was the stereo and an equal, if not larger, stack of records. I'd listen to the radio, to the tapes I made, to the records that were my uncle's sonic sources for his life as a DJ; they would become the foundation of my understanding of music, and my cousin's understanding of soul in his production career. I'd grow up to buy records on my own, and hone and acquire the taste I had in the sights and sounds of Hip Hop culture.

As time went on, the bare walls in my room would soon be filled with pages from *The Source,* when it still served as that. Das EFX, EPMD's "Business as Usual" and Pete Rock and CL Smooth posters from the "All Souled Out" EP and CD packaging would double as décor…walk through that bedroom today, and some of it has weathered the storm called time. As I grew, the presence of those records were just as integral, if not more so, than the presence of those books. And my physical

relationship with both were the same. I would pick up a book, study its cover, look at the table of contents and delve into the writing from page first until page last. In the same way I would pick up an album, stare at the front cover image and imagine why the artist made choices in clothes or pictures, in abstract art or photograph. Then I would put the album on the record player and put the needle on the record while I studied the back credits of the album: song titles, producers, writers, band members, and even sample sources or "interpolation" credits. The equality of these chambers in my youthful understanding is the foundational methodology I bring to my life today. Let's be clear: I can close my eyes and envision the image right now, to this day: books on one side, records on the other side, and a clear visual of a pathway into college.

"The SPINificient Revolution": Exploring the Idea of DJ Rhetoric

DJ Rhetoric stands as the modes, methodologies and discursive elements of the DJ. What does that even mean? Let's unpack this like DJs rubbing new vinyl on their pants legs to crack open the plastic wrap (#IYKYK)…

At the core of pushing towards a DJ Rhetoric sits a contemporary definition of rhetoric given by Carmen Kynard in her 2008 text, "'The Blues Playingest Dog You Ever Heard of': (Re)positioning Literacy through African American Blues Rhetoric." Illuminating a (re)conception of rhetoric in regards to African American student protest history in the 1960s, Kynard states:

> I am using rhetoric to encompass much more than the art of persuasion and stylised speaking. I mean the qualities of language, both oral and written, through which cultural meanings and histories are communicated and thus, where attitudes towards language and life are central. Rhetoric is, thus, a means of discourse, where what gets said in stories, dance, song, paintings and everyday banter communicates belief systems, social values, a sense of the past, notions of shared identity and communal aspirations. (Kynard 396)

Let's look at another contemporary example to bring this sentiment into focus. On the Griselda Records founder Westside Gunn's 2016 album entitled *Flygod*, the song "Outro" finds Bro. A.A. Rashid talking that talk, and explaining the importance of not compromising one's artistic vision with music, fashion or branding. In this three-minute soliloquy, he hits a very key idea: "You better curate your art, nigguh. You better tell these nigguhs why you do what you do. 'Cause there ain't nobody gonna be there to explain that shit. You need rhetoric! Who told you rhetoric was a bad word? Nigguhs don't read enough! Listen: rhetoric means persuasive language" (Rashid). The culmination of Bro. A. A. Rashid's ruminations in this song connected to the beat speak to both the nexus and expansion of Kynard's analysis. Both Kynard and Rashid are also working to engage with their respective communities. For Kynard, it is an academic audience deeply invested in the educational practices of Black and Brown youth. Meanwhile, Rashid is speaking to a particular slice of the Hip Hop listening community; the placement on Westside Gunn's album automatically targets

listeners who appreciate grimy and gritty lyricism, and dark melodic beats. Whether pedestrian or seasoned listeners, this particular sonic community is engaged in "Hip Hop music as strategic curated art." These sounds typically stray from the "Radio Rap Bops" that most people might interact with.

Here, I add onto both Rashid's and Kynard's definitions: part of a DJ's language extends beyond just the "language, oral and written." DJ Rhetoric is also about what gets said "sonically" by a DJ. The ways in which DJs decide to express themselves and communicate that expression amongst members within and outside of DJ culture via turntables and the sounds they create with their arsenal/archive/collection of music has everything to do with the sonic quality of the choices they make (Craig 2023). So a DJ's language progresses beyond just what gets said in songs by an MC or singer, and incorporates the actual sonics of the song; thus, how what gets said in the song coalesces with the music present to make it a complete work. Essentially, it's about how that DJ works and interacts "in the mix" with other pre-fixed songs, or even in the mix by completely (re)configuring pre-fixed songs. And when I say "in the mix" I want to be clear that I mean…mixing songs! The fundamental premise of a DJ blending and beat-matching music based on listening to tempos and pacing of songs and finding clever and seamless ways to manipulate songs to sound fire together, one after the other. For real DJs, "in the mix" is not the artificial DJ pocket, where everyone – they momma, daddy and best friend's cousin's auntie – thinks they can be a DJ. In all honesty, the language of the DJ does not include Broadway theatrics upon entrance to your DJ set. This philosophy is NOT based solely upon a sync button or a mathematical sentiment, or the inability to split double-time numbers into typical BPM representations.[2] We not about that on this side, my friends…

