Black Noise

Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America

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eloquence, which I think kind of shook up the white television crews." Later, he noted that the gang truce and the political struggles articulated in that meeting were "translated into the [hip hop] musical culture." Hip hop, Davis concluded, "is the fundamental matrix of self-expression for this whole generation."[21]

CHAPTER TWO

"All Aboard the Night Train"

Flow, Layering, and Rupture in Postindustrial New York

Got a bum education, double-digit inflation
Can't take the train to the job, there's a strike at the station
Don't push me cause I'm close to the edge
I'm tryin' not to lose my head
It's like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder
How I keep from going under.
—"The Message"[1]

Life on the margins of postindustrial urban America is inscribed in hip hop style, sound, lyrics, and thematics.[2] Situated at the "crossroads of lack and desire," hip hop emerges from the deindustrialization meltdown where social alienation, prophetic imagination, and yearning intersect.[3] Hip hop is a cultural form that attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity, and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean history, identity, and community. It is the tension between the cultural fractures produced by postindustrial oppression and the binding ties of black cultural expressivity that sets the critical frame for the development of hip hop.[4]

The dynamic tensions and contradictions shaping hip hop culture can confound efforts at interpretation by even the most skilled critics and observers. Some analysts see hip hop as a quintessentially postmodern practice, and others view it as a present-day successor to premodern oral traditions. Some celebrate its critique of consumer capitalism, and others condemn it for its complicity with commercialism. To one enthusiastic group of critics, hip hop combines elements of speech and song, of dance and display, to call into being through performance new identities and subject positions. Yet, to another equally vociferous group, hip hop merely displays in phantasmagorical form the cultural logic of

late capitalism. I intend to demonstrate the importance of locating hip hop culture within the context of deindustrialization, to show how both postmodern and premodern interpretive frames fail to do justice to its complexities, and how hip hop's primary properties of flow, layering, and rupture simultaneously reflect and contest the social roles open to urban inner-city youths at the end of the twentieth century.

Worked out on the rusting urban core as a playground, hip hop transforms stray technological parts intended for cultural and industrial trash heaps into sources of pleasure and power. These transformations have become a basis for digital imagination all over the world. Its earliest practitioners came of age at the tail end of the Great Society, in the twilight of America's short-lived federal commitment to black civil rights and during the predawn of the Reagan-Bush era.[5] In hip hop, these abandoned parts, people, and social institutions were welded and then spliced together, not only as sources of survival but as sources of pleasure.

Hip hop replicates and reimagines the experiences of urban life and symbolically appropriates urban space through sampling, attitude, dance, style, and sound effects. Talk of subways, crews and posses, urban noise, economic stagnation, static and crossed signals leap out of hip hop lyrics, sounds, and themes. Graffiti artists spraypainted murals and (name) "tags" on trains, trucks, and playgrounds, claiming territories and inscribing their otherwise contained identities on public property.[6] Early breakdancers' elaborate technologically inspired street corner dances involving head spins on concrete sidewalks made the streets theatrically friendly and served as makeshift youth centers. The dancers' electric robotic mimicry and identity-transforming characterizations foreshadowed the fluid and shocking effect of morphing, a visual effect made famous in *Terminator* 2. DJs who initiated spontaneous street parties by attaching customized, makeshift turntables and speakers to street light electrical sources revised the use of central thoroughfares, made "open-air" community centers in neighborhoods where there were none. Rappers seized and used microphones as if amplification was a lifegiving source. Hip hop gives voice to the tensions and contradictions in the public urban landscape during a period of substantial transformation in New York and attempts to seize the shifting urban terrain, to make it work on behalf of the dispossessed.

Hip hop's attempts to negotiate new economic and technological conditions as well as new patterns of race, class, and gender oppression in urban America by appropriating subway facades, public streets, language, style, and sampling technology are only part of the story. Hip hop

music and culture also relies on a variety of Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American musical, oral, visual, and dance forms and practices in the face of a larger society that rarely recognizes the Afrodiasporic significance of such practices. It is, in fact, the dynamic and often contentious relationship between the two—larger social and political forces and black cultural priorities—that centrally shape and define hip hop.

In their work on the blues, Houston A. Baker and Hazel Carby describe the ways in which various themes and sounds in blues music articulate race-, gender-, and class-related experiences in southern rural black life, as well as the effects of industrialization and black northern and urban migration. Similarly, George Lipsitz's work on rock 'n' roll illustrates how post–WW II labor-related migration patterns, urbanization, municipal policies, and war-related technology critically shaped the sounds and themes in early rock 'n' roll and the cultural integrations that made it possible.[8] He also illustrates how rock 'n' roll depended heavily on black musical structures, slang, and performance rituals in producing its own lexicon.

Examining how musical forms are shaped by social forces is important, because it brings into focus how significantly technology and economics contribute to the development of cultural forms. It also illuminates both the historically specific aspects of musical expressions (e.g., rock 'n' roll as a post–WW II phenomena) and the stylistic links between musical forms across historical periods (e.g., mapping the relationship between rock 'n' roll and blues music). In line with this, Andre Craddock-Willis situates four major black musical forms: the blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, and rap as expressions that emerge in relation to significant historical conditions and the relationship between black Americans and the larger political and social character of America. Linking jazz to de facto racial segregation, rhythm and blues to the nagging inequality that fueled the civil rights movement, Willis locates these musical genres as cultural forms that articulate in part community reactions to specific social and political contexts. Yet, he also alludes to the points of continuity between these and other black forms and practices, such as the cultural traditions, styles, and approaches to sound, motion, and rhythm that link jazz to blues and blues to rap.[9]

Willis, however, misapplies this useful formulation when he attends to rap music and its relationship to contemporary American society. For him, rap's distinguishing characteristic is its status as a postmodern form whose contradictory articulations are a by-product of the postmodern condition. In describing rap music as "an expression of the complexity of post-modern African-American life," Willis argues that

rap's contradictory stance toward capitalism, its raging sexism, and other "non progressive" elements are unresolved postmodern contradictions that, once they have been sorted out, will permit rap to take its place "on the historical continuum of Black musical expression." Willis perceives rap's contradictory positions to be postmodern contradictions, rather than an expression of long-standing social and political inequalities and beliefs. He situates rap's "bad" facets as points of discontinuity with previous black cultural forms and its "good" facets as points of continuity, going so far as to suggest that once these good and evil forces are worked out and good has prevailed, rap will be able to "take its place at the altar" of emancipatory black cultural production.[10]

There are at least three major, yet familiar, problems with this formulation. First, it vigorously erases the contradictory stance toward capitalism, raging sexism, and other "non progressive" elements that have *always* been part and parcel of jazz, the blues, and R&B, as well as any number of other nonblack cultural forms. Early toasts are as vulgar and jazz and blues lyrics are as sexist as any contemporary rap lyrics; the desire for commodities as articulated in some blues and R&B lyrics rivals rap's frequent obsession with conspicuous consumption. One must have rather deeply rose-tinted lenses to miss the abundant and persistent existence of these "non progressive" elements throughout many cultural expressions.

Second, it necessarily refuses to understand these contradictions as *central* to hip hop and to popular cultural articulations in general. Hip hop's liberatory, visionary, and politically progressive elements are deeply linked to those regressive elements that Willis believes "sells the tradition short." This aspect of hip hop's contradictions is not unique to postmodernity, it is a central aspect of popular expression and popular thought. In other words, cultural forms contain cultural ideas and ways of thinking that are already a part of social life. In fact, it is these contradictions that make the culture coherent and relevant to the society in which it operates. It is the contradictory nature of pleasure and social resistance in the popular realm that must be confronted, theorized, and understood, instead of erasing or rigidly rejecting those practices that ruin our quest for untainted politically progressive cultural expressions.[11]

Finally, his identification of rap as a postmodern form is not consistent with his previous formulations of jazz, blues, and R&B as forms that are rooted in economic relations, power relationships, and social struggle. To be consistent with his historical linking of jazz to de facto segregation and R&B to the "de-humanization" that fueled the civil

rights movement, he should have linked rap *and* hip hop more directly to the processes of urban deindustrialization in the 1970s, the post-industrial urban landscape in the 1980s, and their impact on African-American urban communities.

Expanding Willis's frame to include hip hop, I would like to retain his central formulation; that is, the necessary tension between the historical specificity of hip hop's emergence and the points of continuity between hip hop and several Afrodiasporic forms, traditions, and practices. Hip hop's development in relationship to New York cultural politics in the 1970s is not unlike the relationship between other major cultural expressions and the broader social contexts within which they emerged. Hip hop shares the experimental and innovative qualities that characterized rock 'n' roll, the blues, and many other musically based cultural forms that have developed at the junctures of major social transitions. Yet, the emergence of hip hop's styles and sounds cannot be considered mere by-products of these broad sweeping forces. Hip hop is propelled by Afrodiasporic traditions. Stylistic continuities in dance, vocal articulations, and instrumentation between rap, breakdancing, urban blues, be bop, and rock 'n' roll move within and between these historical junctions and larger social forces, creating Afrodiasporic narratives that manage and stabilize these transitions.[12]

In an attempt to rescue rap from its identity as postindustrial commercial product and situate it in the history of respected black cultural practices, many historical accounts of rap's roots consider it a direct extension of African-American oral, poetic, and protest traditions, to which it is clearly and substantially indebted. This accounting, which builds important bridges between rap's use of boasting, signifying, preaching, and earlier related black oral traditions produces at least three problematic effects. First, it reconstructs rap music as a singular oral poetic form that appears to have developed autonomously (e.g., outside hip hop culture) in the 1970s; quite to the contrary, as music historian Reebee Garofalo points out, "rap music must be understood as one cultural element within a larger social movement known as hip hop."[13] Second, it substantially marginalizes the significance of rap's *music*. Rap's musical elements and its use of music technology are a crucial aspect of the development of the form and are absolutely critical to the evolution of hip hop generally. Third, it renders invisible the crucial role of the postindustrial city on the shape and direction of rap and hip hop. Clearly, rap's oral and protest roots, its use of toasting, signifying, boasting, and black folklore are vitally important; however these influences

are only one facet of the context for rap's emergence. Rap's primary context for development is hip hop culture, the Afrodiasporic traditions it extends and revises, *and* the New York urban terrain in the 1970s.

