

**The politics of the cipher:
hip-hop, antiphony and multiculturalism**

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I, Bharath Ganesh, confirm that work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This project explores the incipient forms of multiculturalism present in the musical publics assembled by hip-hop music and culture based on ethnography of a university student group, S4HH (Students for Hip-hop). I position the cipher (a circle of people rapping together) as the diagram of the ethics and politics of hip-hop listening. The primary aesthetic feature of the cipher is antiphony or call-and-response musicality. However, affect in hip-hop musical publics goes beyond aesthetics; it catalyses ethical and political responses. My methods add detail on the varied socialities of listening to the literature on hip-hop studies. I develop antiphony as a unique event that shatters identity and cultivates ethical subjectivities that are constituted in cycles of affect and response between self and other. This argument is based on writings on antiphony from Wole Soyinka, Toni Morrison, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Paul Gilroy. This work helps operationalise the concepts ‘event’, ‘self’, ‘other’, ‘body’, and ‘community’ in the work of Emmanuel Levinas, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean-Luc Nancy for mapping the ethics and politics of antiphony in hip-hop listening.

My study of antiphonal relations illuminates the ethics and politics of bodily response to the material distribution and circulation of affect in hip-hop spaces. I engage in a genealogical analysis of antiphonal aesthetics and the word ‘cipher’ to argue that the bodily capacities of response entrained in shared sites of listening help us consider multiculturalism in creolised and transnational modes. I argue that sharing hip-hop and our presence in the cipher cultivates a comportment and a passivity to difference grounded in an open-ended ethics that allows the other to transform the self. This study develops this antiphonal ethos, maps its material circuits and its imagined geographies, and speculates on the possibilities of an antiphonal multiculturalism.

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Preface

This thesis maps the modes of ethical and political dissent emergent in spaces assembled by hip-hop music and culture. Here, dissent is about the articulation of a multitude of *other* ethical and political values. The expression of these values affirms the unfinished nature of the ‘ethical’ and ‘political’ itself. Ethics and politics are rendered unfinished because they are expressed under erasure, always open to another revision. This is a consequence of antiphony or call-and-response, the core aesthetic of hip-hop culture. Antiphony shapes the sound and the social mediation of hip-hop. I focus on how lived experience in hip-hop spaces is a negotiation of alterity and difference. In antiphony, the listener is called to respond to the performer. In this response, the listener becomes part of the performance as well. I explain antiphony in depth in the following chapters. Here I hope it will suffice to introduce antiphony as a process that entrains an ecstatic mode of being, explained in detail in Chapter 4. This ecstatic comportment is one in which the body is copresent with difference and alterity, it extends itself towards that difference and responds to it. What is implied by ecstasy is the relation to the *outside*, of being outside of one’s normal place, of operating, as Edouard Glissant puts it, ‘in harmony and errantry’ (1997). Ethics and politics in antiphonal relations become experimental and improvisatory. From the movements, experiences, and comportments of bodies calling and responding, I build a notion of the becoming-ecstatic of the multicultural, of the multicultural thought *otherwise* predicated on an unfinished, processual ethics and politics.

These findings are based on field work undertaken based on a student society in California called the Students for Hip-hop or S4HH. This group blends hip-hop culture into a form of activism by advocating for hip-hop’s place in academia and organising festivals and

events. I was interested in S4HH because they were a diverse group of listeners, some of whom are rappers and DJs and some of whom are looking for their first exposure to hip-hop culture. I represent this group as a musical public, where bodies come together to share in musical experience in a variety of ways. Some come to S4HH to debate rhyme schemes and production styles, others come because they want to find a group of friends to freestyle with. S4HH meets weekly through the academic year.

The fact that S4HH is a student society rather than a hip-hop collective (for example) means that these findings cannot necessarily be representative of hip-hop culture in general. In fact, this presents two advantages. First, the musical public in question includes those with a range of experiences with hip-hop culture. This allows the examination of how bodies with different affordances in hip-hop spaces navigate antiphonal relations. With a hip-hop collective, I would instead be exploring antiphony as it affects artists as they produce their work. A student group presents an opportunity to study a space of leisure rather than work. Second, the university setting allows for the exploration of the globalisation of hip-hop music and culture as students come from all over California and the world. These intersections create forms of tension that are mediated in this musical public, allowing me to witness how hip-hop cultures might be developing as a consequence of this globalisation.

By using these advantages, I demonstrate that hip-hop and the antiphony that structures its mediation offers an ethical and political model that entrains a body that enacts responses to difference through an experimental, improvisatory mode. It suggests that ethics and politics are emergent in the relation itself and better understood as a process of articulation, revision, and response. In this way, I try to probe the boundaries between hip-hop and the world outside, exploring how values formed outside are brought in and negotiated within hip-hop spaces. In this sense, hip-hop is an experimental space in which difference in itself becomes the subject of negotiation and mediation. It is logical that in hip-hop spaces we might find the outlines of

a comportment that is a starting point for theorising the multicultural as composed of bodies committed to polyvocal, heteroglot community that is always a work in progress rather a community that somehow ‘arrives’ (see Derrida 2000 in Chapter 11).

In this thesis, I explore the cipher as the example of this community *par excellence*. The cipher is the embodiment of antiphony, where a group of bodies forms a circle to a rhythm and members of the group rap, sing, or move to the beat. The cipher is an ancient form brought to North America by Africans that were forcibly displaced as slaves. Its particular appellation is more recent; the word cipher itself references the tradition of African-American spirituality and the articulation of values based on the experience of the peripheral subject of Western modernity. In this sense, hip-hop gives us the cipher as a model of a contramodern, *other* way of articulating and performing conviviality and cosmopolitanism. By learning from the experiences of S4HH members in and outside the cipher, I provide an empirical investigation into the possibilities of the becoming-ecstatic of multiculturalism.

The thesis is organised in four parts. Part 1 develops a politics of alterity in hip-hop. It does this by presenting a concept of the ‘subject’ of hip-hop and its response to difference. This subject is a listener, and one who chooses to submit itself to being a listener. The introductory chapter (1) defines ‘subjectivity’ as it is used in the thesis. I argue that the hip-hop listener is an ethical subject. This is due to the structure of antiphony, which is based on a demand and response between two bodies. I then account for antiphonal relations and explain that they are mediated through an ethical register. Ethics, which I suggest might be understood better through the framework of *conduct*, are performances made *for* and in the face of the other. I position ethical subjectivity as a relation of demand and response between a body and its other. In doing so, I suggest that ethical subjectivity is a *disposition* in the face of a demand, the ‘call’ in the call-and-response of the antiphonal relation that I sketch in this chapter. In dialogue with

Emmanuel Levinas, I explore this disposition and define it as a comportment that involves a certain passivity to the other, a passivity that allows the other to make a demand on the self. It is in this passivity, itself a kind of act, that I locate the starting point of ethical subjectivity in antiphony. Responsibility—the sense that I must respond to the call of the other—begins from the concrete relation rather than from an abstract code. This sense of responsibility has more to do with the self and how one comports oneself rather than with principles and transcendental values. Combining antiphony with Levinas’s ethics allows me to build on the ‘new cultural politics of difference’ articulated by Cornel West and the ‘contramodernity’ that Homi Bhabha references. Reading them together, I conclude the first chapter by arguing that antiphony and its peculiar ethos makes possible forms of ‘contramodern’ political agency. The focus that West and Bhabha place on liminality and hybridity in their articulation of political agency that I read allows me to explore multiculturalism as performative and contingent. This displacement (away from a political reading of multiculturalism that focuses on the rights and affordances of minorities as subjects of a state to a reading of multiculturalism as a lived experience) allows me to build a theoretical framework by which I uncover this form of the multicultural in hip-hop musical publics.

Chapter 2, ‘Tracing antiphony in musical publics’ details the methods I use to explore this ethical subject or ethical listener. It outlines the field site in more detail, explaining characteristics of S4HH, how and why it is an appropriate site for thinking about ethical listening, and the methodological frameworks that might be used to explore the constitution of the ethical listener. Drawing on interdisciplinary sound studies, my approach attends to the assemblages and spheres of publicity that surround hip-hop listening. The chapter contributes an approach to the social mediation of hip-hop culture by a diverse, globalised public. As a small segment of this public, S4HH is the site I use to study this process. I mobilise three methods that frame the remainder of the thesis. The first is genealogical, exploring the times

and spaces of antiphonal practice in history and how they affect hip-hop culture today. This genealogy is taken up in chapters 3 and 5. The second is ethnographic, using observation, audiovisual recording, and field notes to illustrate forms of political agency in hip-hop culture. Third, I use interviews to explore musical taste, political conviction, and responsibility in S4HH. Together, these three methods allow me to illustrate the indeterminate forms ethical and political agency in a hip-hop musical public and how they play out in a community. With Chapters 1 and 2, I outline how one might explore a politics of alterity to hip-hop. With the framework I develop, I demonstrate that this politics is immanent to the bodies that share hip-hop spaces and produce its ethos.

Part 2 uses literary theory and philosophy to provide detail on the ethical listener. In Chapter 3, I develop the aesthetics of antiphony and their relation to the concept of the self. I make four arguments in this chapter. First, I argue antiphony is meant to be an event in which it is the union of ‘lyricist’ and the listener that completes the literary work. This follows Wole Soyinka’s elucidation of Yoruba drama in which the ‘antiphonal refrain’ thrusts the listener onto ‘The Fourth Stage’, an eventful site in which the self is fragmented and pluralised. This involves a curious doubling of time; for Soyinka, the ‘antiphonal refrain’ is the experience of a ‘no man’s land’ that makes present the gulf between memory and the undetermined future. In this sense antiphony is an event in which the self is stretched and pulled between the old and the new, focused on the experience of transition itself.

The second argument is that this eventful character of antiphony opens forms of performativity and expression that are fundamentally open. Here, open refers to the unfinished nature of the written word itself as a commitment to antiphonal aesthetics. In dialogue with Toni Morrison, I define the notion of openness in antiphony as a kind of permanent approval of polyvocality and the multiplicity of potential responses. Consequently, Morrison describes her fiction as a *map*, one for the reader to negotiate. Her use of narrative techniques and non-

linear narrative intend to call the audience into an improvisatory and contingent relationship with the story itself. Antiphony thus resists closure but remains, even in the text, ‘double voiced’ and heteroglot.

The third argument in Chapter 3 shows that an antiphonal practice in black oral cultures in North America and across the Atlantic is deeply rooted in West African orality. With a close reading of Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s *The Signifying Monkey*, I give an account of the oral practices that have framed both African-American literature and music. Gates’s concept of Signifyin(g) gives a different account of the speech act and the signifier in communication; consequently, my fourth and final argument in this chapter is that in antiphony, speech becomes ontologically different; the signifier is the subject of play and constant revision. It is this improvisation on the signifier itself that allows me to build a concept of antiphony as the source of a contramodern time in which ethics and politics are placed into another matrix of values and determinations entirely. In the ‘situated knowledges’ of antiphonal spaces, we encounter the articulation of *other* kinds of ethical and political agency and values.

Chapter 4 uses the aesthetics of antiphony described in Chapter 3 to outline its ethical and political stakes more clearly. Reading Gilles Deleuze’s concepts of becoming, the event, and ethics in *The Logic of Sense*, I explore the notion of the self in antiphony. I focus specifically on the idea that in antiphony and in the event, the doubling of time into the old and new opens an interval *within* the body itself in which one’s sense of ‘self’ as an identity becomes separate from its own sense of embodiment. Chapter 4 expands on this interval and what ‘identity’ refers to in this argument. This interval implies that there is always an alterity within the self, a recognition that ‘my’ self is plural by virtue of my sharing with others. I explore this interval in the context of the ethical disposition that I explore in Chapter 1. In doing so, I unpack the concept of self, identity, and alterity and explore how difference is mediated ethically in antiphony. The antiphonal self is fragmented, pluralised, and shared. To understand

the political stakes of this plural self, I engage with Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of community as 'unwork', community as that which has no horizon but is an emergent quality of sharing with others. This is what he refers to as the 'becoming-ecstatic' of community, of community as that which is in the process of rewriting itself.

In Part 3, I explore antiphony in the cipher, the arrangement that I argue is the blueprint of community in hip-hop culture. Chapter 5 traces the movement of this arrangement through time and space, from the liturgical 'ring shouts' to the circles of Muslims reciting Nation of Islam teachings, naming this arrangement 'cipher' has a deep meaning. The chapter traces this word and its development in nationalist politics and the Black Arts Movement. In looking into the roots of this term, I explore how the cipher references a history of knowledge production that outlines a set of contramodern spatial practices. I root these practices in the discourse of Black Atlantic spirituality and African-American religions emerging in the early 20th century. With a reading of Nation of Islam and Five Percenter theology, I explore the open-ended ontology that 'cipher' references.

In Chapter 6, I explore the cipher from the perspective of ethical subjectivity and experience. Building on the concept of the ethical subject that I develop in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4, this chapter explores the microscopic conflicts and tensions that emerge within the cipher. A repeating tension around the differential affordances of gendered bodies in the cipher appeared in the course of my research. Therefore, the chapter focuses on the ways in which difference and even discord are mediated in hip-hop communities. In doing so, I explore antiphonal relations between individuals and the forms of responsibility that they express. By focusing on women's experiences of the cipher, I identify how political commitments to feminism (for example) are refracted in the mediation of the cipher. I argue that these are acts that are simultaneously ethical and political, acts taken to elevate the community and revise it through experiment and lived experience.

In Part 4, composed of four shorter essays, I explore how this ethical and political performativity is entrained through antiphony and the sharing in hip-hop culture in the context of S4HH. I explore students' experiences and taste in hip-hop in private and public listening. In Chapter 7 on affect in live hip-hop spaces that S4HH was involved in organising, I argue that hip-hop sound is itself ambivalent in that it does not inherently inspire any kind of ethical or political response. It is the *arrangement* of hip-hop sound, antiphonal technique, and specific discourses that open up the production of ethical subjectivity in hip-hop culture. I establish how S4HH members use antiphonal techniques to articulate ethical and political values on their university campus. This chapter explores how and to what extent antiphony challenges this ambivalence, and how members of S4HH develop multicultural space. In Chapter 8, I explore private listening in the context of S4HH and identify different forms of hip-hop listening and how their listening was affected by membership in S4HH and sharing hip-hop with others. I continue to find that listening is often politically and ethically ambivalent, but it is once it is shared, this ambivalence is replaced with a kind of personal accountability. This leads me to argue in Chapter 9 that shared listening spaces are specifically where we encounter the kind of ethical and political sharing that I developed in Part 2. Finally, in Chapter 10, I develop the notion of a politics of antiphony and listening that is tightly wound with an ethics of comporting oneself towards an outside. I look at contrasting demands and responses between members of S4HH and develop the concept of listening as a kind of comportment that wills one's own pluralisation and transition. I argue that the entrainment of this comportment is the potential of hip-hop sites in the articulation of new multicultural futures.

In Chapter 11, I conclude the thesis with thoughts on the becoming-ecstatic of multiculturalism. The cipher is the blueprint for such a project, a grounded concept of an open space. I argue that the multicultural, just like the community, never arrives, but is a product of relations themselves. I argue that hip-hop's fundamentally antiphonal structure opens a

category of relations that give a grounded account of the ‘open’ and the place of ethical and political agency in maintaining this openness. In the conclusion, I explore how antiphony might help us think about alterity in new ways and how this aesthetic that runs at the very core of hip-hop harbours the potential for rethinking the concept of multicultural community.

Part 1:

Hip-hop and the politics of alterity

1. Introduction: hip-hop and the ethical subject

In this study, I argue that hip-hop culture provides a potential to theorise multiculturalism and the politics of difference through ethical registers. Through ethnography of a student group that works to incorporate hip-hop culture into university life, I explore how listening to hip-hop opens up new forms of multiculturalism and conviviality. The sense of multiculturalism I attempt to develop is not based on a series of principles derived from liberal thought that include minority groups in a national community through political mechanisms of inclusion, recognition, and equality (see Modood 2013, 6-7, Crowder 2013, 44); rather, this study explores the potentials of understanding the multicultural as constituted by ethical selves formed through relations with difference. It brings us to the immediacy of the relation between the self and the other in its depth and materiality, rather than principled claims of minority communities in multicultural democracies through structural mechanisms that guarantee rights (e.g. Kymlicka 1995).¹ I move away from a conception of ethics as ‘universal norms’ that can be ‘accepted by adherents of different ethical traditions’ (Kymlicka 2007, 11) to a conception of ethics as motivation, response, agency, and experience in the affective life of everyday materiality (see Bennett 2001, Popke 2009, Tolia-Kelly 2013, 154, McCormack 2003, Barnett 2005). There is a liveliness to ethics in hip-hop culture that is not common to other popular

¹ I do agree with Kymlicka when he reflects on the criticism that ‘the liberal focus on individual rights reflects atomistic, materialistic, instrumental, or conflictual view of human relationships’ and responds by stressing that rights are an indispensable form of legal protection for immigrant, minority, and marginalised groups (1995, 26).

cultural media. This liveliness is a consequence of the presence of antiphonal aesthetics in hip-hop music and culture. This study outlines this form of ethics, its presence in hip-hop, and its stakes in proposing an antiphonal multiculturalism.

This study consciously avoids analysis of hip-hop lyrics. My focus is on the *practices* of listeners, not on the ideologies and discourses present in hip-hop music. To map antiphonal multiculturalism, my study focuses on the sites in which hip-hop is consumed and shared. I identify the cipher as the diagram of antiphonal multiculturalism. A cipher is quite simple: a group of people arrange themselves in a circle, put on a beat (either recorded or *a capella*), move together, and rap together, usually ‘freestyling’ or spitting ‘off the dome’, coming up with lyrics as they go. The cipher is the atmosphere in which hip-hop’s ethical subjectivities are formed. In the ciphers I observed, I found that the improvisational and antiphonal (or call-and-response) aesthetics that have been cultivated over centuries in African diasporic music are responsible for the production of ethical subjectivities that reframe how the individuals I studied relate to difference.

At stake are four key terms that I introduce in this chapter and that are developed throughout this study: antiphony, ethical subjectivity, the politics of alterity, and contramodernity. Antiphony is a formal feature of hip-hop music. This aesthetic form produces ethical subjectivity in the call-and-response relation that *disposes* the body to music as well as proximate others. In these dispositions, the body finds itself facing an ethical demand. Ethical subjectivity—or rather our comportment and *ethos* when we face alterity—structures our response to its demand. Before moving on to these terms and further explication of my argument, I would like to provide some short commentary on how this study has developed and why I am asking these questions in a dissertation on hip-hop.

Reflections: from politics to ethics, representation to affect

I started this project to understand the potentials that hip-hop culture might have to combat racism, prejudice, and intolerance in the context of Western multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. While I feel I have answered this question, I do not feel it relevant any longer to continue to address it directly. I began to question how much it actually mattered that hip-hop might counter racism: most of those who listen to hip-hop (for the most part) are not ‘racist’ as we understand the word. Might hip-hop only ‘preach to the choir’? Upon being confronted by the empirical reality of the student group I worked with on this project, I found that hip-hop’s real contribution to conceptions of multiculturalism and conviviality was its conditioning of the listener as an active, ethical, and expressive self.

Rather than inspire a kind of banal consumerism, the social mediation of hip-hop appeared to open a time and space for ethical experience and experimentation. I witnessed that despite political conflict between members of the hip-hop society I studied there was a sense of responsibility to the community and to others. My research participants evinced such a level of self-criticism and reflection without prompting them in interviews that it was impossible *not* to think about ethics as what is at play in hip-hop culture and that ethics might matter more for the initial goals for this project. Rather than think through how these subjectivities could counter racism, I began to question how these subjectivities might help us understand how interaction across difference—racial, social, economic (to name a few forms)—might open up a politics of alterity and a possibility to think about conviviality and multiculturalism grounded in the times and spaces of hip-hop culture.

This shift in my assumptions and understanding of the problem I was studying came at the same time that I began attempting to operationalise Gilles Deleuze’s theories of becoming, identity, and sense for my study. I draw on Deleuze’s ethics and theory of the event in *The Logic of Sense* in this study (Chapter 4) to conceptualise how hip-hop culture and its sensory

spaces produce circuits of affective force that throw identity into flux. This promoted my interest in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, who provides an account of alterity and difference and insists on ‘ethics as first philosophy’. He understands ethics through a method inspired heavily by phenomenology and helps us to conceive of ethics as those acts that we make *for* the other rather than a series of principles to be followed. These two thinkers had a significant influence in how I began to theorise conviviality in hip-hop culture. I began to think in terms of how we comport ourselves to the other and what kinds of comportment that hip-hop entrains, rather than the political ideologies expressed by listeners or artists.

Studies of the politics of hip-hop too often focus on the politics of artists and the politics of the milieu in which hip-hop music is made (see Chapter 2 for more details). These are crucial studies that have paved the way for my own, their insights enabling me to push further. However, some of these studies became disappointing when I attempted to apply their insights to the highly diverse student group that I studied. While hip-hop is a product of the African diaspora, its musical public is entirely diverse. This brings out a host of tensions, such as cultural appropriation, commodification, and authenticity that artists and listeners must navigate (see Rodriguez 2006, Richardson and Pough 2016, Morgan 2016, Harkness 2012, Cutler 2014, Sharma 2010). Reflecting on these studies, I designed mine to focus specifically on how listeners mediate differences that emerge in sites of hip-hop listening. In doing so, I have had to focus my study on a very small sample in a very particular milieu. I am interested specifically in how black musicality is mediated by white and other non-black bodies and the comportment that these bodies take in different forms of listening. This perspective ultimately required an approach inspired by the geographies of affect, sensation, and emotion, and my attention as an ethnographer to *how* affective qualities, moods, and atmospheres circulate alongside contestations and dialogical exchanges within the milieu of hip-hop listeners, rather than artists or those most proximate to hip-hop culture itself.

Antiphony

Antiphony is the aesthetic form undergirding my argument that hip-hop produces ethical subjectivity. Antiphony involves a dialogical musical and social relationship of call and response between two bodies. In hip-hop, this is the call and response between an MC and the audience or between the atmosphere of a hall and the records the DJ spins. We should also note that antiphonal techniques are common in all musical cultures across the world and are not unique to hip-hop or other African-American music genres. As I review in Chapter 3, antiphony plays a crucial role in the articulation of ethics, politics, and community in the African diaspora. We can detect a distinctly Africanist aesthetic in hip-hop culture; consequently, we should understand the aesthetics of antiphony and the production of subjectivity in hip-hop with recourse to African and diasporic thought (see Osumare 2008). Here, I outline the formal features of antiphony as they pertain to the spaces that I observed. Like the cipher, antiphony is deceptively simple. It is a mechanism for involving the audience in the manner that transforms listening into an act that valorises the multiplicity of ethical and political determinations present in a musical public.² An antiphonal relation is a line between a performer and a listener that calls for a response. Anyone who has been to a hip-hop gig knows how simple it is: in the chorus or hook of a song, the rapper says ‘when I say hip, you say hop! Hip–’ and the audience finishes with ‘–hop’ to the beat. This aesthetic (which I have oversimplified) dissolves the partition between artist and the audience where it is the movement of both in a rhythmic union that produces a community of ethical and expressive subjects. Antiphony is the aesthetic quality that allows this particular union. Chapter 3 explores the kind of self that antiphony cultivates by drawing on literary theory.

² There is a clear relation to Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept heteroglossia in antiphony. Bakhtin’s work impacted Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s writing on Signifyin(g), which I explore in Chapter 3. Intertextuality in African-American literature can (for example) be read through the relationship in which ‘one speech act determines the internal structure of another, the second effecting the voice of the first by absence, by difference’ (Gates 1988, 121). Bakhtin’s heteroglossia and dialogism can illuminate antiphonal relations by highlighting the ‘double-voiced’ nature of the performative speech act (see Wright 2004, 145).

I benefit from a few studies that have explored black and African-diasporic aesthetic traditions in theorising antiphony (see Ward 1998, 201, Ramsey 2003, Floyd 1995, Osumare 2008, Alim 2006) and instructive ethnographic work on fans and listeners that helps us understand how this can be used to understand hip-hop musical publics (see Bramwell 2011, 2015). Historically, however, there are rich accounts of antiphony's involvement in the production of communities, the role of call and response musicality in spirituality and African-diasporic writing that I develop in Chapter 3. My recourse to literary theory helps outline the effects of antiphony on listeners, uncovering microscopic but exciting potentials for understanding relations across differentiated bodies.

In order to account for antiphony in contemporary hip-hop culture, I rely on the concept of a 'musical public' or an 'aggregation of the affected' as the space in which antiphonal relations occur (Born 2013, 44). This is a step away from other conceptions of hip-hop culture, such as Tricia Rose's (1994) seminal contribution of hip-hop culture being made up of four elements: MCing or rapping, DJing, dancing, and graffiti. This is extremely useful for political-economic or sociological analyses of the milieu that produce hip-hop culture but does not account as well for the public sphere that forms *around* the circulation and globalisation of hip-hop. I emphasise that the musical public is itself different than the milieu that produces hip-hop. The public includes those that live in the same worlds that rappers speak about, worlds carved out in the segregated cities of the United States, between experiences of racism and poverty, police brutality, and everyday violence. This public also includes young people that grew up in privileged suburbs, blasting Tupac in their dad's old Benz on the way to school in the morning. This public is much larger than hip-hop culture and requires that we understand there are different ways and drastically different potentials for listeners to recognise the antiphonal demand woven into hip-hop culture and participate in the dialogical relations.

It is across this public sphere that antiphony operates (and fails to operate). What struck me about antiphony as I was doing my field research was that as listeners learned more and more about hip-hop culture, the more and more listeners felt responsible to conduct themselves in a manner conducive to an antiphonal ethos. The fragment of the musical public that I observed did not have only a *politics* within it; it was this ethos and this comportment (which I found was entrained via antiphonal life) that interested me the most in the group that I worked with.

What is important about antiphony is that we *allow* the other to make a demand on us. This act involves a curious contradiction: by being disposed to the other's demand, I must accept and approve of their right to make a demand upon me, rendering me passive. At the same time, I am expected to respond actively to this demand and account for myself. The beauty of antiphony in the so-called 'post-racial' moment is its ability for us to allow another's demands to constrict us, to take hold of us, and make cause for an event of thought. Perhaps we might return to the banal antiphony that we would encounter at any hip-hop show to illustrate this point better. If a rapper asks us to say 'hop' after he says 'hip', the rapper is demanding that we participate in the show and complete the musical event together. I am rendered passive in the face of the demand (I have to say 'hop' if I want to be a part of the show) and active at the same time in my ability to respond (I get to be a part of the performance itself). The performance becomes a communal event through the refrain for at least a moment. This is the power of antiphony: to reduce the hierarchy of artist/audience to a line between a copresent self and other that depend on each other to complete the event in which they find themselves.

Antiphony is found in much more complex modes as my empirical chapters below detail. I review a few forms of antiphony: between a listener and recorded sound, between a listener and an artist, and between a listener and other listeners. What I find is a myriad of

relations within this fragment of the musical public that involve the structure of a demand and response. It does not always succeed in dissolving hierarchy, but following Paul Gilroy, I do suggest that it makes possible ‘non-dominating social relations’ (1993b, 79) that might help us theorise new registers for living with and relating across alterity. In all of my interviews and in my ethnography I kept returning to the non-linear process by which encounters with hip-hop produced new forms of responsibility (or different modalities of response to a demand) that exceeded the musical public itself. Antiphony, in a way, *trains* the body to comport itself differently to others within the public sphere of hip-hop as well as beyond it. It modifies our *ethos*, and in doing so, enables observation of the arrangements that contribute a new ontological lens for the multicultural.

Ethical subjectivity: approval, demand, and disposition

I develop a model of ethical subjectivity in order to understand how this training in antiphony operates. The most germane starting point comes from the theory of ethical experience that Simon Critchley (2007) develops due to its specific mechanism of demand, approval, and response. Ethical experience is a subject’s ‘active receptivity’ to the demand placed upon it by alterity. The recognition of this demand depends on the subject’s approval of that demand as such:

ethical experience begins with the experience of a demand to which I give my approval. There are two key components to ethical experience: approval and demand...Let me begin by unpacking the notion of approval. I claim that there can be no sense of the good - however that is filled out at the level of content, and I understand it for the moment in an entirely formal and empty manner – without an act of approval, affirmation, or approbation (2007, 14-15).

We can see the relevance to antiphony, where the experience of a demand is the crucial starting point for the antiphonal relation. Critchley’s point about approval is quite useful because it complicates a rather simple dyadic model of the ethics of antiphony between a demand and response. The demand must first be recognised and ‘affirmed’ before ethical experience or a response can occur.

Approval of an ethical demand requires that the self face that demand and connect it to what that self determines as the ‘good’ (Critchley 2007, 20). It follows that for an antiphonal exchange to occur, two parties must approve of the other’s demand (and their right to make that demand) as a good in itself. This is a key difference between the ethical experience that Critchley describes, which centres on the modern, European subject in general, where instead I am interested in the methods by which ethical subjects are constituted by instances of antiphonal relation in the face of alterity. What we find in antiphony is that a concept of the good does not have to be shared for a community to share in ethical experience. It is the sharing of multiple concepts of the good and the polyvocality of ethical determination that is the ‘good’ in the antiphonal milieu (Gilroy 1988). Ethical subjects are meant and trained to approve of the multiplicity and polyvocality of ethical determination in hip-hop spaces. We can read this polyvocality from the double-voiced nature of the signifier and expression (as the written word and the speech act) itself in African-American vernacular and literary practice (Gates 1988, 55).

What Critchley encourages us to ask here is *how* the subjects at play constitute themselves toward the demand of this good, which in the relation of antiphony is always a contestation in the possibility of the other’s different and incommensurable sense of the good: ‘an *ethical subject* can be defined as self-relating itself approvingly, bindingly, to the demand of its good’ (Critchley 2007, 20). Where Critchley says ‘its’ good, in the antiphonal relation, the ‘good’ of the self is presented with the alterity of the good of the other. Consequently, I focus on the ‘good’ as indeterminate and, in the case of hip-hop, discursively and affectively produced through dissent and contestation. What needs to be accounted for are the methods by which antiphonal practice is recognised and subjects comport themselves towards those principles in order to open up an antiphonal event.

Antiphony involves ethical experience with an other, an exchange between my demand and your response. I modify Critchley's theory to include the other and better attend to antiphonal relations: my demand/our approval/your response/(my approval of your response). In order to apply Critchley's theory of ethical experience in the milieu of *shared* antiphonal life we must account for how the other plays a crucial role in the self's determination of the good and its approval of the other's right to make a demand. In hip-hop, the call is hidden in various ways and implicit in the arrangements and spatialities that are present in hip-hop culture. It takes training and time in order to recognise and approve of demands and further training and time to be able to respond. In this sense, the idea that the ethical demand calls from me an unfulfillable responsibility is useful: the circularity of demand/approval/response is an infinite practice; our ethical *end* is never reached. Rather, I constantly *attempt* to communicate and comport myself in such a way towards the demand in order to maintain a community and continue the spatial arrangement by which we share in our difference.

To be in an ethical relationship is also to be *disposed* to an affective alterity and it is this proximity that opens up ethical subjectivity (see Critchley 2007, 10). This idea resonates with Levinas, who locates in sense and the affective excess of the other the force that opens up subjectivity to modulation, wounding, and change. Enrique Dussel has an interesting reading of the other in Levinas that foregrounds the affective. Dussel refers to the other's 'accusing presence' that takes us hostage at the moment of our relationality and proximity with them. Our ability to feel, to touch, and be impinged on—what Judith Butler refers to as precarity (2010), or our *affectivity*, or 'hetero-affectivity' (see Critchley 1999a, 191)—is precisely what allows us to be 'held hostage' by the other. In this sense, the other's 'thisness' and their truth disclosed through their presence makes demands upon us and affects our subjectivity:

Subjectivity is vulnerable, exposed to affection, and is a sensibility more passive than any passivity: it is extreme patience. The hostage is exposed, exposed to expressing, and thus to saying, and thus to giving. Pain marks the start of creation. Levinas said: 'How the adversity of pain is ambiguous!' (Sussin 1999, 139).

Our sensitivity, our precarity, our ability to sense makes it possible for alterity to impinge upon us; it is from a mode of passivity that ethical experience commences. This being held hostage is a necessary fact of proximity, that our affectivity and therefore the potentiality of our being held hostage by the other is the condition of possibility for our responsibility. This positionality, I argue, becomes useful for thinking about antiphonal relations in which the difference expressed by the other forces my own re-evaluation of the good and my accountability for *my* sense of the good.

Responsibility emerges as a sensibility towards that which exceeds our comprehension in a given relation with an alterity. This means that we can never own up to our responsibility, that we can only approach responsibility as a limit that is present but never arrives and is completed (cf. Bauman 1999). Ethical subjectivity might be more easily explained as a demand that takes us hostage, that we are *disposed to* and that we must respond to. My thesis with regard to ethical subjectivity is that the sharing and diffusion of our precarity and affectivity opens us up when the body is disposed to the other's demand. Ethics is a relation with alterity (figured as human and non-human) and is developed through our responses to alterity's affective impingements. Where Critchley suggests that 'ethical experience presupposes an ethical subject disposed towards the approved demand of its good' (2007, 23), I find that in the hip-hop musical public, ethical experience *emerges* in the disposition to alterity whose ability to make demands *I have already affirmed*. This modification of the theory of ethical experience that I am drawing on requires attention to the ways in which the body is disposed to alterity, how it recognises this alterity, and how it decides to respond. Alterity is figured as that which impinges on our sensibility, that which takes hold of us and renders us passive:

what [Levinas] means by ['persecution'] is that we are not given any choice at the beginning about what will impress itself upon us, or about how that impression will be registered and translated. These are domains of radical impressionability and receptivity that are prior to all choice and deliberation... They recur throughout life as part of a not fully articulate sensibility. But perhaps most importantly, this sensibility is neither mine nor yours. It is not a possession, but a way of being comported toward another, already *in the hands of the other*, and so a mode of dispossession (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 95).

The self's recognition of this dispossession and its comportment in the face of it is what begins a journey of ethical subjectivity (see also Butler 2005, 128). It is in *facing* the other that this responsibility emerges, which provides some ground to suggest that ethics may be a product of anarchic subject rather than a corpus of transcendental and universal principles. I position the question of my comportment towards the other as an ethical question, one that involves my recognition of a certain demand, a sense of the 'good', and being placed in a certain disposition. My response is my reaction to these impingements and that is where I *act* in an ethical way.

Antiphonal space and the ethical subject

The antiphonal relation invokes a logic in which ethical subjectivity emerges between a self and its relation to a multiplicity of alterities. To bring things back to hip-hop culture, we might conceive of ethical experience in the instance in which the other 'calls us out' and our response to that call through our comportment, conduct, and ethos. In antiphonal space, this is the demand and response that exceeds the musical site itself: call-and-response not only occurs between myself and the performer, but between myself and the others I share the performance with. This form of antiphony exceeds the musical, it is a social orientation towards the alterity faced in sites of shared listening.

First, we need to understand under what conditions antiphonal space can be approved of. At what point does a listener *recognise* the antiphonal relation? In shared listening sites, the comportment of listeners to one another and their ability to *play* in the antiphonal game become important dimensions of listening together. Often, tensions about listeners (usually privileged, middle class, and distant from the 'roots' of hip-hop) that 'take up space' in hip-hop culture emerge from the failure of these listeners to engage within the rules of the antiphonal game itself. Approval of antiphonal experience requires a certain kind of training. Thus for ethical

experience to emerge within hip-hop culture we need to consider that the listener must become *able* to tune into antiphony before any kind of ethics will come into play.

Second, we need to consider what forms of demand are at play within hip-hop space. These demands are as different as each of the bodies that makes them or experiences them and the situations in which they circulate. The most general and most important demand that recurs through antiphonal spaces in hip-hop is to be ready to be called out, willing to face an other's impingement, and to enter into a dialogue over this impingement rather than to cut short the relation. At other times, the demand is one that makes possible communal experience; in certain spaces, the non-participation of one body in the group assembled frustrates antiphonal relations. These non-participating others are called out for their *lack* of contribution to the antiphonal space and the collective vibe. And, at other times, demands are placed on others on content—what they choose to listen to, what they choose to play for others, and what they choose to express in the cipher or elsewhere. These demands are different and play out in numerous ways but the key point is that these demands call for ethical responses and new comportments.

Third, and finally, we need to consider what kinds of responses occur in the face of the other's demand. It is in the constriction of a demand, an anxiety and dispossession, that the body is moved to express and comport itself ethically. These responses are once again unique to each person that expresses them. However, what I elucidate is how these responses are framed in relation to concrete demands. It is in the microscopic spaces in which responses are played out that we can understand how responsibility operates within hip-hop culture. For some, this involves a certain kind of consciousness of their own distance to 'authenticity' in hip-hop or the impulse to contribute even at the cost of a risk. This might involve rapping in a cipher in order to maintain the vibe and try to contribute and fail. Such a response still involves an ethical act even if one's rhymes are embarrassingly bad. In another vein, this responsibility

may exceed the cipher or even the musical public itself, changing the way an individual might conduct themselves in other sites of everyday life.

These three components—approval, demand, and response—structure ethical experience in hip-hop. I use these terms because they are evident in the literature on antiphony as well as their resonance with ethical experience in Levinas (explained in the following section). By inflecting antiphony with this ethical theory, I hope to put more weight on the notion of *how* antiphony produces spaces of ‘non-dominating social relations’ and why it matters (see Gilroy 1993b, 79). I argue that through antiphony, we might construct an ethical multiculturalism, or perhaps an *antiphonal multiculturalism* that depends on dialogue and the iterations of approval, demand, and response that allows for multicultural life to be an experimental space. This experimental nature comes from the concept of antiphony as the thrusting of the self onto a stage of transformation, of identity pulled in different directions, fragmented and split, and on a journey with no teleological endpoint. It is by understanding this *ethos* of antiphony that we might extrapolate from antiphonal relations in hip-hop culture to envision the politics of alterity.

Alterity and identity in antiphonal spaces

I have reviewed two of my key terms thus far: antiphony and ethical subjectivity. In this section, I explain the concept of the politics of alterity that I operationalise in this study. My concept of the politics of alterity is based on the antiphonal structure of ethical experience that I started to outline using concepts from Critchley and Levinas. I go further, suggesting that we should theorise the politics of alterity through the antiphonal relation itself. Approaching the politics of alterity through antiphony allows us to consider shared musical sites as lively and affective spaces of being-with as well as starting points for theorising the multicultural. I hope to take discussion of the multicultural out of the domain of the political, renaming it as a process

of ethical experimentation in antiphonal relations, grounded in the experience of dispossession and passivity in the face of alterity.

It is helpful to think of the political as scaled down to the body and the actions, behaviours, and contestations that occur across a community of selves. These actions, behaviours, and contestations are governed by a certain *ethos*, which is interpreted differently by each ethical subject. This also requires a shift to an ontological terrain that affirms the thought of being as multiplicity, rather than singularity (Critchley 2015, 105, further detail in Chapter 4). By understanding being as multiple or plural, we understand that there is an alterity always already within us and that alterity cannot be determined by a singular concept such as identity: my accent makes me American; I am American—but just my name should remind you that I am also *not quite* (cf. Bhabha 2004, 122). What we have in antiphony and hip-hop spaces are bodies, fragmented and multiple, in proximity and copresence, forming a community around musical experience that opens up ethical and political registers.

The politics of alterity in hip-hop culture begin with antiphony's operation on identity: a shattering and fragmentation. Antiphonal relations make identity an event in itself. In calling out my identity, the other makes a demand on me that opens an interval in which I must decide how to comport myself in response to the disposition that I find myself in. Becoming (as the change in my own identity) takes place in this interval between the demand and my response. Identity is a process; of course, but it becomes so when it is experienced as an *event*. I am opened up such that I look at myself from the outside, the initiation of an untimely gaze that the other pushes me into. This opens up an anxiety about identity and about who or 'what' I am that is negotiated in ethical responses to the other. This anxiety becomes the source of our *will* to respond, pushing us from a passivity into an active responsibility.

I build further on Levinas to understand the ethics of responsibility and alterity. This is located, for Levinas, in face-to-face relationships in which the other places on me an imperative

and an obligation by making a demand (Lingis 2009). For Levinas, the other with whom I interact exceeds my possibilities of full comprehension: I can never fully understand or *know* the other because that relies on a form of universal knowledge rather than the particularity of *this* other that faces me (see Levinas 1996, 5). We recognise identity only in fragments, calls, and expressions that the other articulates. This perspective allows Levinas to displace ontology with ethics that are based on the particularity of a given relation in which alterity interrupts my comprehension and my ability to ‘grasp’ and ‘know’ the other and myself.

Everything which comes to me from the other (*autrui*) starting from being in general certainly offers itself to my comprehension and possession. I understand him in the framework of his history, his surroundings and habits. That which escapes comprehension in the other (*autrui*) is him, a being. I cannot negate him partially, in violence, in grasping him within the horizon of being in general and possessing him (1996, 9).

In this passage, Levinas stresses that there is something about the particularity of this other that we cannot fully understand. The face of the other, its particularity, is what exceeds our ontological grasp and what it is in the other that invokes an ethical relation: ‘audition and speech...the encounter with the face—that is, moral consciousness—can be described as the condition of consciousness *tout court*’ (1996, 10). Interestingly it is language in its sonic property rather than as a conveyance of meaning that opens this ‘moral consciousness’ and the proximity to the face as an ethical relation.