While DJ Rhetoric stands as the modes, methodologies and discursive elements of the DJ, it simultaneously encompasses the quality of oral, written and sonic language that displays and expresses socio-cultural, historical and musical meanings, attitudes and sentiments. From what gets said in the songs to what gets looped in the break in the mix, from the part of the song that gets cut up and scratched on the 1s and 2s. From what gets stretched, rearranged, and completely reorganized as it's coming through your speakers to what gets chopped, screwed and flipped in the sample. From what gets sprayed and laid on the walls in technicolor to what gets captured physically in the ambidextrous movements of all that poppin and lockin, uprockin' and floorwork.

When you start to think about Hip Hop culture, the DJ is the glue: the cornerstone, the conductor, and the connective tissue of the culture as we know it. Because the DJ serves as the catalyst for multiple aspects of rhyming, dance and visual arts coming together and colliding under one roof to form the culture we know as Hip Hop, understanding the modes and techniques of the DJ become paramount in making sense of DJ Rhetoric. If we "dig in the crates" to contemplate the family tree of rhetorical sensibilities surrounding DJ Rhetoric, there is an interconnectedness between Hip Hop rhetoric (and more largely, Hip Hop studies) as well as African American rhetoric. In the same way Hip Hop is rooted in the Black community, so too is the language, discursive practices and techniques of the Hip Hop DJ (Craig

2023). There is a rich and robust history of African American rhetoric – documented in texts that provide both a survey and an examination of the field from its roots to contemporary concepts – from Ronald Jackson and Elaine Richardson's *Understanding African American Rhetoric: Classical Origins to Contemporary Innovations* to Vershawn Young and Michelle Robinson's *The Routledge Reader of African American Rhetoric: The Longue Durée of Black Voices*. There are also studies that illuminate rhetorical contexts in specific community settings, including Vorris L. Nunley's "*Keepin' it Hushed: The Barbershop and African American Hush Harbor Rhetoric*, Mitchell Duneier's *Slim's Table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity,* and Sacha Jenkins, Elliott Wilson, Gabe Alvarez, and Brent Rollins' *Ego Trip's: Book of Rap Lists*, to name a few. In Jackson and Richardson's seminal text, they envision the major themes of African American rhetoric as "ethics, history, spirituality, language, politics, nationality, religion, gender, popular culture, law, and aesthetics…we define African American rhetoric as it relates to Black African descendants and their experiences in the United States of America" (Jackson and Richardson xiv-xv). Within the realm of African American rhetoric, most people would place Hip Hop rhetoric as a subset of the field. However, I propose a different argument:

> Everyday banter, and thus linguistic directives, for Hip Hop were always communicated in songs, and the banter was a transactional process—a call-and-response of sorts—between the artists and the streets. But the DJs make and break those influential records that begin to dictate the language of the culture. Thus, DJ Rhetoric leads not only to a certain form of DJ Literacy but to a certain form of Hip Hop Language and Literacy (Alim, *Roc the Mic Right*; Richardson, *Hiphop Literacies*) as well. It is here that one could make the argument that HHNL is a submerged area of DJ Rhetoric and Literacy, which is a submerged area of Black Language and rhetoric and African-American literacy. (Craig 58)

Thus, what's critical to keep in mind as we close this rhetoric crate-diggin' session is that DJ Rhetoric stands as the modes, methodologies, and discursive elements of the DJ.

DJ Rhetoric also communicates the values of Hip Hop culture, (re)shaping it as we have known, now know, and will continue to know it. Furthermore, it culminates in a Black space because of how it was birthed and nurtured in urban inner-city Black enclaves. On the one hand, these Black melting pot communities fostered a connectivity between African, African American, Caribbean and Latino/a sentiments. These very Black locations were landmark communities established as post-white-flight stomping grounds. So there were mad Black folx all around, playing various iterations of Black music. These Black stylings were housed in Black city sites:

> By the end of the decade, half of the whites were gone from the South Bronx. They moved north to the wide-open spaces of Westchester County or the northeastern reaches of Bronx County…white elite retrenchment found a violent counterpart in the browning streets. When African-American, Afro-Caribbean, and Latino families moved into formerly Jewish, Irish, and

> Italian neighborhoods, white youth gangs preyed on the new arrivals in schoolyard beatdowns and running street battles" (Chang 12).