Situating the emergence of rap music inside hip hop is not simply a matter of historical accuracy. If the specificity of rap music is to be fully understood, the coherence of hip hop style and how rap developed inside of it is crucial. The hip hop context helps to show how rap is separate and distinct from other related black forms such as toasting and signifying and how its musical collages, which have discrete qualities that differ from jazz, R&B, disco, and soul, developed. It also provides a richer understanding of the intertextual relationships between graffiti, rap, and breakdancing. Although rap is clearly a form of protest, naming it protest music is not sufficient motivation for the emergence of rap music or hip hop. Being angry and poor were not new or unusual phenomena for many African Americans in the 1970s. Furthermore, as a great deal of the history of black cultural practices has been disproportionately explored via male subjects, the oral and protest roots models for rap's development refer to a male-centered scholarly tradition that inadvertently contributes to a contemporary analysis that further marginalizes women producers.[14] Women, although fewer in number than their male counterparts, were integral members in hip hop culture several years before "Rapper's Delight" brought rapping to dominant American popular music. Gender politics were an important facet of hip hop's development. Finally, and most important for my purposes, an examination of how and why hip hop arises helps us to understand the logic of rap's development and links the intertextual and dialogic qualities in rap to the diverse cultural and social context within which it emerges.

The chief questions under consideration are: What is hip hop culture, and what contributed to its emergence? What are some of the defining aesthetic and stylistic characteristics of hip hop? What is it about the postindustrial city in general and the social and political terrain in the 1970s in New York City specifically that contributed to the emergence and early reception of hip hop? Even as today's rappers revise and redirect rap music, most understand themselves as working out of a tradition of style, attitude, and form that has critical and primary roots in New York City in the 1970s. Substantial postindustrial shifts in economic conditions, access to housing, demographics, and communication networks were crucial to the formation of the conditions that nurtured the cultural hybrids and sociopolitical tenor of hip hop's lyrics and music.

Yet, hip hop has styles and themes that share striking similarities with many past and contiguous Afrodiasporic musical and cultural expressions. These themes and styles, for the most part, are revised and reinterpreted, using contemporary cultural and technological elements. Hip hop's central forms—graffiti, breakdancing, and rap music—developed in relation to one another and in relation to the larger society. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to offering a more in-depth understanding of the similarities between hip hop and other cultural forms and of the specificity of hip hop style as it has been shaped by market forces, dominant cultural ideas, and the postindustrial urban context.

The Urban Context

Postindustrial conditions in urban centers across America reflect a complex set of global forces that continue to shape the contemporary urban metropolis. The growth of multinational telecommunications networks, global economic competition, a major technological revolution, the formation of new international divisions of labor, the increasing power of finance relative to production, and new migration patterns from Third World industrializing nations have all contributed to the economic and social restructuring of urban America. These global forces have had a direct and sustained impact on urban job opportunity structures, have exacerbated long-standing racial and gender-based forms of discrimination, and have contributed to increasing multinational corporate control of market conditions and national economic health.[15] Large-scale restructuring of the workplace and job market has had its effect upon most facets of everyday life. It has placed additional pressures on local community-based networks and whittled down already limited prospects for social mobility.

In the 1970s, cities across the country were gradually losing federal funding for social services, information service corporations were beginning to replace industrial factories, and corporate developers were buying up real estate to be converted into luxury housing, leaving working-class residents with limited affordable housing, a shrinking job market and diminishing social services. The poorest neighborhoods and the least powerful groups were the least protected and had the smallest safety nets. By the 1980s, the privileged elites displayed unabashed greed as their strategies to reclaim and rebuild downtown business and tourist zones with municipal and federal subsidies exacerbated the already widening gap between classes and races.

Given New York's status as hub city for international capital and

information services, it is not surprising that these larger structural changes and their effects were quickly and intensely felt there.[16] As John Mollenkopf notes, "during the 1970s, the U.S. system of cities crossed a watershed. New York led other old, industrial metropolitan areas into population and employment decline."[17] The federal funds that might have offset this process had been diminishing throughout the 1970s. In 1975, President Ford's unequivocal veto to requests for a federal bail out to prevent New York from filing for bankruptcy made New York a national symbol for the fate of older cities under his administration. The New York *Daily News* legendary headline "Ford to New York: Drop Dead" captured the substance and temperament of Ford's veto and sent a sharp message to cities around the country.[18] Virtually bankrupt and in a critical state of disrepair, New York City and New York State administrators finally negotiated a federal loan, albeit one accompanied by an elaborate package of service cuts and that carried harsh repayment terms. "Before the crisis ended," Daniel Walkowitz notes, "60,000 city employees went off the payroll, and social and public services suffered drastic cuts. The city had avoided default only after the teachers' union allowed its pension fund to become collateral for city loans."[19] These deep social service cuts were part of a larger trend in unequal wealth distribution and was accompanied by a housing crisis that continued well into the 1980s. Between 1978 and 1986, the people in the bottom 20 percent of the income scale experienced an absolute decline in income, whereas the top 20 percent experienced most of the economic growth. Blacks and Hispanics disproportionately occupied this bottom fifth. During this same period, 30 percent of New York's Hispanic households (40 percent for Puerto Ricans) and 25 percent of black households lived at or below the poverty line. Since this period, low-income housing has continued to disappear and blacks and Hispanics are still much more likely to live in overcrowded, dilapidated, and seriously undermaintained spaces.[20] It is not surprising that these serious trends have contributed to New York's large and chronically homeless population.

In addition to housing problems, New York and many large urban centers faced other major economic and demographic forces that sustained and exacerbated significant structural inequalities. Even though urban America has always been socially and economically divided, these divisions have taken on a new dimension. At the same time that racial succession and immigration patterns were reshaping the city's population and labor force, shifts in the occupational structure away from a high-wage, high-employment economy grounded in manufacturing,

trucking, warehousing, and wholesale trade and toward a low-wage, low-employment economy geared toward producer services generated new forms of inequality. As Daniel Walkowitz suggests, New York became "sharply divided between an affluent, technocratic, professional, white-collar group managing the financial and commercial life of an international city and an unemployed and underemployed service sector which is substantially black and Hispanic." Earlier divisions in the city were predominantly ethnic and economic. Today, "racial and gender divisions and the growing predominance of white-collar work on the one hand and worklessness on the other hand have made New York's labor market resemble that of a Third World city."[21] As Mollenkopf and Castells point out, blue-collar white ethnics who were the single largest social stratum in the 1950s are vastly diminished today. In their place, three new groups have emerged as the dominant stratum. The largest group of the three are white male professionals and managers, followed by female and black or Latino clerical and service workers, and finally, Latino and Asian manufacturing workers. "New York," Mollenkopf concludes, "has been transformed from a relatively well-off white blue-collar city into a more economically divided, multi-racial white collar city." This "disorganized periphery" of civil service and manufacturing workers contributes to the consolidation of power among white-collar professional corporate managers, creating the massive inequalities displayed in New York.[22]

The commercial imperatives of corporate America have also undermined the process of transmitting and sharing local knowledge in the urban metropolis. Ben Bagdikian's study *The Media Monopoly* reveals that monopolistic tendencies in commercial enterprises seriously constrain access to a diverse flow of information. For example, urban renewal relocation efforts not only dispersed central-city populations to the suburbs, but also they replaced the commerce of the street with the needs of the metropolitan market. Advertisers geared newspaper articles and television broadcasts toward the purchasing power of suburban buyers, creating a dual "crisis of representation" in terms of whose lives and images were represented physically in the paper and whose interests got represented in the corridors of power.[23] These media outlet and advertising shifts have been accompanied by a massive telecommunications revolution in the information-processing industry. Once the domain of the government, information processing and communication technology now lie at the heart of corporate America. As a result of government deregulation in communications via the breakup of AT&T in 1982, communication industries have consolidated and internation-

alized. Today, telecommunications industries are global data-transmittal corporations with significant control over radio, television, cable, telephone, computer, and other electronic transmittal systems. Telecommunication expansion, coupled with corporate consolidation has dismantled local community networks and has irrevocably changed the means and character of communication.[24] Since the mid-1980s, these expansions and consolidations have been accompanied by a tidal wave of widely available communications products that have revolutionized business and personal communications. Facsimile machines, satellite-networked beepers, cordless phones, electronic mail networks, cable television expansions, VCRs, compact discs, video cameras and games, and personal computers have dramatically transformed the speed and character of speech, written, and visual communication.

Postindustrial conditions had a profound effect on black and Hispanic communities.[25] Shrinking federal funds and affordable housing, shifts in the occupational structure away from blue-collar manufacturing and toward corporate and information services, along with frayed local communication patterns, meant that new immigrant populations and the city's poorest residents paid the highest price for deindustrialization and economic restructuring. These communities are more susceptible to slumlords, redevelopers, toxic waste dumps, drug rehabilitation centers, violent criminals, red-lining, and inadequate city services and transportation. It also meant that the city's ethnic and working-class–based forms of community aid and support were growing increasingly less effective against these new conditions.

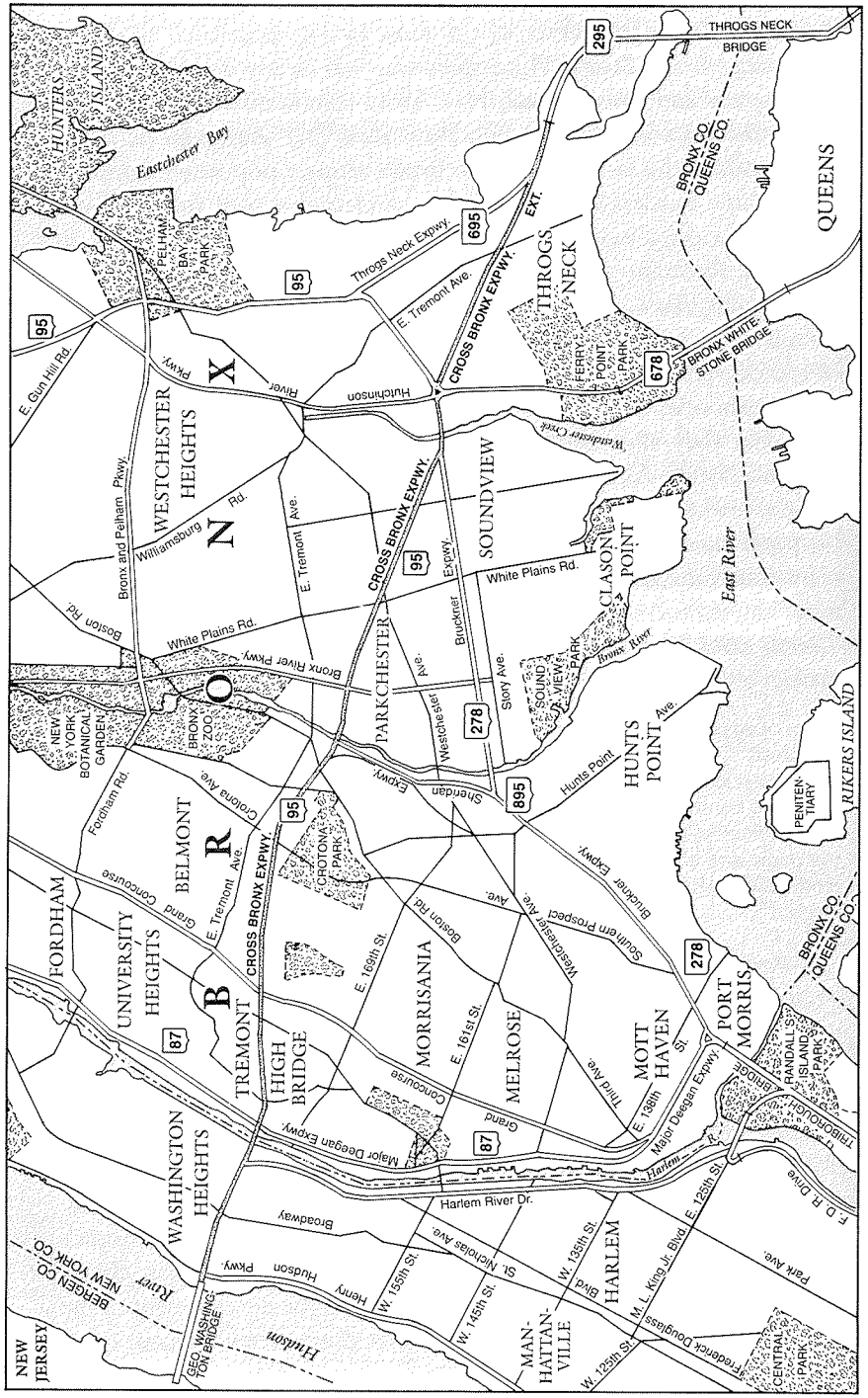
In the case of the South Bronx, which has been frequently dubbed the "home of hip hop culture," these larger postindustrial conditions were exacerbated by disruptions considered an "unexpected side effect" of the larger politically motivated policies of "urban renewal." In the early 1970s, this renewal [sic] project involved massive relocations of economically fragile people of color from different areas in New York City into parts of the South Bronx. Subsequent ethnic and racial transition in the South Bronx was not a gradual process that might have allowed already taxed social and cultural institutions to respond self-protectively; instead, it was a brutal process of community destruction and relocation executed by municipal officials and under the direction of legendary planner Robert Moses.