For Levinas, ethical register is invoked in face-to-face communication in which the incommensurable and incomprehensible particularity of a different being is affectively present through communication and sense. Communication is figured as a sharing and touching with the other, a situation of mediation literally between bodies. In face-to-face communication with the other’s alterity, identity is called into question. Levinas renders communication (not as an exchange of information but as a sharing between beings) as an ethical space that turns identity (my difference) and alterity (your difference) into an event.

It is this displacement of comprehension in the excess of the other that allows Levinas to privilege performative response in his theory of ethical relation instead of a moral

consciousness grounded in an abstract or universal schema (see Nealon 1998). This displacement allows him to affirm the ‘saying’ of language above the ‘said’. It is not meaning that counts but ‘saying’ (as a performative act) as the means of response and the relation of proximity: ‘Saying is not a game...it is the proximity of one to the other, *the commitment of an approach*, the one for the other, the very signifyingness of signification’ (Levinas 1991b, 5, emphasis added). What is relevant about enunciation is that it involves a particular comportment to the other through the use of language (in addition to other forms of communication). This proximity is the source of ethics. The character of our relation is in and through language and sense. That Levinas turns our attention to ethics as performativity in proximity to alterity is a prescription to understand the ethics and politics of hip-hop from a perspective that takes seriously the hermeneutics and play of language and affect rather than the meaning, significance, and comprehension of the other’s expression. In addition, Levinas prescribes that ethics be about how we comport ourselves towards the other in their precarity and vulnerability, making for an ethics grounded in the particularity of the other’s alterity rather than in the universal identity that they might seem to belong to. It is this claim that Butler extends in her reading of Levinas in *Frames of War*:

In the name of preserving the precarious life of the other, one crafts aggression into modes of expression that protect those one loves...for Levinas the meaning of responsibility is bound up with an anxiety that remains open, that does not settle an ambivalence through disavowal but rather gives rise to a certain ethical practice, itself experimental, that seeks to preserve life better than it destroys it (Butler 2010, 177).

While Butler’s context here is the question of non-violence, the principle that she draws from Levinas is that the proximity of the self to the vulnerability of the other demands a certain kind of ethical practice and comportment.

In his essay, ‘Substitution’ (1991b, 99-130), Levinas explores how the ‘I’ and identity are interrupted by the demand of responsibility that we experience in the face of the other. This interruption is developed in more depth in my reading of Wole Soyinka in Chapter 3 and my reading of Gilles Deleuze in Chapter 4. It is in ‘Substitution’ that Levinas introduces

responsibility as ‘one-for-the-other’, or responsibility as responsibility for the other. This is developed through a critical take on the self-conscious Western subject that can claim to know itself (see Peperzak, Critchley, and Bernasconi in Levinas 1996, 79, see also Lingis in Levinas 1991b, xxii-xxiii). In the relation to the other there is nothing that ‘resembles self-consciousness’, the self has ‘meaning only as an upsurge in me of a responsibility prior to commitment, that is, a responsibility for the other’ (Levinas 1991b, 103). For Levinas, alterity accuses us, affects us, and thereby constitutes us; our consciousness cannot pre-exist the event of this accusation, but rather, the accusation calls us into question and produces subjectivity in an ethical terrain. Levinas locates responsibility in a given disposition towards alterity and sense and identifies response as an iteration and an experiment that is prior to a ‘logos of response’ (1991b, 102). What we are left with is an ethics of response: how do we respond to being put into question by an exterior body (see Levinas 1991b, 100-101)?

What interests me in ‘Substitution’ is not the notion of responsibility for the other but the notion that sense and alterity accuse us and call us into response. It is from the distribution of sense and the accusation of the other *through* sense (and the enunciation of language in its sonority rather than its meaning) that calls us into question and opens up ethics. Levinas positions sense as that which disrupts the identity of the Western, self-conscious subject. This is of particular import in the antiphonal relation which itself affirms the possibility of multiple determinations of identity and the ‘good’. Levinas articulates this relationship between sense and identity on an interval, referring to the ‘hither’ side of identity and the self.

The ipseity, in the passivity without arche characteristic of identity, is a hostage. The word *I* means *here I am*, answering for everything and for everyone. Responsibility for the others has not been a return to oneself, but an exasperated contracting, which the limits of identity cannot retain. [...] The self is on the hither side of rest; it is the impossibility to come back from all things and concern oneself only with oneself. It is to hold on to oneself while gnawing away at oneself. Responsibility in obsession is a responsibility of the ego for what the ego has not wished (Levinas 1991b, 114).

Levinas lays out how individuality is held hostage in the presence with the other and the disposition of the self towards alterity. To be responsible for the other is a demanding position

that requires a self capable of facing its own dissolution. Chapters 5-10 demonstrate *how* this self is cultivated in hip-hop musical publics through sense and experience. Responsibility here reads as the antiphonal performativity that Wole Soyinka describes in ‘The Fourth Stage’ (which I read closely in Chapter 3), in which tragic music involves stepping out onto and facing an abyss in which the self is thrown into question. For Soyinka and for Levinas, the other—the other performer, the other who calls me—is the starting point of the enactment of the drama of identity and my responsibility. In this sense, identity is a process and a performance; through Levinas I add that the *mechanic* by which identity is rendered unstable is the point at which we are held hostage by alterity, the process by which alterity accuses and takes hold of us.

Levinas’s essay ‘Substitution’ suggests that subjectivity is produced in its accusation by alterity. It is a particular event of love and fecundity between myself and your alterity that Levinas positions as ‘ethical’ (see Levinas 1991a, Irigaray 1986). What is exciting about Levinas’s philosophy is that by privileging ethics to ontology it allows for decentred and decolonial concepts of ethics from outside the Western tradition (see Drabinski 2011, 51-55). In particular, Levinas is useful because he rejects a universalist understanding of ethics as a distinct moral code based on reason by rooting ethics in the particularity of beings themselves and the domain of experience and copresence. By looking to the sonic and ethicopolitical structures of subalterity (see Drabinski 2011, 70) we find a space that can usefully operationalise a Levinasian framework for understanding the ethical and political effects of antiphony.

In the politics of alterity that I am developing, identity moves from being a representation (this is who I am) to something that resembles sense (I have a sense of my identity) that becomes fragmented and diffuse in the antiphonal relation. To say that identity becomes an event in the interval between a demand and a response is to open up the relation between the materiality of my self (the body that I present to you) and my self as ipseity (the

body that I feel myself to be). This interval is interesting because it posits an alterity already present within the self. A quote from *Zarathustra* comes at an interesting point in Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, where he is thinking about activity and passivity: 'The body's active forces make it a self and define the self as superior and astonishing: "A most powerful being, an unknown sage – he is called Self. He inhabits your body, he is your body [Nietzsche 1961, 62³]"' (Deleuze 2006, 42). Deleuze refers to 'consciousness' as a reactive force towards those powers that dominate. Deleuze locates the 'active' in the *unconscious*: that part of the body that I do not have access to until there is some sensory stimulus that forces me to talk to that unknown sage that *is* my body (see Deleuze 2006, 41-42). That unconscious part of my identity is a part of me that *I do not yet know*. For Nietzsche, the 'power of transformation, the Dionysian power, is the primary definition of activity' (2006, 42); this is an activity that happens in the aleatory point of the event and sense that activates this alterity within me. Antiphony requires that we rethink these concepts of force and modify them slightly. Where Deleuze and Nietzsche privilege active force as a process of becoming (and a concept of the 'good' in the philosophy of difference), antiphony demands that we be more ambivalent. This is not a complete departure from Deleuze; the 'science' of active force is the invention of new ways to *transform* what we are in the face of the reactive forces that impinge upon us:

Each time we point out the nobility of action and its superiority to reaction in this way we must not forget that reaction also designates a type of force...reactions cannot be grasped or scientifically understood as forces if they are not related to superior forces...the reactive is a primordial quality of force but which can only be interpreted as such in relation to and on the basis of the active (Deleuze 2006, 42).

I maintain that active force is involved in the plane of transformation but it is important to recognise, following Levinas, that passivity is itself a 'beginning'. The notion that we are responsible for that which dominates us requires that we conceive not of the 'freedom of

³ The translation in the edition that I cite above is different than the version used in the translation of Deleuze's text. The paragraph cited in Nietzsche (1961) reads: 'Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage – he is called Self. He lives in your body, he is your body' (1961, 62).

consciousness' but the constricting, 'obsessive' responsibility for the other. In this sense, Levinas is giving us a schematic of the ethical subject in the antiphonal relation:

the responsibility for the other, the responsibility in obsession, suggests an absolute passivity of a self that has never been able to diverge from itself, to then enter into its limits, and identify itself by recognising itself in its past. Its recurrence is the contract of an ego...gnawing away at this very identity – identity gnawing away at itself – in a remorse (Levinas 1991b, 114).

Levinas here explores how we might understand how the sense of responsibility, not that of a *free consciousness* but a self held under accusation by another, in fact shatters identity and makes it untimely and eventful. In our passivity we are rendered vulnerable to alterity and its demands. In this position, identity becomes a line stretching across two limits: holding to my self as my self is eroded.

This is the modification that I might suggest to Deleuze's reading of activity and reactivity in Nietzsche: where active force is a kind of transformation (and it takes an active force to negotiate the persistence of my identity through its erosion), a freely active force is not rooted in a responsibility for the other. The freely active force that extends without constriction is not called by the other, or perhaps may never even hear this call, and will not be thrust into face-to-face ethical experience. Ethical activity then depends on a constriction and an accusation that calls for an active response; it is in passivity and our receptivity to sense and alterity that ethical experience is invoked. We should note, however, that this position that Levinas seems to start ethical experience and responsibility from is a movement in two directions: in my passivity I must hold on to my identity as it slips away from me and is shattered by the other. This is where transformation starts: when the other makes my identity an event, forcing me to enter a disjunctive temporality.

Politics in antiphony refers to contestations over differential conceptions of the political 'good' and their articulation in the face of the other. Ethics, on the other hand, refers to how we comport ourselves in response to the other. Antiphony structures communication and copresence—in this study, the extension of two or more bodies in a shared site—such that it

opens contestation on ethical and political lines. It invokes an ethics and politics not rooted in abstract principles but in the lively domain of one body's comportment to another. I propose that the political in antiphony is the terrain over which these comportments are distributed. That is to say that antiphony happens somewhere between bodies disposed to one another but its outcomes are contingent on the comportment that each body brings to the relation. Antiphony happens in a *community*, not one defined by identity but by the fact of the copresent, face-to-face relation in which we share each other and the space we are in. Antiphonal politics are the choices that are made in the face of an arrangement of alterity in the spirit of constructing new, contramodern spaces and times. This politics does not happen through an identification with particular ideologies; rather, what is political is how the body presents itself to the other. This politics is muddled up with an ethical subject that is disposed to alterity's call, from which emerges a politics constituted of experimental and iterative responses to this disposition. In shared spaces of hip-hop culture, politics plays out through an ethics of response to sensible alterity and the dispositions it puts us in.

This rethinking of identity as made eventful in antiphonal space relies on the concept of the body—and consequently its identity—as fundamentally vulnerable to affect.

Precariousness as a generalised condition relies on a conception of the body as fundamentally dependent on, and conditioned by, a sustained and sustaining world; responsiveness—and thus, ultimately, responsibility—is located in the affective responses to a sustaining and impinging world. Because such affective responses are invariably mediated, they call upon and enact certain interpretive frames; they can also call into question the taken-for-granted character of those frames, and in that way provide the affective conditions for social critique (Butler 2010, 34).

Affective experience in the face of alterity disturbs the 'taken-for-granted character' of interpretive frames. But I suggest that we can take this conception of the body beyond the horizon of social critique and also explore how it structures the material relations in which new frames, but more importantly, new modalities of community emerge. I dive into the assemblage of bodies rich with affective circuits to understand the micropolitics at play inside and between the bodies that constitute the assemblage. Where affect can be the 'stuff of ideation and

critique' (Butler 2010, 34), I argue that in antiphonal space, it is the stuff of new possibilities for convivial, multicultural life.

Contramodernity: toward antiphonal multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is generally based on a theorisation that does not question the limits of concepts such as recognition, equality, and tolerance in everyday affective life. Though many proponents of multiculturalism are important advocates for finding the potentials for accommodating 'others' in the 'nation' in the current political reality, this perspective does not account for the processes by which the 'other' and the 'nation' are reified. This has led postcolonial critics to articulate different forms of 'the politics of difference'. This politics relies on a revision of how the concepts of 'other' and 'self' can come to exist. Turning briefly to Cornel West and Homi Bhabha, I review their revision of identity and difference and argue that self and other are articulated in response to alterity. These are notes towards rethinking the multicultural as a fundamental condition of existence—we live in a world composed of bodies different than ours that place a demand on us—and speculate on the kind of politics that might respond to this condition. I position antiphony and the ethical self that it produces as productive of a repertoire of actions and ethical orientations that might suggest another form of relating across difference.

In Cornel West's 'new cultural politics of difference', he imagines the 'distinct articulations of talented (and usually privileged) contributors to culture...in order to empower and enable social action and, if possible, to enlist collective insurgency for the expansion of freedom, democracy and individuality' (West 2009, 4). This form of social action is 'incessantly critical' (2006, 77): it is an iterative and experimental *practice*. That West locates the new cultural politics of difference in 'articulations' emphasises the importance of enunciation, orality, and performativity in his politics. West's image of this contributor in the

new cultural politics of difference is a ‘Critical Organic Catalyst’, a person that is ‘attuned’ to what the ‘mainstream’ has to offer but remains committed to producing ‘subcultures of criticism’ (2009, 24). These subcultures—of which we might include many segments of hip-hop’s musical public—produce the new cultural politics of difference:

The new cultural politics of difference can thrive only if there are communities, groups, organisations, institutions, subcultures, and networks of people of colour who *cultivate critical sensibilities and personal accountability*—without inhibiting individual expressions, curiosities and idiosyncrasies’ (2009, 25, emphasis added).

West’s mention of *sensibilities* and *personal accountability* fits with the conception of antiphony, ethical subjectivity and alterity that I have developed thus far. West’s account of the cultural politics of difference stresses the role that our sensibility and comportment have in mediating difference in multicultural and diverse spaces. West affirms the dialogical modality through which antiphony operates between an individual and the alterity that calls upon it. He reminds us that this is a particular product of African heritage:

White-supremacist assaults on black intelligence, ability, beauty and character required persistent black efforts to hold self-doubt, self-contempt and even self-hatred at bay. Selective appropriation, incorporation of European ideologies, cultures and institutions alongside an African heritage – a heritage more or less confined to linguistic innovation in rhetorical practices, stylisations of the body in forms of occupying an alien social space (hairstyles, ways of walking, standing, hand expressions, talking) and means of constituting and sustaining camaraderie and community (e.g. antiphonal, call-and-response styles, rhythmic repetition, risk-ridden syncopation in spectacular modes in musical and rhetorical expressions) – were some of the strategies involved (West 2009, 15).

I would like to hone in on West’s articulation of antiphony as a modality that constitutes and sustains ‘camaraderie and community’. Antiphony is a contramodern practice that is an active response to the violence rendered and impingement made on the racialised black subject. It is worthwhile, then, to take antiphony seriously as a starting point for new modalities of multiculturalism. In this sense, selective appropriation of black aesthetics can inspire the production of the critical sensibilities and personal accountability of the new politics of difference.

The African heritage that the Critical Organic Catalyst negotiates presents a challenge in the context of hip-hop musical publics that participate in the aesthetic enjoyment of African-

American music but do not share the same *heritage*. How can we make sense of the *globalisation* of hip-hop music and the kind of diversity it opens up?⁴ How does heritage figure in hip-hop spaces, and what are the limits to the appropriation and incorporation of forms of African heritage? This is where West's thought becomes increasingly instructive. His model of the Critical Organic Catalyst refers to resistance as the cultivation of critical sensibilities and modes of responsibility. We might employ this notion to better understand hip-hop fans; what matters is the sensibility and energy they bring to the group rather than what they signify and represent. What matters is the *how*—perhaps the *ethos*—of enunciation itself. I think this is why West is careful to remind us that antiphonal expression is 'risk-ridden': to signify is to take a risk, to project a certain self, and expose it to the community who may build upon it or destroy it. How we accept and affirm this risk and how we respond to the other is embedded in a social, antiphonal structure that being in the hip-hop musical public involves. It is in rhythm itself that identity is split, fragmented and shattered:

A tremendous articulateness is syncopated with the African drumbeat... into an American postmodernist product: there is no subject expressing originary anguish here but a fragmented subject, pulling from past and present, innovatively producing a heterogeneous product (West, quoted in Bhabha 2004, 253).

For West, the drumbeat is a kind of selective appropriation, pulling from the past and mixing in of the present in an experiment. It is this doubleness and ambivalence—the ability to pull and project at the same time, grounded in a critical sensibility—that serves as a means for thinking about the subject of multiculturalism. This is, for Homi Bhabha, a subject of a 'disjunctive temporality' that 'creates the signifying time for the inscription of cultural incommensurability where differences cannot be sublated or totalised' (2004, 254).

⁴ Hip-hop audiences are complex. We might consider the *globalisation* of hip-hop (which has been explored extensively) and understand how hip-hop culture and musical publics are spatialised in different locales (see Basu and Lemelle 2006, Terkourafi 2010, Aidi 2014). However, as Murray Forman's seminal chapter in *That's the Joint* reminds us (2004), hip-hop cultures are unique to the spaces and places that sustain it. Others have spoken of a diasporisation of hip-hop culture and musical publics (see Osumare 2008, Motley and Henderson 2008). I propose that we think of the *globalisation* of hip-hop differently than the *diasporisation* of hip-hop. The former would refer to the circuits of capitalist modernity and consumption that assemble musical publics. This stresses that there is an *ambivalence* in sites of globalised hip-hop culture with regards to the potential for ethical subjectivity. *Diasporisation*, then, might refer more to the 'connective marginalities' that Halifu Osumare proposes in which black and other non-white groups make use of hip-hop to produce a resistant and critical culture. Where Marcyliena Morgan is optimistic that 'global hip-hop will not necessarily follow a consistent path, [it] will be critical' (Morgan 2016, 145), I think this needs to be circumscribed by the fact that this might be true for the diasporisation of hip-hop tropes, aesthetics, and techniques but is also contingent on *how* hip-hop musical publics are spatialised and how these musical publics produce particular subjectivities grounded in a critical sensibility.

The enunciative present of antiphonal life resists the possibilities of closure, its risky *parole* always open to another response that might face an incommensurable difference. The oral, dialogical structure that frames antiphonal relations opens up a site where the possibility of multiple forms of appropriation allow for simultaneous movement backwards and forwards. The ‘ambivalence’ involved in this disjunctive present elicits a negotiation between nostalgia, heritage, and the ‘past’ and an unfolding present and the call of the other.⁵ Following Stuart Hall, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Cornel West, Bhabha builds a notion of ambivalence and the postcolonial that rewrites the representation of the subject:

There is an attempt to construct a theory of the social imaginary that requires no subject expressing originary anguish (West), no singular self-image (Gates), no necessary or eternal belongingness (Hall). The contingent and the liminal become the times and the spaces for the historical representation of the subjects of cultural difference in a postcolonial criticism (2004, 256).

We might take the contingent and the liminal a bit further and argue that these spaces are also the *sites* at which new forms of multiculturalism are articulated, iterated, and tested in concrete relations. Where the contingent and the liminal become the source of historical representation in literary and cultural criticism, finding these sites in hip-hop musical publics might help us to reposition the notion of hip-hop as something *also* contingent, fluid, and changing. These sites in hip-hop culture foreground a certain kind of training and cultivation of ethical selfhood *through* practices of signification, play, and enunciation that can help us rewrite how we might construct a concept of the multicultural as constant agonism, dialogue, and heteroglossia. I suggest that through observation of liminal, disjunctive sites in hip-hop culture we might rethink an *other* time for the globalisation of culture. Against colour, heritage, and rootedness, or lost in cosmopolitan superdiversity, from a postcolonial reading of hip-hop we might find a way to think about the conflicts, antagonisms and incipient, but incomplete, modes of conviviality that construct a *contramodernity*, a space and a time that magnifies sensibilities towards the multicultural rooted in a heteroglot negotiation of incommensurable differences *in*

⁵ The sections on Gilles Deleuze in Chapter 4 explore these notions from a temporal and phenomenological perspective.

situ. We might look to antiphony as a social site for conceiving of a new logic of the ‘multicultural’ outside the lines of cosmopolitan closure (which I take up briefly in Chapter 11).

This logic requires a departure from modernity. It is a logic that is open to multiple horizons, negotiated in sites of incommensurable and copresent alterity. Homi Bhabha’s ‘postcolonial contramodernity’ is articulated through times and spaces that ‘[force] us to rethink the profound limitations of a consensual and collusive ‘liberal’ sense of cultural community’ (2004, 251). The ‘postcolonial perspective’ recasts the concept of national, assimilated and diverse communities by ‘[insisting] that cultural and political identity are constructed through a process of alterity...The time for “assimilating” minorities to holistic and organic notions of cultural value has dramatically passed. The very language of cultural community needs to be rethought’ (2004, 251). Contramodernity is a rejection of a system of national values that pre-exist the subject. It emerges through liminality and the selective articulation of heritage and horizons:

emphasis on the disjunctive present of utterance...allows the articulation of subaltern agency to emerge as relocation and reinscription. In the seizure of the sign, as I’ve argued, there is neither dialectical sublation nor the empty signifier: there is a contestation of the given symbols of authority that shift the terrains of antagonism. The synchronicity in the social ordering of symbols is challenged within its own terms but the grounds of engagement have been displaced in a supplementary movement that exceeds those terms. This is the historical movement of hybridity as camouflage, as a contesting, antagonistic agency functioning in the time-lag of sign/symbol (2004, 277).

The production of contramodern subjectivities occurs in the disjunctive times and spaces of encountering alterity. These are affective sites, as Bhabha notes (2004, 276), but they are also sites of discursive and ontological transgression. The ‘contra’ in contramodern here is the contestation and rejection of given ‘values’ and ‘orderings’ that moves doubly with a ‘supplementary’ rearticulation of new values submitted to a dialogical mediation of a shared site of incommensurable and copresent life. At stake is resignifying modernity. This is where the story and the knowledge of the Critical Organic Catalyst is instructive: by reaching forward, pulling from the past, and expressing through simultaneously affective and discursive registers,

the Catalyst attempts to articulate modernity *otherwise* through its comportment, ethos, and responsibility.

Hip-hop operates in its own contramodernity but in doing so it is implicitly rewiring modernity. It selectively appropriates a number of technologies and techniques from a Black Atlantic and African-American vernacular including antiphony, improvisation, Signifyin(g), and African diasporic religions. It emerges from the sites at which the values of liberal modernity betray the subjects it claims to protect and even nurture. It is impossible to think of the contramodernity that hip-hop articulates without identifying how the global history of black subalterity in North America, its contingent diasporic networks, and disjunctive temporalities frames it. Cornel West reminds us that the body racialised by liberal modernity as ‘black’ is constitutive of the ‘mainstream’ of popular culture; consequently, it has power and agency by cultivating critical sensibilities and responsibility in audiences. Music, here, is a call to use aesthetic power and participation to produce and enable experimentation in a contramodern time.

Through the logic of a hip-hop contramodernity, whose genealogy and practice I describe at length in the following chapters, I wish to articulate a starting point for rewriting the multicultural from the perspective of the social technologies nurtured and disseminated in the thought and aesthetics of the African diaspora. This is multiculturalism *otherwise*, rooted in an experimental contramodernity that engages in forms of selective appropriation in order to recompose new forms of community and culture. Its basis is in the antiphonal schema of demands and responses iterated over a series of disjunctive times and spaces. I hope that by relaying the stories of how antiphony plays out in multicultural spaces with an ethnographic and genealogical approach to the political techniques present in hip-hop culture and musical publics, I can contribute a model of thinking through community and subjectivity via a lens rooted in antiphony as a starting point, rather than propositions on equality, tolerance, or

recognition. In doing so, I stress the potential of hip-hop to develop a sense of the multicultural that can inspire a postcolonial, contramodern approach to the politics of difference.

2. Tracing antiphony in musical publics

In this chapter, I explain how I deploy my theoretical approach and operationalise antiphony to understand the relation between hip-hop and multiculturalism. Hip-hop studies, if we choose to think of it as a field of interdisciplinary inquiry (see Brooks and Conroy 2011), incorporates a broad range of methods and crosses a variety of disciplines. My study draws on the literature of sound studies and the social mediation of sound (Bull 2012, Born 2013, Thompson and Biddle 2014, Goodman 2010) and the subjectivity of listeners and consumers of hip-hop music and culture in diverse audiences (see Petchauer 2012, Bailey 2014, Osumare 2008, Muhammad 2015). Linguistic and literary methods have been used to uncover the social and spatial conditions relayed by MCs and producers in hip-hop music. Sociological approaches shed light on the political and economic forces that affect creative producers of hip-hop content. These studies incorporate deep ethnographic detail with critical approaches to the culture industries and the representation of black communities in various contexts (Morgan 2009). A significant number of studies focus on the spatialisation of hip-hop culture outside of its original North American context, exploring translations of hip-hop culture in places as varied as South Africa (ie. Haupt 2008), France (ie. Swedenburg 2001), Brazil (ie. Aidi 2014), and Poland (ie. Helbig and Miszczyński 2017 [forthcoming]). These studies are particularly useful for the research problem I develop and address in this work because they turn our attention to the mediation of hip-hop music as it is translated across cultural difference. This has led to a rich set of insights

on participation in hip-hop as a cultural practice across cultural differences and the geographies of interpretation that hip-hop participation invokes.

I attempt to contribute a methodological approach to understanding the disjunctive temporalities that emerge in a dispersion of antiphonal relations in hip-hop audiences. This attempts to consider hip-hop as an assemblage of overlapping circuits of bodies and affect. My geographical approach to hip-hop requires a number of displacements:

- (1) First, I move away from the theorisation of hip-hop as a ‘culture’. That is not to suggest that there is not an assemblage of bodies, technologies, aesthetics, and sound that is the centre of hip-hop music. Hip-hop *is* a culture, but ‘hip-hop culture’ does not capture the entirety of the *circuits* across space that hip-hop traverses. For that reason, I refer to a hip-hop musical public as the object of inquiry (Born 2011), a shorthand for the overlapping spheres of publicity and privacy in which hip-hop content is circulated by processes of shared and private experiences of listening to sound (see Born 2013, 35). This is in contrast to ‘hip-hop culture’ as the object studied. This displacement allows us to move beyond the creators of hip-hop and their *intent* in producing music and towards the effect of the circulation of affect *through* hip-hop music across contemporary audiences and to analyse what listeners *do* with music (Thompson and Biddle 2013, 19). This move is resonant with the shift recommended by Christopher Small in *Musicking*, where music is read by the researcher as an infinitive: to music (see Small 1998, 2). This refers music back to a form of publicity:

the act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships...between those organised sounds that are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part (1998, 13).

I position this study in a different approach to other studies of hip-hop by eschewing the concept of the ‘hip-hop culture’ to describe the site and instead focusing on the

public across which hip-hop music circulates. This stresses my attention on the microsocalities of antiphonal relations.

- (2) Second, I focus on private and shared listening as sites of the hip-hop musical public rather than regarding a track, song, or specific work as an object of analysis (for example, see DeNora 2000, Anderson 2004). Further, I move away from studying artistic communities and focusing on hip-hop fans to explore the effects of antiphony on everyday audiences rather than the hip-hop ‘heads’ and musicians that are constantly up-to-date and innovative in their craft. In doing so, I have focused on a segment of the hip-hop musical public that is composed of individuals that have chosen to share their interest and curiosity in hip-hop culture with others. I will explain this group in more detail in the following section. An ethnographic approach to shared listening sites is imperative to understanding the effects of antiphonal relations as it turns our attention to the multisensory milieu in which hip-hop music is experienced and consumed. While I find that private listening opens up antiphonal relations, private listening does not involve the kind of productive, disjunctive relation to alterity that it opens up in in-person encounters. By focusing on this segment of the musical public, I was able to observe how listeners interpreted music and how that affected their relations to other members of the musical public. It is in this antiphonal circuit, between individual group members and the group itself, that I observe new possibilities for rethinking the multicultural.

In my exploration of antiphony, I find that the ethical register in the face to face is the central node of communication in hip-hop communities. Antiphony’s stakes go beyond the best MC or the best dancer. It is an affective economy of ethical sharing on which community is constituted. This economy is a circuit of disjunctive temporalities that open up contramodern sites of multicultural exchange. It is from these sites that I try to propose a multiculturalism

that is grounded in performativity and responses to alterity opened in hip-hop's contramodernities. I undertake this approach to probe the politics that emerges from the antiphonal relations distributed in a hip-hop musical public. This is to produce a 'situated knowledge' (see Saldanha 2007, 47) about the affective economies of antiphony in a multiethnic and multiracial community. From here, I use the antiphonal relation to explore the ethics of response between members of the community. It opens alterity as an event that is negotiated through an economy of force and affect by being situated in a broader musical public and in relation to hip-hop culture. It is here that I witness events to build a theory of multiculturalism otherwise by tracing the affective life that surrounds the antiphonal relation.

Field site: Students for Hip-hop (S4HH)

This study focuses on a fragment of the global musical public that includes the artists and creative producers of hip-hop culture and the fans, audiences, and consumers of hip-hop culture. My study is centred on an ethnography of a student group, named Students for Hip-hop (S4HH as a shorthand). S4HH is a student society at the University of California at Berkeley, in the Bay Area. At the time there were about 20 to 25 active members and numerous other students who were part of the group but were not as active as the core membership that I was exposed to.

Access

As a researcher looking to do fieldwork on hip-hop, I left for the Bay Area for two reasons. First, I knew that access in London would be a challenge given that I did not have any organic links to hip-hop culture in the UK at the beginning of this project. Going to the Bay Area, I had hoped, would have expedited my access to circles of cultural producers that positioned themselves within hip-hop culture considering that I already had a social network in the area

to rely upon. I intended to study hip-hop musical publics in the different cities in the East Bay, primarily Oakland, California but indeed access was extraordinarily difficult. I was more interested (at the time) in politically conscious music and the artistic communities that sustained such cultural production. As I continued to research hip-hop and understand the context and institutions that gave birth to hip-hop and many of its messages, I began to realise that there was a gap in analysing how the social structures embedded in hip-hop culture were spatialised in groups distant from the ‘roots’ of hip-hop culture, represented as the music of marginalised and mostly African-American voices. I began to shift my interest towards listeners rather than producers. This allowed to me to pilot methods with friends from university that continued to live in the Bay Area after we graduated. I interviewed them, observed them freestyle, and took note of the music they chose to play and how they interacted with it. While this limits the study to a milieu of listeners and fans rather than offering a comprehensive perspective on producers *and* audiences in the musical public, the study addresses the lack of empirical data on listeners in the hip-hop studies literature (see for example Muhammad 2015).

I only had about six months to complete my field research. I spent two months attempting to access a variety of cultural producers and communities in the East Bay. Luckily, the fact that I had a network in the region helped significantly; a friend of mine who was continuing as an undergraduate student at the university (who we will meet in this study as ‘Mira’), heard that I was doing research on hip-hop and asked me to speak at a S4HH meeting. Mira presented me with the opportunity to get exposure with a group of students that were specifically interested in hip-hop and affirmed the power and the potential of hip-hop as a vehicle for pedagogical and political change. In the short timeframe I had, this was the most compelling opportunity to come up as I was starting my fieldwork and it enabled me to access an extremely diverse and interesting musical public. I quickly got in touch with the president

of the organisation, Alisa, and told her about my research and proposed to lead a workshop about my research to the group. She was interested in the idea and asked me to present the talk the following week.

At the time I was exploring the relationship between African-Americans, Black Nationalism, and the Black Arts Movement and linking it to the ideas, discourses, and narratives present in early hip-hop. My presentation centred on this, asking the question, ‘what kind of politics is present in hip-hop?’ I spoke for an extended period, detailing some of my early research. I drew on Marcus Garvey to contextualise Jay-Z’s capitalism and entrepreneurship, on A Tribe Called Quest to think through the religious and biopolitical registers that travelled from the Nation of Islam into the Black Arts Movement, and the ‘resistance’ narratives present in Black Arts poetry to consider the anti-establishment messages presented by Lupe Fiasco. The group was well-engaged in the discussion and my presentation gave me to exposure to enough members of the group that I had scheduled about ten interviews by the following week. The group was incredibly inviting and allowed me to join in their meetings for the remainder of the academic term.

Diversity

The second reason I set off from London for the Bay Area was its diversity. From the start of this project, I was interested in how a spectrum of listeners, with different identities, positionalities, and experiences differentially mediated the codes, discourse, and affective economies present in hip-hop musical publics. The Bay Area is an important, if somewhat peripheral, node in American hip-hop music, which through the 1990s was centred in New York and Los Angeles. It should be noted that many great producers and artists spent time in the Bay Area. Of course, Tupac Shakur is one of the most notable names and is the key inspiration and favourite artist for S4HH’s president, Alisa.

I expected that S4HH would enjoy close relations with the African-American community on campus. While this did exist, S4HH was much more embedded in the multicultural movement on campus. This was reflected in the makeup of the group, which was evenly distributed across East Asian, South Asian, Latina, and European ethnicities. The relative lack of African-American and black participation in the group was a question that I wanted to address given the debates on whiteness and appropriation of hip-hop that came up in meetings. I reflected on this with one active member of the group, an African-American named Samuel (this is developed further in Part Three). It is important to note that considering that this research occurred at an elite global university, the underrepresentation of black students is a significant concern and likely affects the ability of black students to access S4HH. Samuel, also a member of the Black Students Union on campus, relayed to me that he feels that there is a dynamic of ‘appropriation’ occurring within S4HH. What I think Samuel is hinting at is a tension present in the relatively cosmopolitan and diverse group that composes S4HH and the more fundamental and inextricable relation of hip-hop to black music and diaspora. It hints at a tension that Paul Gilroy broaches in *Between Camps* when he problematises the ‘enthusiasm’ of cosmopolitan musical publics for ‘producers’ of culture: ‘audiences whose enthusiasm for the fruits of alterity and the glamour of difference... may not be matched by any equivalent enthusiasm for the people who produce the culture in the first place’ (Gilroy 2000, 270). Put more simply by Alisa in another workshop, the problem is that ‘people love black culture but they don’t love black people’.

This tension is why I choose now to position the site by problematising its ‘diversity’. Where hip-hop is black music and is deeply rooted in the aesthetics for which members of the African diaspora had to fight, quite literally with their lives, to keep; in contemporary times, its audiences are not all members of that diaspora. Its audience is ‘diverse’, opening an important tension with whiteness and non-black bodies. As Cecilia Cutler observes, double

consciousness might work in the ‘other’ direction in hip-hop culture where it is blackness that is positioned as normative and whiteness is positioned as ‘other’ (Cutler 2009, 79, Netcoh 2013, Fjogstad Langnes and Fasting 2016). That means we also have to invert the normative discourse of ‘diversity’ which usually refers to non-whiteness. I refer instead to the *diverse* audience of hip-hop which involves the sharing of black and non-black bodies. While this risks reifying racial difference, my approach tries to account for the mediation of phenotypical difference from the perspective of the research subject; that is to say that racialisation matters, but I treat it functionally in musical publics as a kind of affordance or constriction rather than a fixed identity that a body expresses.

The ‘diverse’ audience that I refer to is a profoundly ambivalent audience that is distant from hip-hop’s African-diasporic roots. That is not to say that they are not or cannot claim to identify with or participate in hip-hop culture (in reality it is quite the opposite), but it is to approach hip-hop musical publics by foregrounding the tensions, conflicts, and negotiations that happen around the social and phenotypical differentiation of bodies in shared spaces. Diversity is often thought of as the incorporation of ethnic minorities into structures and institutions; for example, when universities speak of ‘diversity’ this is often a code for referring to the need to incorporate more non-white people into the undergraduate student body or faculty. I move away from this notion of diversity to one that is simpler. The hip-hop musical public is superdiverse; it is composed of people of all ethnicities and it is global and cosmopolitan in scope. It is also fundamentally tied to the circuits of global capitalism and popular culture. This means that when we think of the hip-hop musical public and study listeners, we must keep in mind a *diversity* of listeners. This is a diversity not only of ethnicity and race but also a diversity of class and positionality. This plays out in antiphonal relations as one’s experience and interpellation as a racial subject becomes one of those identities that are rendered fluid and unfixd in the antiphonal relation.

This diversity also opens up tensions and conflicts which I focus on in this study that provide a potential for understanding the ambivalence and diversity at play in hip-hop and other musical publics (cf. Kim 2016, Jazeel 2005, Saldanha 2007). It is the antiphonal negotiation and contestation at play in hip-hop musical publics and specifically in the Students for Hip-hop that we can read outside of notions such as ‘appropriation’ and ‘authenticity’ in hip-hop. These are important tensions, but I look behind them, focusing on the sites where they are negotiated by individuals and communities. I proceed from this perspective by attending to the affordances of bodies differentiated by race, ethnicity, and positionality in hip-hop spaces on their performative capacities (Alim et. al. 2010, Williams and Stroud 2015, see also Ganesh 2015, Saldanha 2007, 2010, Born 2013, 41-44). The negotiation between bodily difference and performative response opens up new possibilities for *other* multicultural subjectivities and communities. It is for this reason that I make no claims about ‘authenticity’ in hip-hop. I consistently make recourse to African, African-American, and Diasporic aesthetic traditions to ground and understand hip-hop culture and musical publics outside of Eurocentric explanations. However, I offer no definition of what hip-hop ‘authentically’ is; rather, I argue that hip-hop community is constituted through a constant call and response between bodies experimentally and continuously negotiating difference through social structures that are a product of black aesthetics.

S4HH as a musical public

Once I had completed a few interviews and attended a few of the S4HH meetings, I decided to focus my data collection on this site. I gained a thorough insight into how antiphony operated as an affective circuit in the group through observation and my presence. I had a chance to get to know the members of the group in interviews and at events before and after. My method is broadly ethnographic with my attention to the times and spaces in which difference is

negotiated in antiphonal relations across black and non-black musical publics (see Alim et. al. 2011). This is a rather obscure event when compared to all the other forces at work when S4HH convenes. However, this series of events and encounters involve the negotiations and contestations over difference across a diverse audience of hip-hop listeners. I trace these events in the data presented, grounded primarily in quotes from interviews.

I position S4HH as a musical public rather than a segment or instance of hip-hop culture. This displacement (introduced above) attempts to account for the social mediation of hip-hop cultural objects *rather* than the creative production of hip-hop music and art. At the same time, S4HH members are active contributors to hip-hop culture across the Bay Area in various ways. I position S4HH as a musical public because I am interested in how these individuals come together and share their interest in hip-hop rather than what they contribute to it. This allows me to foreground the affective circuits that hip-hop culture puts into play and how they are mediated by audiences. As stated earlier with regard to antiphony, it is impossible to neatly partition the performer and the audience; in the antiphonal aesthetic, the musical event is joined with communication and sharing. Consequently, I read the musical public as a kind of community of those affected by hip-hop culture who come together to communicate about it and share it.

In order to study this musical public, I lay out a few questions that are important to answer and are explored in the following chapters. First, I wanted to explore how S4HH positioned itself as a student organisation on a university campus. In this regard, Petchauer's (2012) work on hip-hop student organisations is instructive; following him, I recorded details from meetings and reflected on them in interviews with members of the group. I tried to explore, using a genealogical method, how different events, leaders, and institutions came to inspire the trajectory of S4HH and the types of literacies and pedagogies that the student group referenced (Snell and Söderman 2014, Petchauer 2015). Hip-hop has been effective in

classroom settings for prompting discussion among secondary school students offering texts that can serve to encourage critical thinking (Paul 2000, Morell and Duncan-Andrade 2005). Hip-hop can be taught alongside canonical texts, such as poetry and history texts, ‘used as a bridge linking the seemingly vast span between the streets and the world of academics’ (Morrell and Duncan-Andrade 2002, 89, see also Stovall 2006, 597). Similarly, hip-hop can be used for teacher education to provide a ‘critical perspective’ and ‘counter-narratives’ that can feed into activist work; in this sense, hip-hop can be seen as a site of praxis (Akom 2009, 55).

I also explore the differences in musical taste between members of S4HH, using interviews, asking them about how they became interested in hip-hop and what attracted them to joining S4HH, and how their time in the group modulated their tastes and interests. This involved eliciting their responses to my observations about the group’s meetings and their experiences with other members of the group. At times this became sensitive, as interviewees shared certain frustrations and challenges with me. It was also productive, enabling me to reach under the surface and explore how individuals negotiated difficult moments and incommensurable differences. I also encouraged interviewees to consider how they felt and how they responded to certain situations that I had observed and brought up in interviews (see Petchauer 2012, 23, Kruse 2016).

Doing an ethnography of antiphonal relations involves an attention to moments of interpretation and response to difference. This is a sensitive field and means that it is quite easy to misinterpret an event. I noticed this gaze often; as a researcher, I would sometimes add an anxiety about positional differences in events I observed that upon reflection in an interview were just a product of my own desire to find evidence that suited my assumptions and hypotheses. While I make reference to moments of bodily and affective intensity, I do this through reflection with a research participant rather than purely on observation. It is worth noting—for myself and I imagine for others researching how the biopolitical categories of race

and ethnicity are negotiated in Western societies—that we might read a situation as somehow coded by race or ethnicity when it is in fact irrelevant to other contingencies that we observe. My focus then is on these events through the eyes of those who experience them rather than relying only on my (at times anxious) gaze. Of course, there are also times when, as an embedded researcher, I also rely on my intuition and sense to ask questions based on my informed observations.