Out of these geographic spaces abandoned by whites and newly occupied by various people of the Black diaspora, Hip Hop is born. And the attending physician who promotes pushing between contractions is the DJ.

I Wrote This to the "Terry" Beat on Repeat aka "…Virgil Abloh throw rug to roll you up like Fruit Roll-Up…" aka The Lineage Called DJ Rhetoric

I remember sharing the childhood story from two sections ago with my homie Dr. Bilal Polson as I unknowingly took a roughly eight-mile walk in the summer of 2019. I was trooping it from dropping my car off for service at the dealership in Jersey City; I tried to make my way back to Weehawken, and I got a good halfway before I recognized that Nike Slides are *not* the shoe of choice for such endeavors. However, the extended walk gave me the time I needed to chop it up with Bilal. In these early conversations, we would discuss how our sonic sensibilities informed, influenced, and infused how we moved through our roles as educators, our notions of pedagogy, but also how those two elements could inform and influence how we guided public conversations around music – for both the academy and the students we teach. I remember this moment clearly, as it would spark a number of theories for both of us. This dual-layered narrative is critically important to how the idea of sonic lineage (Polson) was sparked. My conversation with Bilal about this moment was one he told me I would need to share. Bilal and I build consistently on Hip Hop music, culture and its relevance to teaching and learning from K-16. This narrative was part of our convo that took myriad twists and turns. As Principal of an elementary school, Polson uses Hip Hop as a catalyst for how students engage in art, music and English Language Arts (ELA) classes. For me, I was thinking through teaching a new class at City Tech for the African American Studies Department entitled "Hip-Hop Worldview" – for this class, I was specifically ruminating on how Rapsody's *Eve* album could connect students to Hip Hop's past, present and future, thus connecting them into multigenerational Hip Hop conversations.[3] While doing this thinking, I was also solidifying the revisions for my full-length manuscript that revolved around DJ Rhetoric, literacy and pedagogy. At the time of this conversation, I was wading through the turbulent waters of just losing my mother. When I received the call to teach the class, I almost didn't accept it. Bilal helped me recognize that my mom's passing and the call from Dr. Monique Ferrell to teach the class were not two unconnected pieces of a time-space continuum.

Instead, it was *Kairos*.
Being in the right space and place at the absolute right time…

My mom passed on Saturday, July 27, 2019. I was asked to teach the class two days later, on Monday, July 29, 2019. Thanks, Mommy…

For Dr. Polson, Principal of Northern Parkway Elementary School, this conversation was one of the very last moments before he launched his multimedia "#literacylives #textual-lineage" project. These collective think-tank build-sessions ultimately led to the concept of sonic lineage. Let's unpack these terms and definitions to determine how DJ Rhetoric and sonic lineage become an integral addition to the 21st century parameters of Hip Hop studies, and Rhetoric and Composition.

DJ Rhetoric, "Digging in the Crates" and the Bridge to Textual Lineage

The art of understanding records through the timeless tradition of "digging in the crates" (also known as DITC) is part of the apprenticeship that all DJs should know. While many DJs transition into being producers (Schloss; Craig [2013, 2015]), they will tell you that solid DJ training has opened the door for them to become greater producers. Within DJ communities and embedded in the trajectory of DJ experiential learning, many DJs carried record crates for other DJs. Part of the experience of carrying crates is learning what those crates contain.

"Digging in the Crates" (DITC) is without question a research methodology that every great DJ has engaged in throughout their career (Craig 2015). A term originally coined by the Bronx crew of rappers, DJs and producers[4] in 1992 (Pizzo), it is a concept that is closely aligned with Lynnée Denise's idea of "DJ Scholarship." DITC is a specific form of DJ research (Denise), connecting a DJ to how they consume, archive and interface with sonic sources (Craig 2023). Many times, the act of "digging" not only involved having a sense of what songs are on a record or what the record looks like visually (from the cover to the actual label on the record), but also studying the liner notes – a distinctive form of writing, rhetoric and early Hip Hop documentation and communication (Coleman): what are some of the key samples; what artists appear on the records; where have you seen and heard those artists before? Daphne A. Brooks keenly assesses the gravitas that liner notes hold in music's sonic cultural education:

> liner notes hold out the possibility of operating as critical, fictional, or experimental works of writing in and of themselves. Conventional liner notes often walk a fine line between pedagogy and socialization, between sociohistorical and cultural reportage and heuristic conditioning (here's how and why to love the artist in question). The most ambitious notes strive toward the narrative realization, or the narrative reimagining, of a sonic collection of songs altogether. And there was a time when the notes had the potential to shore up the supposed import and ambition of a recording, amplifying its intellectual resonance by *writing* its value into the cultural imaginary. (Brooks 5-6)

The composing practices as well as the rhetorical strategies in this moment align with an acute linkage to the concept of textual lineage.