Between the late 1930s and the late 1960s Moses, a very powerful city planner, executed a number of public works projects, highways, parks, and housing projects that significantly reshaped the profile of New York City. In 1959, city, state, and federal authorities began

the implementation of his planned Cross-Bronx Expressway that cut directly through the center of the most heavily populated working-class areas in the Bronx. The Expressway was clearly designed to link New Jersey and Long Island, New York, communities and to facilitate suburban commutation into New York City. Although he could have modified his route slightly to bypass densely populated working-class ethnic residential communities, he elected a path that required the demolition of hundreds of residential and commercial buildings. In addition, throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, some 60,000 Bronx homes were razed. Designating these old blue-collar housing units as "slums," Moses's Title I Slum Clearance program forced the relocation of 170,000 people.[26] These "slums" were in fact densely populated stable neighborhoods, comprised mostly of working- and lower-middle class Jews, but they also contained solid Italian, German, Irish and black neighborhoods. Although the neighborhoods under attack had a substantial Jewish population, black and Puerto Rican residents were disproportionately affected. Thirty-seven percent of the relocated residents were nonwhite. This, coupled with the subsequent "white flight," devastated kin networks and neighborhood services. Marshall Berman, in *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, reflects on the massive disruption Moses's project created:

> Miles of streets alongside the road were choked with dust and fumes and deafening noise. . . . Apartment houses that had been settled and stable for over twenty years emptied out, often virtually overnight; large and impoverished black and Hispanic families, fleeing even worse slums, were moved wholesale, often under the auspices of the Welfare Department, which even paid inflated rents, spreading panic and accelerating flight. . . . Thus depopulated, economically depleted, emotionally shattered, the Bronx was ripe for all the dreaded spirals of urban blight.[27]

Between the late 1960s and mid-1970s, the vacancy rates in the southern section of the Bronx, where demolition was most devastating, skyrocketed. Nervous landlords sold their property as quickly as possible, often to professional slumlords, which accelerated the flight of white tenants into northern sections of the Bronx and into Westchester. Equally anxious shopkeepers sold their shops and established businesses elsewhere. The city administration, touting Moses's expressway as a sign of progress and modernization, was unwilling to admit the devastation that had occurred. Like many of his public works projects, Moses's Cross-Bronx Expressway supported the interests of the upper classes against the interests of the poor and intensified the development of the vast economic and social inequalities that characterize contemporary



New York. The newly "relocated" black and Hispanic residents in the South Bronx were left with few city resources, fragmented leadership, and limited political power.

The disastrous effects of these city policies went relatively unnoticed in the media until 1977, when two critical events fixed New York and the South Bronx as national symbols of ruin and isolation. During the summer of 1977, an extensive power outage blacked out New York, and hundreds of stores were looted and vandalized. The poorest neighborhoods (the South Bronx, Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and Crown Heights areas in Brooklyn, the Jamaica area in Queens, and Harlem), where most of the looting took place, were depicted by the City's media organs as lawless zones where crime is sanctioned and chaos bubbles just below the surface. The 1965 blackout, according to the *New York Times* was "peaceful by contrast," suggesting that America's most racially tumultuous decade was no match for the despair and frustration articulated in the summer of 1977.[28] The blackout seemed to raise the federal stakes in maintaining urban social order. Three months later, President Carter made his "sobering" historic motorcade visit through the South Bronx, to "survey the devastation of the last five years" and announced an unspecified "commitment to cities." (Not to its inhabitants?) In the national imagination, the South Bronx became the primary "symbol of America's woes."[29]

Following this lead, images of abandoned buildings in the South Bronx became central popular cultural icons. Negative local color in popular film exploited the devastation facing the residents of the South Bronx and used their communities as a backdrop for social ruin and barbarism. As Michael Ventura astutely notes, these popular depictions (and I would add, the news coverage as well) rendered silent the people who struggled with and maintained life under difficult conditions: "In roughly six hours of footage—*Fort Apache*, *Wolfen* and *Koyaanisqatsi*—we haven't been introduced to one soul who actually lives in the South Bronx. We haven't heard one voice speaking its own language. We've merely watched a symbol of ruin: the South Bronx [as] last act before the end of the world."[30] Depictions of black and Hispanic neighborhoods were drained of life, energy, and vitality. The message was loud and clear: to be stuck here was to be lost. Yet, although these visions of loss and futility became defining characteristics, the youngest generation of South Bronx exiles were building creative and aggressive outlets for expression and identification. The new ethnic groups who made the South Bronx their home in the 1970s, while facing social isolation, economic fragility, truncated communication media, and shrink-

ing social service organizations, began building their own cultural networks, which would prove to be resilient and responsive in the age of high technology. North American blacks, Jamaicans, Puerto Ricans, and other Caribbean people with roots in other postcolonial contexts reshaped their cultural identities and expressions in a hostile, technologically sophisticated, multiethnic, urban terrain. Although city leaders and the popular press had literally and figuratively condemned the South Bronx neighborhoods and their inhabitants, its youngest black and Hispanic residents answered back.

Hip Hop

Hip hop culture emerged as a source for youth of alternative identity formation and social status in a community whose older local support institutions had been all but demolished along with large sectors of its built environment. Alternative local identities were forged in fashions and language, street names, and most important, in establishing neighborhood crews or posses. Many hip hop fans, artists, musicians, and dancers continue to belong to an elaborate system of crews or posses. The crew, a local source of identity, group affiliation, and support system appears repeatedly in all of my interviews and virtually all rap lyrics and cassette dedications, music video performances, and media interviews with artists. Identity in hip hop is deeply rooted in the specific, the local experience, and one's attachment to and status in a local group or alternative family. These crews are new kinds of families forged with intercultural bonds that, like the social formation of gangs, provide insulation and support in a complex and unyielding environment and may serve as the basis for new social movements. The postindustrial city, which provided the context for creative development among hip hop's earliest innovators, shaped their cultural terrain, access to space, materials, and education. While graffiti artists' work was significantly aided by advances in spray paint technology, they used the urban transit system as their canvas. Rappers and DJs disseminated their work by copying it on tape-dubbing equipment and playing it on powerful, portable "ghetto blasters." At a time when budget cuts in school music programs drastically reduced access to traditional forms of instrumentation and composition, inner-city youths increasingly relied on recorded sound. Breakdancers used their bodies to mimic "transformers" and other futuristic robots in symbolic street battles. Early Puerto Rican, Afro-Caribbean, and black American hip hop artists transformed obsolete vocational skills from marginal occupations into the raw materials

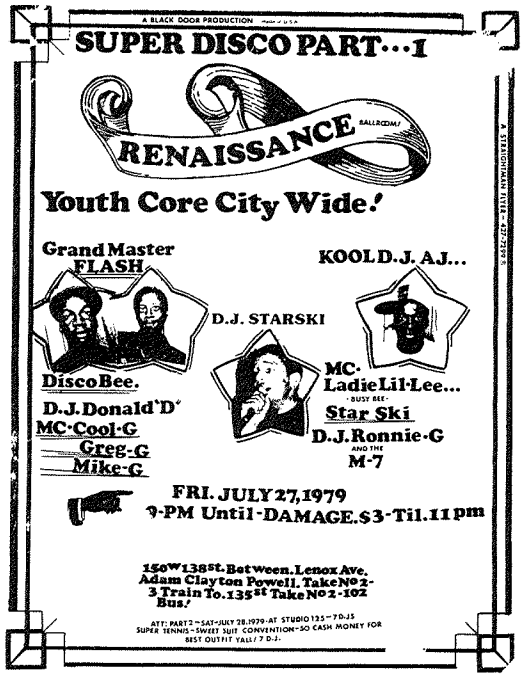
for creativity and resistance. Many of them were "trained" for jobs in fields that were shrinking or that no longer exist. Puerto Rican graffiti writer Futura graduated from a trade school specializing in the printing industry. However, as most of the jobs for which he was being trained had already been computerized, he found himself working at McDonald's after graduation. Similarly, African-American DJ Red Alert (who also has family from the Caribbean) reviewed blueprints for a drafting company until computer automation rendered his job obsolete. Jamaican DJ Kool Herc attended Alfred E. Smith auto mechanic trade school, and African-American Grandmaster Flash learned how to repair electronic equipment at Samuel Gompers vocational High School. (One could say Flash "fixed them alright.") Salt and Pepa (both with family roots in the West Indies) worked as phone telemarketing representatives at Sears while considering nursing school. Puerto Rican breakdancer Crazy Legs began breakdancing largely because his single mother couldn't afford Little League baseball fees.[31] All of these artists found themselves positioned with few resources in marginal economic circumstances, but each of them found ways to become famous as an entertainer by appropriating the most advanced technologies and emerging cultural forms. Hip hop artists used the tools of obsolete industrial technology to traverse contemporary crossroads of lack and desire in urban Afrodiasporic communities.