Mapping antiphony: three approaches

I employ genealogical, interview, and ethnographic methods to map out affective circuits in S4HH that involve ethical and political subjectivities. I map antiphony in three disjunctive temporalities and relations: (1) in the time of the response to identity called into question, (2) in the interactions with hip-hop's contramodernities, and (3) in negotiating the ethics and politics of copresence in the shared sites of the musical public. Below, I explain the methods I use to understand and analyse these spaces.

Genealogical approach

Inspired by Cornel West's notion of 'selective appropriation', I understand S4HH as a site that develops its members' critical sensibilities and sense of personal accountability and responsibility. I use genealogical methods to deconstruct the epistemic dimensions that shape the approach that S4HH takes to developing its members and positioning itself in regard to the wider campus community. I argue that S4HH makes conscious use of the forms and institutional structures developed in African-American history with specific attention to Black Nationalism, Black Power, and the Black Arts Movement. As I detail in Chapter 5, these three movements nurtured the form of the cipher as a site that produces subjectivities outside of normative modes presented in modernity. S4HH offers an opportunity to cultivate a critical

mindset and a sense of responsible listening through its deployment of African-American vernacular modernities, of which the cipher is the key one that I detail in this study.

I use a genealogical approach to analyse three datasets: field notes of meetings, audiovisual data on live music sites, and interviews of S4HH leadership on the objectives and goals of the group. I witness a process of selective appropriation of 20th century African-diasporic aesthetic structures that are used to cultivate a unique S4HH listener that resonates with West's notion of the Critical Organic Catalyst. With a close reading of primary and secondary sources on hip-hop, Black Arts, and African-American spiritualities and their connection to the concept of the ethical self I have developed in Chapter 1 and expand on in Chapters 3-5, I attempt to provide a genealogical perspective on the spaces, times, and contramodernities that inspire the arrangements and *dispositifs* developed by S4HH. This work is crucial because it highlights how bodies in the musical public develop sensibilities that can recognise and engage in antiphonal relations. These *dispositifs* are explored empirically in Parts 3 and 4.

Ethnographic approach

The entire study is couched in an ethnographic approach that led to the collection of multisensory data on antiphonal arrangements locating their origins and translations in the assemblage of a musical public (on this method with regard to the cipher, see Alim et. al. 2010, 117). First, I embedded myself with this group and observed their development over the course of one university term with my active participation from late February 2014 to May 2014. This timeframe was sufficient to collect data required to understand the institutions and structures developed by S4HH, become close enough with a majority of the active participants in the group to understand their relationship with hip-hop, organise interviews, attend weekly meetings and ciphers, and attend the two major events in the university that S4HH was involved

with organising. It is important to note that the students that I researched are not fully committed to hip-hop culture; it is a supplement to their university life, for most it is a hobby and an interest. There are of course some in the group, the president in particular, for whom hip-hop is a central component of their life and identity. Therefore, I did not observe these students through the lens of their everyday lives, but used ethnographic and observational methods in selected spaces where the group came together. The 'field', then, was a temporary and fleeting space that occurred in the coming-together of the members of the group. It is in these spaces that I utilised an ethnographic approach.

I use my findings from ethnographic work in multiple chapters in this study. It illuminated the different ways in which subjectivity is produced and nurtured in the group and the inspiration for the structures that create that subjectivity. It illuminated the embodied registers of copresence that I detail in the chapter on the politics of the cipher, turning my attention to the vibes and atmospheres that emerge in sites of shared listening. Finally, I used ethnographic methods to feed into interviews that allowed me to relay how different instances of copresence and sharing affected the identity and relation to alterity experienced by individual members of the musical public.

I am interested in the *affective* and *pre-cognitive* effects of the subject's position in antiphonal relations, how the subject interprets that alterity, and how the subject decides to respond. In my ethnographic work, I focus on detailing the sensory experience of participating in the different sites I describe and giving depth to what interviewees brought up in our discussions. I employed a combination of audiovisual and notational techniques in order to 'capture the symbolic content of practices and [to] witness the liveliness, rhythms and contingency of their performance and the embodied dimensions of making sense' (Lorimer 2013, 67, see also Knoblauch 2006). I had intended to use audiovisual methods more extensively as numerous writers have stressed the capacity for photos, video, and audio to open

the researcher's gaze to alternative senses (Grimshaw 2005) and that multisensory media will capture more data points and attend better to the materiality of the research subject (Renold and Mellor 2013, 30, Pink 2007, 98, Taylor 2013, 60). For certain spaces, audiovisual methods allowed me to '[focus] on the affective assemblages of research assemblages: the smells, sounds, aesthetic economies of research sites, the indirect discourses through which research subjects speak' (Hickey-Moody 2013, 93). However, I found that the camera and audio recorder could be an obtrusive presence in certain sites. I never attempted to film or record meetings and ciphers, relying only on field notes in order to document these sites. This is due to two reasons. First, I noted that when participants were aware of my filming in more intimate settings than a gig, there was a conscious awareness that they had of the camera. In particular, use of a camera or audio recorder would have been problematic in the cipher, which is itself an oral performance that is specifically intended to be ephemeral and fleeting. The camera would have changed my position in the cipher from quiet participant to an obtrusive cameraman, creating a distance between myself and the others sharing the space with me. While this would have been useful in analysing movement and embodiment in the cipher, there would have been risks that the data would be skewed in terms of participants performing to the camera rather than for the cipher itself. I found it more useful to record my thoughts on the ciphers that I participated in and reflect on them with members of the group rather than try to film these events. In that sense, it was important that I go beyond the incorporation of 'sounds and images' into field notes but rather to describe sounds, movements, and sensations by translating them into ethnographic descriptions that I could use to prompt interviewees. (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 149; see also Henley 2004, 108). Thus, where I did use it, video was a technology that supplemented my capture of affective relations in field notes. In Chapter 7, I use descriptions of video to describe affective economies that were recorded without the

intervention of my own interpretation in field notes (Daston and Galison 1992 in Ruby 2000, 42).

I reserved the camera for sites of live music and to capture details where notetaking and conversing with others was not possible or where the affective economies and atmospheres at play were specific to live music performances. This method is used to understand the live spaces that S4HH was involved in setting up, turning our attention to the production of hip-hop spaces and their use by audiences and communities. In particular, the camera is relevant for research that takes ‘body movement,’ ‘gesture,’ ‘dance’ and the ‘display of emotion’ and ‘affect’ as a major concern (Ruby 2000, 47-49)—precisely those atmospheres and circuits at play at live gigs. In this context, the camera turns attention to affective atmospheres and allows me to explore the selective appropriation of spatial arrangements that are inspired by African-diasporic modernities. With the camera I am able to supplement my study of the spaces and times present in the affective atmospheres organised by S4HH:

Atmospheres have, then, a characteristic spatial form—diffusion within a sphere. Returning to Deleuze and Guattari, we can say that atmospheres are generated by bodies—of multiple types—affecting one another as some form of ‘envelopment’ is produced. Atmospheres do not float free from the bodies that come together and apart to compose situations. Affective qualities emanate from the assembling of the human bodies, discursive bodies, non-human bodies, and all the other bodies that make up everyday situations... By creating and arranging light, sounds, symbols, texts and much more, atmospheres are ‘enhanced’, ‘transformed’, ‘intensified’, ‘shaped’, and otherwise intervened on. If atmospheres proceed from and are created by bodies, they are not, however, reducible to them (Anderson 2009, 80).

Atmospheres are a product of the consistency and expression of spatial arrangements. Their diagrams are temporal and rooted in particular epistemic situations. The camera can ‘exploit the distinctive capacity of synchronous sound film to communicate a sense of the lived experience of the events and situations observed’ (Henley 2004, 105). These atmospheres are a ‘coming together of people, buildings, technologies and various forms of non-human life in particular geographical settings’ (Conradson and Latham 2007, 238 in Bissell 2010, 272). Through the lens of the atmosphere, I can observe how ‘the individual subject comes into being through its very alignment with the collective’ in the festival and live music spaces organised by S4HH (Ahmed 2004, 128 see also Böhme 1993, 118). This atmosphere extends beyond the

immediate sites of live music and the festival that S4HH organises and into the more private sites such as meetings and the cipher.

Interviews

I conducted 16 interviews of active members of S4HH. While there is no formal list of members that I was presented with, there were approximately 25 active members. I reached out to all 25 members but was unable to schedule an interview with the remaining nine due to time constraints or members' preference not to participate in an interview. I present a significant amount of interview data in the empirical chapters below. That is not because the ethnographic data was not sufficient but rather because I used interviews to control against my own interpretation of the events, movements, and atmospheres that I observed. I was able to interview a broad range of members, some of whom were hip-hop fans that attended S4HH meetings to have conversations and debates about hip-hop music, some that were involved with a range of artistic and entrepreneurial pursuits, some that were seasoned rappers and musicians, and others that were simply curious and interested in learning more about hip-hop.

Interviews were focused on two broad themes. First, I asked interviewees to recount for me how they got interested in hip-hop, their first memories of listening to hip-hop music, and what they found interesting about it. This produced rich, diverse oral histories of how group members got into hip-hop. I found that for the majority of participants, hip-hop was first encountered in private listening experiences and their interest in it grew through sharing and communicating about hip-hop music. This is particularly useful in tracing how group members developed their own critical sensibilities before and after becoming a part of S4HH. Second, I asked group members to reflect on their experiences with S4HH, in ciphers, and in meetings. This often led to tangential discussion about other times and spaces in the hip-hop musical public to explain faults with or qualities of S4HH. I used this to explore how each interviewee was on a different path and journey in relating to others in the group and to hip-hop culture in

general. In particular, I used interviews to open up anxieties that interviewees had about others they shared musical publics with, exploring the encounters and events that opened particular kinds of conflicts, incommensurable differences, and contestations within hip-hop spaces such as the cipher. It also allowed me to uncover the role that antiphonal relations played in developing a convivial culture in S4HH. The interview allowed me to draw on moments that I had observed in meetings, live gigs, and ciphers and ask research participants to reflect on their emotional and affective states in those situations and how they comported themselves and behaved in those relations. This gave me depth on embodied moments that they had experienced in hip-hop musical publics (often our discussions left the sphere of S4HH) and provided insight into the decisions they made and how they behaved. This allowed for a sustained discussion of the critical sensibilities and responsibility that was being cultivated in S4HH.

Situating the approach

My approach attempts to understand how antiphonal relations operate on two scales: the body and the collective. I focus on antiphonal relations and events as they are embodied and experienced. By focusing on experience, I foreground affective relations by eliciting information in interviews and recording them through visual ethnography. This approach is informed by nonrepresentational theory, which points out the complex ways in which ethics are bound up in experience (cf. McCormack 2013). In the ethical subjectivity of antiphonal experience that is radically opened up to the other, the question is one of motivation behind the subject's response:

The classical human subject which is transparent, rational and continuous no longer pertains. Classical ethical questions like 'What have I done?' and 'What ought I to do?' become much more difficult when the 'I' in these questions is so faint, when self-transparency and narrativity are such transient features (Thrift 2008, 14).

This requires attention both to the atmosphere of a particular relation as well as the subjectivity of an individual's response. Ethics, for S4HH, also existed on a collective circuit, in which being a part of the group and a member of the community was experienced as a responsibility. I explore the affordances that bodies of in the S4HH musical public that are ethnically and positionally differentiated in the power-geometries of the network and those present in antiphonal relations (Tolia-Kelly 2006, Born 2013). In addition, I analyse the relationship between the specific, contingent atmospheres in which S4HH convened, focusing on how the arrangement of materials in space produce specific atmospheres and spaces for particular ethicopolitical purposes. Also, I interpret the affective states that members of the musical public assembled by these arrangements experience. This requires a move away from representation of difference (which is due to the research question about how alterity is *mediated* rather than coded) to the concrete effects of difference as it is negotiated through antiphonal—ethical and political—registers.

I position the data I have collected into a few registers. I use the four planes of the social mediation of music that anthropologist and musicologist Georgina Born details as a guide (see Born 2011, 378): the (1) 'intimate socialities of musical performance and practice', (2) the imagined communities that 'music conjures up', (3) 'music's refraction of the hierarchical and stratified relations of class and age, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality', and (4) the 'social and institutional forms that provide the grounds' for the circulation of music. My study focuses primarily on the first, second and third planes. Antiphony involves an intimacy with a performer as well with those people that share in the musical event. In the previous chapter, I detailed the aesthetic properties of the antiphonal event as the fragmentation and splitting of identity, the ecstatic, non-teleological community that it posits, and the play of vernacular techniques and Signifyin(g) (see Chapters 3 and 4). I explore antiphony in the cipher and the places recounted in stories heard in interviews as well as how antiphonal relations are

distributed throughout S4HH. I was embedded in the group and was able to trace ‘intimacies’ with hip-hop in private listening, exploring the moods and situations in which they listened to and used hip-hop music, their experience of different places in which they heard hip-hop on the campus, and the discussions and contestations that took place in meetings. Further, hip-hop is only a segment of these students’ identities. Their listening is distributed across various public and private spaces and different music plays various roles in the spaces they navigate in everyday life (see Kassabian 2013). This is precisely what makes S4HH so interesting: it is a momentary collision of listeners that brings together a temporary hip-hop public. In this sense S4HH is a collective project and experiment, dependent on the energies and sensibilities brought to the group and cipher.

The second and the third plane are operationalised to study the circuits of antiphony in S4HH. The interaction of these two planes is crucial to understand antiphony and the modes by which ethnic and positional difference are mediated in the intimate socialities of S4HH listening. There are multiple operations of ‘imagined community’ at play. First, S4HH is its own community with its own subdivisions and communities. It is also important to recognise the imagined communities and notions of space and place that hip-hop music brings up through lyrics, themes, and images (see for example Forman 2004). At play are also the tensions about whiteness and cultural appropriation within and outside hip-hop that are refracted (at times) in interactions in the cipher and meetings. Finally, there are also tensions around gender, class, and privilege that emerge and are mediated in antiphonal relations and work to differentiate listeners. In exploring this plane, I am interested in how phenotype and positionality are interpreted as forms of alterity and how these differences are mediated. My focus is specifically on the affordances that each of these bodies have as they move through hip-hop musical publics and how these affordances affect the way they mediate and respond to antiphonal relations.

I position differences in identity on this third plane as alterity that is negotiated in concrete, situated relationships in varied atmospheres. To explore the musical ‘materialisation’ of identity proposed by Georgina Born (2011), I analyse how antiphonal events, in intimate, face-to-face, and proximate relationships to alterity, break apart identity and produce new bodily comportments. Consequently, phenomenological theories of the production of subjectivity are increasingly important (and are covered in Chapter 1, Chapter 3, and Chapter 4). In order to understand these processes, I employ a lens that uses nonrepresentational theory, performativity, and embodiment to dig into the relationship between subjectivity and hip-hop music. This draws on the recommendation that future research on musical socialities and subjectivity take into account

the materiality and thus the subjective affordances of particular musico- and sonic–social–technological assemblages; they should examine how subjectivity responds to the recursive interplay between private and public; and they should attend to the affective constitution of modes of subjectivity by music and sound without assuming that it promotes the self-communion of the liberal subject (Born 2013, 41).

Geographers exploring phonographic methods, phenomenology, and subjectivity have made important contributions to these questions (ie. Saldanha 2006, Jazeel 2005, Leyshon et. al. 1995, Anderson et. al. 2005, Kanneiser 2011, Gallagher and Prior 2014, Revill 2016). Hip-hop is a form rather than a genre in itself, and consequently is a mobile practice that produces sonic landscapes (Leyshon, et al. 1995, 429). These landscapes contain indexical references that exceed sites of listening. Hip-hop and music more generally is a ‘communicative and generative practice, wherein sounds appear to speak to us directly...cultivating their own immanent political geographies’ (Jazeel 2005, 238-239). Music enfolds imaginative geographies of local and ‘other’ places, ‘situated practices’ of listening, and political potentials that emerge as music ‘moves and is given meaning in actual places’ (Saldanha 2002, 347-348). This requires a method attuned to critical phenomenologies of sound and the notion of sound as an event (Revill 2016, 243). While Revill argues for a method that privileges sound itself, the aesthetics of antiphony remind us that music happens *in a community* and consequently,

that dialogue and polyvocality are important factors in the ‘affective politics’ of sound (see Kanngeiser 2011 in Revill 2016, 243). Consequently, for my study it is not sound itself that matters (a step away from phonographic methods) but *how* sound is mediated in ways that challenge and disrupt the production of the subject and the self. Using antiphony is a means to understand the constitution of the subject through affect and discourse *outside* of a liberal biopolitics and aesthetics. I emphasise how governmentality, technologies of the self, and production of subjectivity are extremely important in hip-hop musical publics but I attempt to do so in such a way that focuses on the splitting of identity, subjectivity, and the becoming-ecstatic of community (see Chapter 4) rather than reiterate the ‘self-communion’ of the liberal subject. This happens in the disposition that the call of antiphony puts us in. Drawing on Jean-Luc Nancy, geographer Paul Simpson provides an evocative understanding of how we might study the subjectivity of the listener:

the sound itself is precisely sound's materiality, its body, its timbre, and about the resonance these produce. I am then less interested in the judgments made of the sound of music, with it being good or bad, suitable or unsuitable, or with the ways in which identities are made in practices of listening, but rather want to think about the ways in which the subject listening is constituted in its relations to, or with (for reasons that will become clear), this materiality of the sound itself (2009, 2559).

While Simpson argues that this requires a decentring of interpretation (2009, 2572), I argue that it is crucial that embodiment be taken into account in hermeneutic processes themselves. This means that interpretation is bound up with affect and subjectivity and is folded into the dispositions that the subject finds itself in. Interpretation is key to our relationship with sound as well as the others with whom we share sonic materiality. While sound most certainly has pre-cognitive implications, in studying antiphony, it is important to remember the materiality of the body and antiphony’s power to shatter and fragment subjectivity; it is how this relation constitutes the subject that is the crucial antiphonal difference that puts into play the hermeneutic and ethical registers implicated in the simultaneity of sonic and interpersonal affect. This opens up the horizon of phenomenological and nonrepresentational geographies of

music to the question of its social mediation, in which interpretation plays a crucial role in the constitution of the subject outside of liberal norms.

Contribution and limitations of the study

My ethnography is limited to a small segment of a larger musical public that has formed around hip-hop music and culture. This means that the stories I heard and the observations I made are idiosyncratic and specific to the unique situation of S4HH. Ethnographies of different sites in the hip-hop musical public, such as rap competitions, dance events, or youth workshops might generate different results, where other kinds of affects and atmospheres are present. However, I give weight to my findings by ensuring they are contextualised in the genealogical context of hip-hop culture. Rather than mapping hip-hop as a spatial tactic, I explore the sites at which antiphony moves through a musical public as a circuit of ontogenetic force; rewiring and rewriting subjectivities as it traverses bodies. By reading relations in hip-hop through the lens of antiphony, we encounter how it repositions the body's sense of identity, community, and temporality. These subjectivities and sensibilities have a long history in the African diaspora and, through hip-hop culture, are articulated by diverse audiences. I offer one series of those articulations, contingent on the situation and context of S4HH. My study does not offer a universal form of antiphony that can be repeated elsewhere. Instead, I argue that by tracing antiphonal circuits as they traverse space, we can attend more effectively to the mediation and refraction of representational, embodied, and incommensurable differences in the experience of listening to and sharing in musical life. My argument that the antiphonal exchanges that I explore in this study might bear the building blocks of a new way of thinking about alterity and multiculture attempts to make no universal statement but rather to turn our attention to *how*

music and the public that it assembles participate in an experimental agency in relating to alterity.

I contribute a geographical method for tracing the politics of the musical public that surrounds hip-hop culture. Through antiphony, I open up experimental, ethical registers by which difference is mediated and experience plays out on a disjunctive temporality. By studying listeners, I add how these spaces and times are mediated and the effect that it has on ethical subjectivity. I find, from the spaces, stories, and people I heard, that the experimental ethics at play in hip-hop musical publics provides an ontogenetic and lively inspiration for structuring and mapping multicultural life.

Part 2:

Antiphony and the ethical self

3. The aesthetics of antiphony

Antiphony is an aesthetic, musical, and social structure at the core of hip-hop and African-diasporic music that preceded it. Call and response blurs the boundary between the subjects ‘performer’ and ‘audience’, making the clear difference between these positions ambiguous.

In soul, again as in gospel performances and church services, it was in the ‘live’ setting that these individual and communal agendas were often most dramatically integrated. The soul concert was a public ritual in which the ecstatic responses provoked by the artists, like those excited by the preacher or the gospel singer, simultaneously assumed a unificatory and an individuating function. Anyone moved by the sheer excitement of the music to dance or holler could find personal release and expression in the midst of a communal celebration, with their own ‘performances’ becoming an intrinsic part of the show, triggering the fervour of others (Ward 1998, 201).

Antiphony also structures how difference and alterity are mediated in hip-hop culture. Antiphony has not been studied in its full complexity in hip-hop studies and its impact on concrete, intersubjective relations in its musical public is unclear.

The forced movement of Africans to the Caribbean and North America by European slave traders led to the development of vernacular forms of antiphonal musical culture in the Western hemisphere (Stuckey 1987, 41). Though antiphony is found across the world in various cultures, it is particularly important to African music and has had a significant influence on the musical forms to emerge in the Americas:

While antiphonal song-patterning, whereby a leader sings phrases which alternate with phrases sung by a chorus is known all over the world, nowhere is this form so important as in Africa, where almost all songs are constructed in this manner (Waterman 1990, 90).

Antiphony is a key continuity between West African and African-American (and Black Atlantic) musics (Dorsey 2001, 46). Antiphony was the ‘defining structure’ of the African-

American spiritual and was ‘ubiquitous’ in West and Central African musical cultures (Burnim 2015, 50). Antiphony is also present in African-American spirituality and musicality (Wilson 1974, 4), specifically in its rhythms and timings (Iyer 2002, 397).

Though antiphony is a musical aesthetic, in West Africa, music played a role that spanned language, literature, politics, and memory. A number of studies have referenced African aesthetics and antiphony in modern African American music including the blues and jazz (see Osumare 2008, Brown 2002, Marcoux 2012, Floyd 1995, Ramsey 2003). The ring dance or the ‘ring shout’ was a dance performed by groups of enslaved Africans in the American South. In Katrina Dyonne Thompson’s *Ring Shout, Wheel About* (2014), she quotes an ex-slave Hettie Cambell: ‘Dance roun’ in a ring. We had a big time long bout wen crops come in an everybody bring sumpm...we gives praise fuh the good crop and then we shouts and sings all night’ (Hazzard-Gordon 1990, 18 in Thompson 2014, 115). The ring shout is an ancestor of the cipher in which musical performativity is a shared act. Slaves would ‘steal away’ to gatherings that were ‘affectionately known among blacks as frolics’ (Thompson 2014, 99) at secret meetings in slave quarters and forests, where they would sing, dance, socialise, and strategise when they were able to subvert the ‘authoritative white gaze’ (2014, 119-120). These gatherings were a reclamation of power in a temporary space that subverted white power and modernity: ‘Private frolics away from the white gaze allowed slaves to “do as we pleased” [quote from ex-slave Albert Hill in Thompson 2014, 223n105]. [...] These events allowed blacks to gain authority over their own bodies’ (Thompson 2014, 120). This break allowed for a temporary articulation of a contramodern time and space for enslaved Africans in the American South. These events were an affective and structural reconfiguration of space—for a time—through the risk of ‘stealing away’ to find and create spaces outside of white authority. LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) locates the origins of the blues in the melodic diversity and antiphonal singing technique (Jones 2002, 26).

When primitive or country blues did begin to be influenced by instruments, it was the guitar that had the most effect on the singers...Blues guitar was not the same as a classical or 'legitimate' guitar: the strings had to make vocal sounds, to imitate the human voice and its eerie cacophonies. [...] When the Negro finally did take up the brass instruments for strictly instrumental blues or jazz, the players still persisted in singing in the 'breaks.' This could be done easily in the blues tradition with the call-and-response form of blues (2002, 70).

We might read antiphony as the sound of a disjunctive temporality that opens relation onto a time that *breaks* with structures of power and authority to seize and constitute a new time that plays out in a collective relation. The break, then, is a temporal and spatial one; musical 'transgression [is] of the very laws of being and time' a kind of 'reconfiguration' through what Fred Moten, drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, refers to as a 'queer performative', that occurs in a liminal 'space between repetitions' (Moten 2003, 69). This space is a discontinuity, a cut, a break, and a doubling of time into the old and the new:

this is what jazz comes to, this dissemination of the break. Such *jouissance*...the animation—the essence and historicity—of an invaginative tradition of joy and pain [is] just that nonlocalizable dis/continuity. The new thing in jazz was in Armstrong already—this is the old-new thing (Moten 2003, 268n65).

The break is a moment of affective reproduction and circulation to perform an *other* time, an antiphonal time that breaks with the configurations of modernity and reconfigures them based on alternative values that form through the distribution of antiphonal relations.

The hip-hop MC has an interesting relation to the griots or griottes (fem.), who were musicians, artists, historians, even arbiters and counsellors and who were seen as 'honorable guardians of tradition' that performed a variety of cultural roles in West African society (Dorsch 2004, 103, Tang 2007), including the transmission of cultural tradition through music. Griots were storytellers that kept traditions alive, a parallel with MCs today: 'the griot is celebrated as "a symbol of knowledge," a teacher...and a leader who guides his people' (Dorsch 2004, 112). Much like the griot, the preacher, artist, performer, and rapper in the vernacular makes use of musical speech and storytelling in antiphonal forms in order to share and elucidate communal values and traditions.

Paul Gilroy insists that antiphony is an ethical and political structure as much as it is a musical one. Gilroy introduces the concept of 'antiphonic democracy' in *The Black Atlantic* to

describe the relations that are hosted in African diasporic music. For Gilroy, ‘antiphony (call and response) is the principal formal feature of these musical traditions’ (Gilroy 1993b, 78), and he quotes Toni Morrison’s rich elucidation of the musicality of call and response that she has ‘appropriated’ in her writing (see also Eckstein 2006b, 194):

My parallel is always the music because all of the strategies of the art are there. All of the intricacy, all of the discipline. All the work that must go into improvisation so that it appears that you’ve never touched it. Music makes you hungry for more of it. It never really gives you the whole number. It slaps and it embraces, it slaps and it embraces. The literature ought to do the same thing (in Gilroy 1993b, 78).

Antiphony is an incomplete, indeterminate sonic structure that puts the audience in a culturally specific position involving a move away from the distanced spectator to the involved celebrant. This antiphonal space is the site of an ethical and political sharing that is always an iteration at the limit of a slap and an embrace, a self and its other, and an artist and her audience. It is a specific aesthetic that adjusts our conception of what an audience actually *is* in the context of antiphony.

The imagery of the slap and an embrace brings the body fully into the frame, replete with its limits, its touches and its dispositions. Antiphony is social and it is embodied and performative:

there is a democratic, communitarian moment enshrined in the practice of antiphony which symbolises and anticipates (but does not guarantee) new, non-dominating social relationships. Lines between self and other are blurred and special forms of pleasure created as a result of the meetings and conversations that are established between one fractured, incomplete racial self and others. Antiphony is the structure that hosts these essential encounters (Gilroy 1993b, 79).

Antiphony plays a pivotal role in helping to frame about the relation between ethics, communication, and alterity beyond textuality (see Gilroy 1993b, 77). Antiphony was one mode in which the slaves fought ‘to hold on to the unity of ethics and politics sundered from each other by modernity’s insistence that the true, the good, and the beautiful had distinct origins and belong to different domains of knowledge’ (Gilroy 1993b, 39). Antiphony was part of the fight for non-European conceptions of value, the good, and the ethical. Tracing antiphony’s unification of ethics and politics in hip-hop’s musical public sheds light on the

development of an ethics and politics of difference that is constructed on affective registers that correspond to a contramodern reconfiguration.

Below I focus on four prominent writers for whom antiphony plays an important role. I stress that the four figures are not the only writers that conceptualise antiphony, but each writer's ideas on antiphony are directly relevant to my broader argument that runs through this study about hip-hop musical publics and the cultivation of an ethical self.

I begin with Wole Soyinka, a Nigerian playwright and scholar, whose early essay 'The Fourth Stage' criticises Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* to provide a productive distinction between African and European drama. The essay focuses specifically on the question of identity, essence, the self and the production of myth in traditional Yoruba drama. While I do not have space here to deal with these questions in full detail,⁶ I focus on contextualising his use of the phrase 'antiphonal refrain' at an important moment in the essay where Soyinka focuses on the differences between European and Yoruba concepts of drama, music, and performance. Soyinka—particularly with the use of words such as 'celebrant' and 'votary' to describe the audience and 'liturgy' to explain the dialogue that happens on the Fourth Stage—insists on the devotional character of music in the Yoruba context. His essay gives a sense of the performer and listener intertwined facing the dissolution of identity, essence, and origin (Jeyifo 2004, 81). The Fourth Stage is the stage of the fragmentation of the self (Awoonor 1974, 668), its eventful quality helps us understand the spatiality of antiphony and the quality of the forces and relations that it houses.

After Soyinka, I go into more depth on Toni Morrison's conceptualisation of antiphony in a black literary tradition. Morrison, reflecting on her writing process in a non-fiction essay, explains that antiphonal aesthetics influence her refusal to give the reader a full, clear depiction of 'data'; instead, she uses antiphonal techniques to encourage a deeper and more involved

⁶ For further details on Soyinka and the Fourth Stage, see Jeyifo 2004; particularly Chapter 2.

participation in her fiction. In this sense, she makes a call on the reader to improvise and imagine rather than ‘contemplate’ facts. This is connected to her insistence that there can be no final say on what black writing *should* be; she argues against an easily articulable end or telos for the black writer stating that the demand of such writing is that she cannot authorise or suggest what counts as properly black writing, or what the black writer *ought* to write about or to what ends she should aspire. Writing becomes about an ethos in these points from Morrison. At the core is antiphony, figured as an insistence that the text is only the first step in a broader transformative and dialogical process that involves ‘critical reading, [the] context of writing, and reception’ (Hones 2015, 3).

I then turn to antiphony in Gates’s influential book, *The Signifying Monkey*, that describes Signifyin(g) as the master trope of intertextuality in the African-American vernacular. His term, Signifyin(g), refers to vernacular language games that are dialogical in nature and documented in African-American vernaculars that bear antiphonal structures. To Signify is to build on, as an iteration, another’s expression for the sake of play, critique, parody, or satire (to name a few). Signifyin(g) is a practice attuned to indeterminacy and the possibility of interpretive difference; playing the game involves an antiphony, in the quite literal sense of call and response, between two texts or bodies. The indeterminate quality of Signifyin(g) helps us theorise of antiphony as a communicative structure where interpretation is always an unfinished dialogue.

These three examples help us understand what Paul Gilroy means when he writes that antiphony ‘underlies the special role of black musics in articulating non-verbal—unspoken and unspeakable—formulations of ethics and aesthetics’ and the possibility of contramodernities (1988, 314). While language plays a key role for Soyinka, Morrison and Gates, Gilroy helps us position antiphony as the meta-communicative structure that houses dialogue in a particular manner and ethos. This allows us to conceptualise antiphony as the structure that allows for a

cultivation of ethical selfhood in which identity and alterity are rendered into an event from which emerges an incipient politics of difference.

The Fourth Stage, antiphony, and the audience in Wole Soyinka

Wole Soyinka stresses the relations between body, self, and essence in the ‘antiphonal refrain’ of Yoruba tragic music. His perspective is one in which the lyricist (the performer) touches, through music, the celebrant (the listener), the two participating together on what Soyinka calls the Fourth Stage. Ogun, the Yoruba God that serves as the ‘model for the tragic victim of Yoruba tragedy’, transcends and incorporates the dramatic categories of ‘Apollonian’ and ‘Dionysian’ as given by Friedrich Nietzsche in his reading of Greek theatre (Ready 1988, 712, Weyenberg 2011). The Fourth Stage becomes a powerful site of liminality and transition at the same time that it is a site that involves the continuity of one’s own incompleteness (Msiska 2007, 122). Identity, then, is understood not as a static essence or a process, but an incomplete product, an iteration, of one self’s mediation of alterity through antiphonal communication (cf. Kortenaar 2011, 82). The antiphonal space of Yoruba tragic music that Soyinka describes refigures identity by ungrounding it and locating its flux in the alterity between lyricist and celebrant or votary (cf. Dosunmu 2005, 41). The Fourth Stage is a realm of transition; what Soyinka calls a ‘no man’s land’:

The forms of music are not correspondences at such moments to the physical world, nor at this nor any other moment. The singer is a mouthpiece of the chthonic forces of the matrix and his somnambulist ‘improvisations’ – a simultaneity of musical and poetic forms – are not representations of the ancestor, recognitions of the living or unborn, but of the no man’s land of transition between and around these temporal definitions of experience (Soyinka 1990, 148).

The performer’s improvisation is the map to a certain becoming where temporally defined notions of ancestry, self, and future and displaced in the event of transition and enunciation, referring us back to a doubleness in which identity and projection become simultaneous but fragmented and stretched across its limits. The Fourth Stage is the metaphor of this impasse

between the past and the future, the time of the break, the time of the ‘old-new thing’ (Moten 2003, 268n65).

In Yoruba tragic music as Soyinka describes it, language is the ‘secret correspondence’ with the ‘symbolic medium of spiritual emotions within the heart of the *choric union*’ in which the speaker and listener are intertwined and touching (Soyinka 1990, 148, emphasis added). Thus the Fourth Stage, this stage of transition, the ‘vortex of archetypes and home of the tragic spirit’ (1990, 149), engenders an antiphonal structure and quality in the choric unification of listener and speaker. The Fourth Stage is *dialogical* and at the same time, it is worship and production of myth:

Its dialogue is liturgy, its music takes form from man’s uncomprehending immersion in this area of existence, buried wholly from rational recognition. The source of the possessed lyricist, chanting hitherto unknown mythopoeic strains whose *antiphonal refrain* is, however, instantly caught and thrust with all its terror and awesomeness into the night by swaying votaries, this source is residual in the numinous area of transition (Soyinka 1990, 149, emphasis added).

Soyinka’s vocabulary stresses the immanence of the spiritual realm to the musical. Our structure of antiphony then cannot escape its origins in this spiritual dialogue shared between a lyricist and ‘votaries’ in the ‘terror of the night’. That Soyinka uses the ‘night’ to describe the Fourth Stage is further relevant given his stress that the experience of music thrusts the listener onto a stage that is unknown and uncharted. This formation suggests an important point concerning Soyinka’s reading of Yoruba tragic music. The unity of spiritual and musical, of the ‘possessed lyricist’s’ poetic chants, involves throwing oneself in worship to a space of risk to the self. Through this antiphony, the listener is a participant on the Fourth Stage, indeterminate but constituted by the antiphonal call of the lyricist. The Fourth Stage is a dialogic space of transition initiated by the ‘choric union’ between the lyricist and celebrant who ultimately *share* the experience of transition.

In the essay, Soyinka uses the terms chorus, celebrant, reveller, votary or dancer to think about the ‘audience’ or ‘spectator’ in the Yoruba aesthetic. This move is highly relevant for how we understand antiphony in Soyinka’s frame of Yoruba tragic music and relevant to

his departure from Nietzsche. In Greek tragedy (for Nietzsche), the audience and the chorus is 'largely passive: seeing rather than acting...we are only psychologically but not ontologically changed' (Jones 1996, 82). Nietzsche, in describing the theatres of the Greeks, writes that the 'terraced structure of concentric arcs made it possible for everybody to actually *overlook* [*Übersehen*] the whole world of culture around him and to imagine, in absorbed contemplation, that *he himself was a chorist*' (Nietzsche 2000, 63). In this sense, we can see how this contemplative spectator is not ontologically transformed in the process of experiencing theatre, but affected by a certain arrangement of dramatic materials: he simulates the chorist, he is not in the choric union of antiphony. The performance is a spectacle rather than an event in which the audience is invested. This is an important point of departure for Soyinka as in his view the spectator or the chorus is not in a relation of contemplation but rather a *choric union*. This is an important move because it shows us that the spectator is co-constitutive with the Yoruba tragic-musical event: 'the celebrant speaks, sings, and dances in authentic archetypal images from within the abyss. All understand and respond, for it is the language of the world' (Soyinka 1990, 145). The audience plays a completely different role in the Yoruba context than the Greek in such a way that it is problematic to even use the word 'spectator' or 'audience'. We are left instead with the subjects of the of the antiphonal refrain: 'celebrant', 'reveller', 'votary'.

This change in the notion of the chorus unified with the spectator allows Soyinka to criticise the validity of European musical concepts in the Yoruba context. First, we see that myth, poetry, and music are unified and inextricably linked because tragic music returns the Yoruba man to the originary, raw play of language itself rather than a particular meaning or a distribution of sense that can be 'contemplated' and 'overseen'. Soyinka begins differentiating the Yoruba concept from Nietzsche's Greek one by emphasising that the former insists on the simultaneity of music, poetry, and myth. For Nietzsche, the 'chorus in its primitive form, in proto-tragedy, [is] the mirror image in which the Dionysian man contemplates himself'

(Nietzsche 2000, 63). This ‘Dionysian man’ is of particular interest to us and helps us understand Soyinka’s most important departure from Nietzsche and European analyses of music and their validity for black musicality. The ‘Dionysian man’ is ‘nauseated’ after having ‘looked truly into the essence of things’ and now ‘sees everywhere only the horror or absurdity of existence...he is nauseated’ (2000, 60). Nietzsche’s ‘nausea’ does not speak to that condition of the colonised, and this in my opinion is Soyinka’s break with Nietzsche in his essay:

On the arena of the living, when man is stripped of excrescences, when disasters and conflicts (the material of drama) have crushed and robbed him of self-consciousness and pretensions, he stands in present reality at the spiritual edge of this gulf [the Fourth Stage], he has nothing left in physical existence which successfully impresses on his spiritual or psychic perception. It is at such moments that transitional memory takes over and intimations rack him of that intense parallel of his progress through the gulf of transition, of the dissolution of his self and his struggle and triumph over subjugation through the agency of the will (1990, 149).

Where for Nietzsche, Dionysian man is nauseated by looking into the ‘horrible truth’ of things, Soyinka affirms that nausea is never even a question for the ‘living’ who experience the truth of being ‘crushed and robbed’; performance becomes a ‘parallel’ of the ‘gulf’ of transition shared with the audience, foregrounding expression, vitality, and becoming in the face of this condition. The performance on the Fourth Stage makes real that gulf of transition and the ‘anguish’ of dissolution of self and the hero’s triumph through the gulf that celebrates the persistence of the will *despite* the horror and absurdity that is faced by the performer and recognised by the listener. By plunging off the ‘precipice’ (Soyinka 1990, 160) into the ‘night of transition’ (1990, 158), Soyinka gives us a sense of how the Fourth Stage helps us relate to difference and the other: by risking the dissolution of our identity and essence, we enter the stage of becoming, a stage that is *shared* in antiphonal sociality. It is in the antiphonal refrain of the Fourth Stage that the self—both the lyricist and the celebrant, artist and audience—is understood as a process of fragmentation and reconstitution (see Soyinka 1990, 145).

At this point, we can condense this rather complex discussion to a few principles on antiphony. Antiphony is a particular aesthetic form that plays a role in calling a listener to the Fourth Stage. Antiphony demands that we reconceptualise this ‘listener’ in a different way;

perhaps as a ‘votary’, ‘celebrant’ or ‘reveller’. What is more important is that it suggests a certain *kind* of listening, a listening that is constitutive of the musical event rather than separate from it. The antiphonal refrain of Yoruba tragic music calls the listener to a subject-positionality that is *open to its own dissolution and fragmentation*. This positionality confronts the ‘anguish’ which it opens up between ‘essence’ (identity) and ‘self’ (as becoming) through the musical medium.

The Yoruba is not, like European man, concerned with the purely conceptual aspects of time; they are too concretely realised in his own life, religion, sensitivity to be mere tags for explaining the metaphysical order of his world. If we may put the same thing in fleshed-out cognitions, life, present life, contains within manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn. All are vitally within the intimations and affectiveness of life (Soyinka 1990, 144).

Through Soyinka, we can think of antiphony as the ‘futile exploration’ of the anguish of an unstable identity between self, ancestor, and the future through the play of language in dialogue. In this sense, we are not to speak of music and poetry, but to remember that the poetic *is* the musical just as the musical *is* the poetic. Through the ‘improvisations’ of the lyricist, the listener, in choric unity, glimpses the fourth stage and the art of the transitory night. This transitory night is a disjunctive, revisionary time that I understand as constitutive of a contramodern mode of listening.

Antiphony, closure, and indeterminacy

Soyinka’s Fourth Stage offers us a way of speaking about music and drama together by hinging upon the antiphonal refrain that involves the chorus and listeners in a simultaneous relation to the performer or lyricist. For Soyinka, tragic musical drama is the recognition of the Yoruba body experiencing the anguish of severance, dissolution, fragmentation of self, and ultimately transition. Toni Morrison also uses antiphony in a similar way, pointing out its properties that blur the line between author and reader and how antiphony informs the musicality of her writing:

I want my fiction to urge the reader into active participation in the non-narrative, nonliterary experience of the text, which makes it difficult for the reader to confine himself to a cool and distant acceptance of

data. When one looks at a very good painting, the experience of looking is deeper than the data accumulated in viewing it. The same, I think, is true in listening to good music (Morrison 1984, 387).