In his 2009 book entitled *Reading for Their Life: (Re)Building the Textual Lineages of African American Adolescent Males*, Alfred Tatum argues that one way to reinvigorate and re-engage African American adolescent males in the subjects of reading and writing is to help them understand their "textual lineage." Tatum describes the idea of a textual lineage as: "similar to lineages in genealogical studies, [textual lineage] is made up of texts (both literary and nonliterary) that are instrumental in one's human development because of the meaning and significance one has garnered from them" (Tatum xiv). Thus, textual lineage can be comprised of authors of importance to the student; as students see the value in the authors they choose, this should translate into an eagerness to read and explore more literature of varying authors, especially if the authors write similar work or come from a similar background or tradition to some of the authors originally presented in a student's textual lineage.

Another way to envision the process is the following: think about the last time you were on *Amazon.com*. If you type in the title *Hip Hop Literacies* (2006) by Dr. Elaine Richardson, you will find all the info pertaining to Dr. E's work. Scroll down the screen and you will find the following section: "Customers who viewed this item also viewed: *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop* (2009) by Adam Bradley, *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip Hop Culture and the Public Sphere* (2004) by Gwendolyn Pough and *African American Literacies* (2002) by Elaine Richardson." Clicking on Dr. Pough's book brings us to a note that says "Frequently Bought Together" which lists the two other books most purchased with *Check It While I Wreck It*. And right underneath that, you can find a list of items that were purchased with Dr. Pough's book, including Tricia Rose's seminal text *Black Noise* (1994), *Can't Stop, Won't Stop* (2005) by Jeff Chang and *Prophets of the Hood* (2004) by Imani Perry. These different lists represent a similar bloodline that comes with particular books…a lineage of sorts. And this lineage can shift and change, based on customer reading choices and purchases. We see this all day long on Amazon, and also on Netflix: if you like *Pulp Fiction* (1994), then you'll LOVE *The Killer* (1989) by John Woo, *City of God* (2002) by Katia Lund, *Snatch* (2000) by Guy Ritchie and *Lucky Number Slevin* (2006) by Paul McGuigan. We also see these machinations musically. If you look back a few sections, you'll remember the story about how I studied records and albums similarly to studying books. Consuming the information on the "mechanics" of the music I loved and listened to allowed me to build a sonic archive, a deep cerebral musical database that connected me to various rifts, sounds and samples when I would hear them in various moments. As I studied the sights, sites, and sounds of my favorite artists and albums (and even the albums that weren't that great), I became steeped in a musical knowledge that you can only acquire by doing listening laps in a sonic swimming pool! This is the work that DJs have always done, and this is what brings the richness of sounds and genre inclusion into Hip Hop's landscape.

As always, feel free to thank your favorite DJ…

Part of any great DJs' philosophical DNA comes from their algorithmic intuition; their ability to isolate, identify and quantify a sonic source, and then build upon it

with choices dictated by the sonic choice that first sparked such thinking. This intuition is inherited through learning and steeped in years of listening…

"It ain't what I'm drivin', it's what's drivin' me…" aka "It's a Dirty Game…" aka Doin' the Knowledge on DJ Algorithmic Connections

Let's think back to the narrative I shared about my upbringing. In the same way that perusing and admiring books captured a contextual understanding based on the physical text, listening to albums and mixtapes of DJ radio shows enabled the visual and aural connections I would later understand as tangible connections to how I "see" and "hear" sonic sources. Hence, a certain sound or image might trigger a recollection that brings me back to a particular song, and the moment(s) that song evokes, alongside how I might imagine other songs that are important to the initial sound's trajectory; this triggering alongside this imagining are critical aspects of a human DJ's algorithmic intuition. Thus, a particular type of

"sonic lineage"

furthers a human DJ's algorithmic intuition, as it connects the physical and aural (or audio) of records and songs in the same way a book captures a physical context.