Stylistic continuities were sustained by internal cross-fertilization between rapping, breakdancing, and graffiti writing. Some graffiti writers, such as black American Phase 2, Haitian Jean-Michel Basquiat, Futura, and black American Fab Five Freddy produced rap records. Other writers drew murals that celebrated favorite rap songs (e.g., Futura's mural "The Breaks" was a whole car mural that paid homage to Kurtis Blows's rap of the same name). Breakdancers, DJs, and rappers wore graffiti-painted jackets and tee-shirts. DJ Kool Herc was a graffiti writer and dancer first before he began playing records. Hip hop events featured breakdancers, rappers, and DJs as triple-bill entertainment. Graffiti writers drew murals for DJ's stage platforms and designed posters and flyers to advertise hip hop events. Breakdancer Crazy Legs, founding member of the Rock Steady Crew, describes the communal atmosphere between writers, rappers, and breakers in the formative years of hip hop: "Summing it up, basically going to a jam back then was (about) watching people drink, (break) dance, compare graffiti art in their black books. These jams were thrown by the (hip hop) D.J. . . . it was about piecing while a jam was going on."[32] Of course, sharing ideas and styles is not always a peaceful process. Hip hop is very competitive and con-

frontational; these traits are both resistance to and preparation for a hostile world that denies and denigrates young people of color. Breakdancers often fought other breakdance crews out of jealousy; writers sometimes destroyed murals and rappers and DJ battles could break out in fights. Hip hop remains a never-ending battle for status, prestige, and group adoration, always in formation, always contested, and never fully achieved. Competitions among and cross-fertilization between breaking, graffiti writing, and rap music was fueled by shared local experiences and social position and similarities in approaches to sound, motion, communication, and style among hip hop's Afrodiasporic communities.

As in many African and Afrodiasporic cultural forms, hip hop's prolific self-naming is a form of reinvention and self-definition.[33] Rappers, DJs, graffiti artists, and breakdancers all take on hip hop names and identities that speak to their role, personal characteristics, expertise, or "claim to fame." DJ names often fuse technology with mastery and style: DJ Cut Creator, Jazzy Jeff, Spindarella, Terminator X Assault Technician, Wiz, and Grandmaster Flash. Many rappers have nicknames that suggest street smarts, coolness, power, and supremacy: L.L. Cool J. (Ladies Love Cool James), Kool Moe Dee, Queen Latifah, Dougie Fresh (and the Get Fresh Crew), D-Nice, Hurricane Gloria, Guru, MC Lyte, EPMD (Eric and Parrish Making Dollars), Ice-T, Ice Cube, Kid-N-Play, Boss, Eazy E, King Sun, and Sir Mix-a-Lot. Some names serve as self-mocking tags; others critique society, such as, Too Short, The Fat Boys, S1Ws (Security of the First World), The Lench Mob, NWA (Niggas with Attitude), and Special Ed. The hip hop identities for such breakdancers as Crazy Legs, Wiggles, Frosty Freeze, Boogaloo Shrimp, and Headspin highlight their status as experts known for special moves. Taking on new names and identities offers "prestige from below" in the face of limited access to legitimate forms of status attainment.

In addition to the centrality of naming, identity, and group affiliation, rappers, DJs, graffiti writers, and breakdancers claim turf and gain local status by developing new styles. As Hebdige's study on punk illustrates, style can be used as a gesture of refusal or as a form of oblique challenge to structures of domination.[34] Hip hop artists use style as a form of identity formation that plays on class distinctions and hierarchies by using commodities to claim the cultural terrain. Clothing and consumption rituals testify to the power of consumption as a means of cultural expression. Hip hop fashion is an especially rich example of this sort of appropriation and critique via style. Exceptionally large "chunk" gold and diamond jewelry (usually fake) mocks, yet affirms, the



Courtesy of Kid (of Kid-N-Play)

gold fetish in Western trade; fake Gucci and other designer emblems cup up and patch-stitched to jackets, pants, hats, wallets, and sneakers in custom shops, work as a form of sartorial warfare (especially when fake Gucci–covered b-boys and b-girls brush past Fifth Avenue ladies adorned by the "real thing.") Hip hop's late 1980s fashion rage—the large plastic (alarm?) clock worn around the neck over leisure/sweat suits—suggested a number of contradictory tensions between work, time, and leisure.[35] Early 1990s trends—super-oversized pants and urban warrior outer apparel, "hoodies," "snooties," "tims," and "triple fat" goose down coats, make clear the severity of the urban storms to be weathered and the saturation of disposable goods in the crafting of cultural expressions.[36] As an alternative means of status formation, hip hop style forges local identities for teenagers who understand their limited access to traditional avenues of social status attainment. Fab Five Freddy, an early rapper and graffiti writer, explains the link between style and identity in hip hop and its significance for gaining local status: "You make a new style. That's what life on the street is all about. What's at stake is honor and position on the street. That's what makes it so important, that's what makes it feel so good—that pressure on you to be the best. Or to try to be the best. To develop a new style nobody can deal with."[37] Styles "nobody can deal with" in graffiti, breaking, and rap music not only boost status, but also they articulate several shared approaches to sound and motion found in the Afrodiaspora. As Arthur Jafa has pointed out, stylistic continuities between breaking, graffiti style, rapping, and musical construction seem to center around three concepts: *flow*, *layering*, and *ruptures in line*.[38] In hip hop, visual, physical, musical, and lyrical lines are set in motion, broken abruptly with sharp angular breaks, yet they sustain motion and energy through fluidity and flow. In graffiti, long-winding, sweeping, and curving letters are broken and camouflaged by sudden breaks in line. Sharp, angular, broken letters are written in extreme italics, suggesting forward or backward motion. Letters are double and triple shadowed in such a way as to illustrate energy forces radiating from the center—suggesting circular motion—yet, the scripted words move horizontally.

Breakdancing moves highlight flow, layering, and ruptures in line. Popping and locking are moves in which the joints are snapped abruptly into angular positions. And, yet, these snapping movements take place one joint after the previous one—creating a semiliquid effect that moves the energy toward the fingertip or toe. In fact, two dancers may pass the popping energy force back and forth between each other via finger to finger contact, setting off a new wave. In this pattern, the line

is both a series of angular breaks and yet sustains energy and motion through flow. Breakers double each other's moves, like line shadowing or layering in graffiti, intertwine their bodies into elaborate shapes, transforming the body into a new entity (like camouflage in graffiti's wild style), and then, one body part at a time reverts to a relaxed state. Abrupt, fractured yet graceful footwork leaves the eye one step behind the motion, creating a time-lapse effect that not only mimics graffiti's use of line shadowing but also creates spatial links between the moves that gives the foot series flow and fluidity.[39]

The music and vocal rapping in rap music also privileges flow, layering, and ruptures in line. Rappers speak of flow explicitly in lyrics, referring to an ability to move easily and powerfully through complex lyrics as well as of the flow in the music.[40] The flow and motion of the initial bass or drum line in rap music is abruptly ruptured by scratching (a process that highlights as it breaks the flow of the base rhythm), or the rhythmic flow is interrupted by other musical passages. Rappers stutter and alternatively race through passages, always moving within the beat or in response to it, often using the music as a partner in rhyme. These verbal moves highlight lyrical flow and points of rupture. Rappers layer meaning by using the same word to signify a variety of actions and objects; they call out to the DJ to "lay down a beat," which is expected to be interrupted, ruptured. DJs layer sounds literally one on top of the other, creating a dialogue between sampled sounds and words.

What is the significance of flow, layering, and rupture as demonstrated on the body and in hip hop's lyrical, musical, and visual works? Interpreting these concepts theoretically, one can argue that they create and sustain rhythmic motion, continuity, and circularity via flow; accumulate, reinforce, and embellish this continuity through layering; and manage threats to these narratives by building in ruptures that highlight the continuity as it momentarily challenges it. These effects at the level of style and aesthetics suggest affirmative ways in which profound social dislocation and rupture can be managed and perhaps contested in the cultural arena. Let us imagine these hip hop principles as a blueprint for social resistance and affirmation: create sustaining narratives, accumulate them, layer, embellish, and transform them. However, be also prepared for rupture, find pleasure in it, in fact, *plan on* social rupture. When these ruptures occur, use them in creative ways that will prepare you for a future in which survival will demand a sudden shift in ground tactics.

Although accumulation, flow, circularity, and planned ruptures exist across a wide range of Afrodiasporic cultural forms, they do not take

place outside of capitalist commercial constraints. Hip hop's explicit focus on consumption has frequently been mischaracterized as a movement *into* the commodity market (e.g., hip hop is no longer "authentically" black, if it is for sale). Instead, hip hop's moment(s) of incorporation are a shift in the already existing relationship hip hop has always had to the commodity system. For example, the hip hop DJ produces, amplifies, and revises already recorded sounds, rappers use high-end microphones, and it would be naive to think that breakers, rappers, DJs and writers were never interested in monetary compensation for their work. Graffiti murals, breakdancing moves, and rap lyrics often appropriated and sometimes critiqued verbal and visual elements and physical movements from popular commercial culture, especially television, comic books, and karate movies. If anything, black style through hip hop has contributed to the continued Afro-Americanization of contemporary commercial culture. The contexts for creation in hip hop were never fully outside or in opposition to commodities; they involved struggles over public space and access to commodified materials, equipment, and products of economic viability. It is a common misperception among hip hop artists and cultural critics that during the early days, hip hop was motivated by pleasure rather than profit, as if the two were incompatible. The problem was not that they were uniformly uninterested in profit; rather, many of the earliest practitioners were unaware that they could profit from their pleasure. Once this link was made, hip hop artists began marketing themselves wholeheartedly. Just as graffiti writers hitched a ride on the subways and used its power to distribute their tags, rappers "hijacked" the market for their own purposes, riding the currents that were already out there, not just for wealth but for empowerment, and to assert their own identities. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the market for hip hop was still based inside New York's black and Hispanic communities. So, although there is an element of truth to this common perception, what is more important about the shift in hip hop's orientation is not its movement from precommodity to commodity but the shift in control over the scope and direction of the profit-making process, out of the hands of local black and Hispanic entrepreneurs and into the hands of larger white-owned, multinational businesses.

Hebdige's work on the British punk movement identifies this shift as the moment of incorporation or recuperation by dominant culture and perceives it to be a critical element in the dynamics of the struggle over the meaning(s) of popular expression. "The process of recuperation," Hebdige argues, "takes two characteristic forms . . . one of conversion of

subcultural signs (dress, music, etc.) into mass-produced objects and the 'labelling' and redefinition of deviant behavior by dominant groups—the police, media and judiciary." Hebdige astutely points out, however, that communication in a subordinate cultural form, even prior to the point of recuperation, usually takes place via commodities, "even if the meanings attached to those commodities are purposefully distorted or overthrown." And so, he concludes, "it is very difficult to sustain any absolute distinction between commercial exploitation on the one hand and creativity and originality on the other."[41]

Hebdige's observations regarding the process of incorporation and the tension between commercial exploitation and creativity as articulated in British punk is quite relevant to hip hop. Hip hop has always been articulated via commodities and engaged in the revision of meanings attached to them. Clearly, hip hop signs and meanings are converted, and behaviors are relabeled by dominant institutions. As the relatively brief history of hip hop that follows illustrates, graffiti, rap, and breakdancing were fundamentally transformed as they moved into new relations with dominant cultural institutions.[42] In 1994, rap music is one of the most heavily traded popular commodities in the market, yet it still defies total corporate control over the music, its local use and incorporation at the level of stable or exposed meanings.