In a reflective article on her writing process, Morrison explains how she uses black principles, concepts and forms in her writing. Morrison uses the antiphonic moment to give a sense of difference and identity that implicitly touches on ongoing debates around identity, authenticity and black writing brought up in Cornel West's proposition about 'selective appropriation' of various heritages by the black artist:

let me hasten to say that there are eminent and powerful, intelligent and gifted Black writers who not only recognise Western literature as part of their own heritage but who have employed it to such an advantage that it illuminates both cultures. I neither object to nor am indifferent to their work or their views. I relish it, in precisely the way I relish a world of literature from other cultures. The question is not legitimacy or the 'correctness' of a point of view, but the difference between my point of view and theirs. Nothing would be more hateful to me than a monolithic prescription for what Black literature is or ought to be (Morrison 1984, 389).

The gap between essence and the self re-emerges here in that difference in perspective is not to be authorised or literary blackness to be 'prescribed'. It is a product of a transition across that gap between essence and the self; it is the play across that gap that matters and that antiphony enables. She does away with objectivity ('correctness') and instead thrusts difference into a realm of conversation and dialogue. For Morrison, literary difference should be held radically open without any final horizon of 'Black literature'. For Morrison, blackness itself demands that she write in a way that disposes of authority: 'because my *métier* is Black, the artistic demands of Black culture are such that I cannot patronize, control, or pontificate' (388). Indeed, it is her '*métier*' that positions itself in a contramodern time because its task is to 'confront a reality unlike that received reality of the West, it must centralize and animate information discredited by the West...because it is information held by discredited people, information dismissed as "lore" or "gossip" or "magic" or "sentiment"' (Morrison 1984, 388). We see clearly in these lines that Morrison uses the literature of the 'discredited' and their sonic and literary techniques to write in a way that 'centralises' and 'animates' reality from the position of the West's peripheral subject (Fuston-White 2002, 468).

In order to accomplish this task, Morrison uses the ‘aesthetic tradition of Afro-American culture’ (1984, 388-9). Morrison’s writing intends to open a critical sensibility:

it must make conscious use of the characteristics of its art forms and translate them into print: antiphony, the group nature of art, its functionality, its improvisational nature, its relationship to audience performance, the critical voice which upholds tradition and communal values *and which also provides occasion for an individual to transcend and/or defy group restrictions* (1984, 389 emphasis added).

Morrison’s last line here is of particular interest in comparison with Soyinka. The aesthetic or literary object should have the potential for the reader, listener, or beholder to come up against and resist the ‘restrictions’ imposed by a group or community. She points to the potential of improvisation and communal experience to produce critical and alternative sensibilities that disturb the ordering of the body, aesthetics, ethics, and politics in Western modernity (see Dobbs 1998, 565, Krumholz 2008). The ‘functionality’ of black art, literature, and music is its simultaneity and union of listener and performer, artist and audience, and community that allows the exploration of the ‘abysses of painful personal experience’ (Eckstein 2006a, 279). The African-American literary work, for Morrison, demands a contingent relationship on the audience recognising the antiphonal relation that the work intends to produce: ‘working with these rules, the text, if it is to take improvisation and audience participation into account, cannot be the authority—it should be the map’ (Morrison 389). Morrison stresses that by following in an antiphonal aesthetic by attempting to force the reader to improvise and participate in the realisation of the text, the reader’s subjectivity is modified. Reflecting on her novel, *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison makes clear how she theorises the reader of the novel as an active participant in the constitution of the story itself:

One problem was centering: the weight of the novel’s inquiry on so delicate and vulnerable a character could smash her and lead readers into the comfort of pitying her, rather than into an interrogation of themselves for the smashing. My solution—break the narrative into parts that had to be reassembled by the reader—seemed to me a good idea, the execution of which does not satisfy me now. Besides, it didn’t work: many readers remain touched but not moved (Morrison 1994, 168).

Like tragic music, Morrison’s literature encourages us to engage in a stage of transition in which it is the experience of reading that is meant to move the reader beyond pity rather than a singular sense. It pushes us towards no horizon in particular but to a simple, perhaps ‘futile’

(see Soyinka 1990, 148) journey. This journey is the quality of the antiphonal event. Antiphony as a journey and open-ended play and experimentation rearticulates the relation between audience and artist as an exchange and a dialogue rather than observation, contemplation, or listening; hearing happens on the limit of a relation in which my attempt to respond is always an iteration and an *attempt*, rendering the antiphonal relation perpetually unfinished. Speaking of Michael Jackson's performativity, Michael Eric Dyson writes:

Antiphonal exchange permits the artist to articulate his or her vision and authorizes the audience to acknowledge its reception and even shape its meaning by responding to the emotion being expressed, refracting the message being sent, or reaffirming the idea being communicated. In this context, meaning is an open-ended process that resists premature or permanent closure (Dyson 2004, 448).

Toni Morrison's deployment of antiphony in her writing is organised specifically to resist arbitrary forms of 'closure' as her text is read. This openness requires an aesthetic, literary, and poetic approach that offers only incomplete and contingent meaning. By forcing the reader to reassemble the actions, words, and experiences that led to the tragic story of Pecola, impregnated by her father as a girl, in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison draws the reader into an antiphonal relation in which they are meant to *submit themselves* to the 'smashing' and shattering of identity. This submission resists the closure that we might 'pity' Pecola; Morrison's narrator Claudia tells us before the first chapter: 'There is really nothing more to say—except why. But since *why* is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in *how*'. Reading becomes a kind of refuge in which we take account of the stories of Cholly Breedlove, Pecola's father, and Claudia and Frieda, Pecola's friends. Through their eyes, we experience the ways in which her life is derogated. Morrison, in telling the story not from Pecola's perspective but all those characters that she comes into contact with, forces the reader to examine *how* this derogation happens and asserts our responsibility for it. By using antiphonal aesthetics, Morrison resists closure and comfort, opening the geography of reading to an eventful site that resonates with Soyinka's Fourth Stage of dissolution and transition.

Signifyin(g) as a mode of antiphonal play

Signifyin(g) is a communicative practice in African-American vernacular speech. Put simply, Signifyin(g) is the revision of a previous text through its repetition and use in rhetorical play. I read it as a form of performativity and a mode of antiphonal play. Signifyin(g) is one form of antiphony and has been an important concern for a number of studies of black music. In the intertextual and intersubjective play of Signifyin(g), language is a material to be shared by a community of speakers rather than a means of conveying meaning. In his book *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates uses the Yoruba God Esu as the image of Signifyin(g), who represents ‘the great trope of African-American discourse, and the trope of tropes, his language of Signifyin(g), is his verbal sign in the Afro-American tradition’ (Gates 2014, 26). Gates builds the notion of the Signifying Monkey through the figure of Esu represented as a janus-faced monkey figure, a Yoruba god that survived the Middle Passage in the oral culture of the Africans brought to the ‘New World’ as slaves. Esu-Elegbara is the ‘trickster figure of Yoruba mythology’, a God of the hermeneutic order (cf. 2014, 24):

Esu is the guardian of the crossroads, master of style and of stylus, the phallic god of generation and fecundity, master of that elusive, mystical barrier that separates the divine world from the profane (2014, 5).

Esu is ‘the god of indeterminacy’ because he ‘embodies the ambiguity of figurative language...Esu rules the process of disclosure’ (2014, 25).

Signifyin(g) pertains to the process by which a signifier is attached to sound image in language. The bracketed ‘g’ in Gates’s formulation ‘is a figure for the Signifyin(g) black difference’ (2014, 51). This allows Gates to rework Saussure’s formulation of the signifier and signified from the structures of the black vernacular. Instead of Saussure’s concept of signification as the simultaneity of the sound image and the concept, in the ‘black vernacular’ Signification is an interval between the signifier and the rhetorical figure (2014, 53).

Directing, or redirecting, attention from the semantic to the rhetorical level defines the relationship, as we have seen, between signification and Signification. It is this redirection that allows us to bring the repressed meanings of a word, like the meanings that lie in wait on the paradigmatic axis of discourse,

to bear upon the syntagmatic axis. This redirection toward sound, without regard for the scrambling of sense that it entails defines what is meant by the materiality of the signifier, its thingness (2014, 64).

Signifyin(g), then, is the series of language games that play with the signifier on its sonic (not representational or semantic) properties, stressing the materiality of the signifier itself (Gates 2014, 65). Signifyin(g) structures how hermeneutics, performativity and language games are played in the black vernacular (Smitherman 1996). Signifyin(g)

is a mode of formal revision, it depends for its effects on troping, it is often characterised by pastiche, and, most crucially, it turns on repetition of formal structures and their differences...the black rhetorical tropes, subsumed under Signifyin(g), would include marking, loudtalking, testifying, calling out (of one's name), sounding, rapping, playing the dozens, and so on (Gates 2014, 57).

Signifyin(g), as I deploy the concept in this study, refers to the iterative, experimental, playful and intertextual process by which words, texts, language, and sound—signifiers—are interpreted, revised through repetition and reuse in hip-hop culture and musical publics (see for example Smitherman 1997, Perry 2004, 63, Schloss 2004, 161, Potter 1995, Dimitriadis 2009, 48-49, also Williams (JA) 2014, DeBose 2005, 137). Signifyin(g) is the DJ's remix, the battles between b-girls and b-boys in a dance cipher, and the movement of freestyles between rappers. Signifyin(g) may have its own discourse, but discourse is second to Signifyin(g) as expression and hermeneutics itself. It is the play on the signifier in its infinitesimal difference:

In this sort of revision, again where meaning is fixed, it is the realignment of the signifier that is the signal trait of expressive genius. The more mundane the fixed text ("April in Paris" by Charlie Parker, "My Favorite Things" by John Coltrane), the more dramatic the Signifyin(g) revision. It is this principle of repetition and difference, this practice of intertextuality, which has been so crucial to the black vernacular forms of Signifyin(g), jazz—and even its antecedents, the blues, the spirituals, and ragtime—and which is the source of my trope for black intertextuality (Gates 2014, 70).

While Gates is referring to Signifyin(g) as the master trope of African-American literature, it can also be transposed to the antiphonal play of communication within the space of hip-hop culture and black music. Geneva Smitherman, in her seminal article on vernacular communication in hip-hop music, explains Signifyin(g) in artistic terms, applying Gates's concept to hip-hop:

what rappers do when they sample is revisiting and revising earlier musical work. As a rhetorical strategy, sampling is a kind of structural signifyin... They are indirectly commenting on the work of earlier Black writers within the narrative structure of their own literary production. The sampling of rappers thus presents a conscious preoccupation with artistic continuity and connection to Black cultural roots (1997,

15).

While Smitherman provides a clear definition of Signifyin(g) for hip-hop, she does so from the perspective of the artist. How Signifyin(g) is practiced by listeners remains open: how are these communicative structures present in musical form and rhetoric appropriated (if at all) by listeners and consumers? This question is particularly pertinent given the fact that the antiphonal aesthetic requires that we understand musical affect and response in the sharing between listeners as well as artists.

Research on Signifyin(g) in African-American music stresses the antiphonal nature of the practice and its close relationship to musicality. One of the most interesting examples is a game played by African-American children and youth called ‘The Dozens’ in the early 20th century. In the game, two players would share witty insults about one another’s family members (with particular emphasis on the others’ mother) often in rhymes and cadence. In his book on the game, Elijah Wald explains that there were as many versions of the Dozens as there were players:

Depending on who was talking, ‘playing the dozens’ or ‘putting someone in the dozens’ could mean cursing someone out, specifically insulting someone’s mother or other relatives, or engaging in a duel of increasingly elaborate insults that might or might not include ancestors or female kin. It could be a challenge to physical combat or a test of cool in which the first player to throw a punch was regarded as having proved his lack of self-control. Dozens techniques at times included viciously funny rhymes...along with puns, extravagant exaggerations, and other forms of verbal play. But insults could also be direct, nasty, and intended simply to hurt (Wald 2014, 4-5).

The Dozens was a rhetorical language game in which Signifyin(g) practices were central; we see that in the game, wit and insult—techniques used by the literature of the Signifying Monkey—are present in the techniques used by Dozens players who would use the sound image as the material for ‘verbal play’ (cf. DeBose 2005).

The Dozens is one example of non-musical Signifyin(g), though the cadences and rhyme schemes that players use resemble rap songs today. The Signifying Monkey, Esu, the seminal trickster, was a model for the urban ‘city slickers’ who would repeat and revise Signifyin(g) toasts (long poems): to use language to ‘baffle, circumvent, and even subdue

agents of oppression with the same wit, cunning, and guile as tricksters past' (Floyd 1995, 94). In *Blues People*, Amiri Baraka's classic work on the history of black music in America (written while he went by LeRoi Jones), demonstrates that Signifyin(g) was at play in the earliest form of the blues, whose cries and hollers referenced an antiphonal musicality that precede the blues in the ring shout and the spiritual (Jones 2002, 62). Signifyin(g) revision is also prevalent in jazz, where the breaks, riffs, and improvisations bounce between players such that the musical text is revised in its performance (see Chapter 8 in Ramsey 2003).

The stakes for Signifyin(g) are specifically related to the problem of modernism and the racialised position of the black body in the modern regime. LeRoi Jones articulated this border with much of the same vocabulary as Soyinka uses to theorise the Fourth Stage:

There was always a border beyond which the Negro could not go, whether musically or socially. There was always a possible limitation to any dilution or excession of cultural or spiritual references. The Negro could not ever become white and that was his strength; at some point, always, he could not participate in the dominant tenor of the white man's culture. It was at this juncture that he had to make use of other resources, whether African, subcultural, or hermetic. And it was this boundary, this no man's land, that provided the logic and beauty of his music (Jones 2002, 80).

The liminal zone between race and the possibility to revise a previous cultural resource, to respond to it and use it to call others into participation bring the stakes of antiphonal play into full focus. The call to Signify and play on existing musical tropes, housed in antiphony and call-and-response, what Floyd refers to as the musical trope of tropes, is contingent on the racialisation of blackness and the *limits* placed on the black body in its musical and social movement. Call and response and antiphony thus become ethical and political problems; ethical in terms of *how* to proceed, and political in terms of the stakes of play and performance itself. Antiphony's particular relation to modernity and racism had concrete effects on musical practice itself:

Any text, black or white, can be read by the vernacular, by the signifier...turning white texts into black as black musicians applied African-American rhetorical strategies to European forms. In these events, European and American dance music was trifled with, teased, and censured as it never had been before—infused with the semantic tropes and values of Call-Response. The 'willful play' of the black signifiers became more important than the given melodies they played as they created call-and-response figures, cross-rhythms, elisions, smears, breaks, and stop-time figures, 'telling a story' with musically dialogical, rhetorical tropes that asserted, assented, implied, mocked, and critically evaluated the possibilities of the new music with which they had made contact. I believe that Signifyin(g) was developed in response to

the black cultural apostasy that had resulted from the onset of modernism, which itself was fed by factors such as the prohibitions instituted by exclusionary lawmaking after Reconstruction, the loss of the communal ethos of black culture, and the continued ill-treatment of African-Americans throughout the United States. (Floyd 1995, 98)

In this sense, Signifyin(g), and the master musical trope of antiphony are a form of rhetorical play that produce a comportment towards an experimental politics committed to the production of new sensibilities. We can see that through musical practice and performance, rhetorical play became a means of ethical and political action and a means of calling modernity into question. There are significant political stakes for identity, race, and community in antiphony at the present moment for critiquing and revising modernism. However, this is not solely an artistic practice, but a responsibility for listeners and ‘audiences’ as well.

The stakes of antiphony as interpretation

So far, I have explored antiphony in three ways: antiphony and the dissolution of identity in the performance; antiphony as a commitment to a black, non-teleological communicative ethos; and as intertextual and iterative. Below, with a close reading of Paul Gilroy, I add a fourth dimension to antiphony, arguing that its unique quality is central to the articulation of contramodern spaces and times. Antiphony is a metacommunicative structure that structures the forms of contestation across different interpretations and voices in a hip-hop musical public. This is what is at *stake* for antiphony: to insist on the value of multiple modes of address and performance and to think of community outside of notions of identity and teleology which antiphony displaces through play and modes of performativity rooted in the vernacular of the Black Atlantic.

Antiphony departs from European musical traditions: ‘non-European expressive traditions have refused the caesura which Western high culture would introduce between art and life’ (Gilroy 1988, 313). Gilroy criticises the partition between the artistic object and the life of its production and consumption; non-European (and here, antiphonal) musical traditions

cannot be abstracted from the life-worlds that give it form and meaning. Antiphony, and the relations that it houses are extramusical in that they are a property of interaction with musical objects and takes into account the relevance of other listeners and participants that share musical space. This is how I read Gilroy's recommendation to replace the 'artefact' with the 'act of expression' as the object of musical research (1988, 313). In addition to the act of expression, what Signifyin(g) tells us is that what also counts is how the artefact (that trace of an act of expression) is itself expressed upon and interpreted in a given milieu. The interpretation and study of black diasporic music and literature needs to take into account the 'intertextual patterns in which discrete texts and performances have echoed each other, corresponded, interacted and replied' (1988, 313). Antiphony celebrates the vitality of musical consumption, and it is evident in Signifyin(g) and other forms of iterated, improvisational and playful modes of interpretation. The aesthetic object may not stand on its own, it is necessarily part of a situated, hermeneutic process in which the performance is not simply consumed but becomes the start of a broader process of communication.

In terms of the modern challenges of 'race', ethnicity, biopolitics, and community, antiphony might play an important role in anticipating the epistemic terrain on which ethical and political interventions might take place (see Gilroy 1993a, 136-137). In antiphony, if we are interested in the act of expression and the act of interpreting the artefact, we should insist on understanding the ways in which alterity within hip-hop is interpreted, what factors affect its interpretation, and how its interpretation plays out in shared spaces of listening. I further suggest that within these musical publics, the play of antiphony and Signifyin(g) are often extramusical, emerging between listeners, encouraging us to look for non-musical forms of antiphonal relations. By foregrounding the expressive act above the object expressed, we take seriously that expression, dialogue, and play with language are at the core of thinking around black arts: 'These modes of signification render the arbitrary relation between signs in its most

radical form. It cannot be said too often that they originate in a historical experience where the error of mistaking a sign for its referent becomes quite literally a matter of life and death' (Gilroy 1988, 313).

These points stress quite clearly that an aesthetics of Western art or music are not ideal for the study of hip-hop musical publics, where rhetorical play, iteration, and ethics are at play rather than standards of beauty, authenticity or clarity of genre; art is part of life, not an abstraction from it. In a criticism of 'corporate multiculturalism', Gilroy stresses the expressive nature of the incipient forms of subaltern and peripheral forms of ethics, politics, and multiculturalism. The 'extensive ethical investment in face-to-face, body-to-body, real-time interaction' is not present in the 'citation and simulation of [diaspora] cultures'; the 'solidarity of proximity yields to the faceless intersubjectivity of communicative technologies like the Internet' (Gilroy 2000, 252). If the public spheres of black musical production and consumption have a potential to produce a contramodern notion of the multicultural, it is in the ethics and politics that exists in *proximity* to alterity rather than in the distant, 'tele-present' forms of aesthetic consumption of music today (Dreyfus 2001).⁷

Gilroy suggests that aesthetic theories of diasporic communities of artists, writers, and musicians help us consider the contramodernities that they produce.

Our cultural politics is not therefore about depthlessness but about depth, not about the waning of affect but about its reproduction, not about the suppression of temporal patterns but about history itself. This realization is our cue to shift the centre of debate away from Europe, to look at *other more peripheral encounters with modernity* (Gilroy 1988, 316, emphasis added).

Gilroy recommends a focus on the vernacular and 'peripheral' forms of subaltern expression. I read Gilroy's recommendation to 'shift the centre of debate away from Europe' as a suggestion to look into the hermeneutic order at play in the consumption of African diasporic

⁷ Dreyfus writes, for example, that the distance of interactions in internet-mediated communication does not preserve the full spectrum of sense available to the body in embodied interaction (2001, 67). In writing about why we pay more to see a play rather than a film, Dreyfus references the specificity of the affective quality of theatre: 'the co-presence of audience and performer provides the audience with the possibility of direct interaction with the performer, and it seems clear that it is this communication going on between the performers and the audience that brings the show to life' (2001, 61).

creativity through a lens of depth and attention to vitality. Research should privilege the process and meaning of interpretation as it is conducted *in situ* rather than focus on the significance of the object itself. Elsewhere, Gilroy expands on the stakes of this displacement:

The history of black music enables us to trace something of the means through which the unity of ethics and politics has been reproduced as a form of folk knowledge. This sub-culture often appears to be the intuitive expression of some racial essence but is in fact an elementary historical acquisition produced from the viscera of an *alternative tradition of cultural and political expression* which considers the world critically from the point of view of its emancipatory transformation (Gilroy 1993a, 137, emphasis added).

Black music and the cultural sphere around it has consistently been tuned towards the ethical project of a better future (1993a, 132). At stake in the tradition of black music is the possibility of a kind of contramodernity and the imagination of another *time* rooted in the ethical, aesthetic, and political ‘folk knowledges’ of the subaltern (cf. Gilroy 2000, 336). This temporality might refer to a diasporisation or métissage of modernity (rather than rejection and retreat to a racial essence) in which racialised modalities of control and subalterity are transformed. Consequently, the prescience and potency of black music extends well beyond its limits in sound, unfolding a horizon of ethics and politics attuned to alterity and *other* ontologies of the transnational, multicultural, and the modern.

To understand antiphony as an ethical and political structure, hip-hop needs to be analysed from the perspective of its performance and its publicity rather than through an interpretive method attending to discrete cultural objects such as samples or lyrics, though we cannot do away with hermeneutic methods to study the publics that consume and enjoy hip-hop. This is different than analysing hip-hop music, which begins with the aesthetic properties of sound and poetry. Starting the analysis from its aesthetic materiality distances us from the vernacular American cultures from which hip-hop originated. Foregrounding the object as productive of political subjectivity does not reconcile with the positionality of African-American and African diasporic literature that insists on the ethical and political stakes of antiphonal life. Instead, my analysis focuses on the processes by which hip-hop music is

enjoyed and expressed upon through a study of antiphonal play. Antiphony turns us toward a different epistemological approach:

It is a tenacious challenge to the nascent orthodoxies of post-modernism which can only see the distinctive *formal* features of black expressive culture in terms of pastiche, quotation, parody, and paraphrase rather than a more substantive, political, and aesthetic concern with polyphony and the value of different registers of address (Gilroy 1988, 314, emphasis added).

Antiphony holds together Gilroy's thread that runs from music to politics: it opens up a unique, non-representational form of ethics through the plurality of 'different registers of address' where contestation occurs through call and response and proximity rather than the 'formal' features of music itself. The point is that antiphony is one way of understanding 'black expressive culture' and its political salience beyond the postmodern approaches that explore the 'politics' of music through its aesthetics rather than its utility in social milieu. The antiphonal approach suggests that an anarchic, unrepresentable, and unspeakable (and by extension, non-universal and non-codifiable) ethics can emerge from the practice and performance and enjoyment of black music. Antiphony is more than a formal property, but an *ethos* of music making and listening. Gilroy's point about 'polyphony' at the end of the passage emphasises quite clearly the differential modes of address open up a more 'substantive' register (proper to a liveness in music rather than the discrete objectivity of a particular sonic material) that is productive of an experiment in ethics and politics. Instead of understanding the formal features of this polyphony, Gilroy suggests we go deeper and uncover the ethico-political unity buried within the antiphonal relation.

In the following chapter, I turn to Gilles Deleuze's theory of the event and Jean-Luc Nancy's theory of community to emphasise that the aesthetics present in black music help us understand how their conceptual reworking of ethics, identity, alterity, community and politics can be applied to the politics of hip-hop. Their insights help us dig into the antiphonal relations that open up in hip-hop musical publics and to read antiphony as a form of 'ontological

dissent'.⁸ By using antiphony as a conceptual device to theorise the event and community, I hope to build on the insights I have drawn out on antiphony for black aesthetics outlined above and their relation to poststructural and phenomenological approaches to difference, alterity, ethics, and politics. Reading antiphony, the event, and community together provides an intellectual basis to study the anarchic ethics and emergent politics that occurs in the face-to-face relationships in hip-hop musical publics. Most importantly, this perspective allows us to break with an aesthetic tradition that favours analysis of the materiality of the aesthetic object and attend to the performances, contexts and experiences between bodies and communities of musical enjoyment.

⁸ Paul Gilroy presented this idea of 'ontological dissent' and black music in a keynote address at the conference 'New Urban Multicultures' held at Goldsmith's, University of London on 17 May 2016.

4. Towards a phenomenology of ethics in the antiphonal relation

Gilles Deleuze's *Logic of Sense* presents a theory of becoming and the event that is very useful to push antiphony further as an analytical framework. The event involves a specific form of temporality, invokes a particular reading of ethics, and is intimately connected to the processes of signification and sensibility. I begin with Deleuze's theory of becoming in the *Logic of Sense* to explore how sense, identity, and becoming are related in his theory. I relate this to antiphony and the ways in which sense scrambles identity and time, locating becoming in this loss of identity. This approach gains significantly from the insights of Wole Soyinka whose description of the antiphonal refrain of the 'transitory night' of the Fourth Stage references a similar theorisation of musical sense. Where Deleuze's theory is of sense in general, reading it in relation to Soyinka maps the subjective and affective territory we might use to interpret antiphonal events and the ethical subject in hip-hop musical publics. The shattering of identity is a central aspect of becoming for both Soyinka and Deleuze; in this shattering we are plunged onto a stage of transition, a disjunctive temporality that produces the potential for new ethical subjectivities.

After exploring the relations between sense, becoming, and event, I review the ethical contribution that Deleuze makes in the middle sections of the *Logic of Sense*. For Deleuze, ethics is bound up with the event itself; to be ethical is to make oneself 'worthy' of the event. Importantly, the event is read as a wounding and even a death. This brings us back to the 'night

of transition' that we encounter in Soyinka. This is not necessarily a literal death but the death of the self on the hither side of a transition, the self that is in relation to the potential of the self that *will be*. Identity comes into play once again as that which shatters; from this 'crack', 'wound', and 'death', an ethics emerges.

Becoming is positioned as the negotiation of a paradox in which the body is pushed, stretched, and pulled in two directions at once. Deleuze, reflecting on Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, explores becoming as the paradoxes she encounters, becoming bigger and smaller at the same time; she is always stretched across two limits. This is the 'night' of her becoming, unsettled, growing larger and smaller as she continues to ask 'which way, which way' (Deleuze 1990, 3). Pure becoming constantly 'eludes' the present; it 'is the paradox of infinite identity', the 'infinite identity of both directions or senses at the same time' (1990, 2). The present is infinitely subdivided into past and future; this infinite identity is

the contesting of Alice's personal identity and the *loss of her proper name*...when the names of pause and rest are carried away by the verbs of pure becoming and slide into the language of events, all identity disappears from the self, the world, and God. This is the test of *savoir* and recitation which strips Alice of her identity...Paradox is initially that which destroys good sense as the only direction, but it is also that which destroys common sense as the assignation of fixed identities (1990, 3).

Becoming splits identity to a past and a future (what I have been and what I will be) in which the present is eluded; identity becomes infinite in the sense that it is subdivided across many possible pasts and futures. This quality of becoming as the loss of identity and the 'proper name' fits with the dissolution of the self that we encountered with Soyinka. The choric union of lyricist and celebrant is precisely the loss of the proper names 'performer' and 'audience'. For Soyinka, the antiphonal refrain becomes a kind of abyss, a gulf of transition in which cultural histories and memories resonate with the future.

A Deleuzian approach to sense helps to consider the abyss of becoming in the face of affective alterity. For Deleuze, the sense of a thing is 'truth', an 'ideational material' rather than truth as a 'conceptual possibility' (1990, 19). The disclosure of sense renders the relationship between the signifier and the signified unstable; instead of sound image and

concept, sense is the boundary between a proposition and a thing (1990, 22). The event has an ‘essential relationship to language’ because the ‘event is sense itself’ (1990, 22). What this means is that sense is expressed through bodies, language, and propositions. At the same time, sense ‘does not merge at all with the proposition, for it has an objective which is quite distinct’ (1990, 21). There is something within sense that escapes language, what is expressed, and the proposition. This, perhaps, is why Deleuze mentions that ‘only empiricism knows how to transcend the experiential dimensions of the visible without falling to Ideas’ (1990, 20). As with Signifyin(g), where it is the play of the materiality of the sound image itself that has aesthetic and rhetorical function, the event stresses the limit of the sense of something and its expression or proposition. By calling for an empiricism that does not fall back to ‘Ideas’—perhaps more specifically, *proper names*—we can explore the material and ideational potential of sense in antiphonal events. Signifyin(g) is itself a continuous displacement of the proper name and a suspension of meaning, turning us to the sense and sonority of antiphonal relations. Going back to Alice, we might say that Signifyin(g) is the ‘test of *savoir*’ in which given knowledge is itself displaced by a rhetorical play, returning us to the materiality of the signifier itself. Signifyin(g), consequently, has a relation with nonsense; by playing with the materiality of the sound image, the person that Signifies is not stripping the sound image of its concept or idea but redistributing what is expressed by the proposition itself. This play on words and mimicry—infinitesimally different repetitions—produces *nonsense*, which for Deleuze is not the absence of sense but precisely that practice that ‘donates’ and produces sense in the displacement of the proper name.

Deleuze reads the event as a specific temporality, what he refers to as the time of Aion. The time of the Aion is the infinite subdivision of the present into past and future as opposed to the time of Chronos, in which time is the succession of corporeal ‘presents’ to which the past and future are only relative (see 1990, 162-164). Aion refers to a temporality in which the

present is always eluded. It is a temporality of becoming in which the present is divided into the disjunction of past and future. This other reading of time is its 'eternal truth', 'always already passed and eternally yet to come' (1990, 165). The Aion is a time of the surface and of incorporeal events, in which memory and potentiality are two points of a circle unfolded into a line that traverses an instant or an event (1990, 165-167). The time of Aion is like the time of the break, in which we are pulled across two (or more limits) in which an infinity of pasts and presents converge and intersect resisting the possibility of any kind of closure. This is a disjunctive present of the 'actor' and expression itself: 'This present of the Aion representing the instant is not at all like the vast and deep present of Chronos: it is the present without thickness, the present of the actor, dancer or mime...It is the present of the pure operation' (1990, 168). Aion is the temporality of an enunciative present that makes my identity itself into an event, opening that interval between myself and that 'sage' that I call Self (see Chapter 1). Aion is the time of the limit, where Chronos is the time of the subject, its memory and its presence. Aion is the temporality of the event that produces and donates sense, where our surface and our body is wounded, cracked; but this crack is only a manifestation of a play in the 'depth of the body' (1990, 155).

The ethical self relates to the event in an ambiguous and double relation to death played out on the interval between self and self. 'In one case', the time of Chronos, 'it is my life, which seems too weak for me and slips away at a point which, in a determined relation to me, has become present' (Deleuze 1990, 151). This is the first movement in which the self, presented with the alterity of an event, expresses itself in the face of this event but falls short, something within 'me' is not communicated and my 'life' (my presence) is not expressed as I would have willed it to be. In the second movement, 'it is I who am too weak for life, it is life which overwhelms me, scattering its singularities all about, in no relation to me, nor to a moment determinable as the present, except an impersonal instant which is divided into still-future and

already past' (1990, 151). Being in the face of the event is being caught in its dual structure and its ambivalence.

The event is actualised and experienced as a failure and an attempt, that to be facing the event is to experiment and fail, to express and be washed away (Deleuze 1990, 152). In the structure of the event, the self is fragmented, actualised and expressed to some degree or 'part' and other parts of the self are silent, cut across possible pasts and futures that are not expressed, that remain hidden and unexplored, within the event. Deleuze quotes Maurice Blanchot, who suggests that the event formulates the present as an *abyss*, infinitely subdivided into pasts and futures, projections and failures, in which identities crack. It is the possibility of this dual structure that allows for the event to be a place of experimentation and liveness, the present only a 'mobile and precise point' in which my proper name is lost.

This brings us to what ethics means for Deleuze. Ethics is being worthy of that which occurs and willing the event, both in its corporeal actualisation and presence to me and in the possibility of the eternal return of the event. It is an affirmation of the loss of the proper name and a willingness to allow the event to render the body and the self to wounding. Deleuze writes: 'Either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us...What does it mean to will the event?' (1990, 149). In this sense, we cannot speak so much of the subject itself as we can speak of the ethical self as that body which can will the event. The question returns to one of the *sensibility* of that body itself in the disjunctive temporality of the enunciative present.

This long lane behind us: it goes on for an eternity. And that long lane ahead of us – that is another eternity. They are in opposition to one another, these paths; they abut on one another: and it is here at this gateway that they come together. The name of the gateway is written above it: 'Moment' (Nietzsche 1961, 178).

Zarathustra pre-empts Deleuze's theory of the Aion, positioning the gateway as the surface and the limit between the past and the future. Ethics is the comportment maintained in the throw of oneself into the gateway 'Moment'. It is also to will what happens in that moment, and to will

a return to that which occurred and may occur in the future: ‘I and you at this gateway whispering together, whispering of eternal things – must we not all have been here before – and must we not return and run down that other lane out before us?’ The gateway and the event becomes a question of the will and how I—not as a subject or an identity—but a body swallowed up in the Aion of pre-individual singularities comport myself towards that which occurs to me and will occur again. The event, then, has a complex relationship to ethical subjectivity and the persistence of the I, in terms of my ipseity, as it is swallowed up and wounded by alterities. The ethical question is whether, I, with you, can enter into that gateway called ‘Moment’ and make a leap into that gulf of transformation—between the past before us and the future that awaits us—willingly.

Indeed, to engage in antiphony requires a willingness to jump into that gulf of transition, to throw oneself into it willingly, and to sacrifice the proper name in a journey with sense. What it means to will the event in antiphony is to will the disclosure of the other, his truth, and his ability to shatter my own identity. This happens at the limit between myself and the other.

In antiphony, there is a different sense of time than that which Deleuze provides. To read antiphony as an event is not only to use the metaphor of Aion (of past and present infinitely subdivided) but also to read the event as constituted in relation to alterity and the other. Identity, and the cracks on its surface, becomes the event itself in antiphony which takes place on that disjunction between the incommensurable differences between myself and the other. Identity becomes split through an enunciative present in which my orality and my expression are a gateway between who I am, and what I have been, and who I intend to be. In that moment of expression, I am infinitely subdivided; my expression is simply a trace of an attempt to project my past and my future without being represented. This is ultimately an ethical question: how do I express myself in a way that wills the futility of my accurate self-representation in the face of the other and at the same time affirms the potentiality of my own dissolution, the loss of my

proper name? We need to remember that in antiphony this loss happens somewhere, in a community, and is embodied in a state of affairs and a particular assemblage. The event itself, the antiphonal relation and the splitting of identity, is incorporeal, but it is *experienced* and sensed by bodies. In digging into antiphony, I ask how does a body comport itself such that it allows the other to rewrite it? This is not only the time of Aion and Chronos, but also a time that affirms the temporality that the other holds over me to allow the gateway that occurs at the limit between the path of the past and the path of the future. What ethics means is to comport oneself to the possibility of my identity being rendered an event, for it to be called into question and thrust into the disjunctive temporality of my response to the other. In the antiphonal relation, the 'I' that I am is rendered as an event; it is an interval in which I present myself through a response and a comportment.

Antiphony as the becoming-ecstatic of community

Signifyin(g) and the larger structure of antiphony runs through the core of hip-hop as an aesthetic form, music, and culture. Importantly, in blurring the line between artist and spectator, listening becomes a disjunctive event. If listening becomes a performance, then repeated antiphonal relationalities entrain a repertoire of bodily comportments. While I leave it to my following empirical study of a hip-hop public to flesh out this training, at this point I would like to argue that this repeated, iterated experimentation and play of antiphonal relations produces a certain comportment which allows us to follow interesting pathways into questions of community, politics, and ethics. By using antiphony to think about hip-hop and identity, I attempt to demonstrate that antiphony is a cultural form that tries to rewrite how identity, essence, community, ethics and politics come to play in the relation to the other. Where these issues are posed in poststructural and critical literatures, without engaging with the African

diasporic tradition, we miss one crucial source of *how* the kind of re-writing of community called for in this literature is already underway in the West's 'peripheral' modernities.

I turn to Jean-Luc Nancy, who rewrites the ontology of being from the primacy of the relation, to conceptualise the ethical context of antiphony from a phenomenological perspective. Nancy proposes being-with as a fundamental ontological premise and draws out its implications for the notion of 'community'. In *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy elucidates that 'being-with' is the ontological starting point, rather than Being. The ethical is problematised as a site of practice rather than grounded or founded in universal and abstract propositions:

Nancy offers an alternative way into thinking about ethics without grounds or foundations. The singular-plural does not offer a foundation for ethics, rather it *is* ethics; ethics itself is originary. The starting point of the singular-plural of being is always open or transimmanent, a relation without content. As such, this originary ethics has not content, but is rather aligned with what Nancy calls 'ethos' or conduct (Fagan 2013, 101).

We can see that this ontological position is useful for interpreting antiphonal relations. That it is the 'ethos' or 'conduct' of the body that Nancy is concerned with further stresses the point that ethics has to do with our comportment in the event of relation and its consequences for a body that is singular-plural rather than a being with a certain identity. For Nancy, all that is 'in common' is the *fact* that we are enmeshed in relations and that we are constituted by our mutual exposition and sharing. Consequently, how we comport ourselves to the other refers to the affordances and possibilities we have to share in a given community.

In this section, I theorise antiphony as a mechanism of community, ethics, and politics that responds in many ways to the critiques of identity, totality, and immanence in community that Jean-Luc Nancy presents. Community, in Nancy's sense, refers more to the unfinished process by which meaning is produced that we encounter both in Toni Morrison's writing and the practices of Signifyin(g). Reading antiphony through Nancy allows us to understand in what ways antiphony rewrites how we present ourselves to each other and how antiphony constitutes community. Nancy's thought helps us to open up a comportment that corresponds to antiphonal sharing. Its implication for modernity becomes clear: antiphonal relations are

experimental, clarifying and adding on to an ontological foregrounding of being-with (over being or even becoming) and demonstrates its political potential. This dialogue, perhaps strange to some, will help to remedy the lack of engagement with black politics in poststructuralist theory (see Hesse 2011). Indeed, this dialogue helps us learn more about being-with by focusing on culture and affects that come from *other* democratic forms.

We might begin, following Nancy, to unpack the ontology of being-with by criticising the concept of community in European modernity (see 1991, 9-14). Contemporary community begins with a lack of a shared originary essence:

The first task in understanding what is at stake here consists in focusing on the horizon *behind* us. This means questioning the breakdown in community that supposedly engendered the modern era. [...] Until this day history has been thought on the basis of a lost community—one to be regained or reconstituted. [...] Distinct from society (which is a simple association and division of forces and needs) and opposed to emprise (which dissolves community by submitting its peoples to arms and to its glory), *community is not only intimate communication between its members, but also its organic communion with its own essence* (1991, 9, emphasis added)

Immanence is Nancy's term to denote communities formed on the basis of shared essence and/or consanguinity. An immanent community is one whose labour is to reproduce its own essence. We can see how this is opposed to antiphony, which valorises multiple modes of address in order to insist on the impossibility of closure. This community of organic communion is a trap. Nancy begins his essay on the *Inoperative Community* with the relation of totalitarianism and immanence. An immanent community is one that produces its own essence as its goal and its telos as its own mythology of essence and origin.

It is precisely the immanence of man to man...that constitutes the stumbling block to a thinking of community. A community as having to be one of *human beings* presupposes that it effect...its own essence, which is itself the accomplishment of the essence of humanness (Nancy 1991, 3).

It is in this sense that Nancy defines 'totalitarianism' and 'immanentism' as a state in which an affirmation of shared essence or identity (humanness, whiteness, Christianness, blackness, etc.) is the horizon and work of a community. Indeed this is a closure that refers to community from the perspective of a fixed identity. To rethink community away from a totalitarianism imposed by a telos and originary essence, Nancy provides the concept of *ecstasy* in opposition to

immanence. Ecstasy, ‘defines the impossibility, both ontological and gnological of absolute immanence (or of the absolute, and therefore of immanence) and consequently the impossibility either of an individuality...or of a pure collective totality’ (1991, 6). Ecstasy therefore affirms that the individual is not whole and cannot be represented (for it is infinitely fragmented and divisible) and the pure collective totality is a myth (even in perfect communion, it remains an assemblage and contingent composition of bodies). Nancy uses ecstasy to theorise the self as a singular-plurality shared with and constituted by our placement and proximity to other singular-pluralities.

The becoming-ecstatic of community would mean the obliteration of racial identity as such and a deterritorialisation of phenotypical difference. If race (or nation, for that matter) is what we share as our ‘being-in-common’, then our becoming-ecstatic is impossible: if our work is closed by its horizon as the affirmation of shared essence or consanguinity, our differences and our pluralities are effaced in the communion of a common singularity or unity. Ecstasy is the rejection of a *telos* or any such narrative of shared direction; it posits no goals, rather, it is organised around ‘unwork’. The key point about unwork is that it posits *no horizon*, no *telos*, and no goal. This helps illustrate the character of becoming-ecstatic: a community sharing for its own sake, constituted by its own sharing rather than its identity or a representation.

An immanent community, one produced by and through ‘work’ rather than ‘unwork’, posits a ‘common being’ that is ‘objectifiable and producible (in sites, persons, buildings, discourses, institutions, symbols: in short, in subjects)’ (1991, 31). The work of the immanent community is the affirmation of its essence itself. Work relates to closure and immanence rather than the proliferation of difference. Unwork is the moment at which the relation becomes an event:

Community necessarily takes place in what Blanchot has called ‘unworking,’ referring to that which, before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension. Community is made of the interruption of singularities, or of the suspension that singular beings *are* (1991, 31).