It's important to note that when I say "DJ algorithmic intuition," I am also clear about the current use of the term "algorithm." So let's contextualize this quandary with a full understanding and acknowledgement of the racist and discriminatory practices that have come to light when thinking about how contemporary algorithms work based on silent programmer bias (Benjamin 2019; Noble 2018). Ruha Benjamin's work is insightful here, when thinking about how we envision algorithms in our understanding of 21st century digital practices. She states "problem solving is at the heart of tech. An algorithm, after all, is a set of instructions, rules and calculations designed to solve problems…thus, even just deciding *what problem* needs solving requires a host of judgments" (Benjamin 11).

Here, Benjamin helps us to (re)think the problem that Hip Hop would originally aim to solve: extending "the funky part" of any given record. However, because of two of the philosophies of Hip Hop (shared from the Nation of Gods and Earths) – "show and prove" as well as having "knowledge of self" – DJs were not only trying to find "the funky part" of the break, but there's also an acute element of hearing a song today and being able to identify the sample and the original source. For example, sitting at the dinner table a few nights ago with my wife, she was playing soundsmith and curating our sonic dining experience. As soon as Yuna's "Broke Her" started playing, my brain immediately went to Drake's "0 to 100." But to insure I did the proper knowledge, a search quickly found that Frank Dukes aka Adam Feeney produced a beat called "Vibez" (with Chester Stone Hansen) that *both* Yuna and Drake used: Yuna sang over the original beat, then Boi Wonda sampled "the funky part" for the major melody of "0 to 100." Connecting the dots for understanding these sources is not only engaging with the "rules and calculations designed to solve problems" that

Benjamin presents, but it is also a research practice in itself: reviewing the credits and linear notes of a song illustrate a timeline as well as a sonic chronology for how songs that sample other songs line up. It's the type of investigation and exploration we ask of our students in classrooms each and every day – to flesh out an idea with data points and other information available to how we might truly gain a sense of what the current landscape is when thinking through a conversation in progress about an idea that sparks one's thinking. Who thought about it first? Who added on to the concept, or stopped to refute the idea? But most importantly, *what problem needs solving* – what elements have not been interrogated in a way that bring forth new perspectives and knowledge. This is a small glimpse into the DJ algorithmic mindset that solid DJs bring to the table. The DJ's sonic capacity to hear and identify a source and then do the due diligence to understand the song's trajectory is another aspect of sonic lineage. It runs parallel to Denise's other facets of DJ scholarship, specifically the cultural practices she identifies as "chasing samples" and "reading liner notes" (Denise 64). But it also directly speaks to research required of DJs not only wanting to understand "the funky part" of the record, but also needing to know the entire record in order to fit it into a DJ set properly. Much of the musical understanding from early DJs comes from the legacy of the feminist practices that mothers and aunties exhibited with Hip Hop pioneering DJs when they were children (Stoever). Knowing the entire record as well as "the funky part" that served as the groove to those early Park Jams evolved into the grooves that DJs would sample to produce recorded Hip Hop tracks. On the "Geto Boys Reloaded" podcast, Hip Hop DJ, producer, emcee and cultural stalwart Large Professor identifies the bridge between early Hip Hop records and the sources from which they originated, when he states "So when Hip Hop came around…you hear a Grandmaster Flash record, and then now you go in your parents' records and you hear the record that they used and it's like 'oh, this is what they doin'?!? Oh, okay.' Then, now you get out there and start getting with the elders. Like my man in the BX, my man Sgt. Len Funk, he used to put me onto mad records, and give me the stores to go get them. So it was just that community thing, and you have different versions of it" (Large Professor).

Spotify, Pandora and Tidal amongst other streaming services, all operate with a lineage-like algorithm that has changed how newer Hip Hop artists may make music. But it is the DJ, steeped in the listening and reading traditions shared by Black women, who is notorious for helping the listener to connect to songs – sonic sources – they may or may not know of, but fall into place when curating a "soundline," or a sonic lineage. It's not only a list of sources that share the same sentiment, but in some cases, it's an earlier source that predicates the existence of the newer source. It's the lineage, the bloodline, and the family tree. This sentiment is expressed well by DJ Skeme Richards, who recently served as music curator for Red Bull's 2022 BC 1 World Finals. In describing his work as a DJ for Red Bull's global Breaking Competition (BC), Skeme says:

"DJing for me means life. Right? It's culture. The DJ's job is to educate the listener. It's always an educational process. And for me being able to share what I grew up on cul-

turally to the rest of the world, that's so valuable. Because the point of culture – and *this* culture – is lineage, right? And I'm here to pass down that lineage. So my process with getting music together is basically going through a catalogue of music and understanding what works, what doesn't work. Oh, this is BC1, so I need *this* style of music…I walk away from every party after seeing the floor and everybody moving with a smile on my face. Because at the end of the day, I'm like 'I did that.' I brought culture to this space." (Skeme Richards)