Expanding on the formulation advanced by Lipsitz and others at the outset, in the brief history of hip hop that follows I attempt to demonstrate the necessary tension between the historical specificity of hip hop's emergence and the points of continuity between hip hop and several black forms and practices. It is also an overview of the early stages of hip hop and its relationship to popular cultural symbols and products and its revisions of black cultural practices. This necessarily includes hip hop's direct and sustained contact with dominant cultural institutions in the early to mid-1980s and the ways in which these practices emerge in relation to larger social conditions and relationships, including the systematic marginalization of women cultural producers. In each practice, gender power relations problematized and constrained the role of women hip hop artists, and dominant cultural institutions shaped hip hop's transformations.

GRAFFITI

Although graffiti as a social movement (i.e., writing names, symbols, and images on public facades) first emerged in New York during the late 1960s, it is not until almost a decade later that it began to develop elaborate styles and widespread visibility. Even though the vast majority

of graffiti writers are black and Hispanic, the writer credited with inspiring the movement, Taki 183, is a Greek teenager named Demetrius who lived in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan. While working as a messenger, traveling by subway to all five boroughs of the city, Taki wrote his name all over the subway cars and stations. In 1971, a staff writer at the *New York Times* located Taki and published a story about his tagging that apparently "struck a responsive chord" among his peers. Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant describe the effect Taki's notoriety had on his peers:

> Kids were impressed by the public notoriety of a name appearing all over the city (and) realized that the pride they felt in seeing their name up in the neighborhood could expand a hundredfold if it traveled beyond the narrow confines of the block. The competition for fame began in earnest as hundreds of youngsters, emulating Taki 183, began to tag trains and public buildings all over town. "Getting up" became a vocation. Kids whose names appeared the most frequently or in the most inaccessible places became folk heroes.[43]

By the mid-1970s, graffiti took on new focus and complexity. No longer a matter of simple tagging, graffiti began to develop elaborate individual styles, themes, formats, and techniques, most of which were designed to increase visibility, individual identity, and status. Themes in the larger works included hip hop slang, characterizations of b-boys, rap lyrics, and hip hop fashion. Using logos and images borrowed from television, comic books, and cartoons, stylistic signatures, and increasingly difficult executions, writers expanded graffiti's palette. Bubble letters, angular machine letters, and the indecipherable wild style were used on larger spaces and with more colors and patterns. These stylistic developments were aided by advances in marker and spray paint technology; better spraying nozzles, marking fibers, paint adhesion, and texture enhanced the range of expression in graffiti writing.[44] Small-scale tagging developed into the top to bottom, a format that covered a section of a train car from the roof to the floor. This was followed by the top to bottom whole car and multiple car "pieces," an abbreviation for graffiti masterpieces.

The execution of a piece is the culmination of a great deal of time, labor, and risk. Writers work out elaborate designs and patterns in notebooks, test new markers and brands of spray paints and colors well in advance. Obtaining access to the subway cars for extended periods requires detailed knowledge of the train schedules and breaking into the train yards where out of service trains are stored. Writers stake out train yards for extended periods, memorizing the train schedule and wait for new trains to leave the paint shop. A freshly painted train would be followed all day and when it reached its designated storage yard (the "lay-up") at night, writers were ready to "bomb" it.

Writers climbed walls, went through holes in fences, vaulted high gates, and "ran the boards," (walked along the board that covers the electrified third rail) to gain access to the trains. Once inside the yards, the risks increased. Craig Castleman explains:

> Trains frequently are moved in the yards, and an unwary writer could be hit by one. Trains stored in lay-ups are hazardous painting sites because in-service trains pass by them closely on either side, and the writer has to climb under the parked train or run to the far side of the tracks to escape being hit. Movement through tunnels is dangerous because the catwalks are high and narrow, it is dark and there are numerous open grates, abutments, and low hanging signs and light fixtures that threaten even the slowest moving writer.[45]

Some writers who have been seriously injured continued to write. In an exceptional case, master writer Kase 2 lost his arm in a yard accident and continued to execute highly respected multicar pieces.

Train facades are central to graffiti style for a number of reasons. First, graffiti murals depend on size, color, and constant movement for their visual impact. Although handball courts and other flat and stationary surfaces are suitable, they cannot replace the dynamic reception of subway facades. Unlike handball courts and building surfaces, trains pass through diverse neighborhoods, allowing communication between various black and Hispanic communities throughout the five boroughs and the larger New York population and disseminating graffiti writers' public performance. Second, graffiti artists are guerilla outlaws who thrive on risk as a facet of one's skill—the element of surprise and eluding authority among writers, the fact that it is sometimes considered criminal to purchase the permanent markers, spray paints, and other supplies necessary to write. Subway cars are stored in well-protected but dangerous yards that heighten the degree of difficulty in execution. An especially difficult and creative concept, coloration and style are all the more appreciated when they are executed under duress. Well-executed train work is a sign of mastering the expression.

Although (master) pieces are usually executed individually, writers belong to and work in crews. Group identity and individual development are equally central to graffiti writers practices. These crews meet regularly and work on ideas, share knowledge, and plan trips to the train yards and other desired locations together. Crew members, among other things, compete with other crews (and each other), photograph each other's work for study, protect each other, and trade book outlines for paint supplies. Pieces are often signed individually and then identi-

fied by crew. Craig Castleman identified hundreds of crews; prominent ones include: Three Yard Boys (3YB), The Burners (TB), The Spanish Five (TSF) Wild Styles, Destroy All Trains (DAT) and the Mad Transit Artists (MTA).[46]

Female graffiti writers participated alongside male writers rather than in separate groups or crews. In addition to risks associated with execution in yards and elsewhere, women writers had to combat sexism from their male peers. Two prominent female writers, Lady Pink, an Hispanic American born in Ecuador and Lady Heart, an African-American born in Queens, understood that their three o'clock in the morning trips to the train yards involved risking their safety as well as their reputations. In some cases, male graffiti writers spread rumors about female writers' sexual promiscuity to discourage female participation and discredit female writers' executions. So, unlike male writers, female writers had to protect their artistic reputations by protecting their sexual reputation. Lady Heart believes that, although it was sometimes an effective strategy, fear of family reprisals and the physical risks in train yards were much greater deterrents against female participation.[47]

Although both male and female writers chose to paint pieces involving social criticism and developed elaborate tags and characterizations, female writers often chose different colors and selected images that highlighted their female status as a means to greater recognizability. Many female writers used bright pinks, less black, more landscapes and flower scenes around the tags, and fewer "death and destruction" cartoon characters. However, female writers sustained the stylistic approaches to line, motion, and rupture. In this way, color selection and subject matter were forms of gender-based individualization inside the parameters of the expression that were not unlike male writer Dondi's use of a character in comic book artist Vaughn Bode's work, or graffiti writer Seen's use of Smurf characters.[48]

Although city officials had always rejected graffiti as a form of juvenile delinquency, antigraffiti discourse and policy took a dramatic turn in the mid- to late 1970s. No longer merely "an infuriating type of juvenile delinquency," as it was defined by municipal leaders in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the graffiti problem was reconstructed as a central reason for the decline in quality of life in a fiscally fragile and rusting New York. By the mid 1970s, graffiti emerged as a central example of the extent of urban decay and heightened already existing fears over a loss of control of the urban landscape. If the city could not stop these young outlaws from writing all over trains and walls, some political leaders feared, then what could the city manage?[49] Reconstructed as symbols of civic disorder, graffiti writers were understood as a psychic as well as material toll on New York, solidifying its image as a lawless, downtrodden urban jungle.

As the *New York Times* and municipal representatives searched for newer and more aggressive strategies to stamp out graffiti writing and symbolically reestablish control, graffiti writers were expanding and refining the form. In the mid-1970s, elaborate train facade murals and multicar pieces arrived on platforms most mornings. A simple name tag had developed into multiple train car skylines, Christmas greetings, abstract drawings likened to cubist art, romantic expressions, and political slogans all drawn with illustrations in dozens of colors, shades, styles, and elaborate lettering.

In 1977 the Transit Authority made an extensive effort to regain control. At the center of this effort was a new chemical many believed spelled disaster for graffiti writers: the buff. Although the buff did not end graffiti writing, it discouraged many writers and dramatically limited the life of the murals on the train facades. Steve Hager describes the chemical process and its effects:

> Many writers dropped out in 1977, when the Transit Authority erected its "final solution" to the graffiti problem in a Coney Island train yard. At an annual cost of $400,000, the T.A. began operating a giant car wash that sprayed vast amounts of petroleum hydroxide on the sides of graffitied trains. The solvent spray was followed by a vigorous buffing. At first the writers called it "the Orange Crush," after Agent Orange, a defoliant used in Vietnam. Later it was simply known as "the buff." Fumes emanating from the cleaning station were so deadly that a nearby school closed after students complained of respiratory problems. . . . Even T.A. workers admitted that they couldn't stand downwind from the station without getting nauseous. Meanwhile the solvent was seeping into the underfloorings of the trains, causing considerable corrosion and damage to electrical parts.[50]

"The buff" was followed by $24 million worth of system-wide fencing that included barbed wire fences, ribbon wire (which ensnares and shreds the body or object that attempts to cross it), and for a brief stint, attack dogs.[51] By the early 1980s, the T.A. had regained control of the subway facades by preventing most of the work from reaching the public *intact*. Yet, this did not spell the end of graffiti art. Kase 2, Lee Quinones, Futura 2000, Rammelzee, Lady Pink, Dondi, Lady Heart, Seen, Zephyr, and many other writers continued to write. The buff did not erase the graffiti, it just discolored it, rendering the subways cars truly defaced and a profoundly depressing symbol of a city at war to silence its already discarded youths. Writing continued, albeit less often and new locations for graffiti and new means of dissemination developed.