Community appears as a process of unfinished interruption and resignification. This concept of community is a useful one to appropriate in a framework for an antiphonal multiculturalism. As the structure that hosts the ‘communitarian’, democratic moment between incomplete racial selves (see Gilroy 1993b in Chapter 3), the antiphonal community can be read as a mode of unworking community. Community becomes about unwork, which is constituted by the sharing of expression and performance rather than sharing in a common representation or narrative. Of course, we still find closures along the way; art (for Nancy) is not for politics’ sake but political art can produce the kinds of closures that Nancy warns us about, making a certain politics the *work* of artistic practice. An art immanent to a politics becomes a form of work and risks the community of immanence that Nancy is trying to unwrite.

In community, the body, the individual, and the singular being are separated by their own limits (their skin, their touch) but enmeshed and copresent, facing each other in full proximity. The singular-plural being is the ‘immaterial *and* material space that distributes’ it as one amongst many others (1991, 27, see also Nancy 2008, 33-37). The individual necessarily recedes as the autonomous subject is always incomplete, always in relation to itself and others. Moving away from the individual to the singular-plural being allows Nancy to explicate community as a sharing of mutual exposition, of copresence with alterity: ‘communication is the constitutive fact of an exposition to the outside that defines singularity’ (1991, 29). Copresence is not a ‘bond’ between subjects, but it is ‘the appearance of the between as such: you *and* I (between us)—a formula in which the *and* does not imply juxtaposition, but exposition’ (1991, 29). Community is not a relation between individuals that belong to a greater whole, but the contingent assemblage of bodies sharing their mutual exposition. Nancy calls this mutual exposition ‘compearance’, referring to the point that singular beings always co-appear or ‘compear’ (1991, 28). This allows Nancy to give a vitalist definition of community as action rather than work and as an experiment rather than a project or a representation that is

‘in-common’. The mutual exposition of two (or more) singular beings opens up a topology of communicative relations in which *sharing* and *interrupting* constitute community: ‘What is exposed in compearance is the following, and we must learn to read it in all its possible combinations...*you shares me* [“*toi partage moi*”]’ (1991, 29). Mutual exposition opens up an ethics located in a community whose goal is sharing rather than communion in a certain identity.

Towards the end of the essay on the ‘Inoperative Community’ and in another chapter titled ‘Shattered love’, Nancy considers love as a structure of sharing [*partage*] and communication which I read as a parallel to antiphony. Lovers are separated and divided at the same time that their intimacy is shared. It is at the border of the touch between one and the other in ecstasy and joy that ‘lovers expose, at the limit, the exposition of singular beings to one another and the pulse of this exposition: the compearance, the passage, and the divide of sharing’ (1991, 38). The touch between lovers is a becoming-together, but the touch also reminds us of the limit of my becoming and *my* identity; in my presence with the lover (for example), becoming occurs through sharing. In this *partage*, we are further broken and fragmented, less whole and more plural:

he, this subject, was touched, broken into, in his subjectivity, and he *is* from then on, for the time of love, opened by this slice, broken or fractured, even if only slightly. [...] The break is a break in his self-possession as subject; it is, essentially an interruption of the process of relating oneself to oneself outside of oneself. From then on, *I* is *constituted broken*. As soon as there is love, the slightest act of love, the slightest spark, there is this ontological fissure that cuts across and that disconnects the elements of the subject-proper—the fibers of its heart (1991, 96).

In the becoming that is shared with the lover, the subject is splintered into a plurality within its own singularity. In the chapters that follow I trace this shattering in antiphonal, rather than erotic, relations and explore how the self is constituted in the process of these breaks and touches. Love, as the intimate copresence of two singular beings, breaks our identity and ‘interrupts’ the process by which we understand ourselves from the outside. Love is an iterated practice and an experience, it does not ‘arrive’: ‘love takes place, it happens, and it happens

endlessly in the withdrawal of its own presentation. It is an offering, which is to say that love is always proposed, addressed, suspended in its arrival, and not presented [or] imposed' (1991, 97).

Nancy's thought on love suggests that community constituted by the sharing of mutual exposition is in a state of permanent incompleteness. Where 'love' is one way in to thinking about this, I instead propose antiphony, whose structures lack the same intimacy of love but do claim the potential to interrupt and break the subject. Love—as does communication for Nancy—takes place at the limit of the body, traced by the capacity to touch and to speak to the lover. Love is a kind of unwork, an articulation that is 'presented, proposed, and abandoned on the common limit where singular beings share one another' (1991, 73). Antiphony similarly involves an articulation that is offered to the other in a kind of sharing.

Antiphonal politics as face-to-face partage

We can map out the limits of the singular-plural being where writing, love, art, and thought happen (see 1991, 78). It is through articulation and mutual exposition that we are spaced; facing one another through the limits of our body.

Someone enters a room; before being the eventual subject of a representation of this room, he disposes himself in it and to it. In crossing through it, living in it, visiting it, and so forth, he thereby exposes the disposition—the correlation, combination, contact, distance, relation—of all that is (in) the room and, therefore of the room itself. He exposes the simultaneity in which he himself participates at that instant, the simultaneity in which he exposes himself just as much as he exposes it and as much as he is exposed in it...the taking place of the *there* and as *there*, does not involve primarily the succession of the identical; it involves the simultaneity of the different (Nancy 2000, 97).

Even in something as banal as a room, we can see how the spacing of self and other are contingent, the limits of each body (the walls, the pictures on them, the sofa, the bed, someone) are exposed and offered to the other each time and in each disposition. This iterated exposition is all the more intensified in other, less mundane examples (I explore the ethics of understanding the arrangement of singular-plural beings in the cipher in Chapter 6 for example). What is important is the temporality that Nancy describes in this room: even in its

stillness, something still takes place—the exposition of all the bodies—and it happens at each time that the room is entered.

In community, or interpersonal interaction, the singular being appears in its plurality, each time comporting and offering itself to the other. This is not necessarily a mode of ‘care’ for Nancy but an ontological fact (see 2000, 56-57, 61). As we are mutually exposed one to another, the self is suspended and destabilised as it articulates, writes, and speaks along its limits. It is in this exposition that we are spaced and distributed. Antiphony retains the quality of this mutual exposition, however, the unique heritage and space of antiphony speaks back to community, unwork and the risk of exposition that relates it directly to the reconfiguration of ethics and politics and the arrangement of contramodern times and spaces.

My reading of Nancy has laid out the problem of totality and immanence and condensed some of his ontological positions in order to suggest that a certain comportment is trained and cultivated in antiphonal relations. I use the ontology of being-with to think of a becoming-ecstatic of community that is constituted by the play of antiphonal relations that operate in hip-hop musical publics. In the unwork of an antiphonal community, identity is unfinished, deferred, suspended, and incomplete. In the becoming-ecstatic of community and culture, that we communicate is all that should be shared, our subjectivities and selves constituted by the other’s interruptive clamour and touch. This interruption, going back to Deleuze, is the role of events of expression and enunciation. It is in the sharing of our mutual exposition and the offering of ourselves to another that the unworking or *inoperative* community is realised.

In order to share in the ideal way that Nancy outlines, we must comport ourselves *differently*. We are tuned for immanence and communion, the solidarity of identity rather than its fracture and dissolution. Love remains one eventful sphere in which the immanence of our selfhood is fractured; antiphony is another. For love to be sustained, the lovers must suspend

themselves and take the risk of love not being returned, but offering it anyway. This is a risk, one that is similar to the experience of antiphony and exposing ourselves to the other's call.

Nancy relates the immanent with the 'moderns', stressing one more dimension in which the notion of unwork and the becoming-ecstatic of community refers to a parallel movement with the contramodernities articulated by antiphony:

politics was never 'totalizing' for the ancients, who no doubt invented politics but who thought it only in the context of a city of 'free men', that is, in the context of an essentially differential and not 'totalizing' city. [...] The politics of sovereign nation-states, for its part, was sustained through a relationship to a destination common to all and for each alone that always went beyond politics...this same sovereignty led to a 'politics in totality' that became that of the moderns (Nancy 2010, 46).

It is the nation-state and its imposition of a common horizon or 'destination' as what is figured as a specifically modern phenomenon here. In order to understand this point, we must briefly turn to Nancy's early work on the political in the 1970s. In a project on the 'retreat' of the political, Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy argue that a certain 'closure of the political' is a product of enlightenment humanism and articulates an immanent community through the completion of politics in technology at the expense of philosophical questioning of the political (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 2010, 110). Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy argue that despite the blurriness between philosophical and political thought (Sparks in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 2010, xvii), the philosophy of politics is finished: 'it seems to us as indispensable today to recognize that what completes itself (and does not cease to complete itself) is the great "enlightened," progressivist discourse...of the actualization of the genre of the human' (2010, 111).

By pointing at enlightenment humanism and progressivism, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy are implying that the foundational assumptions behind Western politics are responsible for this closure. There is no questioning of philosophy or politics, rather the political has become dominated by technology. It is in the relation between sovereignty, closure, and

technology that Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy draw on Martin Heidegger and relate the end of sovereignty and technology to totalitarianism:

In Heidegger's terms, in those terrifying and profound paragraphs that conclude 'Overcoming Metaphysics', politics in the age of technology means the total domination of rational calculability and planning, the triumph of instrumental reason...the domination of the political by technology and the utter oblivion of Being implicit in this process entail a homogenization of all areas of human life into complete uniformity (*Gleichförmigkeit*). In this process, the human being, metaphysically understood as an *animal rationale*, is transformed into the figure of the worker (Critchley 1999b, 204).

It is this reading of technology as the completion of the political by dominating that *closes* the political: Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy refer to the 'total completion of the political in the techno-social' (1997, 132). Nancy remains suspicious of technology, particularly in its political forms, for its ability to construct the body as that of a worker, uniformly rational, and homogeneous. As we know, the *working* community is the horizon that Nancy wants to leave behind; in the age of technology, community becomes immanent to the work of 'rational calculability' and the 'triumph of universal reason'. Nancy is highly suspicious of techno-social modernity that effects the 'enlightened' and 'progressive' human subject that is organised as a worker in the community of 'reason'. What Nancy does not focus on enough is what occurs on the periphery of this modernity—where we find antiphony and a multitude of other subaltern articulations—to explore the *inoperative* and *unworking* communities that challenge this modernity and reconfigure this assemblage of technique, politics, and ethics to create community outside of this closure.

Nancy encourages us to think at the *end* of sovereignty (2000, 137), beyond the closure of the political through rational technology. Instead, politics are located a plane of sense and the event (Dejanovic 2015, 2). Nancy (as does Lacoue-Labarthe) conceives of the 'political' not in the classic site of the *polis*; rather, he articulates the political as an experimental or inventive approach to the 'relation' of 'being-together' (see Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1997, 158). By reformulating the 'political' in this work, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy try to construct another modernity rooted in the philosophical questioning of the human through the ontological

primacy of being-with. My turn to antiphony responds to this shift. In arguing that antiphonal relations are events with unique, disjunctive temporalities, I attempt to respond to the challenge of thinking at the closure of the political in ‘universal reason’ by turning to the peripheral, experimental, and vernacular modernities of antiphony in hip-hop musical publics (see Nancy 2010, 40). This may lead us to a different *sense* of democracy, resonating with Nancy’s groundless ethics, Deleuze’s notion of the event, and antiphony’s alternative processes for the constitution of the subject. I conceptualise the political in hip-hop through antiphonal forms of *partage* ‘that follows the impossibility of incarnating the essence of democracy and representing its figure, alongside the necessity of “democratically” keeping open this impossibility’ (2010, 39). Democracy is a product of iterations; true democracy is groundless, heteroglot, and polyvocal constituted only by the spacings, articulations, and communications of those who participate in it. In the following chapters, I demonstrate that antiphonal relations in hip-hop musical publics are crucial for observing the process of the becoming-ecstatic of community. This allows the possibility of locating the becoming-ecstatic of multicultural community in the life of the peripheral, vernacular modernities that hip-hop puts at play.

Part 3:

The politics of the cipher

5. Genealogy of ‘cipher’

The cipher is the elemental space in hip-hop culture. I interpret it as a blueprint for the antiphonal relations of contemporary hip-hop culture in which the ethical and political registers I explored theoretically in Part 2 are embodied. I explore the ethos and the atmosphere of the cipher in Chapter 6. The cipher is where rappers get their first taste of battling, where they hone their skills and practice their flow. It is also where fans and onlookers experience hip-hop as a shared project, rather than just music to listen to. I refer to the cipher as the paradigmatic site of ‘musicking’ (see Small 2000 in Chapter 2) in hip-hop. Ciphers, however, are not limited to rappers: b-girls and b-boys (hip-hop dancers)⁹ form ciphers with loud beats on in the background and someone jumps in the middle and dances. Once they are done, someone else jumps in. Like dancers, in the ciphers I observed, rappers will ‘spit’ their bars (lines of verse) and when they lose the beat or are simply finished, they stop and someone else picks up. Ciphers, on the surface, are simple: a free-flowing group of people listening and performing together over a beat. However, there is much more to the cipher than the bodies and the sounds that compose it. Cipher, from its etymology to the ontology it invokes, assembles a contramodern time and space. In preparation to understand the reconfiguration of ethics and

⁹ There is a multiplicity of dance styles in hip-hop; to call them ‘breakers’ or ‘breakdancers’ would be inaccurate as a variety of other styles exist. The preferred term for referring to a hip-hop dancer is ‘b-girl’. For more detail on dance ciphers, see Schloss 2009.

politics in the contramodernity of the cipher in Chapter 6, I trace a genealogy and politics of the term ‘cipher’ and detail its emergence in hip-hop culture below.

When I first encountered the cipher that S4HH formed every Wednesday night, I was struck by the term itself. ‘Cipher’, in common usage, refers to an encryption of language in order to make it indiscernible except to its intended recipient. Its etymology, however, is particularly interesting. According to the Oxford Dictionary of English, cipher means either ‘a secret or disguised way of writing; a code’ or ‘[dated] a zero; a figure 0’.¹⁰ For this chapter, the first definition seems of little interest. The second, however, is quite the opposite: cipher refers to the *number ‘0’ as well as its form*. Forming bodies in an elliptical pattern and rapping, singing, or even listening to music is absolutely not a contribution of hip-hop culture; this practice has deeper roots in musical cultures throughout history across the globe.

In hip-hop culture, the term cipher arrives via the Five Percent Nation of Gods and Earths (NGE), a Black Muslim sect that started in the 1960s (I will use the terms Five Percenters and NGE interchangeably in this chapter). The Five Percenters share many teachings with the Nation of Islam (NOI) and other African-American religions in the 20th century. As this chapter shows (and explained by Miyakawa 2005), the theology of the Five Percenters is based on numerous sources. Their texts, beliefs, and outlook is based on Islam, Jewish and Arab numerology, Masonic principles, Gnostic spirituality, and transnational mysticism. The Five Percenters ‘see themselves as teachers, bringers of a specific type of self-knowledge’ (Miyakawa 2005, 3). ‘Knowledge of self’ refers to historiographical and ontological revision; the Five Percenters refer back to African and Asian knowledge and ontologies in order to challenge the inferiority of the non-white subject in Western modernity. The term ‘cipher’ refers to the space in which this black, Afro-Asiatic subject speaks in another modernity and another episteme. In this chapter, I draw out the milieu that the Five Percenters

¹⁰See the entry for ‘cipher’ in *Oxford Dictionary of English* (3 ed.), online version, 2015.

were embedded in and how this influenced their theological position. I specifically explore their use of the term ‘cipher’, its relation to black musicality and antiphony, Black Atlantic mysticism, and Five Percenter numerology. ‘Cipher’ belongs to this context and, based on my reading of the term, ‘cipher’ denotes both a circle, a number, a group of rappers, as well as a contramodern site of ontological revision and dissent. My genealogical approach to ‘cipher’ attempts to unearth the influences and transnational character of Five Percenter thought and how this came to inflect hip-hop culture.

The Five Percenters refer to ‘blackness’ as the Afro-Asiatic body (inclusive of those races racialised by ‘Europe’ as non-‘white’) as the divine ‘Original man’. The Five Percenters were among the first rappers, and we can see their influence in a number of albums and tracks (see Miyakawa 2005, Mohaiemen 2008). They were instrumental in the development of hip-hop poetics and culture. While the ring shout, a kind of cipher practised by the slaves (introduced in Chapter 3), usually referred to Christian tradition and spiritual values, the Five Percenters developed their theology and ciphers from the hybrid geographies of black religions from Marcus Garvey’s Ethiopianism to the Nation of Islam (NOI). This version of Islam is at the core of the contramodern time of the cipher. It is important to remember that this time is not based solely on Islamic principles, but is based on an exchange of mystic, magical, and occult texts that combine Judaism, Islam, Christianity and even Hinduism based on the circuits and connections between cultures in the Black Atlantic. The notion of the cipher and its naming as an element of hip-hop culture reflects this rich geography of exchange.

This history is the backdrop invoked in the event of being present in the cipher. In Chapter 6 I explore how this plays out in the musical public assembled by S4HH. ‘Cipher’ is a speech act that invokes a specific genealogy rooted in the configurations of ethics and the body in black religions in the twentieth century. Below, I present a brief schematic of the reordering of knowledge that ‘cipher’ invokes. Ciphers are a product of religious experiences

and mysticisms in the hybrid milieus of the slaves, black writers, artists, musicians, as well as Black Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Below I review key texts that tell the story of the ordering of knowledge in these traditions. ‘Cipher’ refers to a reordering that stipulates that the divinity of the Afro-Asiatic man, represented by his mystical, mathematical, and scientific knowledge as *other* to the techno-social domination present in Western society (as explored at the end of the previous chapter). Ciphers in hip-hop may not consciously reference this history, but this history illuminates the contribution that hybrid black religions in the twentieth century made to the development of hip-hop culture. Five Percenter thought and culture still inflects how members of a musical public participate in a cipher and the ideas that they are exposed to. In the following chapter that explores the ethos of the cipher, I demonstrate how NGE thought is an important part in affective and discursive politics at play in hip-hop musical publics. By tracing the term cipher in this chapter, I map out the contours of the ontological reordering it attempts to perform. In order to accomplish this, I turn to the texts, ideas, philosophies, and theodicies that influenced the Nation of Gods and Earths, providing us with a backstory to the term ‘cipher’ that highlights the stakes of contramodern revisions undertaken by African-Americans in the 20th century.

Black Zionism and the divinity of blackness

The form of the cipher—groups of people getting together in a circle to sing and dance with one another—is nothing new. The ‘ring shout’ was a kind of cipher that allowed for the convergence of values and aesthetic styles through which enslaved Africans in the Americas to sustain collective values and their history: ‘ancestor worship and contact, communication and teaching through storytelling and trickster expressions’ (Stuckey 1987, 16 in Floyd 1991, 266). ‘The shout was an early Negro “holy dance” in which “the circling about in a circle is the prime essential” [Gordon 1990, 447]’ (Floyd 1991, 266). Essentially, the ring shout

involved dance movements, call-and-response and stomping the feet to produce a rhythm; it was a ‘convergence’ of a variety of musical, spiritual and performative acts (Floyd 1991, 267-268). Floyd uses the ‘conflation’ of dance, performance and sound in the ring shout to argue for a ‘cultural-studies approach to inquiry into black music’ (1991, 269):

Throughout the history of black music, its black listeners have also been dancers. Having emerged from the ring, black music, in the words of Albert Murray, ‘disposes the listeners to bump and bounce, to slow-drag and steady shuffle, to grind, hop, jump, kick, rock, roll, shout, stomp [1978, 144]’ (Floyd 1991, 269).

The cipher in hip-hop is an extension of a longer genealogy of black musical *practice*: the ring shout, its circularity, its performance as a form of communal dance and musical expression refers to a ‘material’ site and a series of performances (1991, 269).

In the ring shouts, ‘the present was extended back to the past and into the mythic realm of the Old Testament...black worshippers dramatized pivotal events in early Jewish history, such as the Israelites’ liberation and triumphant departure out of Egypt’ (Chireau 2000, 19). Allegories to Jewish identity—enslavement, exodus and chosenness—extended across the past and into the future, with the notion of a coming liberation and departure. That African-Americans were ‘chosen’ by God ‘gave a powerful philosophical impetus to movements as diverse as Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, the Nation of Islam, and the Ras Tafari Brethren in Jamaica’ (Chireau 2000, 20). Garvey references an imaginary geography of ‘Ethiopia’ rooted in the Old Testament, asserting that the ‘uplift’ and liberation of the black race

was to be accomplished through the sustained labors of New World blacks...Ethiopianism thereby provided the theological rationale for the endeavors of numerous African American churches and missionary associations in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and it undergirded the ideology of secular black nationalism in the century to come...In the traditions of black Jewry that would emerge in the early twentieth century, the emphasis upon chosenness fostered a definition of race which allowed blacks to counter the assaults of Anglo-American supremacy and the stigma of African American inferiority...The Old Testament...came to be understood by many blacks as a literal presentation of the history of the African people—as the true Jews (Chireau 2000, 20).

In fact, Black Jews used the term ‘Hebrew’ to identify themselves (Chireau 2000, 21). This is one experiment in a long history of reconstructing a name for the black body outside of its circumscription in white supremacist modernity in North America.

Marcus Garvey started the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) as a political vehicle for a ‘Black Zionism,’ planning to settle Western blacks in Liberia (Robinson 2001, 25). Garvey called for the self-organization and determination of Afro-Americans under a ‘race-first’ strategy: ‘Negroes should give their own racial concern precedence over all other matters...the time has come for the Negro to forget and cast behind him hero worship and adoration of other races...and start out immediately, to create and emulate heroes of his own’ (Garvey 1919, quoted in Robinson 2001, 28, 142n93). The UNIA gained significant support and had become ‘the major political force among blacks in the postwar world’ by 1921 under Garvey’s leadership (Hill 1983, xxxiii in Robinson 2001, 24).

The project of reconstructing black identity in the twentieth century was simultaneously spiritual and political. Many of the practitioners of these new black religions collaborated with each other and were followers of Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, through which numerous ideas and texts about black identity and spirituality circulated. A member of the UNIA, Rabbi Mordecai Herman, organised the Moorish Zionist Temple of New York (Chireau 2000, 22). Another influential Black Jew, Rabbi Arnold Ford, helped form several Black Jewish organisations in New York in the 1920s and was (in November 1930) ‘the first black American to emigrate in order to found a homeland, a black Jewish Zion, in Ethiopia’ (Chireau 2000, 26, see also Dorman 2013), performing an imagined geography very close to that of Marcus Garvey. In this, it is clear that a political project is conjoined to a spiritual one, linking a politics of emancipation with a theological approach to transnational black liberation.

Before his death in Ethiopia during the Italo-Ethiopian war, Arnold Ford had educated Wentworth Arthur Matthew, who became the ‘torch bearer’ for the Black Israelites (Dorman 2013, 152). Matthew was educated in ‘cabalistic [Kabbalistic] science’ (Dorman 2013, 163), building on esoteric spiritual teachings with those closely associated with Marcus Garvey (2013, 166). This teaching drew on the work of Lauron William de Laurence, whose translations of magical esoteric works were ‘widely circulated’ and ‘remain highly respected among practitioners of Afro-Atlantic religions such as Santeria, Vodou, Rastafarianism, and other Afro-Atlantic religions’ (Dorman 2013, 167, Knight 2016, 167-169). De Laurence’s work, according to Dorman,

Played critical roles in the genesis of twentieth-century alternative African-American religions such as the Moorish Science Temple’s Black Islam, Rabbi Matthew’s Black Judaism, and Leonard Howell’s Rastafarianism. The central theme in de Laurence’s introductions and glosses...is the New Thought concept of the immanence of God. De Laurence favoured biblical quotations such as ‘The Kingdom of God is within you,’ ‘You are the temples of the Living God’ (Dorman 2013, 167).

As Dorman points out, the ‘New Thought’ religious movements in the United States stressed the immanence of God in man and had a significant impact on the Garvey movement, Black Jews, the Moorish Science Temple, and the Nation of Islam.

The Moorish Science Temple (MST) further developed this theology into an imagined ‘Afro-Asiatic’ subjectivity. The MST was founded in 1913 by a man named Timothy Noble Drew Ali in Newark, New Jersey. He claimed credentials based on extensive travels in North Africa, the Middle East, and India; he was apparently titled by the King of Morocco to ‘teach Islam to the Negroes in the United States’ and began preaching in Detroit, Michigan (Essien-Udom 1962, 34). Drew Ali’s followers were provided with identity cards that recognised them as ‘Moslems [sic] under the Divine Laws of the Holy Koran of Mecca, Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom, and Justice’ (Lincoln 1961, 52, see also Marsh 2000, 34). Drew articulated that the Black body descended from the ‘Asiatic’ (Lincoln 1961, 51), giving African-Americans a narrative of ‘a new national origin that made them part of a far-flung Moorish Nation that had somehow made its way to North America’ (Draper 1969, 70-71 in Marsh 2000, 31).

The Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam proposed that the black man is God and that divinity is immanent to blackness. The concept of the immanence of divinity to the body is present in the 'New Thought' mysticism in Lauron William de Laurence's texts, from which Noble Drew Ali reproduced whole passages in his *Circle Seven Koran* in 1927 (Curtis 2009, 76, Knight 2016, 170). Drew Ali also took a number of concepts from Freemasonry (as well as other traditions) in the same vein as the Black Jews involved with the UNIA.

Wu-Tang Clan (themselves Muslims of the Five Percenters strand) continued this frame of Afro-Asiatic identity in their 1997 track 'Wu-Revolution'. The track begins with 'things' that take control of the body, animating it in degrading vectors to the point where the narrator is 'lost' and denigrating his people. Reminiscent of evil spirits, the landscape of America is rendered as a source of corruption in the track. Wu-Tang Clan, claiming themselves to be 'poor righteous teachers' as do other Five Percenters, interpellate the listener in a schema of blackness based on a geography that Signifies on the notion of Afro-Asiatic identity, in reference to the 'Asiatic Black man' and a mental battle between God and the devil. The opposition created between God and devil in Wu-Tang's work here is important as it positions blackness as divine and the other or *enemy* of blackness as the 'devil'. As the listener, positioned as one of the 'Gods', we are also interpellated into this geography, implored to take the 'devil' off our plane. This devil could be considered the 'white man' in the discourse of the MST and Nation of Islam; however, here it is modernity that is located as such: later in the track, Wu-Tang calls the listener to 'leave all the cigarettes and guns, the alcohol and everything...that's destroying and decaying your mind'. It is a habitus formed in Western time that Wu-Tang are encouraging us to refuse. Through a physical and epistemic 'purification' (as the argument goes), the black body can recognise its divine subjectivity and militate revolution. Below, I explore the parameters of this 'purification' and 'devilish' modernity in a

reading of Amiri Baraka's play *A Black Mass* produced on his label Jihad Records with collaboration from Sun Ra and the Myth Science Arkestra. It is crucial to understand the 'devil' as Western modernity rather than the white male body in order to unpack the kind of displacement that the cipher tries to accomplish.

'A Black Mass' as a contramodern text

Amiri Baraka (born LeRoi Jones) is a key figure in the Black Arts movement and was significantly influenced by the teachings of the Nation of Islam. His is a style of black art-activism that crafted landscapes of aesthetic violence that called in race into question in admittedly grating but innovative ways. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, LeRoi Jones was a poet influenced heavily by the New American Poetry of the Beat Generation and a contemporary of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg (Woodward 1999, 52). In his early work, Jones was influenced by black musicality and published *Blues People* (2002 [1963]). In it, he determined black musicality to 'always [be] radical in the context of formal American culture' (Jones 2002 in Sullivan 2011, 13). The trope of 'ahistorical or transhistorical black societies' was crucial for the 'reconstitution of an...historical symbolic African space' (Smethurst 2010, 79). Baraka drew particularly on the teachings of Malcolm X in framing this poetic aesthetics as 'reclamation' (Thomas 2008, 116).

Amiri Baraka founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BARTS) which eventually became an influential, albeit short-lived, Black Arts institution (Woodward 1999, 63, Smethurst 2005, 151). Through BARTS, Baraka set out to 'offer "both practical and theoretical schooling" in all areas of drama...the program was particularly aimed at black youth, the Black Arts also wished to provide a place for professional artists to perform' (Woodward 1999, 64). Despite its influence, BARTS fell apart by 1967. Baraka as he continued to write, prescribed a militant literature to 'effect the destruction [of] national

oppression and its material base, monopoly capitalism' (Baraka 1980, 10). Typical of Black Arts Movement writing in this period was the use of avant-garde techniques to 'suck the audience into a unique and very precise universe...what we are digging is ritualized history...history that allows emotional and religious participation' (Larry Neal in Smethurst 2010, 78).

Working with Sun-Ra and his Arkestra, Baraka released the play *A Black Mass* (first performed in 1966) on the Jihad Productions label as a jazz LP in 1968.¹¹ In it, Baraka dramatises the Yacub myth of the Nation of Islam with spoken word and jazz accompaniment. The close reading of the play that follows helps establish the continuity and historicity of the NOI in civil rights era black aesthetic militancy as well as the tropes of 'inversion' and contramodernity that Baraka employs.

Baraka Signifies on the Yacub myth that was used to explain the nature of the white man as the 'devil' by the Nation of Islam. Yacub, a mad scientist in Mecca some 6,000 years ago, created the white man-devil from the Original Man in an experiment. Baraka's play pushes the mythology as a criticism of rationalism and knowledge, locating the position of the 'devil' as technological and rational *modernity*. Thus, the play is a move beyond a shallow reading of the term 'devil' as racialisation of the white body but rather to refuse the ontological ordering extended by European and American techno-social domination, a resonance with the phenomenological and poststructuralist critiques I review in Chapter 4.

The play starts with Yacub announcing that he is creating a new organism, and when he is criticised, Yacub claims 'creation is its own end...I created, I brought something into space that was never there' (4:01-9:26). Yacub is immediately presented as a being that creates for his own gain and power to create his own world as his work (indeed, this is a resonance

¹¹ This is a rather rare record. It is available on YouTube, which is the version that I use for the reading below. I have verified the authenticity based on the original text of Baraka's *A Black Mass*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oi98wfZyqpU>. Timestamps given are relative to the YouTube video.

with the immanent community that Jean-Luc Nancy tries to unwrite in the *Inoperative Community*). Yacub claims to have created time itself by creating ‘a being in love with time/a being for whom time will be goodness and strength’ (13:32).

His colleagues argue that beings of time are evil (14:07), that Yacub’s work is a ‘magic against humanity’ (13:43). This being, in love with time, is at odds with ‘original reason,’ represented by the historicity of the Original Man and Afro-Asiatic body (24:22). This new being, this being of *time*, is constituted by ‘the substitution of *thought for feeling*, a *heart full of numbers* and *cold formula for curiosity*’ (23:36, emphasis added). This ‘monster’ (18:33) has no responsibility for ‘the world of humanity, [it is] a being that will make its own will and direction’ (15:13). Baraka locates the pathology of this monster not in the facticity of its skin (whiteness is mentioned around 20 minutes into the play in a quiet offhand mention and articulated clearly in the term ‘white monster’ at 31:07), but in its obsession with reason. This ‘monster’ which is ‘a man like ourselves though different’, a ‘being who will not respond to the world of humanity, a being that will make its own will and direction’ is a clear caricature of European modernity and the cold logic used to justify colonial brutality: eugenics, racism, economic speculation and the privileging of rationality over sensation. Yacub’s monster is monstrous precisely because it *creates its own time*, it creates a time for *itself*, at the expense of its others so that it may take its own direction with no sense of responsibility: this monster is ‘a mirror twisted evil...another man, a soulless monster, distortion of humanity’ (18:55-19:50).

Humanity is defined in the *inverse* of this monster: feeling over thought/curiosity over formula through the constant affirmation in the LP that identifies the monster as incompatibly other; the monster must be banished. Yacub protests: ‘we must have compassion, we must teach them!’ but he is immediately stopped by the authority who forbids it, he says that we must banish this monster to the ‘cold north’ to fend for itself, ‘the beast must be cut off from

our people' (28:30-30:55). Between the first and second act, we hear screaming and what sounds like widespread death, misery, and violence perpetrated by Yacub's monster, affirming the claim and push for banishment. Finally, Yacub, refusing that his rationalist monster should be banished, claims 'I will prove the power of knowledge' and releases the monster. Amidst the screaming we hear something about the 'white monster' (31:07): 'this thing is not man—it is not of ourselves, but the hatred of ourselves!' (31:33).

Baraka's Signifyin' revision of the Yacub myth draws critical attention to it by deploying two binaries: time/space, and thought/feeling (or perhaps fixed meaning/affect). Blackness, rather, Original Humanity, is the latter of both; Yacub's monster—a metaphor for Western modernity—privileges time over space and thought over feeling. What Baraka offers is a map for thinking polemically about coloniality and white domination. In the play, Baraka is defining *blackness* in inverse to rationalism and natural science. Black is defined as 'original, responsible, human' while Yacub's monsters (which are not referenced as white until later in the play) are seen as the inverse of humanity, the embodiment of hatred. This technique of inversion offers a critical and polemic perspective on modernity, represented by Yacub. His untameable creation (monster, devil), suggests the possibility of a reading outside of one that only stipulates that 'the white man is the devil'. This move of inversion casts critical light on the processes of *knowledge* in modern Western epistemology: cold formulas for curiosity, thought over feeling. The play ends with a call by the narrator: 'there are beasts in our world/let us find them and slay them' (34:18). We are rendered responsible as the listener to act against these 'beasts'. But they are not readily apparent: we must first find the beast, encouraging us to question if these beasts are proper *bodies* or rather the epistemes and orderings that produce 'monstrosity': the devil on Wu-Tang's 'mental mentality'.

The Nation of Islam as counter-epistemology

In the 1930s a new prophet appeared, superseding Timothy Noble Ali Drew after his 1929 disappearance: W. Fard Muhammad, the founder of the Nation of Islam. Master Fard Muhammad, as he was known by his disciples, taught the religion of the Nation of Islam in a series of catechistic ‘Supreme Wisdom Lessons’ where members recited ‘basic math, English, and reading’ along with ‘bizarre metaphysical statements’ through call and response (White 2001, 27). A man named Elijah Poole came into contact with the Moorish Science Temple, encouraged by his father (White 2001, 26). Poole was a member of the UNIA but after Garvey’s deportation, disappearance of Noble Drew Ali, and the deepening of the Great Depression, Elijah Poole looked to a new leader, Wallace D. Fard Muhammad. Poole’s wife encouraged him to see Fard deliver a speech on Islam in 1931 (Clegg 1998), and upon speaking to Fard, Elijah Poole joined his movement, the growing Nation of Islam.

After joining the movement, Elijah Poole changed his name to Elijah Muhammad as Fard insisted that new Muslims take new names and reject their ‘slave names.’ Fard disappeared in 1934 while the NOI was quite young. Before his departure Fard had selected Elijah Muhammad as his successor (Berg 2009, 35). After a brief period of conflict and incarceration by the FBI, Elijah Muhammad took the reins of the organisation in 1946. Muhammad codified the teachings of the NOI in his work *Message to the Blackman in America* (among other writings), in which he explains Islam as a form of ‘self-knowledge’ and authentic religion for African-Americans. His writing alerted the black body to its position in an assemblage of segregation and epistemic violence that operated on the mind as much as it did the body (see for example, Muhammad 1973, 22.4-22.5).

The Nation of Islam developed a holistic approach to developing and empowering the black body. The Nation developed a model of everyday conduct for Muslims that directed behaviour in support of a separatist movement. Part of becoming a member of the Nation of

Islam involved a dietary change, with a list of permitted foods, prohibitions on drugs, alcohol, and foods such as catfish, shellfish, and other foods associated with slave culture in addition to the traditional Islamic restriction on pork (Curtis 2006, 98). Members of the Nation were to only eat one meal a day, which would serve to extend their lives and save money (2006, 99). To support these diets and maintain economic sovereignty, Muhammad ‘encouraged individual followers and his mosques to establish businesses that would provide healthy food and employment opportunities’ to members of the Nation (2006, 102), resulting in various restaurants and styles of food served (McCutcheon 2013). Chapters 82-87 of *Message to the Blackman in America* by Elijah Muhammad explain the economic plan for the NOI, the end goal being ‘Separation! Independence’ (the title of chapter 87): ‘to be successful, we must have some of this earth to produce our people’s needs.’ Muslims were required to give alms to support a ‘three-year savings plan’ dubbed the ‘Economic Savings Program’ by Elijah Muhammad (82.1). The ultimate goal was to use this money to buy *land*, invest in it, and sow the seeds of the black nation. Muhammad even purchased several farms in Georgia, Michigan, and Alabama by 1970 and invested in fishing (Curtis 2006, 105-106). This notion of territorial practice heavily influenced Malcolm X’s thinking about self-defence and autonomy from power and flowed into the foundation of the Black Panther Party (Bloom and Martin 2013).

Elijah Muhammad sought to secure and sustain the Nation through a number of key institutions. The University of Islam is a primary and secondary school (still holding sessions today). Its curriculum was very broad, serving grades four through twelve and incorporated martial arts training for men and ‘civilisational’ training for girls in addition to core subjects such as mathematics, history, and language arts (Marsh 2000, 43). The impetus for the University of Islam was the need for a separate school independent of the epistemology of mainstream America (Curtis 2006, 76). Rapper KRS-One continues this epistemic challenge in his poetry, hoping that black youth will ‘come to know that they come from a long race and

line of kings, queens and warriors’ (KRS-One in Dyson 1995, 92). In Boogie Down Production’s track ‘Why is That?’, KRS-One calls out the epistemic violence in historical pedagogy, offering a genealogy of blackness that challenges a ‘whitened’ history when he refers to the ethnicity of biblical characters, criticising the assertion of the whiteness of Biblical characters. This answer to epistemic violence is an attempt to enable the potential divinity of blackness in the face of a historical discourse that writes out the potentiality of blackness in Biblical history. Education, seen as a normalising force exerting a racialised control by denying truth to black youth is to be countered by alternative sites of education. This thought stems from a larger frame of relocating blackness as a subjectivity of alternative historical and social orders. KRS-One finishes the verse saying that the ‘information we get today is just wack’ and encourages his listeners to ‘correct’ these mistakes.

KRS-One uses antiphony to encourage the listener to think about *why* the information we get is ‘wack’, the listener called antiphonally by the demand, ‘Yo, correct the wrong’. The lyrics are like a map that encourages the listener to explore the epistemic violence present in modernity. This is about reconfiguring the imagined geographies and temporalities of Western modernity, using an antiphonal technique to create the desire for better ‘knowledge’ in the body of the listener.

We might look to Malcolm X, perhaps the NOI’s best-known preacher, to understand this mission. During this time in the early 1960s, a revolutionary Malcolm X emerged—a man intent on militating an alternative territoriality and geography for African Americans: ‘Malcolm X assumed the role of educator, one committed to producing an alternative geographical knowledge. African Americans must be in control of themselves, their identity, their analysis, and their actions’ (Tyner 2006, 60). However, Malcolm X’s increasing visibility proved a threat to other power-holders in the NOI including Elijah Muhammad. He was murdered by members of the Nation in 1965 after he had distanced himself from the

organisation and returned from his *hajj*. Upon his return, Malcolm founded his own organisation, the Organisation of Afro-American Unity, and his faith moved away from some of the core teachings of the Nation of Islam (see for example Marable 2011).

Mathematics and the Wisdom Lessons

Malcolm X's 'relentless pedagogy of racial redemption through cultural consciousness and self-awareness' inspired the hip-hop generation of the late 70s and 80s (Dyson 1995, 92). Malcolm X began studying black history in prison after he had been introduced to the Nation of Islam (Haley and Malcolm X 1964). It was Malcolm's embedding in the Nation of Islam that gave him the credibility to articulate an alternative for a black culture within the United States after he served his sentence. Larry Neal points to the musicality of Malcolm X's voice and its unique ability to speak to a new milieu: Malcolm is

the black voice skating and bebopping like a righteous saxophone solo—mellow truths inspired by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, but shaped out of Malcolm's own style, a style rooted in black folk memory...we could dig Malcolm because the essential vectors of his style were more closely related to our own...He was the first black leader, in our generation, to resurrect all the strains of black nationalism lurking within us (Neal in Smethurst 2010, 79-80).

Black Arts activists recognised Malcolm's words that 'history had been "whitened"' (Tyner 2003, 171) and it was the work of cultural militants to challenge historiography through artistic practice. Black Arts was to effectuate self-realisation through improvisatory performance, emphasising that artistic, and consequently, activist practice was to be *built* and constructed in participation with the medium.

Through Malcolm X, the theology of the NOI that Fard had taught circulated widely amongst young African-Americans. In Fard's Supreme Wisdom Lessons, it is stated that 'Islam is Mathematics'. It stipulates both a 'Mathematical Language' with ten numbers and an Alphabet of 'twenty-six' letters. These lessons were delivered through call-and-response and catechism, where a question would be asked and the student was to recite the answer to the question from memory, similar in structure to the 101 Questions on the Koran that Drew Ali

used in the Moorish Science Temple (cf. Knight 2007). A man who took the name Clarence 13X became a member of the Nation of Islam in 1961 (according to an FBI dossier, see Knight 2007, 34). Clarence made friends with another NOI member, John 37X, and the pair became known as the ‘High Scientists’ ‘for the way that they constantly pored over the Supreme Wisdom Lessons’ (Knight 2007, 36). Clarence’s affinity for gambling, smoking marijuana and his bold, and even heretical statements got him called a ‘rebel’ by Malcolm X and eventually led to his expulsion from the Nation of Islam in 1963 (Knight 2007, 37). Clarence took so seriously the notion that the Original man is God that he referred to himself as Allah, one of the factors that led to his expulsion. There was internal strife and conflict amongst black Muslims in the mid-1960s, and Clarence 13X and John 37X eventually found themselves as outcasts, but they continued to study the Supreme Wisdom Lessons. According to Michael Muhammad Knight, after this, ‘Clarence 13X and John 37X smoked herb and studied their NOI lessons at “the Hole,” a hangout for hustlers, number-runners and riff-raff in the basement of Clarence’s tenement building’ (Knight 2007, 49).