It's that DJ algorithmic mindset that initiates the auditory understanding and connections of a sonic lineage. So when my man Carlos of Classic Material New York (CMNY) put me onto Griselda (Craig 2022), I could immediately connect with Mobb Deep, Wu-Tang, G-Unit, Odd Future and other groups of the past that influenced their sonics. My wife's sharing of Yuna brought us to Drake but also to Frank Dukes in the same way my man Chenjerai's recommendation of Oh No brought me to Cue Records and Stone's Throw (and a 20+ year union and partnership). So when Large Professor realized that "Paid in Full" sampled "Ashley's Roachclip" by the Soul Searchers, it was his DJ algorithmic mindset that led him to the Music Factory record store to find the original record (courtesy of Mr. Walt of the Beatminerz). In the same way I recently heard "Looking for the Perfect Beat" and when Bam says "It's Working!" it brought me *right* back to DJ Double K in *Beat Street* (1984). Since Hip Hop's inception, DJs have always held the responsibility of diggin' in the crates to exhibit a specific type of sonic lineage in both theory (with how said DJ connects to and understands the fundamentals of Hip Hop cultural sonic traditions) but also in practice (whether it's sharing those sonic sentiments in a jam, a live event [Weheliye] or even in producing compositions for emcees and vocalists). Much of Hip Hop's sonics went from the Park Jams and the tapes of the Park Jams, to hearing production on songs to chasing down the original records used in the samples (which originally started as the "foundation breaks" – the breaks used at the Park Jams [(Flores in Craig 44]).

DJs brought DITC to life, but the research-minded aspect of the DJ births
a specific desire to acquire a type of
sonic lineage.
These sonic markers spark an intellectual quest
based on narrative and memories soaked in sound.

"Sampling the Sample to Expand the Source": From Textual Lineage to Sonic Lineage

In harnessing the nature and relevance of textual lineage, imagine how powerful Tatum's thinking might be when opened up to a chamber that really felt like a rhetorical strategy when aligned with the DJ. For example, if we push Tatum's philosophy further, and replace the notion of traditional-based "text" with the idea of twenty-first century text – which includes sound, or the sonic, as text – how, then, would "sonic lineage" work? It functions based on the visual language cues and aural rhetoric, the sights, sites, and sounds that inform how one engages with historical musical trajec-

tories, as well as ways that "readers" (or listeners) engage in the learning that comes from the sonic. We can hear this sentiment expressed by Large Professor:

> Even in like the mid 80's and late 80's, there's always gonna be the "Old School-New School" type thing. But at that time, we were the new school now. And the old school dudes knew all the breaks and the beats…now it was coming into a time where there were standard breaks you were supposed to know and you were supposed to have: "Impeach the President," things like that. Like "Substitution", "Kool is Back" by Funk Inc…that piqued [dudes like me and Pete Rock's] interest into like "yo, let's git into these other records now." (Large Professor)

In this moment, Large Pro is tapping into an aural genealogy of sorts – this is the essence of sonic lineage. Again, as DJs isolate mental associations with the visuals of records (from the physical label on the record to the images on the record covers), delve into research practices by consuming liner notes, study every nook and cranny of a record for sound, and discern which record makes sense to play at what time, there are kinesthetic connections based in felt sense that are markers of time and space based in the sonic enterprise…or simply put – memories soaked in sound. Go no further than three sections prior, and you'll see this idea in praxis: the "Terry" beat and "Chopstick" will always be sonic markers for the lineage of this piece.[5]

Another example that might epitomize this work can be found with the path Polson created with his "Literacy Lineage" movement (#literacylives, #textual-lineage). On August 12, 2019 – the day after Hip Hop culture's birthday – Polson started the literacy lineage conversation with what many consider to be the centerpiece of Hip Hop music and production: "Funky Drummer (Part 1)" by James Brown (Polson 2019). From there, on a daily basis, you could find a Tweet, an Instagram post and a Facebook link to a picture of the record label. Sometimes it was an image of the 12", sometimes it was the 45. But for over a year, Polson brought this work to the forefront and continued to push the envelope for what we might consider twenty-first century literacy practices…and all by posting a record a day! I'll admit here, my favorite posts came from the politically-inspired daily entries: for example, the January 13, 2021 entry came from the Honeydrippers. The title…"Impeach the President." On January 7, 2021, the song was "Wake Up Everybody Pt. 1" by Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes. On January 6, 2021…"Midnight Train to Georgia" by Gladys Knight and the Pips. And finally, on January 19, 2021: "Hit the Road Jack."