The level of municipal hostility exhibited toward graffiti art was matched only by the SoHo art scene's embrace of it. Early interest in graffiti art among gallery owners and collectors in the mid 1970s was short-lived and inconsistent. However, in the late 1970s, new interest was sparked, in part as a result of the promotional efforts of Fab Five Freddy, who now appears as a rap host on MTV. Appearing in an article in the Scenes column in the *Village Voice* in February 1979, Fab Five Freddy offered graffiti mural services at $5 a square foot. Using his art school training and fluidity with art school language, Freddy became a broker for graffiti. Making a number of critical contacts between the "legitimate art world" and graffiti writers, Freddy led the way for future exhibits at the Fun Gallery, Bronx gallery Fashion Moda, and the Times Square Show throughout the early 1980s, coupled with the efforts of artists, collectors, and gallery owners (e.g., Stephan Eins, Sam Esses, Henry Chalfant, and Patti Astor) gave graffiti momentary institutional clout and provided mostly unemployed graffiti artists financial renumeration for their talents. Clearly, the downtown art scene, in providing the graffiti artists with fleeting legitimacy, was most interested in making an investment in their own "cutting-edge image." Few writers would make a living as gallery artists for long, and almost all writers were paraded about as the latest "naturally talented" street natives.[52] Once the art world had satisfied its craving for street art, writers continued to work, albeit not as much on the subways.

Graffiti is no longer a widely visible street form, a fact that has led to the assumption that the form is no longer practiced. However, recent research by Joe Austin demonstrates that graffiti writers continue to write, using strategies for display and performance that work around social constraints. According to Austin, writers paint murals, videotape and photograph them, and distribute the tapes and photos through graffiti fan magazines all over the country. Via videotape and fanzines, train murals are documented before they are painted over or deformed by "the buff," allowing the process of writing on the train surface to be shared.[53] Although many writers are still outlaws, their status as such is no longer a major source of public embarrassment for city officials. In fact, Transit Authority publicity campaigns in 1992 and 1993, such as "sub-talk," refer to their victory against graffiti as a sign of their role in the city's supposed improving health, all the while continuing to scrub and paint hundreds of train cars before they go into service to sustain these illusions. Although SoHo seems uninterested in graffiti art, businesses and community centers in the Barrio, Harlem, the Bronx, and Brooklyn still commission graffiti art for logos, building facades, and graffiti art is represented on tee-shirts, rap artists' clothing, and music video set designs.

BREAKDANCING

In the mid-1970s, dancing to disco music was a seamless and fluid affair. Disco dances, such as the Hustle, emphasized the continuity and circularity of the beat and worked to mask the breaks between steps. In disco music, the primary role of the DJ was to merge one song's conclusion into the next song's introduction as smoothly as possible, eliminating or masking the breaks between songs. At the height of disco's popularity, a new style of dance and musical pastiche emerged that used disco music to focus on the break points, to highlight and extend the breaks in and between songs. At these break points in the DJ's performance, the dancers would *breakdance*, executing moves that imitated the rupture in rhythmic continuity as it was highlighted in the musical break.[54]

Described as a "competitive, acrobatic and pantomimic dance with outrageous physical contortions, spins and backflips [which are] wedded to a fluid syncopated circling body rock," breakdancing is the physical manifestation of hip hop style.[55] Breaking, originally referring only to a particular group of dance moves executed during the break beat in a DJ's rap mixes, has since come to include a number of related movements and dances (e.g., electric boogie and up-rock) that take place at various points in the music.[56]

As the dance steps and routines developed, breaking began to center on the freeze, an improvised pose or movement that ruptured, or "broke the beat." Usually practiced in a circle formation, breaking involved the entry into the circle, the footwork, which was highlighted by the freeze, and the exit. Nelson George offers an insightful and rich description of the dance:

> Each person's turn in the ring was very brief—ten to thirty seconds—but packed with action and meaning. It began with an entry, a hesitating walk that allowed him to get in step with the music for several beats and take his place "on stage." Next the dancer "got down" to the floor to do the footwork, a rapid, slashing, circular scan of the floor by sneakered feet, in which the hands support the body's weight while the head and torso revolve at a slower speed, a kind of syncopated sunken pirouette, also known as the helicopter. Acrobatic transitions such as head spins, hand spins, shoulder spins, flips and the swipe—a flip of the weight from hands to feet that also involves a twist in the body's direction—served as bridges between the footwork and the freeze. The final element was the exit, a spring back to verticality or a special movement that returned the dancer to the outside of the circle.[57]

To stop the time was only one part of the freeze. In the freeze, the dancer also took on an alternative identity and served as a challenge to com-

petitors. Dancers would freeze-pose as animals, super heroes, business men, GQ models, elderly or injured people and as female pin-up models. The freeze pose embodied an element of surprise that served as a challenge to the next dancer to outdo the previous pose. As a moment of boasting or sounding on the dancers' competitors, freeze poses might include presenting one's behind to an opponent, holding one's nose or grabbing one's genitals to suggest bad odor or sexual domination.[58]

Breaking was practiced in hallways on concrete and sometime with cardboard pads. Streets were preferred practice spaces for a couple of reasons. Indoor community spaces in economically oppressed areas are rare, and those that are available are not usually big enough to accommodate large groups performing acrobatic dances. In addition, some indoor spaces had other drawbacks. One of the breakers with whom I spoke pointed out that the Police Athletic League, which did have gymnasium-size space, was avoided because it was used as a means of community surveillance for the police. Whenever local police were looking for a suspect, kids hanging out in the PAL were questioned.

Breakdancers practiced and performed in crews that dominated certain neighborhoods. During competitions, if one crew's boasting or sounding won over the crowd completely, the embarrassment it caused the other crew usually resulted in fighting. Bad blood between crews often remained long after the competition and dancers had to be careful in their travels around New York. Crazy Legs, known for inventing the "W" move as well as a special backspin, explained that during the Rock Steady Crew's heyday, they had to fight other crews just about every weekend.[59]

Although the Rock Steady Crew, a mostly Puerto Rican group, always had female breakers, such was not the case with all predominantly male breakdancing crews. Rock Steady's Daisy Castro, aka "Baby Love," attributes this absence to lack of exposure, social support, and male discouragement.[60] Female breakdance crews, such as the Dynamic Dolls, breakers such as Janet, aka "Headspin," Suzy Q, Rock Steady's Yvette, Chunky and Pappy were always part of the breakdance scene. Yet, few women regularly performed the break-specific moves, such as the headspin or the hand-glide; they were more likely to be seen executing the popping, locking, and electric boogie moves.

Although this absence has in some cases to do with relative ease of execution of specific moves for female bodies, most girls were heavily discouraged from performing break moves because they were perceived by some male peers as "unsafe" or "unfeminine." Female breakdancers sometimes executed moves in conventionally feminine ways, to highlight individuality and perhaps to deflect male criticism. Again, women who performed these moves were often considered masculine and undesirable or sexually "available." Although these sexist attitudes regarding the acceptable limits of female physical expression are widespread, they are not absolute. In my interview with Crazy Legs and Wiggles, two Rock Steady Crew dancers, Crazy Legs had no objections to any female dancers executing any moves, whereas Wiggles would "respect" a female breaker but was not as comfortable with females exhibiting the level of physical exertion breaking required.[61]

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Breaking combines themes and physical moves found in contemporary popular culture with moves and styles commonly found in Afro-diaspora dances. Breakdancing shares "families of resemblance" with a number of African-American dances. It shares moves and combinations with the lindy-hop, the Charleston, the cakewalk, the jitterbug, the flashdancing in Harlem in the 1940s, double dutch, and black fraternity and sorority stepping. Breaking has also frequently been associated with the Afro-Brazilian martial arts dance Capoiera, particularly for the striking similarities between their spinning and cartwheel-like moves. Yet, breakers also borrow and revise popularized Asian martial arts moves by watching "karate" movies in Times Square. Recent hip hop dance moves, such as the Popeye, the Cabbage Patch, or the Moonwalk, imitate and are named after popular cultural images and characters. Sociologist Herman Gray, referring to another hip hop dance, the Running

Appropriation

Man, points out that it may also mime the common experience of young black men being chased by the police. The "lockitup" is a Newark, New Jersey–based dance inspired by car-jacking, an armed form of auto theft. According to Marcus Reeves, its moves are said to "act out the procedures of 'poppin' (stealing) a car. While the dancer mimics the car theft ritual, the crowd urges him or her with chants of "lockitup!"[62]

Much like graffiti, breakdancing developed a contradictory relationship to dominant culture. In January 1980, one of the first published articles on breakdancing covered a group of breakdancers who were detained by the police for fighting and causing a disturbance in a Washington Heights area subway station. Once the police were convinced that it was, in fact, "just a dance," the breakers were let go. As unsanctioned public dance and public occupation of space, particularly by black and Puerto Rican youths, breakdancing continued to draw the attention of the police. Over the following five years, articles in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times* continued to cite examples of the police arresting breakdancers for "disturbing the peace" and "attracting undesirable crowds" in the malls.[63]

At the same time, breakdancing became the latest popular dance craze in the United States, Europe, and Japan. Not only were breakdance crews forming, but dance schools began hiring breakdancers to teach breakdancing lessons, geared to "hip" middle-class whites.[64] Like SoHo's response to graffiti, breakdancers were hired by popular downtown dance clubs for private parties to provide entertainment for their leisured clientele. Crazy Legs recollects this period of notoriety and exploitation and his reaction to it:

> We got ripped off by so many people. When it came down to Roxy's, they gave me a 50-person guest list every week, but I realize now that they were making crazy dollars. Packed. We weren't making no money. But the bottom line was, they were giving me and Bam (Afrika Bambaataa) and all these other people such a great guest list because all these white people were coming in. . . . We were pretty much on display, and we didn't even know it. We just thought it was great because we was like "Wow, now we got a great floor to dance on, and go party, and we have juice, and we have ghetto status and things like that . . ." Now I realize we were on display. People were paying $8 and $7 whatever it cost . . . to watch us. And we weren't getting anything from the door.[65]

By 1986, when commercial outlets seemed to have exhausted breakdancing as a "fad," breakdancers as mainstream press copy all but disappeared. Yet, the form is still heavily practiced, particularly alongside rap artists and other dance music genres. Dancers in hip hop clubs still perform in circles, inventing steps in response to rap's rhythms. Although rappers' dancers are no longer named *breakers*, the moves are extensions

s of breakers' stock moves and with approaches to motion, ture that refer to and affirm the stylistic approaches of graf- ap DJs, and the early breakers. The Public Broadcasting 1 dance special "Everybody Dance Now!" demonstrated continuities between the moves executed by early break- re recent rock, soul, and dance performers such as Janet and Michael Jackson, Madonna, C&C Music Factory, New Kids on the Block, New Edition, The Fly Girls on Fox Television's Comedy Show *In Living Color*, and MC Hammer—illustrating the centrality of hip hop dance style in contemporary popular entertainment.

RAP MUSIC

Rapping, the last element to emerge in hip hop, has become its most prominent facet. In the earliest stages, DJs were the central figures in hip hop; they supplied the break beats for breakdancers and the soundtrack for graffiti crew socializing. Early DJs would connect their turntables and speakers to any available electrical source, including street lights, turning public parks and streets into impromptu parties and community centers.