The Nation of Islam teachings include a set of numerological ‘problems’ which can be found in *The Problem Book*. The book contains 34 mathematical problems that deal with the origin of the Original man and the ‘miserable condition’ that he finds himself in: ‘This book teaches the Lost-Found Nation of Islam’ through ‘a thorough knowledge of our miserable state of condition in a mathematical way when we were found by our saviour, W. D. FARD’. There are a number of mathematical problems that NOI members and Five Percenters believe that solving will lead to cosmic truths. Problem 13 had a significant impact on Clarence 13X and John 37X. Problem 13 reads:

After learning Mathematics, which is Islam, and Islam is Mathematics, it stands true. You can always prove it at no limit of time. Then you must learn to use it and secure some benefit while you are living, that is- luxury, money, good homes, friendship in all walks of life.

Sit yourself in Heaven at once! This is the greatest Desire of your Brother and Teachers.

Now you must speak the language so you can use your Mathematical Theology in the proper Term - otherwise you will not be successful unless you do speak well, for she knows all about you.

The Secretary of Islam offers a reward to the best and neatest worker of this Problem.

There are twenty-six letters in the Language and if a student learns one letter per day, then how long will it take him to learn the twenty-six letters?

There are ten numbers in the Mathematical Language. Then how long will it take a Student to learn the whole ten numbers (at the above rate)?

The average man speaks four hundred words - considered well.¹²

This opaque problem was John 37X's starting point for 'sciencing out' the Living Mathematics, the precursor to the NGE's Supreme Mathematics. At the Hole, the two changed their names, Clarence 13X taking the name 'Allah' and John 37X taking the name 'Abu Shahid' (Knight 2007, 49). Abu Shahid came across *The Problem Book* of the Nation of Islam and eventually, over a few days of fasting, came up with a system called the 'Living Mathematics' with 12 numbers based on the problem (see Allah 2009). While he had started working on this in the mosque and ended it 'on the streets' (reported in Knight 2007 and Allah 2009), Shahid was dealing and using drugs and was sent to prison for six months for gun possession after he had come up with his version of the 'Living Mathematics' based on Problem 13 (Knight 2007, 52). During this time, Clarence 13X has revised (or perhaps Signified) Abu Shahid's Living Mathematics and developed the Five Percenters' 'Supreme Mathematics'. When Shahid returned from prison, Clarence 13X–Allah–'was teaching the Supreme Wisdom' to young men in the Hole (2007, 52). Allah, in order to maintain fidelity to the stipulation in Problem 13 that there are 10 numbers in the mathematical language, had revised the 'Living Mathematics' to 10 numbers instead of the 12 numbers proposed by Abu Shahid. Most interestingly, after Abu Shahid's 'Living Mathematics' were revised by Allah into the 'Supreme Mathematics', and 0, positioned after 9, was called 'cipher' (2007, 53).

¹² Original versions of NOI and NGE texts are extremely difficult to procure. The problems in the Problem Book can be found online. I have verified the authenticity by checking it across references in Miyakawa 2005, Allah 2009, and Knight 2007. The copy I have used is available here: <http://www.cipherttheory.net/supremewisdom.pdf>.

The Supreme Mathematics as Signification on De Laurence's 'Cabalistical Magic'

De Laurence's book, *The Book of Magical Art, Hindu Magic and Indian Occultism*, had significant reach as far as Western Africa as well as the Caribbean and North America (see Elkins 1986). Jacob Dorman discusses how Rabbi Matthew used de Laurence's works, *The Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* to develop his 'cabalistic sciences' (2009, 124). A chapter on 'Cabalistical Magic' in *The Book of Magical Art, Hindu Magic and Indian Occultism* explains ten enumerations, or 'Sephiroth' of the 'infinite', a key teaching of Jewish mysticism. These enumerations are of interest because they closely resemble the 'Supreme Mathematics' developed by Allah as he and Abu Shahid were studying the Supreme Wisdom Lessons. Table one compares the descriptions of the enumerations of the Infinite in 'Cabalistical Magic' as it is presented in *The Book of Magical Art, Hindu Magic and Indian Occultism* with the Supreme Mathematics of the Nation of Gods and Earths.

De Laurence's explanation of the Sephiroth reveals a fascinating correlation to the Supreme Mathematics of the Five Percenters. Kabbalah refers to the Sephiroth, which in Orthodox Jewish tradition, refers to the 10 attributes by which the Infinite (Ein Sof) reveals Himself. However, it does seem that the Supreme Mathematics of Nation of Gods and Earths theology correlates almost directly on the ten enumerations described by de Laurence. In fact, Yusef Nurrudin (1994) relates Five Percenter theology to Kabbalah and gematria (mystical Jewish numerology) as well as *abjad* (Arabic numerology), suggesting that there is a continuity, though exactly *how* numerology and mathematics came to be so central to the Five Percenters is a matter of close reading, extrapolation, and speculation. I develop a speculative reading of de Laurence's 'Cabalistic' sciences and their relationship to the Five Percenter's theology. The similarities are so striking that it seems that a lineage between de Laurence's Cabalistical Magic and the Supreme Mathematics is evident.

Table: de Laurence’s Sephiroth and NGE Supreme Mathematics

Enumeration (de Laurence)	Meaning (de Laurence)	Number (NGE)	Meaning (NGE) ¹³
Cether	‘most simple essence of the divinity...it bestows the gift of being upon all things, and filleth the whole universe’ (De Laurence 1915, 224).‘[I]t is called that which the eye seeth not’ and ‘hath its influence by the order of seraphims, or <i>Hajoth Hakados</i> , that is, creatures of holiness’ (1915, 224).	1. Knowledge	Knowledge is to know, listen and observe. Knowledge is a body of accumulated facts. Knowledge is the foundation for all things.
Hochma	‘Hochma, that is, wisdom, and dignifies the divinity full of ideas, and the First Begotten; and is attributed to the son’ (1915, 225).	2. Wisdom	Wisdom is the manifestation of one’s knowledge, the ways and actions one uses his or her knowledge to know truth.
Prina	‘Prina, viz., providence and understanding; and signifies remissiveness, quietness, the jubilee, penitential conversion, a great trumpet, redemption of the world, and the life of the world to come: it is attributed to the Holy Spirit [...] and from thence...administers form to matter’ (1915, 225).	3. Understanding	Understanding is the mental picture one draws of knowledge, wisdom. To see things much clearer for what they are, visible through the (all Seeing Eye) this is the mind!
Hesed	The fourth enumeration ‘signifies clemency or goodness; [...] and hath its influx by order of dominations...and so through the sphere of Jupiter fashions the images of bodies, bestowing clemency and pacifying justice on all’ (1915, 225).	4. Culture or Freedom	Culture is ones way of life; Islam is the culture of freedom and righteousness, the culture of peace, in which all things coincide and live in harmony.
Gebusach	This enumeration is ‘power, gravity, fortitude, security, judgement, punishing by slaughter and war; and it is applied to the tribunal of God, the girdle, the sword’ (1915, 225).	5. Power or Refinement	Power is the truth, truth in origin only means of refinement; for to go according to the truth is to make ones-self known again. Truth is the power to resurrect the mentally dead from their present state of unawareness and ignorance of self.
Tiphereth	This enumerations is ‘apparel, beauty, glory, pleasure, and signifies the tree of life, and hath its influence through the order of virtues’ (1915, 225).	6. Equality	Equality means to be equal in all aspects of one’s true self.
Nezah	This enumeration is ‘triumph and victory...it signifies the justice and eternity of a revenging God’. [...] ‘it hath its influence through the order of principalities, whom the Hebrews call <i>Elohim</i> , i. e., Gods’ (1915, 226).	7. God	God is the original man, Allah is God, always has been always will be. The all eye seeing, the all and all is 360 degrees.

¹³ This information on the meaning of numbers in the Supreme Mathematics is available at <http://www.ancientorderoffreesiatics.com/MathNGE.html>. I have verified it to be consistent with NGE teachings based on Miyakawa 2005 and Allah 2009.

Hod	'praise, confession, honour and fame...it hath its influence through the order of the archangels...that is, the sons of God.'	8. Build or Destroy	Build means to add on to life a positive creation or education; destroy means to know of, take, that which is untrue, and add light to the knowledge.
Jesod	'the Living God; [...] that is, foundation, and signifies a good understanding, a covenant, a redemption and rest and hath its influence through the order of angels' (1915, 226).	9. Born	Born is to bring into existence a mental birth of self.
Malchuth	'kingdom and empire, and signifies a church, the temple of God, and a gate; and hath its influence through the order of <i>Animastic, viz., of blessed souls</i> ...nobles, lords and princes, [...] the soul of the Messiah is president among them' (1915, 226).	0. Cipher	A circle of 360 degrees.

The first three enumerations and numbers in the Supreme Mathematics are here directly correlated. Perhaps what the similarities between the Supreme Mathematics and de Laurence's Sephiroth in his 'Cabalistical Magic' in Table 1 reveal is the indirect relationship between esoteric theologies and the sources that Fard and Elijah Muhammad drew on and how those lines were taken up and incorporated into the teachings of the Five Percenters. Above, the first three enumerations of the infinite or three numbers of the Supreme Mathematics are 'knowledge, wisdom, and understanding', a clear correlation between the first three Sephiroth and the Supreme Mathematics. Abu Shahid drew on fundamental teachings in the mosque (which were certainly influenced by de Laurence): 'You must remember that I was fresh out of the Mosque...that information was foremost in my mind. [...] We were always taught knowledge, wisdom, and understanding' (Allah 2009, n.p., digital edition, Chapter 6, 'Elders & Firstborns').

After Abu Shahid drew on fundamental teachings within the Nation of Islam to identify the first three enumerations, he argued that 'everything comes in threes' (echoing Masonic principles), signifying 4, 5, and 6 as Freedom, Justice, and Equality. We see some deviation between De Laurence and Abu Shahid here. For De Laurence, the fourth enumeration, '*Hesed*'

is the aspect of the infinite that ‘bestows clemency and justice’ on all. This is a deviation from the Sephiroth until Allah (Clarence 13X) redeveloped it into ‘culture or freedom’, referencing ‘Islam’ as peace, freedom, and culture. In this sense, 4, in the Supreme Mathematics, references Islam and culture as that which ‘bestows clemency and justice’; thus, Allah’s revision of 4 brings the Five Percenter mathematics closer to the Sephiroth of De Laurence. In the Living Mathematics, Abu Shahid, 5 corresponded to ‘justice’ (corrected to ‘power’ by Allah in the Supreme Mathematics) and 6 to ‘equality’; Allah left this the same. Abu Shahid came to ‘equality’ through the following process:

Well if you want to be God then you have to be a Righteous Ruler, because the god of Righteousness is a Righteous Ruler. You must stand on your own ‘two feet’, there are twelve (12) inches in a foot, two feet is twenty-four (24) inches. Six is half of twelve (12), $24 \div 2 = 12$, six is half of twelve and half of anything is Equality (Abu Shahid in Allah 2009, Chapter 6).

6 is a point of deviance between the Sephiroth and the Supreme Mathematics, though given the numerological justification that Abu Shahid provided, there is a clear reason for this deviation. However, the 6th enumeration of the Sephiroth in de Laurence also refers to the ‘order of virtues’ for which ‘equality’ would fit given the notion of a ‘righteous God’ as a ‘Righteous Ruler’. 7, 8, and 9 continue the consistency between the Sephiroth and the Supreme Mathematics. What de Laurence refers to as the seventh enumeration, ‘Nezah’, is the order of beings that ‘the Hebrews call *Elohim*, i. e., Gods’. This is reflected in Shahid’s Living Mathematics and the Five Percenters Supreme Mathematics for which 7 is God. For de Laurence, the eighth enumeration refers to ‘praise, confession, [and] honour’ and has its order through the ‘sons of God’. In NGE language, ‘build’ and ‘destroy’ is to add a positive creation on to life and to destroy is to take it away in order to expose ‘truth’ and bring the truth into the ‘light of knowledge’. We might interpret what Gods and Earths ‘build’ and ‘destroy’ as the ‘sons’ or the creations of these Gods and their ‘praise’ and ‘confession’ of others. Finally, 9 in the Supreme Mathematics is ‘born’, referencing the nine months it takes for a child to go from conception to birth. ‘Born’ also references a ‘mental birth of self’—a ‘foundation’ in de

Laurence's words—and that which 'signifies a good understanding'. Abu Shahid had three more numbers, with significance for 10, 11, and 12, but this was dropped in the final version of the Supreme Mathematics institutionalised by Allah.

Allah's changes to Shahid's Living Mathematics brought the system closer in line to de Laurence's description of the Sephiroth: ten numbers. Further, it is the first point at which the word 'cipher' comes into the Five Percenter lexicon (though it is unclear exactly how it arrived, the topic of the next part of this chapter). The term 'cipher' is not commonly present in Nation of Islam, Moorish Science Temple writings, or de Laurence's books. However, it is in a Nation of Islam teaching, the 'Actual Facts': 'The Earth weighs six sextillion tons - (a unit followed by 21 ciphers).'¹⁴ This is a clear, written reference to the term cipher referring to zero and is certain that Clarence 13X, committed to learning the lessons thoroughly, would have thus been made aware of this term. It is interesting that the tenth enumeration, *Malchuth*, refers to 'kingdom and empire' and the 'temple of God'; for the Nation of Gods and Earths, the cipher *was* quite literally the temple of the 'Gods', where the Gods and Earths would get together to build and destroy with one another. The notion of territory and space conveyed by kingdom and empire exists within the notion of cipher as a space shared and constituted by Gods and Earths (men and women).

Cipher forms part of the fundamental philosophy of the Five Percenters: that knowledge and ontology are cyclical and circular; the cipher refers to the cycles of the Earth, the constant process of Gods and Earths gaining knowledge, wisdom, and understanding through building and destroying. In this sense, we should read the cipher as a structuring notion of a fundamentally experimental and processual ontology that consciously deviates from the accepted metaphysics of a transcendent God (instead the Original *man* is God). 'Birth' (9 –

¹⁴ Special thanks to Michael Muhammad Knight for pointing me to this lesson in a private correspondence (July 2015). See also: <http://www.ciphertheory.net/supremewisdom.pdf>.

Born) is the coming into consciousness of the divinity of the Original man. It is *through* the cipher—as we will see in the example of one hip-hop milieu below—that this ‘birth’ happens.

What is clear is that there are linkages between the text from De Laurence, the numerology (*gematria*) of the Kabbalists, Black Jews, Black Muslims, Ethiopianism, and what the early black spiritual and esoteric milieu find expression in hip-hop culture via the Supreme Wisdom Lessons and the Supreme Mathematics of the Five Percenters. According to Michael Muhammad Knight, the term ‘cipher’ has clear similarities to the ‘circle of 360 degrees’ described by Charles Mosley Bey, himself a ‘Moor’, in his two-volume work, the *Clock of Destiny* (2007, 53). However, the term ‘cipher’ itself does not appear in *Clock of Destiny*. While Knight’s outstanding work provides a hint at where the term comes into being in the hip-hop lexicon, ‘cipher’ runs even deeper and indeed is an even more esoteric, but also ecumenical and *global* concept. I argue that while CM Bey’s notion of the ‘circle of 360 degrees’ indeed has much to bear on the development of the Supreme Mathematics, that 0—which comes at the end of the Mathematics—being referred to by English speakers as ‘cipher’ has a deeper significance. It is fair to speculate that Allah got the term from the lesson in the Actual Facts that uses the term cipher to signify the number ‘0’, but its relevance as a concept in mathematics—Eastern and Western—has important relationships the shift to a historiography and modernity that was structured outside of Western modernity.

Cipher and mathematics: beyond Black Jews and Muslims

The notion that the circle is somehow sacred or holy is evident in the symbolism of De Laurence, Noble Drew Ali’s *Circle Seven Koran* and in the NGE Supreme Mathematics. That mathematics is *also* sacred—‘Islam is mathematics’—relates numbers to a way of life and a sense of the world. However, it is a mystery as to where and why the Five Percenters looked to appropriate the term for the Supreme Mathematics. Further, the term ‘Sephiroth’ employed

may be a false positive, a speculative leap based on phonetics and the expression of the Sephiroth as circles a convenient coincidence. This may be a reference to numerology, however, as the Hebrew word ‘sephira’ refers both to the Sephirot of the Kabbalah as well as the act of counting. However, it is more likely that the term ‘cipher’ comes from the Arabic word, *sifr* for the number zero (as that is where the term ‘cipher’ enters the English language). The mystery remains: where did Allah (Clarence 13X) get the term ‘cipher’ for his Supreme Mathematics? To address this mystery, or at least to provide some further thoughts on *how* the term cipher matters, I turn to the mathematical history of zero.

The term cipher, in dated English, also means the number ‘zero’ and the idea of ‘naught’. It is quite possible that this is the extent of it: Allah wanted a word that wasn’t ‘zero’ for the final number in his Supreme Mathematics. However, the number zero—and ‘cipher’ itself—has a much longer, much more political history. The term cipher comes into European language from the Arabic word, *sifr*, which denotes the cardinal number zero. The Greeks were the primary source of European mathematics until the Renaissance, relying on Aristotelian natural philosophy. Aristotle rejected both the notions of zero or the void and the notion of the infinite. Zero would be the first threat to this worldview, before Nicholas Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, or Johannes Kepler. For the Greeks, numbers and geometry were closely related. Pythagoras insisted on the sacrosanct nature of geometry, interested in ratios, shapes, and numbers. However, the number zero (despite awareness of it from ancient Babylonian sexagesimal (base-60) calculation, which used zero as a placeholder between digits, see Seife 2000, 15, Kaplan 2000) did not fit the Greek system because it could not be represented geometrically (Seife 2000, 35). This affected Aristotle’s philosophy, which rejects that the infinite actually exists, and also rejects the Atomist concept of an infinite vacuum in favour of a theory of the cosmos as a series of spheres that surrounded the Earth, a theory later refined

by Ptolemy (Seife 2000, 45-46). This system became the basis of Christian thought when it arrived in the West:

When Christianity swept through the West, it became closely tied to the Aristotelian view of the universe and the proof of god's existence. Atomism became associated with atheism. Questioning the Aristotelian doctrine was tantamount to questioning God's existence... The existence of the void implies the existence of the infinite. Void/zero destroys Aristotle's neat argument, his refutation of Zeno, and his proof of God. So as Aristotle's arguments were accepted, the Greeks were forced to reject zero, void, the infinite, and infinity (Seife 2000, 47).

If the Greeks rejected zero, how did it end up in Europe by the Renaissance? Alexander the Great marched into India by the fourth century BC, spreading the knowledge of Babylonian numeration to India (Seife 2000, 63). Unlike Aristotle, whose philosophy did not take hold in India, Indian mathematicians and philosophers 'embraced' the concepts of the infinite and the void (Seife 2000, 64). It is from India that the mathematical story of word 'cipher' begins.

Indians had a long tradition in mathematics and philosophy. Indian mathematicians developed a place-value system in 200 AD, codified in Aryabhata's *Aryabhatiya* manuscript in 499 AD (Datta and Singh 1938, 86). The earliest symbol used for zero in Hindu mathematics was most likely a dot (see Datta and Singh 1938, 82 and Smith and Karpinski 1911, 53). By the 8th century AD (according to Datta and Singh 1938, 82) or the 9th century AD (Smith and Karpinski 1911, 52), there is evidence of a small circle being used to denote 'zero' (see also Kaplan 2000, 41 and 55), though in *Hindu Mathematics*, the authors speculate the circle was used before this time. Smith and Karpinski, however, admit that 'what suggested the form for the zero is, of course, purely a matter of conjecture' (1911, 53).

Indian mathematicians referred to zero as *sunya* in Sanskrit (Smith and Karpinski 1911, 57). Datta and Singh suggest that in fact *sunya* was recognised as early as 200 BC in the mathematical writings of Pingala, though this was used in his binary numeration system (1938, 75-76). By the 9th century, *sunya* would refer to this concept of zero. It was also absorbed and translated by the rising Muslim empire to the west of India.

Hindu arithmetic was translated into Arabic by Mohammed ibn-Musa al-Khowarizmi after an Indian astronomer visited the court of the caliph in 773 AD (Smith and Karpinski 1991, 92). Al-Khowarizmi codified this in his work on arithmetic, *Algoritmi de numero Indorum* (in Latin, the original Arabic version having been lost), introducing to the Arab world, and ultimately Europe, the decimal system developed by Indian mathematicians (referred to earlier as ‘place-value’). Arabic-speaking mathematicians continued to work on the basis of Indian mathematics, translating ‘*sunya*’ to ‘*sifr*’ (see Seife 2000, 73), but eschewing the circle for the dot because the symbol was already used for the cardinal number five, ‘*hamsa*’, represented in Arabic script as a circle.

By the 13th century, al-Khowarizmi’s work had made it to Europe by way of Leonardo of Pisa, better known as Fibonacci, who studied with Arab mathematicians in Northern Africa (see Seife 2000). Fibonacci travelled extensively through Northern Africa, then controlled by Almohad caliphate in the breakup of the Umayyad dynasty in Spain. He was instructed in mathematics as his father was an overseer of a Pisan trading colony in modern Algeria. Interested, Fibonacci studied Arabic mathematics in depth, leading to the publication of *Liber Abaci*, a ‘compilation of the techniques of Arabic arithmetic and algebra’ (Parshall 1988, 138). In the first chapter, he translates the Arabic *sifr* into *zephirum* in Latin, the word that becomes ‘cipher’ in English, *chiffre* in French, and *Ziffer* in German (Pogliani et. al. 1998, 733). In writing *Liber Abaci*, Fibonacci essentially introduced the Hindu-Arabic numerals to Europe.

While *Liber Abaci* introduced the numerals to Europe, the notion of zero was met with scepticism and resistance. That zero came from the ‘East’ made it suspect, in addition to the challenges it presented to the Aristotelian mathematics. Kaplan describes it as such: ‘anything imported into what was still largely a peasant culture in the West would likely have been looked at askance; anything from the East was especially dangerous, seen as it was of old and still potent heresies’ (Kaplan 2000, 93). Cipher, in its first encounter with Europe, represented an

epistemological break initiated by the Other: ‘the zero of positional notation was the harbinger of a reordering of social and political space’ (Kaplan 2000, 99). In addition to the alterity of zero, the technical difficulties of arithmetic were beyond most Europeans of the time; the opacity of this new system ‘added to the reputation that the Arabic numerals already had for being dangerous Saracen magic’ (Kaplan 2000, 102). Indeed, Kaplan points to the suspicion that even bookkeepers had for the numerals, citing a 13th century Venetian text that recommends banks use Roman numerals due to the fact that the Arabic numerals could apparently easily be falsified (Kaplan 2000, 102).

Regardless of whether the Five Percenters were aware of this deep history of the term cipher, that ‘cipher’, the number zero, and its elliptical form was an Asiatic concept that shook Europe from its dark ages, the story bears mentioning because the trace of this journey exists in the word and implicitly in the decision to add cipher into the Supreme Mathematics. Cipher might be read as a black concept precisely because it is Other to Europe, that it was developed not by the ‘white man’ but by the ‘Afro-Asiatic’ man, the ‘Original’ man. Supreme Mathematics can be read as a claim to recapture a sense of blackness as a journey of knowledge, wisdom and understanding—represented in the geography and travel of ‘0’. Politically, it represents an inverted logic of racialisation: how can the black man be inferior if the ‘white man’s’ mathematics was based on black contributions? To assemble in a circle and cipher is a performative act with thick meaning: a reminder that the basis of modern mathematics came from ‘Afro-Asiatic’ roots. Naming ‘zero’ in the Supreme Mathematics ‘cipher’ is thus a *political* act that names a contramodern time and space. It is, in this sense, cipher is a continuity—if obscure—of the broader project of the imagined geographies of black spirituality, mysticism, and nationalism in the 20th century. Drawing on the syncretic spiritualities of the Black Atlantic, Signifying on a variety of mystical texts, and the contramodern and Afro-Asiatic concept of ‘cipher’, the Five Percenters refer us to a temporality that foregrounds an

ethos of hybridity and ontological dissent. The history that I have presented allows me to conceive of the cipher as the contramodern space in hip-hop *par excellence*; the cipher is the time and space that revises modernity, a process that happens through relations between bodies or ‘Gods’ and ‘Earths’.

Five Percenters think of the cipher not as simply a circle, but as something actual, extended in space: ‘a person, place or thing’. It comes back to the circle of 360 degrees, a complete being and a metaphor for community; it implicitly rejects teleology and linearity, representing instead a notion of becoming, of always incomplete fulfilment and self-realisation. Cipher is also an enclosure, a cipher is a person as well as the things that they may affect. Indeed, the circle of 360 degrees is summed up in the first letter of the Supreme Alphabet, ‘Allah’: ‘arm, leg, leg, arm, head’, each 72 degrees, the Supreme being, the Asiatic man, the ‘Original’ man. Earth Izayaa Allat writes about her journey to self-knowledge in *Knowledge of Self* structured through the Supreme Mathematics:

In August of 2008, after much building with my God about how I saw the Earth and my relation to the Universe, I named myself Izayaa Allat. My name expresses that my reality is intertwined with that of my God. It describes my relationship to him. Allat is the name of one of three pre-Islamic Goddesses. I wanted my name to show my creative nature as an Original woman. Mathematically, my name expresses the equation $9+26+1+25+1+1=6+3=9=Born$. With my name, I realized my power to affect and change any cipher. Mathematics provided the building blocks to understand the patterns of change (Allat 2009, 111).

Here, cipher refers to a material process of becoming, rooted in Five Percenter mathematics. The cipher is a cycle of building, changing, and improving in relation to community. In the glossary of *Knowledge of Self*, cipher is defined as ‘when the Gods and Earths come together to Build’: a *site* in which members of the Nation of Gods and Earth come together to build and destroy. The word ‘cipher’ references the Five Percenters’ mathematical ontology of the body’s immanent divinity and power. The cipher as a performative space, in light of this mysterious and speculative genealogy, is another thinking of political space. It renders the body in a new way, as a God with the power to change the cipher by understanding ‘mathematics’. In the Five

Percenter lexicon, the sound-image ‘cipher’ could refer to the number 0, the letter ‘o’, and the practice of Gods and Earths meeting in a circle to build and destroy.

Perhaps the most important consequence of this history is that numerology and mathematics allowed an alternative *logos* that emerged from complex, poetic ‘problem’ questions that demanded advanced reflection from students in the NOI. It was through the *practice* of getting together, figuring out these problems, and ‘sciencing’ them out that the Five Perceters formed in the first place. In the Fruit of Islam (FOI), the security wing that all males in the Nation of Islam are trained for, men could be required to recite Supreme Wisdom lessons from memory on demand from senior members of the Fruit of Islam. They would become complete members after oral examination. Clarence 13X was out selling the *Muhammad Speaks* newspaper, a requirement of men in the FOI. In the spring of 1960, Clarence 13X was arguing with another ‘Brother’ in a Chicago ‘El’ station who had challenged Clarence’s self-identification as ‘Allah’. The other NOI member said only Master Fard Muhammad could be recognised as ‘Allah’. According to Abu Shahid:

The Father [Clarence 13X, Allah] said, ‘I’m Master Fard Muhammad’s Uncle, that means that I’m his Father, Alphonse Shabazz’s Brother and Alphonso was Allah before Fard.’ [...] ‘Who is the Original Man?’ ans. ‘The Original Man is the Asiatic Blackman, the Maker, the Owner, Cream of the Planet Earth, Father of Civilization, God of the Universe.’ Then the Father said, ‘I am an Original Man and The Original Man is God and that makes me Allah’ (Allah 2009, n.p., digital edition, Chapter 4, ‘The Black Man’s Army’).

This was one of a number of FOI ‘builds’ that were commonplace among members. It was from these builds as FOI members that Allah, Abu Shahid and other Five Perceters would develop the practice of ciphering, which was commonplace by 1965. At this early point, ciphers were places where the Five Perceters would build on the Wisdom Lessons. After a number of the leaders of the Nation were incarcerated by the mid-1960s, the Five Perceters developed a structure ‘through the appointment of ministers’ and ‘holding “house parliaments”’ where ‘Five Perceters would assemble in a circle (*cipher*) and take turns “building” on the date using Supreme Mathematics’ (Knight 2007, 81).

The ciphers were common and, based on details from Yusef Nuriddin, resembled the sense of being in a cipher of rappers:

When dozens of these novel concepts come at you in the rapid-fire, mile a-minute talking pace of a Five Percenter it is a mind-expanding experience...a visit to another world where normal rules of logic are suspended and an entirely new set of rules apply. The terrain of this world is landscaped by the mythology provided in the lessons of the NOI, and the 'divine sciences' created by Clarence 13X, the Supreme Mathematics and Alphabet (Nuruddin 1994, 118).

By tracing the cipher, as a number, a figure, and a circle of 360°, the context and the imagined geographies of this 'other world where normal rules of logic are suspended' are revealed. This other world is rooted in the contramodern reconfigurations that spread to hip-hop culture through the Nation of Gods and Earths and the Nation of Islam. More importantly than these 'origins' is the story of how thoughts, epistemologies, and knowledges produced a different sense of time and space through a long history of Signifyin(g) on a variety of tropes that were present in black religions in the twentieth century. The word 'cipher' is one such Signification, an act that names *another* world and *another* time rooted in *another* ontology. This ontology at times reified the raciological boundaries of blackness and whiteness, but in it is also an enormous potential to rethink the deployment of these boundaries to map out a knowledge *otherwise* formed in the face-to-face of the cipher's contramodernity.

6. Ciphers *in situ*

This chapter explores how the cipher operates as a political site. As I explain in the previous chapter, the cipher is a unique space that initiates a time and space otherwise, an experiment in inverting and reconfiguring modernity and ontology. Below, I explore how the ethics and politics of the cipher are actualised by members of S4HH.

In interviews I explored how the cipher affected participants. The cipher's structure and rules create an alternative site that reorients ethical and political commitments that ground a group of bodies in a form of community. It involves a constant transformation of both the cipher as a whole (the community) and the participant. Importantly, becoming an *active* participant in the cipher involves an ethical and political investment. To spit knowledge and real raps in front of a group takes practice, sweat, and determination; it does not happen on the first day. In this section, I explore the space of the cipher in the S4HH site.

When I joined my first cipher in S4HH, I could sense the thick atmosphere. During the meetings, we would occasionally sit in a circle, discussing logistics for Hip-hop in the Park, brainstorming ideas for new events, and debating the merits of Kanye West or Kendrick Lamar. I found the atmosphere of these meetings was more or less familiar to the student groups I was involved in during my time in university. Perhaps a bit less formal, but it felt like that of a traditional university club or society. It was not so much that the meetings themselves were

different, rather, it was the motivations for what brought those students there that interested me and gave the cipher the affective density that it had.

The cipher was entirely different than the meetings, a completely different space. The meetings were banal, dull at times, while the cipher was much the opposite, a properly charged *atmosphere*: thick and enveloping. While the meetings had their own atmospheres, they were much thinner, hardly present. The cipher, on the other hand, was truly unique. The components of the cipher are rather simple if we break it down: human bodies, rhythm (usually a track of beats made by a DJ that can be rapped over, and the occasional instrumental tracks of well-known classics), and the circular structure that organises the bodies into a discrete site. The cipher is a site that no description can easily convey; what is revealed in this fleeting moment are the compartments and movements of and between bodies: the invisible interactions between sound and body, the travel of fear and intimidation between those bodies, the moving, swaying, and listening that opens a possibility of joy and pleasure. The atmosphere—rather, *vibe*—that emanates from this site is a collective project and a collective responsibility. Just as the Five Percenters asserted a responsibility to build and destroy to affect their ciphers, so too do the participants in Students for Hip-hop sense that the cipher is a project that is shared.

After every meeting, we all knew it was time for the cipher. A few people would head out to meet other commitments or catch up on reading and coursework, but most would stay whether or not they could rap. The group booked a small classroom for the weekly meetings, equipped with an audio system. The lights would be dimmed or turned off entirely and occasionally the classroom projector would put an image on the screen at the front. The first cipher I attended had the cover art of Nas's seminal album *Illmatic* projected at the centre of the classroom. A group member would jack their smartphone into the audio deck using a line-in cord provided, running an instrumental playlist. A beat would come on while the others assembled themselves into a circle. We would be chatting amongst ourselves for the first

minute or so, voices resisting being drowned out by blaring bass, drops, high hats, and funky, melodic throbs. As we quieted down and began to listen, the vibe would change. Each body would sway and zig, bob and bounce to the beat. Arms would bounce along while others would engage their feet in microscopic, rhythmic movement. Each body did its own thing; expressed its energy in its own way. As the group would transition from meeting to cipher, anticipating the first few rhymes that were soon to come, the atmosphere would become dense, charged with anticipation.

Indeed, power was present in affective registers: being in the cipher is profoundly intimidating, especially for the onlooker; in a sense, if you cannot rap or do not intend to, you feel like an invasive presence yourself. The demand posed on this body is what it will contribute, that it will build or destroy. Sonia, an Indian-American rapper, honed her skills rapping and cipherng with her brothers and friends as she was growing up. Unlike her brothers, rapping about ‘bitches’ and ‘hos’ was not an option for her:

Back home, I would just freestyle with my friends for fun. They were mostly dudes, and they would be rapping about like, ‘bitches’ and like...you know that’s like the easy shit to bring up off the top your head. I was a little desensitised to it, but at the same time, I would still—I would just say what was on my mind because I just don’t have the option of ‘bitches’ and like ‘skeet skeet’. It was cool because it generally elevated the quality of whatever was being said.

Because of her refusal to engage in the misogynistic banter that came to the minds of her companions in the cipher, Sonia was able to elevate and build on the cipher with the others.

Her raps became more complex and varied, demanding more from the others in her cipher.

Across the cipher, it just kind of raised the bar a little bit because you have one person that’s not just talking about ‘bitches and hos’, like ‘getting money’ or ‘moving bud’, getting ‘ounces’ and ‘pounds’. Because, you know, frankly, life is not about that. It ended up being really cool getting to build with these friends from back home, and being in Students for Hip-hop really did feel like home to me and that’s why I stuck around.

We see clear resonance between these banal, everyday ciphers that Sonia participated in and the logic of the cipher implicit in the Supreme Mathematics and in the Five Percenter milieu. In a quote later, she consciously uses words such as ‘build and destroy’ and ‘word is bond’ to describe the dense relationality that emerges between her and other participants in the cipher

(see page 139). These phrases, along with ‘knowledge of self’, are seminal bits of hip-hop language that build consciously or unconsciously on the genealogy of the cipher and NGE thought. What she hints at is that the cipher, as a site of construction and destruction, of building and destroying, is an ethical approach to community:

From the beginning of time, people have been gathering in circles to do things, whether it is to socialise, religious and ritualistic shit, I don’t know, tetragrams and shit,¹⁵ that’s a really powerful element. [...] A circle is a site of energy exchange and that’s why it’s important who’s with you in the circle, because you’re going to imbibe a little bit of their energy, right? You’re going to taste a little bit of their world or whatever it is.

She recognises (perhaps not in name) the relevance of the form of the circle as a kind of ‘energy exchange’ and an atmosphere that emerges from a collective project. Sonia stresses the fact that because the cipher is a shared space, one’s own identity and subjectivity is modulated by the other. The people with whom the cipher is formed are extremely important, making present an ethical demand on all the participants:

I think that like the energy that people bring to the circle, I am really sensitive to...I can really tell when like, you can kinda tell when somebody is rapping about bitches and hos when they don’t have anything to say. At that point, the problem is that you still have a flow, but you ran out of content. So stop, at that point. The flow is useless without the content. [...] You catch a flow and you ride it, you know, I can spit limericks for days if I didn’t have to put words in them, in iambic pentameter or whatever.

For Sonia, responsibility in the cipher is complex and is expressed through ethical registers. Simply because another *can* continue his flow does not mean that he should; rapping purely for the sake of form is a problem and reflects a dilution of the group vibe and enacts (for Sonia) a difficult, if not violent, power relation:

There was this dude, he was just rapping, he was rapping over people—this is the thing, I am just really sensitive to dudes that take up space. Because like okay, we’re all conscious folk here, we all understand that gender dynamics are real and there is a fucking glass ceiling and you know, inequality...so let’s just reflect that in our daily lives. As a man or as a white male, when you see other people of other perspectives, just let them have the floor because white default *is* the default, so just allow for other spaces.

There is a complex ethics and politics of race and gender at play here. Sonia is making the argument that the cipher is a space that is shared, *common*. Earlier she states that participants

¹⁵ In fact, in the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* by de Laurence refer to the ‘Tetragrammaton’ in addition to a variety of other figures. Incidences of this term can be found in other de Laurence texts as well. See Dorman 2009, 2013 for details. At the time of this interview, I was not aware of the relevance of the term and did not inquire further.

in the cipher ‘imbibe’ a little bit of the other’s world, but the democracy of this process is undermined when a body ‘takes up space’ by enacting a power relation through the cipher by rapping over others and failing to give room to others to speak because of their indulgent comportment that prioritises sound over content. Bodies, gendered, sexed, and differentiated are afforded differential mobility in the space of the cipher. These differences need to be acknowledged in order to successfully build and destroy; a person must approach the cipher *through* her or his body and ensure that by doing so, a commitment to a communal politics is enacted. For Sonia, this tension is best expressed through ethical relations within the cipher:

I think the cipher is a public space and everybody is valid and legitimate there, but not everybody realises that and I can think it can be intimidating when other people of other skill levels are hella rapping, and sometimes you can feel as though you don’t belong. Like some people need to be brought out of their shell a little bit. And I feel like...in my eyes, that’s the mission and the goal of the cipher. I think as a conscious, functioning component of the cipher, it is important to recognise when to speak and when to step back because of...this is going back to hip-hop...because ‘word is bond’ and we ‘build and destroy’ so we have to be conscious of what we’re building and what we’re binding ourselves to. Sometimes I think people do need to be checked.

Here, Sonia directly references Five Percenter terminology that is common in hip-hop milieu. Sonia’s point that ‘some people need to be brought out of their shell’ refers to the process implied by 9 (Born) in the Supreme Mathematics: people need to become conscious of themselves and it is the role of the cipher to start that process. More interesting, however, is how this comportment is produced *in situ*: ‘building’ and ‘destroying’ is an ethical orientation to performance, listening, and participation in hip-hop culture. The cipher is where this ethic is cultivated. This ethos is a reminder of how the cipher can arrange bodies in a becoming-ecstatic of community. By focusing on the fact that some participants need to be ‘Born’ and learn to be a part of the cipher and learn to build and destroy, Sonia reminds us that the cipher may seem to be an eternal circle but it each time it is formed it is differently, and so are its participants. The ethos of build and destroy that she points to asserts the non-teleological nature of community in the cipher. In this sense, community in the cipher is based purely on the proximity and copresence of bodies that build and destroy off one another.

That many of the members of the cipher *could not* rap was an interesting feature of the Students for Hip-hop. I felt that, most of the time, the majority of us were *watching* and anticipating; but this was a kind of productive relationship, rather than voyeuristic. We participated with our energy:

The cool thing about the cipher is that it is an egalitarian space where everybody is welcome to participate. So when you don't participate, it's kind like, '*hmm...*', you know? I feel like there are ways to participate with your energy without necessarily rapping. I've seen people snapping their fingers, clapping, using their body, just showing appreciation... personally I'm not averse to people just being in the cipher.

Sonia and I shared this observation. I am a relatively shy and rather foreign individual in the cipher as an academic with a relatively poor ability to keep pace with a rhythm, let alone rap (I am better now, ethnography itself was a kind of 'birth' for me in this sense). Not only am I trained to write and express myself in a completely different discursive milieu, I was also aware of the anxiety of being an academic observing and reporting on hip-hop. I was necessarily an outsider. On top of all of this, I have not practised nearly enough to rap on par with anyone else around me. In order to participate, I found myself performing in the cipher and negotiating these forces. As an onlooker, I found myself swaying along and moving my shoulders while listening closely in order to help maintain the vibe.

This is how the cipher begins: all of us there, contributing our energy, vibing together, anticipating the first rapper. Perhaps the thickest affect in the circuit is the demand to contribute in what way one can. Even swaying along, not trying to rap, involves a degree of risking oneself in the face of the community. Before the first rapper, I would begin to look around the cipher to see who would start and spit some rhymes, sliding back into cerebral lucidity after disposing our bodies to sound. Others, not ready to be the first to go, would wait and perhaps think of some topics to rap about. A few seconds later someone would jump in and rap.

Intimidation in the cipher

One of the same four to five rappers would frequently start the cipher. The most experienced rappers, students who could stitch together entire landscapes off the top of their heads, would start and hold down the cipher as I would be trying in vain to stitch together a couplet in my head that I was too fearful to offer anyway. Many of the ciphers I participated in were dominated, as we would expect, by the most experienced rappers. The basic pattern was that a beat would start and get into the groove and a few of the best rappers in S4HH would get us started.