What is most impressive about this initiative is Polson isn't qualifying, quantifying or making any judgments, value claims or even assessments of the records he chooses daily. Instead, it's simply about the label of the record or the 45 – the visual – that opens the door for *other people* to begin to document their own narratives around the influence and importance of the song. He isn't assessing, he's merely serving as a selector: facilitating a digital space for a community of readers/listeners to engage in memories (visual and sonic), thinking and theories on the importance of each sonic text the daily post highlights. Here, Polson fills a void and solves the problem of creating the space for sonic reflection and memory, while also bringing us back to

foundational sonic elements of Hip Hop culture that demand reflection and require review and recollection for the upcoming generation of Hip Hop scholars and cultural practitioners. Polson is also operating in a way that aligns with D. Bruce Campbell Jr.'s theory of cultural citation; Polson's IG posts embody story sharing as "an individual that is embedded in that culture or better yet, present for the story they are sharing" (Campbell 46). Polson is not only sharing sonic markers that initiate the storytelling of various Hip Hop cultural participants, but he himself is present, embedded in the culture and present for the story being shared; this allows for both authentic storytelling and accurate, sharable (and fact-checkable) narrative experiences. Similar to what scholars are doing with genealogy studies, Polson is creating a space for research connections. He is not only building connective webs of family trees for Hip Hop sonic sentiments, but he is also reinforcing the ways in which Hip Hop facilitates a review of the culture's canon; appreciating the original "foundation breaks" (Flores in Craig 44) played at Park Jams, or comprehending how certain R & B songs incite particular Hip Hop centered moments and memories brings a younger generation of Hip Hop heads into bridging their histories with their presence in order to inform their future.

How Might Sonic Lineage Interface With DJ Rhetoric?

So why are sonic lineage and DJ Rhetoric important? Let's put these ideas
in the mix with one another
to see how they blend, like beatmatching two records…

If we understand sonic lineage and DJ Rhetoric as part of a larger scholarly tradition around Hip Hop studies, and its potential within Rhetoric and Composition, and then more broadly still around African American rhetoric, language and literacy, then we can begin to situate the importance of these two particular constructs in the midst of contemporary uprisings and global pandemics.

There is no argument on Hip Hop as global popular culture anymore; it is a given, clear as day, when you turn on the TV and are sold products via Hip Hop in commercials. Take, for example, the pandemic's global DJ: D-Nice, who has parlayed the soul saving sounds of his IG-platform "Club Quarantine" into his own Ford F-150 advertisement, with a score straight outta 1989 with his chart-topping Hip Hop classic "Call Me D-Nice." D-Nice was one of the key DJs who brought us joy and escape in the midst of the earliest grips of the Covid-19 pandemic. His marathon-long IG DJ sets, entitled "Homeschool at Club Quarantine," grew virally to over 100,000 viewers and listeners (Schatz). "Homeschool at Club Quarantine" served as a digital party location that allowed co-workers from a small college to connect virtually on one side of the club, while Michelle Obama, Mark Zuckerberg, Oprah Winfrey, Bernie Sanders and Janet Jackson would slide through on the other; this party created much-needed community, a space for people to engage in a phenomenon of healing, homage and release. It honestly isn't even worth it to argue that Hip Hop is anything *other than* global Black popular culture. It is a given – clear as day – and tangibly actualized when your children turn on their iPads and other devices, and TikTok their way into

Hip Hop centered Black excellence (I'm especially intrigued by the #BlackGirlMagic that comes from Jalaiah Harmon and the Renegade [Lorenz])[6]. As we continue on within a twenty-first century that has centered Hip Hop as the driving force of global popular culture, it is key to understand the value Hip Hop has in its uncanny ability to touch the masses. Hip Hop's cultural capital can be harnessed as a means by which a diverse group of participants can be engaged; such engagement and interaction can be critical, especially in times of socio-political unrest as well as public health crises.

The power of Hip Hop pedagogy is both vast and significant; the ability to (re) imagine a diversity of thought, equity in knowledge sharing and educational practices for both teaching and learning with Hip Hop at the core is far from the "dying fad" the culture was labeled as over fifty years ago.