Although makeshift stereo outfits in public settings are not unique to rap, two innovations that have been credited to Jamaican immigrant DJ Kool Herc separated rap music from other popular musics and set the stage for further innovation. Kool Herc was known for his massive stereo system speakers (which he named the Herculords) and his practice of extending obscure instrumental breaks that created an endless collage of peak dance beats named b-beats or break-beats. This collage of break-beats stood in sharp contrast to Eurodisco's unbroken dance beat that dominated the dance scene in the mid- to late 1970s. Kool Herc's range of sampled b-beats was as diverse as contemporary rap music, drawing on, among others, New Orleans jazz, Isaac Hayes, Bob James, and Rare Earth. Within a few years, Afrika Bambaataa, DJ and founder of the Zulu Nation, would also use beats from European disco bands such as Kraftwerk, rock, and soul in his performances. I emphasize the significance of rap's earliest DJs' use of rock, because popular press on rap music has often referred to Run DMC's use of samples from rock band Aerosmith's "Walk This Way" in 1986 as a crossover strategy and a departure from earlier sample selections among rap DJs. The bulk of the press coverage on Run DMC regarding their "forays into rock" also suggested that by using rock music, rap was maturing (e.g., moving beyond the "ghetto") and expanding its repertoire. To the contrary, the success of Run DMC's "Walk This Way" brought these strategies

Courtesy of Kid (of Kid-N-Play)

of intertextuality into the commercial spotlight and into the hands of white teen consumers. Not only had rock samples always been reimbedded in rap music, but also Run DMC recorded live rock guitar on *King of Rock* several years earlier.[66] Beats selected by hip hop producers and DJs have always come from and continue to come from an extraordinary range of musics. As Prince Be Softly of P.M. Dawn says, "my music is based in hip-hop, but I pull everything from dance-hall to country to rock together. I can take a Led Zeppelin drum loop, put a Lou Donaldson horn on it, add a Joni Mitchell guitar, then get a Crosby Stills and Nash vocal riff."[67]

Kool Herc's Herculords, modeled after the Jamaican sound systems that produced dub and dance-hall music, were more powerful than the average DJ's speakers and were surprisingly free of distortion, even when played outdoors.[68] They produced powerful bass frequencies and also played clear treble tones. Herc's break-beats, played on the Herculords, inspired breakdancers' freestyle moves and sparked a new generation of hip hop DJs. While working the turntables, Kool Herc also began reciting prison-style rhymes (much like those found on The Last Poet's *Hustler's Convention*), using an echo chamber for added effect. Herc's rhymes also drew heavily from the style of black radio personalities, the latest and most significant being DJ Hollywood, a mid-1970s disco DJ who had developed a substantial word-of-mouth following around the club scene in New York and eventually in other cities via homemade cassettes.

Like the graffiti and breakdance crews, DJs battled for territories. Four main Bronx DJs emerged: Kool Herc's territory was the west Bronx, Afrika Bambaataa dominated the Bronx River East, DJ Breakout's territory was the northernmost section of the Bronx, and Grandmaster Flash controlled the southern and central sections.[69] These territories were established by local DJ battles, club gigs, and the circulation of live performance tapes. DJs' performances, recorded by the DJ himself and audience members, were copied, traded, and played on large portable stereo cassette players (or "ghetto blasters"), disseminating the DJ's sounds. These tapes traveled far beyond the Bronx; Black and Puerto Rican army recruits sold and traded these tapes in military stations around the country and around the world.[70]

Grandmaster Flash is credited with perfecting and making famous the third critical rap music innovation: scratching. Although Grand Wizard Theodore (only 13 years old at the time) is considered its inventor, Theodore did not sustain a substantial enough following to advance and perfect scratching. Scratching is a turntable technique that involves playing the record back and forth with your hand by scratching the needle against and then with the groove. Using two turntables, one record is scratched in rhythm or against the rhythm of another record while the second record played. This innovation extended Kool Herc's use of the turntables as talking instruments, and exposed the cultural rather than structural parameters of accepted turntable use.

Flash also developed the backspin and extended Kool Herc's use of break beats.[71] Backspinning allows the DJ to "repeat phrases and beats from a record by rapidly spinning it backwards." Employing exquisite timing, these phrases could be repeated in varying rhythmic patterns, creating the effect of a record skipping irregularly or a controlled stutter effect, building intense crowd anticipation. Break beats were particularly good for building new compositions. Making the transition to recordings and anticipating the range of sounds and complexity of collage now associated with sampling technology, Flash's 1981 "The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel" lays the groundwork for the explosive and swirling effects created by Public Enemy producers, the Bomb Squad, seven years later. In an attempt to capture the virtuosity of Flash's techniques and the vast range of his carefully selected samples, I have included a lengthy and poetic description of

his performance of the "The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel." Nelson George describes the Grandmaster's wizardry:

> It begins with "you say one for the trouble," the opening phrase of Spoonie Gee's "Monster Jam," broken down to "you say" repeated seven times, setting the tone for a record that uses the music and vocals of Queen's "Another One Bites the Dust," the Sugar Hill Gang's "8th Wonder," and Chic's "Good Times" as musical pawns that Flash manipulates at whim. He repeats "Flash is bad" from Blondie's "Rapture" three times, turning singer Deborah Harry's dispassion into total adoration. While playing "Another One Bites the Dust," Flash places a record on the second turntable, then shoves the needle and the record against each other. The result is a rumbling, gruff imitation of the song's bass line. As the guitar feedback on "Dust" builds, so does Flash's rumble, until we're grooving on "Good Times." Next, "Freedom" explodes between pauses in Chic's "Good Times" bass line. His bass thumps, and then the Furious Five chant, "Grandmaster cuts faster." Bass. "Grandmaster." Bass. "Cut." Bass. "Cuts . . . cuts . . . faster." But the cold crusher comes toward the end when, during "8th Wonder" Flash places a wheezing sound of needle on vinyl in the spaces separating a series of claps.[72]

Using multiple samples as dialogue, commentary, percussive rhythms, and counterpoint, Flash achieved a level of musical collage and climax with two turntables that remains difficult to attain on advanced sampling equipment ten years later.

The new style of DJ performance attracted large excited crowds, but it also began to draw the crowd's attention away from dancing and toward watching the DJ perform.[73] It is at this point that rappers were added to the DJs' shows to redirect the crowd's attention. Flash asked two friends, Cowboy and Melle Mel (both would later become lead rappers along with Kid Creole for Flash and the Furious Five) to perform some boasts during one of his shows. Soon thereafter, Flash began to attach an open mike to his equipment inspiring spontaneous audience member participation. Steve Hager's description of their intertextuality, fluidity, and rhythmic complexity indicates a wide range of verbal skills not generally associated with early rappers: "Relying on an inventive use of slang, the percussive effect of short words, and unexpected internal rhymes, Mel and Creole began composing elaborate rap routines, intricately weaving their voices through a musical track mixed by Flash. They would trade solos, chant, and sing harmony. It was a vocal style that effectively merged the aggressive rhythms of James Brown with the language and imagery of *Hustler's Convention*."[74] Many early rappers were inspired by the intensity of Melle Mel's voice and his conviction. Kid, from rap group Kid-N-Play, attributed some of this intensity to the fact that Mel was rapping for a living rather than a hobby: "For Melle Mel, rapping was his job. Melle Mel made a living rapping each weekend at a party or whatever. So he's rapping to survive. As such, his subject matter is gonna reflect that. I go on record as saying Melle Mel is king of all rappers. He's the reason I became a rapper and I think he's the reason a lot of people became rappers. That's how pervasive his influence was."[75] Melle Mel's gritty dark voice was immortalized on Flash and Furious Five's 1982 "The Message," voted best pop song of 1982. The power of rappers' voices and their role as storytellers ensured that rapping would become the central expression in hip hop culture.

The rappers who could fix the crowd's attention had impressive verbal dexterity and performance skills. They spoke with authority, conviction, confidence, and power, shouting playful ditties reminiscent of 1950s black radio disc jockeys. The most frequent style of rap was a variation on the toast, a boastful, bragging, form of oral storytelling sometimes explicitly political and often aggressive, violent, and sexist in content. Musical and oral predecessors to rap music encompass a variety of vernacular artists including the Last Poets, a group of late 1960s to early 1970s black militant storytellers whose poetry was accompanied by conga drum rhythms, poet, and singer Gil Scott Heron, Malcolm X, the Black Panthers, the 1950s radio jocks, particularly Douglas "Jocko" Henderson, soul rapper Millie Jackson, the classic Blues women, and countless other performers. "Blaxsploitation" films such as Melvin Van Peebles' *Sweet Sweetback's Baadassss Song*, Donald Goines's gangsta fiction, and "pimp narratives" that explore the ins and outs of ghetto redlight districts are also especially important in rap. Regardless of thematics, pleasure and mastery in toasting and rapping are matters of control over the language, the capacity to outdo competition, the craft of the story, mastery of rhythm, and the ability to rivet the crowd's attention.[76]

Rap relies heavily on oral performance, but it is equally dependent on technology and its effects on the sound and quality of vocal reproduction. A rapper's delivery is dependent on the use and mastery of technology. The iconic focus of the rapper is the microphone; rappers are dependent on advanced technology to amplify their voices, so that they can be heard over the massive beats that surround the lyrics. Eric B. & Rakim's "Microphone Fiend" describes the centrality of the microphone in rap performance:

> I was a microphone fiend before I became a teen.
> I melted microphones instead of cones of ice cream
> Music-oriented so when hip hop was originated
> Fitted like pieces of puzzles, complicated.[77]

As rapping moved center stage, rappers and DJs began to form neighborhood crews who hosted block parties school dances and social clubs. Like breakdance crew competitions, rappers and DJs battled for local su-

premacy in intense verbal and musical duels. These early duels were not merely a matter of encouraging crowd reaction with simple ditties such as "Yell, ho!" and "Somebody Scream." (Although these ditties have important sentimental value.) These parties and competitions lasted for several hours and required that the performers had a well-stocked arsenal of rhymes and stories, physical stamina, and expertise. Local independent record producers realized that these battles began to draw consistently huge crowds and approached the rappers and DJs about producing records. While a number of small releases were under way, Sylvia Robinson of Sugar Hill records created the Sugar Hill Gang whose 1979 debut single "Rapper's Delight" brought rap into the commercial spotlight. By early 1980, "Rapper's Delight" had sold several million copies and rose to the top of the pop charts.[78]

"Rapper's Delight" changed everything. Most important, it solidified rap's commercial status. DJs had been charging fees for parties and relying on records and equipment for performance, but the commercial potential at which "Rapper's Delight" only hinted significantly raised the economic stakes. Like rock 'n' roll's transition into mainstream commercial markets, rap was fueled by small independent labels and a system of exploitation in which artists had no choice but to submit to draconian contracts that turned almost all creative rights and profits over to the record company if they wanted their music to be widely available. Black-owned and white-owned labels alike paid small flat fees to rappers, demanded rigid and lengthy production contracts (such as five completed records in seven years), made unreasonable demands, and received almost all of the money. Salt from the female rap group Salt 'N' Pepa said that before they signed with Next Plateau Records they were paid $20 apiece per show. When she challenged her manager about their arrangement he threatened her and eventually beat her up for asking too many business questions.[79]