Given that many of those in the group were also ‘new’ to hip-hop and had not developed skills in rapping (as they were more ‘listeners’ than artists), I was not alone in my anxiety. The cipher is one site where access to hip-hop becomes political as well as technical (but of course this is similar to many other performance art forms): being able to have one’s say and contribute is dependent on a certain level of skill and discipline to perform within the limits of the form itself. It takes a significant amount of practice and motivation to participate, and when you are next to an experienced rapper, it is not easy. Participants in the cipher commented on this: the intimidation of the cipher pushed them to other forms of creativity such as writing while others focused more on honing a critical perspective on what they listened to. All the same, an onlooker in a cipher cannot be considered a passive participant or as an audience member; in fact, their creative response to the cipher might be found elsewhere.

Intimidation is one affect that floats through the cipher, but it can be a good thing; an intimidating space calls us to participate in a meaningful way, disposing us to a certain discomfort that encourages those aspiring rappers to practice. Samuel, one of the best rappers that frequently started the cipher, is aware of how his flow intimidates others. He is aware that part of this might come from his own skill level and how he intimidates the others in the cipher, remaining anxious that he enacts this kind of power relation on others:

There's maybe four active people in the cipher and then a bunch of people standing around, not even trying to join in. And it's like, you're making me uncomfortable to rap because I like to rap so I might go on for a long time, but I feel that if I do that, I'm going to make it uncomfortable for the person next to me because he's going to be like 'oh, he's really good, I don't want to go'.

Samuel finds that this dilutes the vibe, questioning why those people are there. He articulates this through a curious register, one that problematises racial and class-based boundaries. While Samuel, a Nigerian-American male from a less-privileged community in the Bay Area, has grown up around hip-hop and the 'struggle' as he refers to it, he appreciates that many of the others in the group do not. Referring to the others in the club, he says 'you're my friends and shit, but you know you get the vibe sometimes that like *you know, you guys aren't really rappers*'. I asked what a 'real rapper looks like' (unintentionally asking a racialised question—I intended to ask him to expand on his definition of a 'real rapper' and quite blunderingly said 'looks') and he said it would be 'backward' and ignorant of him to make any such claim, rejecting that class, race, or gender had anything to do with authenticity in hip-hop. However, he did have this to say:

Hip-hop is a direct reflection of a culture so it reflects the struggle that is common for people of colour in this country, it reflects a struggle of people where they are losing—some people are like 'I lost my grandma', which is sad, you feel me; I lost my potna who was my age, you feel me...that's a major experience, I got four friends that were fifteen years old and got sentenced to jail as adults, they're doing fifteen right now, fifteen to thirty. There is a certain struggle that is common in hip-hop that doesn't reflect [S4HH].

All the same, Students for Hip-hop put together a space where interaction between those who did not come from that place of struggle learned from and befriended those who did. Samuel was very affirmative of this, but he felt that he had to make some sort of call on his 'others', demanding a performance and response:

The thing about [the cipher], it's an open floor, I don't even care if you can't rap, it's just that do you have the balls to just step in and rap with your friends? We're all here giving off a good vibe, you're killing the vibe being here all hella quiet acting like you're in some classroom.

What counts as 'real', what counts as *belonging*, for Samuel, is when that other takes the risk and exposes themselves to being stupid, silly, or embarrassing. The tension comes from the dilution of 'vibe', a collective project that depends on the commitment and responses of *all*

those involved in the cipher, by someone that seems, as the idiom goes, ‘too cool for school’. Samuel places the responsibility on others not to rap *well*, but to risk themselves and participate rather than take the safe route and stay quiet, calling for a kind of ethics of response and a comportment open to a certain shattering and dissolution of one’s self.

Transversal affect and experimentation in the cipher

Samuel’s demand problematises what would otherwise be a simple theoretical explanation based on Felix Guattari’s ‘ethico-aesthetic’ paradigm developed in *Chaosmosis* (as elsewhere in his collaborations with Gilles Deleuze). This space is political because the assemblage of bodies, sound, and the affective economy that emerges opens potential for micropolitical acts through the production of subjectivity: ‘one creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist creates new forms from the palette’ (Guattari 1995, 7). This opens up an ‘ethical choice’ to think through performative experience as a process of creation and experimentation, of building and destroying. ‘Either we objectify, reify, “scientifise” subjectivity, or, on the contrary, we try to grasp it in the dimension of its processual creativity’ (Guattari 1995, 13). Affect has a close relationship here with subjectivity and ethics, which is grounded in a notion of ‘transversality’ or ‘transversal communication’, explained in *A*

Thousand Plateaus:

involution is creative...to involve is to form a block that runs its own line ‘between’ the terms in play...movement occurs not only, or not primarily, by filiative productions but also by transversal communications between heterogeneous populations. Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 239).

This notion of ‘involution’ which slips into ‘transversal communication’ and occurs in a rhizomatic space is updated slightly in Guattari’s discussion of the production of subjectivity, treating transversality as a ‘bridge’ between different kinds of becoming and processual subjectivities that emerge between expression and the visible (see Guattari 1995, 23). The cipher is not quite an *involvement* in this sense, it is an investment of the body in a space of

risk. While the cipher is inherently creative, its ethics are not in processual creativity but in the struggle of making an ethical choice at each moment. Transversality, then, provides an interesting perspective in that it encourages us to attend to subjectivity as a disposition toward experiential creativity. However, the intimidation and risk of the cipher opens up a different modality of ethical relation. As Sonia reminds us, the politics of the cipher do not occur simply through form, but their comportment and statements: when to *stop* spitting is an ethical choice. This is different for Samuel, however, who is not concerned with the content of what is said but the fact that someone stepped in and risked themselves in the cipher. For both Sonia and Samuel, we might read that the most important demand is to accept the risk of performance in the cipher by contributing energy. Ethics thus occur through the choice made in what is said but also in the contraction and anxiety of taking a risk by participating in the cipher.

Transversality is a useful approach taken by non-representational theorists and recent social scientists approaching questions about experimentation within aesthetic, political, and ethical spheres. The experimental connotation of transversality, an encounter that is fleeting and ephemeral but leaves its trace on bodies, is particularly useful to describe the cipher. The range of theoretical resources used to explore experimentation is varied, but what remains common is an ‘attention to the full range of bodies, texts, and practices that constitute spaces of experimentation’ (Powell and Vasudevan 2007, 1790-1791). Such theories offer a ‘critique of experience and an affirmation of an expanded sense of the experiential as a register of ethico-political experiment’ (McCormack 2010, 202). This literature asserts that experience is related to processes of becoming: transversality is a way in to understanding the process of experimentation as it occurs in various sites through the lens of experience. Further, ethnographic and observational methods assist in thinking through processes of experimentation through a Deleuzo-Guattarian lens of encounter and becoming (Davies 2010, 668). Non-representational theory, assemblage theory, and the notion of ‘encounter’ have been

particularly useful in recent thinking about the everyday and embodied forms of political experience. Approaching political inventiveness through the notions of ‘experience’ and ‘experiment’ allows analysis to examine how political frames are subverted and new mappings constructed (see Koopman 2011, Ingram 2012, Williams (AJ) 2014, Megoran 2010).

Recent explorations of ‘experimental geography’ and ‘geographies of experiment’ have led to a varied literature interrogating spaces as diverse as laboratories, museums, and art installations (see Kullman 2013, Last 2012). Such an approach (fruitful for both science and technology studies as it might be for popular geopolitics, see for example Dittmer 2013)—is naturally inclined towards methods broadly housed within non-representational theory. A guiding feature of this literature and thought is Guattari’s transversality, reviewed recently by Derek McCormack in *Refrains for Moving Bodies* (2013). In studying Dance Movement Therapy, McCormack argues that what matters about affect is its ‘transversal quality—it operates as a catalytically eventful relay between a multiplicity of movements and events...[these] therapeutic interventions open up the actuality of experience, transversally, to the relational excess of affect across and between bodies’ (2013, 112). Affect is transversal, the product of an encounter that opens potentials that re-code and reassemble subjectivity.

This approach is very effective in analysing the political dimensions of creative subjectivity, drawing heavily on Guattari’s *Chaosmosis*. Anja Kanneiser (2013) explores how avant-garde art practitioners use affect to modulate political subjectivity. She argues for an experimental politics based on the production of a world to come through tactical performativity. What seems to count as ‘experimental’ in politics are interventions that push subjects up against certain thresholds by manipulating affect. Kanneiser reads transversality as ‘a movement across and through subjectivities, categories, disciplines, institutions and scenes, that is reconfigurative in its progression’ (2013, 71, citing Guattari 1995, 18). In this approach, we might consider political experiments as events that ‘share the commitment to

compose apparatuses, devices and other *situated* set-ups that induce small variations in the world, all the while observing and recording these variations to learn about their potential’ (Kullman 2013, 885). Affective encounters have (in Kanngieser’s view) a transversal quality that ‘reconfigures’ subjectivities, blurring lines between distinct roles such as artist and activist (2013, 77, cf. Kanngieser 2011).

Experimentation in the cipher occurred at ethical registers. It is something we can read back into the demands that Sonia and Samuel place on other members of the cipher. Sonia expects that her others, by recognising their masculinity and responsibility to ‘build’ for the community, contribute something ‘innovative’ instead of relying on cliché, trite raps about ‘bitches and hos’. Samuel demands that his others would participate by taking more initiative and stepping beyond the anxiety of performing at a lower level. I take these demands seriously not because they are ‘right’ or ‘correct’ but because they are part of the compound of forces that modulate and intervene in responses to the cipher.

Alan Ingram (2011) discusses ‘experimental geopolitics’, drawing on Jacques Rancière instead of Guattari. Ingram argues that ‘artistic acts intervene in the constitution of the political by reshaping what is visible, sayable, and doable’, arguing for lines of flight: ‘effective critical art today is that which “questions its own limits and refuses to anticipate its own effects” (Rancière 2010, 149)’ (Ingram 2011, 9). Thus the ‘line of flight’ remains central to the argument, a transversal movement that inspires a critical thought:

the ‘politics’ of art paradoxically consists in setting aside all economic and social ‘explanations’...to identify a more specifically political element: the confrontation between the power and the impotence of a body, between a life and its possibilities (Rancière 2010, 151).

What is particularly interesting in Rancière’s rendering of the politics of art is the centrality of the body’s *potential* within it. This notion resonates well with the experiential space of the cipher. However, to perform in a cipher is quite different than to respond to an artwork, song, or gig. The cipher is an artistic experiment and it dissipates when the cipher ends. Each body is coded differently and experiences different demands and has its particular potencies.

Consequently, it is difficult to speak of a line of flight and a movement from the event ‘involving’ a movement in the subject. It is the subject’s disposition to an ethical demand that opens up a border with the political. For antiphonal relations in the cipher, I focus on the liminal encounter between bodes, a touching, rather than a transversal or a line of flight.

We might conceptualise the performance as an ‘encounter’, ‘an insurrectionary gesture that weds critiques of exclusion and domination to pleasurable action...as an experimental gesture of social-political dissent’ (Kanneiser 2013, 20). An encounter or performance ‘works’ or it produces subjectivity by modulating those lines of visibility and force by acting on a viewer or spectator. This is particularly useful when thinking about *audiences*, but the ciphers I observed did not simply involve hip-hop fans rapping together. It was the recognition of bodily difference and the complex plane of responsibility for others in the community that produced a different sense of politics within the group.

A ‘line of flight’ did not seem the right metaphor for what I had observed. I approached ciphers through a sense of transversality, looking for those affects that modulated political subjectivity. However, when I did speak about ciphers in formal interview settings with members of the group, they were rarely explored in political registers. In that sense, the cipher did not affect their political commitments but instead affected the way they approached others in the group. This ethical register becomes political through the way in which participants in the cipher conduct themselves and relate to one another in *proximity*. My turn to Deleuze’s *Logic of Sense* in Chapter 4 helps to revise this theorisation of the event by bringing us back to the event as the time of Aion, a stretching in two directions at once and the site of the loss of one’s ‘proper name’. The cipher becomes a fascinating site of becoming despite its circularity. It reminds us though the cipher is a repetition; it is also a refrain that is different each time. In each circuit around the curve of ‘cipher’, we become a bit different each time, imbibing the energy of our others. Further, what we build and destroy changes the ethos and the atmosphere

of the cipher in each repetition, stressing each time our responsibility. In doing so, I continue to attend to the ‘experimental’ and ‘experiential’—as recommended by Derek McCormack (2010, 2013)—through different theoretical resources.

Drawing on *Difference and Repetition*, Jeffrey Nealon (1998) links performativity and becoming with ‘call and response’ in the black aesthetic. He argues for a constant becoming-different as central to a ‘blues’ aesthetic (as it is laid out by Amiri Baraka): ‘Baraka [articulates] a kind of paradoxical African American authenticity: it is the “invaluable significance” of *performative improvisation*—the enactment of a becoming-difference—that makes the blues tradition unique’ (Nealon 1998, 125, emphasis original). Rather than focus on a line of flight, becoming is grounded in performance, response to the other, and repetition *through* Signifyin(g). In doing so, ‘both blackness *and* whiteness are inexorably transformed by the performative movements of becoming-black’ (Nealon 1998, 129, emphasis original). This ‘becoming-black’ is too shallow a reading—it is too easy to say that the reader becomes ‘black’. This writes out the eventful property of antiphonal music to open a potentiality for the fracturing and fragmentation of the self onto a plane with no horizon, terming this a ‘becoming-black’ relies on a proper name and identity of becoming in the antiphonal relation. The core of Nealon’s argument here is still useful; we see in the ‘inexorable transformation’ of blackness and whiteness in antiphonal performativity a kind of *métissage* or ‘creolisation’ in which it is the journey, communication, and sharing with the other that shatters and destabilises identity (further discussion in Chapter 11). Antiphony in the cipher refers to the duality in which we are chained to ourselves and our history and the contradictory possibility we have to change. In this sense, the cipher becomes that gateway of ‘Moment’ that Zarathustra describes in which the past and the future converge and refract one another into an infinity of possibilities in the time of Aion (see Chapter 4). Becoming, in the cipher, is the eternal return in each repetition that through antiphony and Signifyin(g) is rendered different each time, modulating and

shattering the self along with it. This speaks true to the cipher: in being exposed to one another in a demanding space, the participants are in a process of becoming-ecstatic in a space that is organised on a primacy of ethical experimentation. This experimentation, in the cipher, happens through a body's specificity, its skin, and its facticity but always reaches beyond it.

Alterity, enchaînement, and the body: Christine

The cipher is a collective project. It requires a community of people to contribute and maintain a vibe. This is accomplished by the music, the foundation over which the cipher is assembled. The event itself is the alterity of the body that speaks, what the other rappers spit and how they flow. Most of the time, lyrics were not pre-written, with the rappers just going off the top of their heads. This is a cerebral experience in which the body and matter are bound together. Bodies in the cipher are exposed and exposing themselves to each other. In this mutual exposition, and the conflicts that emerge between bodies, a politics of the cipher is enacted through a process of ethical experimentation. Below, I use the example of one woman's experience to trace how we might consider the affective and impassioned politics of the cipher from this perspective.

Christine, a young Asian-American woman studying history, is new to hip-hop, introduced to the genre by way of Kendrick Lamar's (2012) album, *Good Kid m.A.A.d. city*. For her, the best hip-hop is political, and a way for her to engage with a more diverse community than she was exposed to in what she considers a privileged upbringing. She frequently writes her own lyrics and poetry, but does not usually perform her writing in the cipher. She prefers to write, and have someone else rap her bars, because of the way she feels about her own voice and appearance:

What I draw on most, I talk about issues like feminism and race and—yesterday was kind of fun, I wrote about my friend, who is a libertarian, so that was fun—most times, my stuff is pretty serious. I feel more comfortable writing it than like rapping it out, because—I don't know, I don't really like my voice and my appearance doesn't really command respect, or whatever. People aren't like, 'you are so deep', if

they look at me, if they hear my voice—It's not like taken that seriously. I have a really high-pitched voice and [...] I like writing more. I would rather someone else rap it.

The fact that her body is different and (for her,) presents an obstacle to her complete participation in the cipher is not trivial. The *fact* of her 'high-pitched voice', her petite build, and her East Asian heritage affects the possibilities of her contributions to the cipher. The facticity of her body affects the 'power and impotence' she experiences in the space of the cipher and affects how she negotiates and makes claims on the space and the community assembled in the cipher. While affects may offer the potential within the cipher for transversal communication, deterritorialisation and recoding, these possibilities are themselves subject to the sticky facticity of her body that makes these relations more complex. Rather than a line to a new political subjectivity, this force pulls her *back into* the site calling for an experimental performativity mediated through her bodily difference.

Christine's embodiment forces us to reconsider the possibilities of her performativity from a perspective that moves beyond transversality, beyond the suggestion that affect simply opens up relationships between assemblages and modulations of subjectivity. From Christine, we get a picture of the cipher as a gendered space that affords her a particular mobility based on the specificity of her body and position. For this reason, I needed a theory of affectivity and politics that takes seriously the facticity of the body and how, when inserted in particular assemblages, the body is afforded different forms of agency.

Engaging with Emmanuel Levinas has been particularly productive in thinking through Christine's limitations and agency within the cipher. Levinas is particularly useful because he argues that subjectivity is inherently related to the body; to speak of identity is to naturally speak of the body. In an early work, an essay titled, 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', Levinas outlines a philosophy of the body in ascendance in Germany as a counterpoint to a 'French' sense of the subject, transcendent and rational. He argues that, in the German conception, 'the biological' is the 'heart' of 'spiritual life', that 'Man's essence no

longer lies in freedom, but in a kind of bondage [*enchaînement*]. To be truly oneself does not mean taking flight once more above contingent events that always remain foreign to the Self's freedom; on the contrary, it means becoming aware of the ineluctable original chain that is unique to our bodies, and above all accepting this chaining' (Levinas 1990, 69). Levinas is recognising that the base instinct that drives Hitlerism are the 'sanguine' urges of the body. Levinas argues that liberalism and Marxism both fail to understand this and by positing a transcendent political subjectivity that is rational and disembodied will fail to acknowledge the *fact* of this bondage. However, there is a way out, a possibility to take our *enchaînement* seriously without the fascism of consanguinity. By taking seriously the anxiety of this bondage, we can look to the cipher to conceive of the embodiment of community not immanent to its own identity and sanguinity but in taking a risk in the face of the anxiety that our skin and facticity present to us.

In the cipher, Christine (as others) is very much chained to her body. She cannot escape her size, shape, sound, and colour. This tempers her ability and desire to engage equally in the cipher, regardless of the fact that she may have the 'balls', as Samuel puts it, to 'step in and rap'. Thinking through Christine's predicament through a perspective of *enchaînement* is productive, and challenges transversality. The cipher itself is much more striated, embodied, and territorialising than the rhizomatic spatiality that transversal affect depends upon. This does not mean that the cipher is *not* political, or that it always territorialises a certain kind of sexism; rather, the body must be considered in the negotiation of alterity as what constricts and limits us and what makes us sense the risk and anxiety of performance. But, as Levinas reminds us, this constriction is also an opening. The cipher demands its participants involve their own bodies, opening up an ethics of being with others by being in one's own skin. Subjectivity (and its modulation) is equally limited through the physical affordances endowed on each subject by the body. In the cipher, Christine is *conscious* of this and (as we see in the example below)

uses her difference to affect the community as a whole. The body is a ‘recurrence of ipseity’, it is the recurrence of the Self: ‘the oneself is “in itself” as one is in one’s skin’ (1996, 85)—I cannot escape my facticity. Christine is locked to a certain set of affordances in the cipher. This is not a consequence of ‘sexism’ within the cipher but rather to say that she (just like all others) are brought *back into* the cipher through their skin, body, and phenotype. Being a woman in a cipher involves different demands because of how one’s own body reacts to mutual exposition to the other.

Levinas’s thought thus presents a challenge to the possibility of ‘becoming-other’ through a transversal line of flight. He writes that ‘identity is not reducible’ to a recognition of ‘difference beyond its immediate identity’; rather, for Levinas identity is a ‘contraction’, a tightness, ‘anguish’ (1996, 86). ‘This anguish’ is the ‘constriction of an “entry within”, which is *not a flight into the void* but a passage into the fullness of the anxiety of contraction’ (1996, 86, emphasis added). Anxiety and distress play a crucial role for the relation with alterity; these are productive passions. By questioning the grounds of identity itself, Levinas argues that subjectivity is not a metaphor for the body; rather, subjectivity is itself subject to the *body*. A transversal movement does not occur in such moments of constriction, anguish and anxiety. Christine, chained to her body and this ‘constriction’ is not called by others in the cipher to become different. Rather, she is called to *response*.

In speaking of responsibility between species, Donna Haraway suggests that ‘the needed morality’ involves ‘culturing a radical ability to remember and feel what is going on and performing the epistemological, emotional, and technical work to *respond practically*’ to situations and relationships that are not classified by ‘taxonomies’ and ‘hierarchies’ (2008, 76). It is then not to speak of *freedom* as open and explosive, but a line back to the body and the concrete situation: ‘the open is not comfortable’ (Haraway 2008, 76). Christine experiences a kind of bondage, a sense of being locked in place in the cipher at particular moments she finds

uncomfortable; however, instead of escaping this *enchaînement*, she is pushed to respond and experiment by ‘building and destroying’. Committed to a feminist politics, Christine feels that hip-hop culture takes misogyny too far. She has a particular taste when it comes to hip-hop:

In general, that frustrates me, I really don’t like when hip-hop is derogatory...it should be something that is constructive, you know? I don’t like it when you’ll just tear something down. Battle rap...that’s a fun space, everyone knows that what you are doing is taking the other person down, it’s not malicious. That’s fun, that’s really fun—it’s more showing what you like.

Christine experiences real moments of disgust in the face of certain raps and rappers that she finds ‘derogatory’. For her, hip-hop culture should be ‘constructive’ and creative. It is when rappers run out of creative jabs and rely on banal, gendered vulgarity that Christine is left uncomfortable and frustrated:

When people just specifically tear [others] down, that really frustrates me because most of it is gendered toward women. It’s like when you have nothing left to say that a lot of people will talk about things like, ‘I’m the shit’ or ‘I have all these women’, I don’t know what to say that’s bad about you anymore, let me just call you a ‘pussy’. It’s very gendered.

Battle raps happen occasionally in ciphers. Ciphers are improvisational spaces and as much for enjoyment and practice than battling, which usually happens on more formal stages and competitive events. Some of the rappers in the cipher, would occasionally slip into the kind of language that would frustrate Christine, though this was not common by any stretch because others in the group would normally ‘check’ someone who was using this kind of immature language. There is, however, an implicit rule in the cipher. When someone says something that offends or angers you, you do not interrupt the other. They are allowed to say their piece and it is up to the community to show the truth and spit knowledge by destroying—taking away—what the other person said. If someone is offended, they are expected to reply—as a rap—after they have finished. I discussed this with Samuel, who explained that ‘respect’ is important in order to ensure that the vibe of the cipher is maintained.

You respect what a person has to say. I mean when you’re freestyling, things are just coming to your mouth, you might say some stuff that’s a little raunchy, it might not even be something that you are thinking or really do, but you’re *freestyling*—you feel me—things are going to come to your mouth that you can’t control at times. You’re talking faster than you’re able to think. It’s just [about] respect.

What makes the cipher work is that all involved put themselves at a certain amount of risk. When Samuel refers to what a person has to *say*, he is referring to performance in the cipher where the speaker is literally exposing themselves in an improvisation. It is the exposure of oneself as an event and an experiment in which we lose control over our speech, it flows out of us and exceeds our total control. For an experienced man like Samuel rapping in a cipher, that risk might be saying something unrepresentative of who they are or what they believe and becoming vulnerable to a warranted rebuke. For Christine, the risk of the cipher might involve exposure to what disgusts or frustrates her. For everyone, just putting oneself out there, to spit anything in the cipher involves a degree of risk. The cipher is a constant, deliberate submission of one's own body to risk and alterity. Indeed, it is this desiring-submission, this diving *back* to the territory of the cipher itself that makes it operate as a political space. This is a politics of response to that bondage of facticity and identity, of being constricted in its own skin: a politics of responding to *enchaînement*.

Christine's responsibility

Christine's response to an offending alterity provides an example of the politics that the cipher constructs. This politics is improvisational, performative, and experimental. As I explained earlier, Christine usually avoids freestyling, but when she (and others) were faced with a new member of the group rapping offensive lines, Christine felt 'compelled' to respond.

Before spring break, some dude, he was brand new to the club and in his freestyles he was really, really misogynistic. It was so frustrating. I was really pissed off actually. That's one of the few times that I freestyled, like you know, you can't do that, you can't talk about raping women as if it is a positive thing and gives you manly credentials, and like 'fucking bitches' stuff, like this is *really derogatory*. When I went home, I ended up writing [a piece] that I really liked, and I'm just saving it for later. I haven't really shared it.

Christine's response to this incident is twofold. First, she responded *within* the rules of the cipher. After the newcomer had finished his raps, she caught the beat and spat back at him. (The event happened so quickly I was unable to capture what she said; however, what was *said*

matters much less than the fact that she spoke up in response.) Despite the ‘constriction’ and anxiety that she feels about rapping in front of the group, she felt *responsible* for speaking up. Second, she also responded outside of the cipher by going home and writing a rap in response to her experience.

Christine felt that it was her responsibility to speak up and challenge the man with the misogynistic rhymes, to expose her truth and ‘give knowledge’ back by ‘destroying’ or taking away the validity of the other’s performance. Interestingly, Samuel articulated that it was the women’s responsibility to counter the men in the group: ‘I wish they would just step up and go hard on us: check them niggas in, by rapping, check them niggas. I wish some girls would do that.’ Here, Samuel has good intentions; he wants women to feel free to speak up and challenge others and he agrees that hip-hop has no place for misogyny. However, he seems to place the responsibility *on* the other, rather than on himself: he does not say that if men run out of things to say and fall back on immature, misogynistic comments that they should rather pass it along to someone else. Part of this is due to the fact that freestyling itself is ‘formal’ in the sense that many rappers are simply practising their flow, style, and ability to rhyme. Not all sensations are constructive; some have to be destroyed. Destruction, then, is an ethical choice and an experiment in response to a concrete situation that challenges the community.

Christine recognises her responsibility as one for the entirety of the group, not just herself. This echoes Levinas in ‘Substitution’, that the self is responsible not for herself, but for her others as well: ‘responsibility for the other does not wait for the freedom of commitment to the other. Without ever having done anything, I have always been under accusation: I am persecuted’ (Levinas 1996, 89). We cannot escape our ‘neighbour’—that presence of alterity we are chained to as much as we are to our own bodies—and we are infinitely responsible for them even when they ‘persecute’ us (1996, 95). ‘Henceforth we are not free to distance ourselves

from him or her' (1996, 95). Christine cannot distance herself from this alterity that she encounters in the cipher. To do so would be to refuse her responsibility and simply walk away:

It's not as if I can be like, 'censor yourself', it's a freestyle, you don't know what you're going to say next. But that that stuff comes out, it shows that something is really wrong with society if that's what you subconsciously say when you have nothing left. [...] You don't have to listen to things, right, if I am like, listening to a song that I really don't like, I can just change to a different one. But like, I'm stuck in the club, listening to some dude saying things that really offend me. And a lot of people, I could tell, felt really awkward. A lot of people were offended. I felt really compelled to speak up, it's not like I can just turn off [laughing].

The Students for Hip-hop ciphers were unique ones. Because the membership drew on a diverse public university's population, tensions around gender, race, and class were visible in the cipher and elsewhere. Thus far, I attempted to outline how I have thought about ciphers, moving from a theorisation of affect in the cipher as a kind of transversal communication and openings onto certain lines of flight to a more embodied, grounded, and 'constricted' thinking of politics and responsibility. This is not a becoming-other but rather a look inward and outward at the same time.

I interpret Christine's response to misogyny as an ethical and political performative of destruction that casts out certain kinds of expression that she thinks have no place in her community. While there are some basic rules to the cipher, it is an open space but an uncomfortable one at the same time. There is no rule that a rapper cannot say something misogynistic much like there is no rule that a rapper cannot present a pre-written work or that a rapper must speak about a particular topic. Because of the cipher's provenance in an improvisational and performative mode of communal relation, there needs to be a thinking of the cipher as a collective project.

In the last quote from Christine above, she says that once the rapper spat his misogynistic bars, she was not the only one offended. In her words, 'A lot of people...felt really awkward'. I remember writing a few notes down after the incident and thinking more about my own response to the incident, having failed to capture Christine's response accurately. In all fairness, the rapper that said those lines was one of my favourite in the club—

he was consistently witty, enigmatic at times, and had a brilliant flow. He could go on for what seemed like whole tracks without needing to stop, and usually, without needing to rely on those references that anger and frustrate Christine. I was grooving along to the beat, bobbing my head and swaying, digging his flow. All of a sudden my movement ceased. I could sense the others to my side and across from me in the cipher slow down, a kind of stillness began to take hold in the room. The vibe had dissipated.

Christine's response, while she framed it in her mind as a political gesture, was also an affectual one. By responding with a rap that challenged the other, she was able to help *restore* the positive vibe that usually characterised the atmosphere of the cipher. Her response was an improvised freestyle that responded to a concrete event, a kind of performative experiment. This brings the argument back to the point at which we started, where a political-aesthetic experiment opens a transversal line of flight between bodies and assemblages to other sites, expanding the field of the political. I have argued that this view—at least for the cipher—should be taken critically, in communication with a Levinasian conception of the phenomenology of the body faced with alterity. This requires a thinking of community as an affective politics of 'being-with'.

'Being-with-each-time': experimentality in the cipher

The cipher initiates a peculiar and interesting space by disposing bodies to the risk of performance in the face of alterity. Community is at stake and all involved have a responsibility in 'building' and 'destroying' in the cipher to shape the community in an appropriate way. This involves a process of exposing oneself to the other and exposing oneself to risk. In doing so, an ethical subjectivity is cultivated in this experience and conflict of copresence in the cipher. The communication that happens between bodies in the cipher organises an affective politics of responding to the other through a cultivation of the ethical self and its proximity to alterity.

This process cultivates a morality and mentality of applying one's convictions in an always-experimental and iterative approach. What is consistent across these experiments is a desire to become part of a community and to shape the community in the image of one's convictions.

Jean-Luc Nancy offers a deep exploration of 'being-with' throughout his writing that is particularly germane to the present study of the cipher. In *Being Singular Plural*, he offers a thought of 'being-with' as specifically iterative and experimental, what he calls 'being-each-time-with'. Interaction in the cipher involves performative responses that I interpret as experiments with ethical decision-making, 'each time' in a specific, concrete situation. At each moment, the body is disposed to its others—'to be there is to be with' (2000, 98)—and it is called to negotiate its position in the face of alterity, here figured as a material arrangement of objects, matter, and bodies. An experiment is a performance that responds to the event of alterity, each-time, there. In doing so, I argue that the cipher is a site in which engaging in this affective politics produces a comportment conducive to ethical experimentation. I read the cipher as a community of shared vulnerability, of bodies disposed to one another. Each participant is meant to expose herself to the other—to take the risk of rapping—and each is responsible to contribute to the project of maintaining the vibe. Communication opens up ethical experimentation. The cipher opens up a site where ethical and moral decisions have to be made at the fleeting, 'each-time' of being disposed to an alterity that calls me into question.

Engagement and communication in the cipher is inflected by the bondage and constriction to one's own body. This embodiment is itself a demand that provides a space for experimentation with response. Being-each-time-with, in terms of the cipher, is accepting that being together involves an iterative practice of relating to one another where the ethical is defined in an iterative process that is open to failure and misfire.

I see in Nancy a kind of synthesis of transversality and *enchaînement*. For Levinas and Nancy, we are *disposed* to alterity (we are not subjects in a *dispositif*) and called by this alterity

to respond. Our capacity is only to respond at each time, there. Ethical practice in the cipher then is necessarily ‘experimental’ in that it emerges only at an instant but has an ontogenetic and transformative potential. In our example, Christine engages with an affective politics in order to restore the collective vibe of the cipher. Here, responsibility goes beyond responsibility for the other; to be ‘ethical’ in the cipher involves a further responsibility to attempt to shape the community. The demand that Christine responds to in the cipher involves a transversal line, bringing political feminism to the cipher, but first and foremost her *decision* to act stems from a sense of responsibility and a moral imperative based on an affectual response to alterity. Her engagement, however, is not outside, it is a political and ethical experiment aimed *inward*, toward her community.

Reading the cipher through dynamics of ‘community’ directs our attention to relations of responsibility rather than properly political contestation. Rather than a sense of responsibility *for* the other, the cipher opens a relationship of responsibility *based on what the other exposes*, what the other *communicates*. To be in the cipher is to be disposed to engaging in an affective politics—for Christine, at that instant, a response to disgust and offense—as it comes into presence through others in the ‘community’. Responsibility, then, is not a condition of recognising the other’s precarity, but rather it is to make oneself precarious in responding to that affect.

Christine felt a metaphorical punch in the mouth from the rapper who spat about ‘bitches’. Rather than angrily disengage, she used the space of the cipher to challenge the other rapper. Though she recognised this as a risk to herself, Christine used *her* sound to bring the challenge forward. Part of this was not only a recognition that the proper response was to spit back in the form expected of the cipher itself but also a broader responsibility that she felt for delineating and producing borders around acceptable conduct within the community. This pushes up the bar, as Sonia explained to us earlier in the ciphers with male friends from her

hometown, by making a demand on others to challenge themselves to push their culture further by being conscious of the content of their rhymes. I argue that these ciphers become political through processes of response to ethical demands, which in turn present new demands; community proceeds through the responses people produce by attempting to answer these ethical demands by drawing transversal lines between the abstract—such as feminism or anti-racism—and the concrete event of being-with others in the cipher.

Ethical subjectivity within and beyond the cipher

I have described the cipher as a peculiar space of political affect. Unlike an ‘artwork’, understood as a finished piece that produces potentials in its viewer or spectator, the cipher is a creative practice within a musical culture. Because of its rich, deep history in the Five Percenters, the cipher operates with certain principles and rules. Building and destroying to produce knowledge and wisdom—a practice honed in rapid fire theological debates in the Fruit of Islam and the Five Percenter house parliaments—frames the cipher as a political space. This affective politics shares a blurry border with ethical experimentation. What we see in Christine’s example is that the ethical displaces the political. Ethics is a response to the concrete situation that she is exposed to in the cipher. The fact that she felt the need to respond is a consequence of a political and moral commitment inspired by feminist politics.

Christine should be commended for stepping up to speak despite her own anxieties about exposing herself to others by freestyling in the cipher. What is interesting is that she felt that her rap did not go far enough. Upon returning home (as she mentioned in a quote above), Christine wrote lyrics responding to the incident. Though she had not presented them while I was in the club, this act is an interesting one because it demonstrates that the affective politics of the cipher, by residing within the body, travels *out*. Mira, an Indian-American student and campus activist, is involved in the S4HH’s leadership and assists with logistics and planning

for Hip-hop in the Park. In the cipher, she experiences a constriction that, as an onlooker, she finds it difficult to respond to. She recounts an experience in a cipher at a poetry slam that she helped to plan in which ‘some guy’ invaded the cipher:

some guy just came and started talking shit about women for two minutes straight. So many people just got up and left because they didn’t want to hear it anymore. Not just women but guys too. And I didn’t know this kid and I’ve never been someone to go up and say ‘What you did upset me, it was wrong’, [...] But I couldn’t help myself that night.

Mira is an onlooker in the cipher and feels limited in her power to intervene in these situations. The rapper began his turn by cutting off another woman in the cipher. She has challenged these people in a more casual context and has found that while the content was offensive, they would defend their performances by commenting on the quality of their flow and delivery. In the encounter above, Mira felt compelled to challenge the offensive rapper because nobody else directly did (many left the cipher in protest). Interestingly, we see a transversal relation between Mira’s social justice training involved in her response to this rapper. Mira forced herself to respect the fact that this rapper did what she could not do: get up on stage and rap. In doing so, she felt she was able to open dialogue with this rapper:

It is just something that I’ve been taught: this is through a lot of social justice work that I’ve done here...I don’t know his story, I don’t know who he is. I do not feel comfortable walking up to any artist and saying ‘what you did up there was shit’. Going up to any stage takes guts, so for me to just walk up there and be like ‘no’, I just don’t think that that’s ever fair, and I recognise that that takes courage and everything but at the same time, I had to, morally, I just had to sit him down and be like ‘Yo, can we talk about this? What you did was wrong’.

Mira took the rapper aside and explained, ‘The audience was half-full [of] women and you insulted each and every one of them. And some men too because they respect women.’ Mira was disappointed with his response; he simply replied that he was ‘sorry’ and excused his behaviour by saying, ‘This is hip-hop’. For Mira, that was no excuse: ‘If there is socially-conscious hip-hop out there, you should know better’.

I offer this example not only to consider the gender politics that occur within ciphers, but given the experiences outlined by Sonia, Christine, and Mira, it is clear that certain forms of freestyling and masculinity can valorise misogyny hip-hop spaces. This example

demonstrates clearly that *responsibility* to the community and the *response* to the cipher occurs in different sites. At the centre, the cipher remains a demanding space in which individuals are exposed to the other, opening up conflicts that are to be handled through a ‘build’ and ‘destroy’ method. However, when this responsibility *misfires*, when an onlooker who cannot rap is not able to respond in the form expected by the cipher, their responsibility is directed elsewhere. This misfire or misdirection is a highly productive excess to cipher which generates, even in onlookers, a sense of responsibility for framing and shaping the community (rather than an escape from it). Mira decided to stay in the cipher and challenge the rapper, unlike many of those who just left instead. This responsibility is a difficult and uncomfortable one:

I’ve tried to start certain conversations with people in Students for Hip-hop, even now, like when we cipher. I know Alisa does it from time to time, I do it, some other girls who are Alisa’s students have tried as well, but there’s only so many times before they start giving you a blind eye, they turn it off—like, ‘we don’t really give a shit’. ‘It’s fun to say or like that rhyme was dope though, my flow was amazing’. [...]. Content matters more than anything, [even if] you have mad flow.

While Mira is deeply committed to the Students for Hip-hop, she has trouble articulating her claims because of her passive participation in the cipher. She feels that she has not earned the respect of the others in the cipher because she she is not able to rap with them. What we observe with Mira is the transversal relation between her subjectivity as a campus activist working to advocate for hip-hop breaks down in the cipher because she cannot operate within the forms and rules that are expected in that space. She experiences a constant misfire in her performance of a response to the others, unable to participate in a discursively equal manner because of her differential bodily capacity.

Mira’s distance to the cipher is a consequence of an intensive anxiety and the rules of the cipher itself. Because it is a *performative* space, the key rule in the cipher, as Samuel explained earlier, is to ‘respect’ what the other has to ‘say’ even if it is offensive because it takes guts to risk oneself in the cipher. The proper challenge, then, is to ‘check’ the other by calling them out *by* rapping. Mira is not comfortable rapping and consequently is unable to

‘check’ her peers in the cipher. Because of this, her sense of responsibility is directed outward.

This is a consequence of her perception of the cipher’s inherent masculinity:

The kind of language that they use...I’ve just never felt comfortable ciphering, ever. I mean that’s partly to do with the fact that, I don’t know how to and I’m just kind of like, shy and like I don’t want to make a fool out of myself, even though I understand that that’s the space where you do that, and make a fool of yourself: that’s where you start, start off slow, nobody’s going to make fun of y–still, even then, I hold myself back. But part of it does have to do with the fact that you know, I’m not going to be using ‘bitch, slut, ho’ in every other sentence.

Mira’s experience in the cipher references the constriction that Christine experienced through her body and voice that prevented her from being a more frequent participant in the cipher. Instead of through her body, Mira experiences this constriction in the words and content expressed in the cipher. Unlike Christine, however, Mira does not take the risk that the cipher calls for and she is unable to effectively negotiate her commitment to social justice and a feminist politics *within* the cipher. The fact that she does not rap, the anxiety she has over stepping up and rapping, constricts her. Mira cannot ‘build’ or ‘destroy’ in the cipher, leaving her in a difficult position. The transversal relation between Mira’s political subjectivity is limited in its potency in the cipher.

The cipher, however, is not a space that is irretrievably gendered and misogynistic. Sonia found that by avoiding the gendered language that her male peers used, she was able to challenge others in the cipher by ‘raising the bar’ for content in her cipher. Similarly, Christine uses the space and performative methods of the cipher to challenge a newcomer to the community that was using language she found offensive. She does not report that this raised the bar, but my own observations confirm that ‘checking’ the other rapper made him more conscious that evening over what he was saying. He clearly was talented and intelligent enough *not* to use offensive content in his rap and Christine helped push him towards that. Both Sonia and Christine, because of their willingness to risk themselves in the cipher, were able to ‘build and destroy’ within it: to participate on an equal level. For Mira, this was not an option due to

the politics of respect within the cipher and her lack of capacity to freestyle to challenge the other:

I do struggle a lot with...putting these certain individuals in a position where I could like talk to them, because, if you can't cipher—it's like a respect thing. Where if you can step in to a cipher and cut them off, they'll respect you. I don't cipher so I find it much harder to engage with these people. If I don't cipher, that's like almost minus respect points to an extent. I definitely keep my distance and I do what I can but I am actually trying to learn how to beat box and that's not because I want to engage with them but because I want to learn how to beat box, but I definitely do see it as a way in the future to engage with them.