DJ Rhetoric and sonic lineage can become powerful rhetorical tools when aligned with the National Council of Teachers of English/Conference on College Composition and Communication (NCTE/CCCC) clarion call from 2020, entitled "This Ain't Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice!". In this statement around the ideas of promoting, proliferating and liberating Black linguistic strategies and rhetorical practices, there is a clear call to acknowledge the brilliance of Black youth and Black language by thwarting anti-Black racist language practices. This call becomes critically important, as we align Black language and linguistic practices with African American rhetoric, DJ Rhetoric and Hip Hop rhetoric. In the same way textual lineage can serve as a roadmap for creating a text-based family tree, I contend that sonic lineage can serve as Hip Hop's auditory family tree, and can contribute to DJ Rhetoric flourishing – as the modes, practices and techniques of the Hip Hop DJ form both a new media conception of sonic writing and the sentiments that sit at the foundation of Hip Hop rhetorical and linguistic practices. Hip Hop's cultural practices did not proliferate themselves through the guise of the emcee; they, instead, did so through the lens of the DJ. Identifying and honoring this historical and sonic lineage sits at the very core of understanding how DJ Rhetoric should be viewed as a creative cornerstone of Hip Hop musical and cultural history.

BONUS BEATS ALERT…
Aka Needle Droppin' Our Way into the Origins of DJ Rhetoric and Sonic Lineage: How We Might Move Forward

The stacks of records I depicted in the introductory narrative of this article served the same purpose as the stacks I moved through in the Sawyer library, through that big building on Appian Way, and through the last building that housed my doctoral cubicle. These stacks were a culmination of a dream I couldn't really envision detail-wise when I was "adulting" as a child. Still, I knew it would somehow be part of the mission and part of my journey. The idea of holding the cover, reviewing the imagery, squinting at the liner notes, and gaining a sense of the ingredients necessary to cook up each and every one of those albums in and of itself is a form of *and* formal literacy; a way by which the reader can begin to decipher the rhetorical elements of sonic composing. This becomes

evident in both volumes of *Check the Technique* by Brian Coleman, which demonstrates the importance of those notes alongside the mental processes explained by the sonic authors we know as Hip Hop artists – deejays and emcees, beatmakers and producers.

Visualizing literacy and rhetorical strategies in the twenty-first century has shifted us outside of the typical box presented by "text-based" practices that only transpire on the page. Opening the door to twenty-first century communicative practices such as DJ Rhetoric and sonic lineage can really push the fields of Hip Hop studies as well as Rhetoric and Composition to move towards achieving the demands outlined by the 2020 CCCC Special Committee on Composing a CCCC Statement on Anti-Black Racism and Black Linguistic Justice, Or, Why We
Cain't Breathe! in their most recent statement.

At the crossroads where the CCCC Black Linguistic Justice statement, Polson's #literacy-lineage project, DJ Rhetoric and sonic lineage converge is a fruitful location for how we might move forward (re)envisioning the importance of the sonic and the unwritten yet very tangible rhetorical and composing savvy of the DJ – even
when the "writing" we may attribute to it is sonic in nature. It is a (re)visioning that could be
quite useful for our students, who are connecting and engaging in their lives with the sonic as the score and the backdrop…
one record at a time.

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Notes

1. If you're new to this work, I urge you to keep reading. In the meantime, if you'd like to read more of the scholarship I've written about the DJ in Writing Studies, you can tap into the "Todd Craig" section of the Works Cited page, as well as articles such as ""Heavy Airplay, All Day with No Chorus": Classroom Sonic Consciousness in the Playlist Project" and "Sista Girl Rock: Women of Colour and Hip-Hop Deejaying as Raced/Gendered Knowledge and Language" by myself and Carmen Kynard, just to name a few more.

2. This sentiment is exemplified by Grimes DJ set at Coachella in 2024.

3. I delve into this work deeply in a book chapter entitled "'How Eve Saved My Soul': Sonic Lineage as the Prequel to the Playlist Project."

4. D.I.T.C. as a Hip Hop crew consists of Lord Finesse, Diamond D, Show (formally known as Showbiz), A.G., Fat Joe, O.C., Buckwild, and Big L (RIP). They originally coined this term as a crew name, Diggin' In The Crates, but also to describe the act of mining for samples and extensive record-shopping missions. It is important to credit this crew of Hip Hop cultural practitioners for the work they've done in giving the world this term.

5. What up, ALC? Typically, I call him Al. You might call him The Alchemist…

6. Shout out to Jalailah as the original Renegader (you can tap in to what she's doing on IG at @jalaiah). Hopefully this citation helps to document her pioneering creative status; this is my attempt to highlight her #BlackGirlMagic and not allow this to become the next Harlem Shake moment.

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