"Rapper's Delight" has also been cited by rappers from all over the country as their first encounter with hip hop's sound and style. In fact, the commercial success of "Rapper's Delight" had the contradictory effect of sustaining and spawning new facets of rap music in New York and elsewhere and at the same time reorienting rap toward more elaborate and restraining commercial needs and expectations. Within the next three years Kurtis Blow's "The Breaks," Spoonie Gee's "Love Rap," The Treacherous Three's "Feel The Heartbeat," Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force's "Planet Rock," Sequence's "Funk You Up," and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message" were commercially marketed and successful rap singles that made and continue

to make more money for Sugar Hill records and other small labels than they do for the artists.[80]

Although Salt 'N' Pepa have been cited as the first major female rappers, some of the earliest rap groups, such as the Funky Four Plus One More had female members, and there were a few all-female groups, such as Sequence. In keeping with young women's experiences in graffiti and breaking, strong social sanctions against their participation limited female ranks. Those who pushed through found that "answer records," (rap battles between the sexes records) were the most likely to get airplay and club response. The first "queen of rap," Roxanne Shante, wrote and recorded a scathing rap in response to UTFO's "Roxanne Roxanne," a rap that accused a girl named Roxanne of being conceited for spurning sexual advances made by UTFO. Roxanne Shante's "Roxanne's Revenge" was a caustic and frustrated response that struck a responsive chord among b-girls and b-boys.[81] Rapped in a sassy high-pitched girl's voice (Shante was 13 years old at the time), Shante told UTFO: "Like corn on the cob you're always trying to rob / You need to be out there lookin' for a job." And the chorus, "Why you have make a record 'bout me? The R/O/X/A/N/N/E?" has become a classic line in hip hop.[82]

Although black and Latino women have been a small but integral presence in graffiti, rapping, and breaking, with the exception of Sha Rock, who was one of the innovators of the beat box, they have been virtually absent from the area of music production. Although there have been female DJs and producers, such as Jazzy Joyce, Gail 'sky' King, and Spindarella, they are not major players in the use of sampling technology nor have they made a significant impact in rap music production and engineering. There are several factors that I believe have contributed to this. First, women in general are not encouraged in and often actively discouraged from learning about and using mechanical equipment. This takes place informally in socialization and formally in gender-segregated vocational tracking in public school curriculum. Given rap music's early reliance on stereo equipment, participating in rap music production requires mechanical and technical skills that women are much less likely to have developed.

Second, because rap music's approaches to sound reproduction developed informally, the primary means for gathering information is shared local knowledge. As Red Alert explained to me, his pre–hip hop interest and familiarity with electronic equipment were sustained by access to his neighbor Otis who owned elaborate stereo equipment configurations. Red Alert says that he spent almost all of his free time at Otis's house, listening, learning, and asking questions. For social,

sexual, and cultural reasons young women would be much less likely to be permitted or feel comfortable spending such extended time in a male neighbor's home.

Even under less intimate circumstances, young women were not especially welcome in male social spaces where technological knowledge is shared. Today's studios are extremely male-dominated spaces where technological discourse merges with a culture of male bonding that inordinately problematizes female apprenticeship. Both of these factors have had a serious impact on the contributions of women in contemporary rap music production. Keep in mind, though, that the exclusion of women from musical production in rap is not to be understood as specific to rap or contemporary music, it is instead the continuation of the pervasive marginalization of women from music throughout European and American history.

One of the ways around these deterrents is to create female-centered studio spaces. I have always imagined that rap's most financially successful female rappers would build a rap music production studio that hired and trained female technicians and interns, a space in which young women of color would have the kind of cultural and social access to technology and musical equipment that has, for the most part, been a male dominion. It would also quickly become a profitable and creative space for a wide range of musicians committed to supporting women's musical creativity and forging new collaborative environments.

Unlike breakdancing and graffiti, rap music had and continues to have a much more expansive institutional context within which to operate. Music is more easily commodified than graffiti, and music can be consumed away from the performance context. This is not to suggest that rap's incorporation has been less contradictory or complicated. Quite to the contrary; because of rap music's commercial power, the sanctions against as well as the defenses for rap have been more intense, and thus resistance has been more contradictory.

Throughout the late 1980s, rap music's commercial status increased dramatically, rappers began exploring more themes with greater intertextual references and complexity, and hip hop crews from urban ghettos in several major cities began telling stories that spoke not only of the specifics of life in Houston's fifth ward for example but also of the general bridges between the fifth ward and Miami's Overtown or Boston's Roxbury. In the same time period, Run DMC's mid- to late 1980s popularity among white teens prompted the *New York Times* to declare that rap had finally reached the mainstream.[83] At the same time, Eric B. & Rakim, Public Enemy, KRS One, L.L. Cool J. MC Lyte and De La Soul also emerged as major figures in rap's directional shifts.[84]

During the late 1980s Los Angeles rappers from Compton and Watts, two areas severely paralyzed by the postindustrial economic redistribution developed a West Coast style of rap that narrates experiences and fantasies specific to life as a poor young, black, male subject in Los Angeles. Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, Ice-T, Ezy-E, Compton's Most Wanted, W.C. and the MAAD Circle, Snoop Doggy Dog, South Central Cartel, and others have defined the gangsta rap style. The Los Angeles school of gangsta rap has spawned other regionally specific hardcore rappers, such as New Jersey's Naughty by Nature, Bronx-based Tim Dog, Onyx and Redman, and a new group of female gangsta rappers, such as Boss (two black women from Detroit), New York-based Puerto Rican rapper Hurrican Gloria, and Nikki D.

Mexican, Cuban, and other Spanish-speaking rappers, such as Kid Frost, Mellow Man Ace and El General, began developing bilingual raps and made lyrical bridges between Chicano and black styles. Such groups as Los Angeles-based Cypress Hill, which has black and Hispanic members, serve as an explicit bridge between black and Hispanic communities that builds on long-standing hybrids produced by blacks and Puerto Ricans in New York. Since 1990, in addition to gangsta raps, sexual boasting, Afrocentric and protest raps, rap music features groups that explore the southern black experience, that specialize in the explicit recontextualization of jazz samples, live instrumentation in rap performance and recording, introspective raps, raps that combine acoustic folk guitar with rap's traditional dance beats and even New Age/Soul rap fusions.[85]

These transformations and hybrids reflect the initial spirit of rap and hip hop as an experimental and collective space where contemporary issues and ancestral forces are worked through simultaneously. Hybrids in rap's subject matter, not unlike its use of musical collage, and the influx of new, regional, and ethnic styles have not yet displaced the three points of stylistic continuity to which I referred much earlier: approaches to flow, ruptures in line and layering can still be found in the vast majority of rap's lyrical and music construction. The same is true of the critiques of the postindustrial urban America context and the cultural and social conditions that it has produced. Today, the South Bronx and South Central are poorer and more economically marginalized than they were ten years ago.

Hip hop emerges from complex cultural exchanges and larger social and political conditions of disillusionment and alienation. Graffiti and rap were especially aggressive public displays of counterpresence and voice. Each asserted the right to write[86]—to inscribe one's identity on an environment that seemed Teflon resistant to its young people of color;

an environment that made legitimate avenues for material and social participation inaccessible. In this context, hip hop produced a number of double effects. First, themes in rap and graffiti articulated free play and unchecked public displays; yet, the settings for these expressions always suggested existing confinement.[87] Second, like the consciousness-raising sessions in the early stages of the women's rights movement and black power movement of the 1960s and 1970s, hip hop produced internal and external dialogues that affirmed the experiences and identities of the participants and at the same time offered critiques of larger society that were directed to both the hip hop community and society in general.

Out of a broader discursive climate in which the perspectives and experiences of younger Hispanic, Afro-Caribbeans and African-Americans had been provided little social space, hip hop developed as part of a cross-cultural communication network. Trains carried graffiti tags through the five boroughs; flyers posted in black and Hispanic neighborhoods brought teenagers from all over New York to parks and clubs in the Bronx and eventually to events throughout the metropolitan area. And, characteristic of communication in the age of high-tech telecommunications, stories with cultural and narrative resonance continued to spread at a rapid pace. It was not long before similarly marginalized black and Hispanic communities in other cities picked up on the tenor and energy in New York hip hop. Within a decade, Los Angeles County (especially Compton), Oakland, Detroit, Chicago, Houston, Atlanta, Miami, Newark and Trenton, Roxbury, and Philadelphia, have developed local hip hop scenes that link various regional postindustrial urban experiences of alienation, unemployment, police harassment, social, and economic isolation to their local and specific experience via hip hop's language, style, and attitude.[88] Regional differentiation in hip hop has been solidifying and will continue to do so. In some cases these differences are established by references to local streets and events, neighborhoods and leisure activities; in other cases regional differences can be discerned by their preferences for dance steps, clothing, musical samples, and vocal accents. Like Chicago and Mississippi blues, these emerging regional identities in hip hop affirm the specificity and local character of cultural forms, as well as the larger forces that define hip hop and Afrodiasporic cultures. In every region, hip hop articulates a sense of entitlement and takes pleasure in aggressive insubordination.

Few answers to questions as broadly defined as, "what motivated the emergence of hip hop" could comprehensively account for all the factors that contribute to the multiple, related, and sometimes coincidental events that bring cultural forms into being. Keeping this in mind, this

exploration has been organized around limited aspects of the relationship between cultural forms and the contexts within which they emerge. More specifically, it has attended to the ways in which artistic practice is shaped by cultural traditions, related current and previous practice, *and* by the ways in which practice is shaped by technology, economic forces, and race, gender, and class relations. These relationships between form, context, and cultural priority demonstrate that hip hop shares a number of traits with, and yet revises, long-standing Afrodiasporic practices; that male dominance in hip hop is, in part, a by-product of sexism and the active process of women's marginalization in cultural production; that hip hop's form is fundamentally linked to technological changes and social, urban space parameters; that hip hop's anger is produced by contemporary racism, gender, and class oppression; and finally, that a great deal of pleasure in hip hop is derived from subverting these forces and affirming Afrodiasporic histories and identities.

Developing a style nobody can deal with—a style that cannot be easily understood or erased, a style that has the reflexivity to create counterdominant narratives against a mobile and shifting enemy—may be one of the most effective ways to fortify communities of resistance and *simultaneously* reserve the right to communal pleasure. With few economic assets and abundant cultural and aesthetic resources, Afrodiasporic youth have designated the street as the arena for competition, and style as the prestige-awarding event. In the postindustrial urban context of dwindling low-income housing, a trickle of meaningless jobs for young people, mounting police brutality, and increasingly draconian depictions of young inner city residents, hip hop style *is* black urban renewal.