Mira's story gives us a confounding picture of ethical subjectivity within the cipher. We see that she experiences frustrations that affect her on moral registers, but because of an anxiety over losing face and lack of capacity in freestyling, she cannot fully perform in an effective way to challenge the other. We see that the moral imperatives to counter others emerge within the cipher, but she seeks other means of redress. In a sense, Mira slips back into a transversal communication that instead of bringing her closer pushes her away from the cipher. However, in her case (which is one of the more extreme cases), she does not shy away from responding to these ethical demands; instead her response is to be found *elsewhere*. This is, however, problematic: Mira is searching for a line of flight *away* from the cipher to articulate her response, shying away from the discomfort and risk that characterises the space. Her example demonstrates the indeterminacy and complexity of the affective politics within the cipher, how different backgrounds and competencies afford a body differentiated potentials for 'building and destroying'. What is interesting and consistent across Sonia, Christine, and Mira is that participating and responding to misogyny in the cipher is an ethical experiment and part of producing ethical subjectivity that gives hip-hop culture such an interesting potential. At the same time, it demands ethical response within an immediate, affective political space rather than a transversal involvement of an external political subjectivity. While Mira has the right to be offended, and the ethical imperative to respond elsewhere, it is not until she commits to a mutual exposition of risk—of investing oneself in the demanding space of the cipher—that she can fully build and destroy in her community.

On gender, ciphers, and community

From Sonia, Christine, and Mira, we see that the cipher opens up an interesting space of an affective politics. In order to speak of an affective politics in this space, we are forced to attend to the varied power-geometries within which bodies in this space are embedded. To describe this politics, I have relied on contestations about gender, but this is by no means the only form of contestation that is encountered in the cipher. An affective politics, in the cipher, is one of responding to concrete situations in and through the body. The application of transversality to explain how different kinds of feminist politics are performed and enacted in the space of the cipher helps us to understand *how* moral frames and codes are formed. Because these three women have particular convictions and criticisms of hip-hop culture, they are called to different modalities of ethical response. For Sonia, a rapper herself, this was challenging them to raise the bar and increase the standard of freestyles in the ciphers that she participated in. For Christine, the offensive raps of another was a call for her to intervene in kind and take a risk. Despite the constriction she felt by her body, her small build and high-pitched voice (as she puts it), she threw herself into this anxiety because she felt an imperative to act. Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, Mira felt consistently responsible yet unable to respond and consequently incapable of shaping the community and building and destroying within it. Understanding this failure to articulate an ethical response is quite important. For Mira, it pushes her to act in other ways—intervening and challenging someone at an event she helped to plan or organising events that sponsor and promote conscious hip-hop acts by taking an active role in organising Hip-hop in the Park.

We should remain critical of the cipher as a space that has the potential to reinstitute misogynistic, gendered relations, not least because of the struggles and conflicts that I review here. Samuel's call for the women to 'check' masculinity is itself problematic because it places the responsibility on women; shouldn't the 'boys' learn to check themselves? At the same time,

Samuel expects that this ‘checking’ happens in the cipher itself and it is on Mira to try to respond in creative ways by risking herself in the cipher. Like Mira, the group’s president Alisa was frustrated with the use of misogynistic lines in ciphers. When Alisa first started getting in to hip-hop culture, she practiced freestyling by listening to beats on headphones, rapping by herself and with friends for hours on end. After her attempts to challenge other rappers in the club that continued to spit offensive bars, Alisa decided to take on ‘the boys’ in a local rap cipher that had a cash prize for the winner. According to Mira, ‘she ciphered for her life that night’ and won the prize by freestyling. Alisa participated in the cipher that night to show to the male rappers in the group that she *could* win. Mira recollects, ‘the fact that she had to think up this way to prove to them—The fact that she felt this way *after* she had been leading the club for the last year, it’s like, what the hell?...it’s just how things are’.

Both Mira and Christine do not blame hip-hop, but rather how wider forms of patriarchy and misogyny are refracted through hip-hop and the lack of an ethical subjectivity around content in the cipher expressed by men. What we see is that the demand made by all in the cipher—to step in and rap—is what participants are expected to respond to. What frustrates Sonia, Christine, and Mira is that their demand on *content* over form is not registered until a woman or other person stands up to challenge the other. However, they all argue that this is a consequence of social values more broadly rather than locating the problem in hip-hop music and culture. Students for Hip-hop, as a group, faces a problem in that people from a variety of backgrounds and tastes in hip-hop come together in the cipher. Some of them are conscious hip-hop heads, like Steven for example, who challenge others by spitting ‘mad flows’ about a multitude of topics. Others, however, are just learning to freestyle and others are only interested in hip-hop for the fat beats and rapid-fire flows, without any care as to what a rapper says. This is, as Sonia, Christine, Mira rightly point out, a problem of form and content. A rapper excuses

himself in a freestyle by falling back on the formal quality of his rhymes or flow. What he *said* does not matter.

Christine's intervention helps us read how this challenge might be placed on rappers that use misogynistic content in a cipher. It is by throwing herself into the anxiety of risk that she challenged a rapper and responded to an ethical demand she experienced due to the affective excess of another rapper's flow. In doing so, Christine built and destroyed, working within the form of the cipher to resist an assemblage of relations that refracted the content packaged by the 'mainstream' hip-hop producers and record executives that validates and even rewards a hypersexualised and misogynistic flow. In this small intervention, Christine takes all of this on, engaging in an ephemeral, and perhaps inconsequential, ethical experiment to challenge another rapper.

I observe and lay out this affective politics of the cipher in order to think differently about how ethical and political subjectivity is produced in the antiphony of the cipher. Challenging him was about asserting her right to build and destroy at an equal level in addition to shaping what was acceptable and not acceptable in her community. It is here where the *politics* of the cipher come into play: when a body steps up, risks itself, and challenges the other in the face of offence. It is a kind of hospitality and a forgiveness, to take offence in stride, but also to be aggressive in response to it. Christine was successful because she threw herself headfirst *into* risk in order to challenge the other. Hip-hop thus has the potential to cultivate any kind of politics, but from Christine we can learn a kind of political expression that is not to cast out what offends us, but to accept that we are chained to this offence, and by throwing ourselves headfirst into it, rather than seeking a line of flight away, shaping community becomes possible.

Political experimentation in the cipher

Somewhere, *this takes place*. This 'somewhere' lacks the quality of a sudden transmission...It's a matter less of FAX-similitude than of detour and dissemblance, transposition and re-encoding: 'somewhere' is distributed throughout some very long technical circuits; 'somewhere' is technique—our discrete, potent, and disseminated contact. Like a silent flash, a momentary suspension of the circuits, the touch of a promise: we shall keep silent about the body, leaving it to its places...Because of this promise...we'd need a corpus: a catalogue instead of a logos, the enumeration of an empirical logos, without transcendental reason, a list of gleanings, in random order and completeness, an ongoing stammer of bits and pieces. (Nancy 2008, 51-53).

Sonia, Christine and Mira challenge hip-hop culture to be more than a site for the repetition of a sexist and materialist record industry. By examining the everyday performances and responses that students involved in hip-hop cultures reported to me, I contribute to this literature an argument that the cipher, as a component of hip-hop culture, has a significant influence by displacing political questions into fragmentary ethical decisions that occur at the limit, a contact point, between one body and another. Nancy, above, thinks of technique as contact, always 're-encoding' and redistributing itself. In the 'somewhere'—read as a metaphor for the site—this contact and co-appearance (mutual exposition as the condition of the cipher) opens up an iterative practice in which the relation to the other becomes an event. Each time, a body must negotiate this affective politics and 'enumerate' an 'empirical logos', a 'catalogue' of ethical decisions made to shape, adjust, and modulate community. I argue that the cipher, in its shape, its history, philosophy and practice, is a culture of a *corpus*. It is the unfinished nature of the cipher, the mystical circle of 360° that represents the constant evolution and cycle of being, that is its only *rule*. In this structure, the cipher—more than just a site where rappers train—gives us a distribution of forces that produce an experiment with a 'modal' ontology (Nancy 2008, 53).

In this sense, the politics of the cipher go well beyond the issue of gender and misogyny in hip-hop. Rather, by displacing the political with the ethical, the performance of affective politics within the cipher opens up a possibility for a transformative and modal ontology built on and that builds an 'empirical logos'. By examining three cases of interventions in the cipher by women who felt they had to step up to change the cipher itself, we see a relationship between

the passions and experience of being in the cipher and the articulation of political claims on an experimental, each-time basis.

Part three of this study began with a history of the term cipher to insist on the importance of the traces of Five Percenter mysticism in the structure of the cipher itself. A cipher, for the Five Percenters represents continuity and the constant practice of making oneself and one's community through building and destroying in a contramodern site. The cipher *calls* us to build and destroy. Sonia and Christine did in such a way to elevate their ciphers and adjust the vibe and mood. We should read this as a site in which two women were able to criticise—destroy—the valuation of misogyny for the sake of a 'mad flow' or musical talent. By insisting that 'content matters more than form', the two are engaging in a political contestation. They acknowledge that the cipher is what people bring to it and it is a collective project to build and destroy over time in order to shape the cipher in the community's image. This flexibility comes from the fact that each cipher is an attempt at building, each time, *there*. It is through the cipher that participants were able to experiment with an affective politics that modulated their ethical and political subjectivities. The cipher, as a demanding space that calls us into a unique participation, even as an onlooker like Mira or myself, or a rapper like Sonia, or a writer like Christine, is one that operates on our bodies, disposes us to participation, and opens up how ethical practice can be imbricated in a politics of being-with.

Part 4:

Hip-hop and the politics of ambivalent sound

7. Antiphonal atmospheres

I began my field research in February 2014 in Northern California, hoping to meet hip-hop fans, artists, and listeners in the Bay Area's diverse music scene. I decided to explore the hip-hop scenes at my alma mater, the University of California at Berkeley. Many of my friends at university talked and cared about hip-hop. Some just liked what was played on the radio, some were fans of political rappers like Lupe Fiasco, and others listened to Dr. Dre and gangsta rap on repeat.

I came across S4HH through a friend who was involved with the group. Until that point, I had been piloting my study on individuals, rather than members of a group dedicated to advocating for hip-hop. At the time, I was experimenting with how to form questions for further, more rigorous study. Before I had a chance to meet members of S4HH, I came across a flyer for an event that I could not afford to miss. Titled the 'Night of Cultural Resistance', it was an open festival for an afternoon and evening featuring the famous Seattle rappers, Blue Scholars and the legendary Talib Kweli. Kweli could in many ways be the archetypical 'conscious' rapper whose lyrics are explicitly about uplift, marginalisation, and the importance of knowledge as a mode of resistance. Blue Scholars, a relatively new duo, feature dense lyrics that describe Seattle, take on the difficulties of multiculturalism and marginalisation, and layer this over intricate and danceable beats and melodies. NoCR (pronounced like 'knocker'), the term the attendees and event staff used to refer to the 'Night of Cultural Resistance', was an

event planned to be family-friendly, featuring arts, crafts, and community in addition to music. It was organised by the campus's multicultural centre with support from the Center for Race and Gender (where I was based as a visiting student researcher, though I was not involved in the planning). I planned to attend with a few of my friends from university who were in their final year.

On a sunny California day, I arrived at my friend's house in the early afternoon. Samy and a few of his friends were sitting outside in a circle on the balcony, preparing for the show later that evening in the typical form of Berkeley undergraduates: sitting in the sun, drinking beer, and passing a joint on a balcony. Inside, Samy's stereo system, propped up on cabinets above the kitchen, filled the living room and balcony with the rhythmic throb of trance and electronic dance music. Though a hip-hop fan, Samy favoured electronic music especially when hosting social gatherings. I caught up with Samy, chatting with him a bit about the show. I spoke with a few of the others on the balcony, having spent time talking to them about conscious hip-hop artists a week or two prior. What struck me is that for them, NoCR was not about politics or even cultural resistance despite the title; it was a chance to see some of their favourite rappers for free. That is not to say that they do not work towards principles in common, but rather that NoCR was about Blue Scholars and Talib Kweli for them.

On that balcony, what struck me was the profound ambivalence that characterised hip-hop listening. Broadly, all of those on the balcony were liberal, open-minded, and well aware of international affairs and history. Samy's immediate circle of friends were all involved in a foreign affairs society on campus and we had many heated debates on that balcony over our years at Berkeley. On that balcony, there was no discussion of 'cultural resistance' and there was nothing exceptional about the day. The tension that started to interest me here was the possibility of listening to Blue Scholars and Talib Kweli without the curiosity or commitment to any of the principles that were behind NoCR. The day was about leisure and entertainment.

I kept thinking about this problem while I was there: how do we understand the ways in which hip-hop becomes appreciated and enjoyed in the same way that almost all other music is consumed? Did it even make sense to think about ethical listening in this situation?

Sitting on the balcony, the smell of grilling burgers mingling with tobacco and reefer was cut by a constant four-on-the-floor beat floating out from the apartment, it struck me that it is *how* an atmosphere is arranged and how it produces a listener that creates political potential in hip-hop musical publics. There wasn't an antiphonal moment on the balcony. It was that moment in which I realised the real question I might be trying to answer is how the subjectivity of the listener becomes antiphonal, at what point they recognise the antiphonal demand and learn to engage in its relations.

The group planned on staying on the balcony until Blue Scholars were billed to come on. One of the others on the balcony and I decided to leave for Memorial Glade, a large field in front of the library where students usually play Frisbee and local residents walk their dogs. For NoCR, the Glade was set up as it would be for graduation days and other public events. The entrance to the library was closed off, serving as a stage, flanked on either side by massive amplifiers and speakers. On the field, a few covered stalls representing local businesses were set up, selling burgers, hot dogs, and sweets.



Memorial Glade at the start of NOCR, photo by author.

I arrived quite early, just as the stalls had been set up. The friend with whom I had walked over to the Glade linked up with a colleague from his business club and left to go throw a football. His colleague's friend, a young woman, was impatiently watching the stage set up, anxious for Blue Scholars to come on (she had a few hours to wait). As I was setting up my camera and audio recording equipment, a Native American came on stage to share a traditional song with the small crowd that had formed. As the man began singing, the woman next to me continued to look bored. She groaned and lamented the performance: 'I just want Blue Scholars, why am I listening to this?' I told her I was quite interested in all the different events that they had set up for NoCR and she advised me to check out the tents that were set up for 'raffles' and 'face painting'. She told me this just as the man had finished his song saying that he wanted to thank everyone coming out to NoCR to celebrate 'diversity on this campus and in the state'.

Obviously a Native American song is not a typical performance at a hip-hop concert and perhaps we might expect other hip-hop fans to display the same impatience. But she asked, ‘*why am I listening to this?*’. This is a sad truth of hip-hop musical publics; even at the ‘Night of Cultural Resistance’ audiences may still refuse to be the kind of ‘radical’ listener that NoCR attempts to promote. The point is not to berate this person for not being into a Native American song at the same time that she is into a rap group, but to point out the ambivalence at play in this musical public. As I explored in Chapters 1 and 4, we need to remember that these kinds of interactions depend on approval and a passivity that allows alterity to take hold. Her *disapproval* shut down the possibility that the man’s sharing tried to open up. Her comment reveals a dissonance that I noticed less radically on Samy’s balcony: many of those attending the event were not necessarily committed to ‘cultural resistance’ despite the ethos of NoCR. For many attendees the festival was just about hearing popular artists for free. Her comment speaks to the ambivalence that presents an ethical and political problem for hip-hop culture that I attempt to map in this chapter. At the same time, the diversity and indeterminacy of listeners—like the woman I met—who are not interested in the politics of hip-hop, but are attracted to its *formal* properties (rhythm, melodies, danceability, and vocals) suggest we may need to be pessimistic about the political potentialities of hip-hop consumption.

With my observations about this ambivalence present in the back of my mind, I roamed the Glade as preparations were underway, taking notes and photos. A small crowd had gathered in the front of the stage (see picture above). I knew that Alisa was one of the MCs for the event that year. She was well-known on campus for her involvement in teaching a student-run class on Tupac Shakur and her participation in S4HH. I expected that Alisa would have a way of working with the audience to engage them on a level that went deeper than just being there for Blue Scholars and Talib Kweli. As the crowd was forming in anticipation of the opening acts for Blue Scholars, Alisa came on to address the crowd to stall for time as the acts got ready.

Alisa came on and briefly introduced herself and NoCR to the crowd. There were three or four rows of about thirty listeners sitting on the grass directly in front of the stage all the way back to a sound tent that was set up about forty feet from the front of the stage. Behind it, visitors to the festival were milling about, meeting their friends and walking across the busy field. To the right of the stage was another group sprawled out on blankets enjoying the last hour of light before sunset.



Alisa came onto the stage and addressed the crowd. She said, ‘well since I’m here, I am about to do my vagina monologue then, it’s an a capella’—[a few people in the crowd shout something indiscernible from the audio recording, and Alisa decided to ask them instead]—‘okay so what do people want to hear? This is a democracy...do you want to hear the vagina monologue or do you want to hear a song?’ The crowd takes it as a noise competition. After she asked if they wanted to hear a song, the crowd shouted ‘Song!’.

A second afterward, the crowd shouted ‘Vagina!’ The latter was certainly more quiet; editing the footage I saw that the audio peaked at a considerably lower level for ‘Vagina’ than it did for ‘Song’. Alisa, after hearing this, said: ‘Vaginas it is. Vaginas is what it is. Alright, this is for all the vagina warriors’ and began her piece.

Frame capture from video, by author.

As best as I could tell, ‘Song!’ certainly won the vote by acclamation that Alisa proposed. Perhaps it sounded differently on stage as I was at the back of the Glade using a telephoto lens and directional microphone to observe the atmosphere of the event from a vantage, but the difference in the sound was certainly lower for the latter. Alisa used antiphony in a deliberate way in this situation to engage the audience but also to *force* them to hear her Vagina Monologue rather than another song of hers. Her use of antiphony and call and response to the audience as she got on stage was of a trickster order, offering an illusion that she would do a song, despite it being impossible given that no DJ had set up to give her something to rhyme over. More importantly, Alisa used her position as the MC to counter the ambivalent listening that I observed. Her decision to go with the ‘vaginas’ anyway played with the audience and in a sense, held them hostage to her performance. Her intervention was welcome in an atmosphere that was *intended* to support an ethos of ‘cultural resistance’ despite being met with an audience that wanted to hear a song. As she performed the monologue, someone in Sather Tower, just southwest of the Glade began to play the 6:00 pm song on the carillon. Alisa was competing with the sound of the bells, which would be heard for the last time in the day. At times the bells drowned out the clarity of her monologue, which was delivered to an implicit rhythm with a hip-hop-inflected flow.

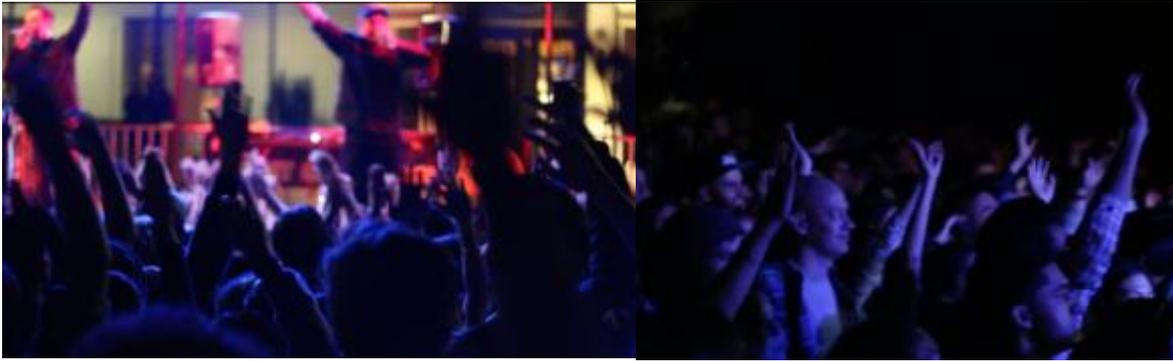
In her monologue, Alisa shares with us her search for a ‘proper name’ and how her skin, not knowing her family, and body prevented her from identifying as ‘white or black’:

*What can I say, I am as light as they come,
But that was meant to be because my skin don't even tan in the sun.
I was told I hold curves in all the right places
But my skin don't match my shape so people ask me what my race is.*

She presents us with an image of her ‘Fourth Stage’ and the realm of her own transition that was expressed through her journey of ‘stepping in to a woman’s shoes’ from ‘flip-flops, to high heels, to combat boots’. This story did not capture the entire audience, who were mostly quietly listening. When she finished, affirming ‘Night of Cultural Resistance’, applause marked the

end of the performance. Antiphony is not an easy relation to be a part of and it often involves suspending oneself to hear the drama of ‘transition’. In using antiphony, Alisa injected her version of ‘cultural resistance’ into the evening’s performances. At my distance, about seventy yards away from the stage, I could not perfectly tell how the audience responded to Alisa but what is clear—and what really matters in this intervention—is that Alisa used antiphonal techniques to turn the audience on to a meaning of ‘cultural resistance’. We might read this as Alisa opening up a disjunctive temporality. She used her position and her power by holding the microphone and being the MC to invite the audience to think about her own sense of identity, and in doing so, possibly questioning their own.

This disjunctive moment opened up by antiphony is productive in musical publics. Later in the evening, when Blue Scholars came on, I filmed audiences as they were dancing and vibing with their electronic-heavy production and politically-inflected raps that play on the multicultural life of Seattle, Washington. Blue Scholars played their track ‘Marion Sunshine’. In the track, MC Geologic and DJ Sabzi play a call and response off each other, with DJ Sabzi repeating the last words of each line. They say, ‘Put your hands up to the sky, everybody wave say, “Hi”’ and all the arms around me started waving to the beat. It was one of the first moments in the evening where the audience seemed to move as one as the sound waves began to coordinate a unified movement. I panned my camera from right to left, holding it up like a periscope trying to capture the audience’s movement. To the left, behind me a few rows, there was a man who was, for a moment, the only one of us close to the stage that didn’t seem to raise his hand. He looked lost as MC Geologic affirmed ‘melanin is good, y’all [DJ Sabzi responds: ‘Yup, in the sun...’]’ to the throng of waving hands. It was an interesting convivial moment as we all moved to that line. As Geologic and Sabzi kept repeating the ‘The sun, the sun’ with the beat, the audience joined. It was an odd moment, this man surrounded with people with their hands up but him resolutely stoic alongside.



Frame capture from video, by author.

I can only speculate as to why we wasn't participating like those around him after the artists said 'everybody put 'em up'. It is hard to tell if those behind him had their hands up as they are underexposed in the shot. But in front of him are a sea of hands up; why was he so different?

He looks as if he is lost; perhaps this was his first hip-hop show or he felt uncomfortable waving along. It's possible his arms were too long to put up and he was squashed between the others around him. Maybe he was too busy looking at the boys and girls in front of him. It is also possible he did not feel like he could wave along to the celebration of melanin. This shows the indeterminacy of antiphony in contemporary, diverse musical publics. This time for him however could have been a productive one as well, experiencing the demand of the artists' antiphony but not quite sure how to respond. To speak of the audience moving in unison only represents a fragment of the bodies at play in these atmospheres. Antiphony itself presents a specific affective circuit that excludes and includes bodies in different ways. The indeterminacy that he evinces reminds us that antiphony is a *skill* and a demand that needs to be approved of. It also involves the risk of even minor and meaningless expression. What is of value is that we can read and interpret his face (speculatively) and consider the means by which NoCR—and events like it—works differentially on the audience. The failure of that ideal moment of antiphonal unity is where we also face the hesitation or diffidence that this man (in my reading) expresses. Even if it does not look like it, for him this moment and his distance

from those around him might still involve an antiphonal relation in which his own racial or ethnic identity was unsettled by the sound image ‘melanin’ and the refrain, ‘the sun’. It might be that the use of antiphony, even when it seems to fail, is to open up the potential for various forms of proximity and distance to begin rewriting the body. Perhaps, then, it is the task of those who produce these atmospheres to introduce and orient diverse musical publics to the ethical and political registers of antiphonal circuits to engage ambivalent audiences.

Antiphonal techniques and ethical and political atmospheres

At both NoCR and Hip-hop in the Park, artists performed in ways that accentuated the politics of their performances, using antiphony and narrative in order to provide context for the performance. This made listening something political at the same time that it was a form of entertainment. At NoCR, this was achieved through a conscious decision to foreground the performances of non-white artists to reconfigure the way the campus community interacted with music and culture. This was articulated by the NoCR organisers on their website, which intended to produce a more demanding multicultural atmosphere:

Multicultural events on this campus are often notorious for being reduced to food, music and dance, without an attempt to create a cross-cultural understanding of a shared hxstory of struggle that informs multi-cultural movements for liberation and equal rights. NoCR was created with the hope of uniting peoples of all races, cultures, nation, religions, abilities and sexual orientations through a multicultural perspective and understanding. Artists, musicians, writers, activists, students and community members come together to celebrate the many hxstories, stories, traditions, and cultural and artistic expressions that together create a multicultural vision of struggle and liberation. Every year NoCR features live performances, art making, food, and various other activities to celebrate our resilience and honor the ways in which communities of color continue to resist and flourish within the university (UC Berkeley, Division of Equity & Inclusion 2016).

Many of the attendees and artists at NoCR were activists working towards their own visions of liberation, solidarity and unity in their own ways, and NoCR offered an opportunity for these activists to come together and enjoy music, art, and community together.

A Latino poet, brought on stage by Alisa and her co-host while they were stalling for Blue Scholars and Talib Kweli to get ready for their sets, used antiphony, humour, and spoken word to engage the audience in a form of ‘cultural resistance’. His words and language, slipping

rapidly between English and Spanish opened up a unique register that challenged the possibility that a listener could be simply ambivalent. He was political without being explicitly so. He did not introduce himself when he got on stage, instead he started with call-and-response:



As he got on stage, he confidently asked, 'Where the queer people at?'. The audience cheered, arms in the air. 'I'm like, hella people should be cheering, because everybody's a little queer.' He laughs as people cheered even louder. 'Where the immigrants at?' The audience cheers again, this time with more hands in the air. 'Everybody should be cheering because everybody's a little immigrant sometimes.'

Frame capture from video, by author.

The poet's use of call-and-response worked to activate an ethos in the audience that made them more receptive to his following poem. The laughter and cheering of the audience is a response to a disposition that his humour put us (as audience members) under. By using questions such as 'where the queer people at' and 'where the immigrants at', the poet used standard opening techniques for a poetry performance. However, he does it in line with the ethos of the event, using language to coordinate and mobilise a particular atmosphere. He calls the audience into a kind of participation through calling for responses that affirm and celebrate alterity, encouraging the audience to participate in *being* queer and immigrant. This speaks back to the

type of space that NoCR attempts to create, one in which an audience is disposed to active participation in a site where the multicultural is not on *display*; rather, it is a step in developing a space where alterity grasps and disposes its audience to its own difference and calls them into an active participation. This ‘disposing’ is accomplished by the poet’s use of language (content, not form) that opens up an affective relation.

He began his poem. A few lines in, the microphone gave out, and he stopped as the audience roared. The microphone came on and he said in Spanish that he would try again. An audience member yelled something inaudible and he responded, ‘Them budget cuts girl!...always trying to keep an immigrant down’. He did this within a register that referenced a politics against austerity and anti-immigrant sentiment, weaving a technological failure into a comical narrative that kept the problem of ‘cultural resistance’ at the forefront of the performance.

He started again once the microphone was functioning properly. Starting in English, his verses ended in Spanish, slipping between the two as if they were one language. The speed of his delivery made it difficult to comprehend either (my rusty Spanish notwithstanding), calling us further into the sound of his verses. This challenge placed the onus on the audience to decipher his meaning. In his poem, he refers to himself as the ‘one you fear’, the ‘one you define with hate’, ‘the one that doesn’t fit your labels but manages to reclaim his name’...‘yo soy el poder de la conciencia [I am the power of conscience]’. In addressing the listener as the person that interpellates *him* with ‘hate’, the poet is making a move to call the audience to question themselves. In ending the poem in Spanish, claiming to be the power of consciousness, he references the politics of hip-hop that I describe in the rest of this chapter, a politics that is a politics of *response* to alterity and a politics of engaging with and cultivating a certain conscience.

The example of this poet explores how content, above and beyond form, matters in the politics of hip-hop culture. Importantly, we see that his use of poetic language and his specific kind of performativity activates an affective relation to political content. NoCR includes and goes beyond hip-hop culture. Hip-hop as a cultural movement that encourages, depicts, and represents the struggle of communities of colour is inherently related to a question of cultural resistance. However, it is open to a risk, that even when content is conscious, its listeners are indeterminate. Consequently, I read the political in hip-hop through a problematic of ambivalence. I find that through the cultivation of the power of consciousness through listening and sharing in S4HH, this ambivalence is overcome, opening out onto an ethical horizon. However, this ambivalence is challenged in a highly specific milieu. In this essay, I explore the process of how hip-hop is shared and how the political emerges within these relations.

At Hip-hop in the Park a few months later, S4HH members used similar techniques to open up an ethical and political register for audiences. Sharing hip-hop with the campus community as well as the city of Berkeley motivated members of S4HH. Despite the varied individual listening preferences, the mission of sharing hip-hop with the Bay Area was a shared responsibility. This is related to the fact that S4HH must operate in an academic context, one where hip-hop should be used to highlight the genre's potential to activate social and political change. Steven, an officer in S4HH, explains the kind of hip-hop that he thinks is important to share:

Just because you don't have conscious content doesn't mean that you are not hip-hop...I really think that the Guccis of the World or the OJ the Juice Man, the Lil Waynes, all the hyphy artists out here, the Mac Dres...etc. are hip-hop, they embody what hip-hop is. [...] I can't stand Kanye but I think he is a hip-hop artist at the end of the day. Because we are in an academic setting we do want to promote things of academic value and there's not really anything of academic value that we can promote through blasting Gucci Mane all the time. His music is simple, everything is simple. We can't really talk about that, especially at [a] university like Berkeley (Steven, Interview 2014).

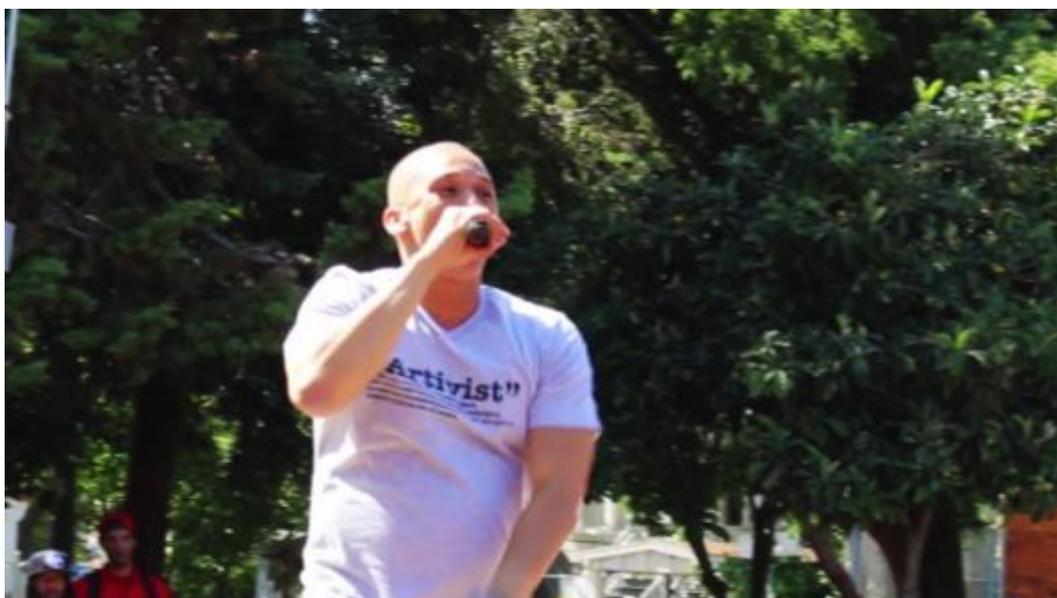
In sharing with the campus community, Steven believes that hip-hop should open up questions by foregrounding music that has a political impact as he feels a responsibility to 'promote [hip-hop] of academic value'. By opening up a conversation, conscious hip-hop can emphasise that

hip-hop is a musical genre with academic (as well as social and political) value. It also speaks back to S4HH's audience as a student group in the context of an elite university; knowing that his audience is well-informed, generally liberal or left-leaning, and high achieving, it makes sense that he believes S4HH should push a certain narrative about hip-hop. This kind of sharing is a political move to present hip-hop in a way that challenges the stereotypes and prejudice that people hold toward hip-hop culture and music:

We just feel like there is sort of a necessity there to promote progressivism in hip-hop and that's kind of our duty. Because so much of the community in the United States looks down towards hip-hop, we feel that as a club it is our job to see that hip-hop can empower people and hip-hop can promote issues as well that are problems in our society (Steven, Interview 2014).

By using the words 'feel like there is a sort of necessity' and 'duty', Steven is speaking about planning HHIP (Hip-hop in the Park) and sharing with the campus community on an ethical register. Because hip-hop is perceived negatively, promoting hip-hop culture in a positive way can challenge perceptions about hip-hop music, empower people, and start conversations about 'issues' that 'are problems in our society'.

The selection of artists for HHIP demonstrates the political valence that S4HH wanted for the festival to open up those political registers of empowerment and changing perceptions. The headline act, Souls of Mischief, is a group of rappers from the East Bay. Steven was particularly excited to invite them not only because Souls of Mischief is made up of four members of the Hieroglyphics crew from Oakland, Steven's favourite rap group. They also because they put on 'Hiero-day', a free hip-hop concert that features local rappers from Oakland. In addition to Souls of Mischief, three other artists were billed for the annual festival. Of particular interest is Oakland-based musician Kev Choice. Kev Choice is an interesting artist to promote for the event because his mission in his music and the hip-hop that he makes is similar to the approach that S4HH takes:



Today's state of black music, particularly mainstream rap, is a concern for many, including [Kev Choice], who imparts, 'the subject matter is often very offensive, and centered around money, sex, drugs, and other subjects that aren't positive... I definitely feel we need more of a balance again.' [...] His artistic vision, he says, is to be 'an artist that combined Hip-Hop with a type of musicality that has never been done' and to 'make conscious Hip-Hop music that is also accepted on a mainstream level' (Kev Choice 2016).

Frame capture from video, by author.

HHIP wove together many diverse musical talents from the Bay Area. MADlines, a conscious hip-hop MC that works with at-risk youth, was the first act during the festival. Her songs speak directly to a tradition of conscious hip-hop that S4HH, and Alisa and Steven in particular wanted to promote. An Oakland local as well, MADlines discusses one of her songs, 'The Weapon' on a radio programme:

[The song] is about using creativity as a weapon against trauma, against the violence that we experience in our communities, whether it be police brutality or sexual harassment. It's really just about using those tools of understanding knowledge of self, understanding our culture. [...] This music, it was a weapon, so why are we not using it? A lot of [mainstream] music being pushed is promoting poor life choices which has a direct effect on who is being incarcerated. Young people are listening—a lot of artists say I'm making music to entertain...I'm not responsible for what happens. That's really—c'mon, that's a cop-out (MADlines in Davey D 2014, transcription from audio interview by author).

Whether or not we agree with the project for hip-hop and given by MADlines above, we see that the selection of artists (MADlines, Boostive, Kev Choice and Souls of Mischief) fit a particular ethos that S4HH worked to cultivate. This was one that spoke directly to hip-hop as a way of bringing up social issues by selecting artists such as MADlines and Kev Choice that promote themselves as 'artists' using hip-hop culture and music to uplift struggling

communities. Finally, Souls of Mischief, being a major name in the Oakland and international hip-hop scene, brought a massive audience by the end of the day.

For Alisa, HHIP was more than just a concert, but an event to showcase all of the elements of hip-hop culture as well as a festival that would be attractive to a wide range of community members. S4HH made arrangements for sound and amplification, a dance cipher, food vendors, an arts tent for children, and wooden boards for graffiti artists. In a meeting about two weeks before the festival, S4HH organised logistics for the festival. In addition to the entertainment on the stage, a few members of S4HH who had friends involved in graffiti and street art helped with organising graffiti boards for artists to paint during the day. A trio of graffiti artists, the Illuminaries, worked on the boards on the day. In order to get the boards ready, S4HH primed the boards with white primer and carried them about half a mile to People's Park. Each member of the Illuminaries took a board and painted a unique piece for HHIP.



Illuminaries artwork at HHIP, photo by author.

The Illuminaries had previously done a project on the same block as People's Park on the wall of a bookshop on Telegraph Avenue. The Illuminaries painted the mural on the bookshop after getting funding from a local non-profit company working to improve Telegraph Avenue (Mabanta and Werts 2013). Themselves Berkeley natives, their mural on a Telegraph bookstore

was intended to ‘offer an uplifting message and inspire reading and imagination’ (Burke 2013). They came out to HHIP to continue working to make their art part of the community itself.

In addition to graffiti, an important element of hip-hop culture, HHIP also featured hip-hop dance. Near the north end of the park by a pair of basketball courts S4HH had set up a dance cipher, where students and local hip-hop dancers performed. At times it was busier than the stage. The dance cipher works as a cipher of rappers, though they dance in the centre when it is their turn rather than rap.¹⁶ The dance cipher provided a space for an associated student group of breakers (who practice breakdancing, a form of hip-hop dance) to perform and share hip-hop dance with audiences as well. The dance cipher drew a diverse crowd and offered a free, open space to learn about other aspects of hip-hop culture beyond rap, DJing and music.



Dance cipher at HHIP, photo by Avichal Agarwal.

¹⁶ Given my study’s focus on freestyling in S4HH rather than dance, I am not able to go into detail on the ethos of the cipher when it is constituted by dancers rather than rappers. Schloss’s (2009) study is a comprehensive study of hip-hop dance and uses similar methods to understand dance ciphers.

S4HH used the multiple aspects of hip-hop culture in order to share an image of hip-hop as a diverse arts scene. HHIP was much more than a concert, like NoCR, but taking it even further, HHIP assembled various, diverse forms of hip-hop in the form of a festival rather than a concert. Sharing hip-hop was not just about sharing music, but sharing an ethos and an atmosphere. The assemblage of HHIP was one that incorporated musical and artistic culture into a larger project of an affective politics. This ethos was broadly ‘conscious’ not in that it supported only ‘conscious’ hip-hop content, but because the space, the artists and the activities there were intended to increase awareness and understanding of hip-hop culture. It is the invitation to communicate that puts an ethos, a consciousness, and consequently, a politics at play. This collective project was intended to share hip-hop as a mature, family-friendly, and positive culture.

People’s Park is a favourite loitering spot for the drifters and panhandlers hanging about on Telegraph Avenue. It is quintessentially Berkeley: you can always find a man on a bench muttering to himself incoherently about foreign policy or a circle of trust-fund-hippies staring at trees while tripping on shrooms. This quote from a student columnist calling for the University to take a more active role in developing the park captures it well:

Rather than cutting across the hypotenuse of the park, most students will opt to walk around the park, even on the other side of the street, to avoid going through. Because I live on the other side of People’s Park, I regularly cut through because it’s much faster. However, when I tell friends of my shortcut, many gasp, asking why I would walk through People’s Park when I don’t need to. [...] This attitude toward People’s Park and the reputation it bears among students is not unique to my circle of friends (Yu 2013).

During Hip-hop in the Park, People’s Park felt more open than I normally knew it. People’s Park is an open grass area flanked on the east and west by trees, shrubs and a few pathways. Towards the west end of the park was a small stage that the HHIP artists used for their performances. To the north are a number of basketball courts and a restroom. The University is just a few blocks north, and the Park ends, butting against the backs of the busy shops on Telegraph Avenue to the west. The dance cipher brought a large crowd outside one of the basketball courts near the sidewalk on Haste Street at the northern end of the park. They had

also set up space on Dwight Street to the south, where graffiti artists were working. The S4HH crew, wearing bright orange shirts, were on the right of the stage, coordinating and helping with setup and talking to the artists.

In the early afternoon once the stage was prepared and the audience was lounging on blankets and chairs that they had brought to the park, MADLines, Alisa, and a few other MCs took the stage and started a cipher:



Frame capture from video, by author.

MADLines took the stage and introduced her shirt, which read ‘Too Many Bitches, Not Enuf Queens’. She continues: ‘That’s my motto...right now we got some Queens on the stage’. Behind her, a rapper that participated frequently in the S4HH ciphers, Shekhar, is grooving, getting ready to spit in the cipher. MADLines turns and takes a few steps back to the left of the stage, turning to face the MCs in what was implicitly a cipher of female MCs with the Queens on the stage. After MADLines had turned to face the Queens and introduced them, Shekhar

furtively sauntered to the right of the stage where Samuel and Nathan, two other male rappers, were waiting as well. His face gave away his emotion in that moment, in an embarrassed smile, he conveyed that he realised that it was his responsibility to step aside. His face made me laugh as I was filming him realise that he was encroaching on the Queens cipher. His face also disclosed a political performative, a response; the cipher had stakes beyond just entertaining the crowd, it was itself a performance that attempted to subvert male hegemony in hip-hop. In his chagrin and his tiptoe aside, we see Shekhar act in an antiphonal relation that maintained an atmosphere that deliberately tried to reconfigure gender relations in hip-hop.

Shekhar demonstrates how contingent these political atmospheres actually are and how his comportment affects the sense of the event itself. We also see how the material affordances of male and female in this space are rearranged and how in Shekhar's constriction he experiences a moment to act ethically and politically while still finding a place to participate in the cipher. For Shekhar, he also experiences a loss of his proper name: no longer just rapper, he becomes the male rapper who had the microphone handed to him *after* the women had finished their performances. This rewrites the cipher from what is often a battle rap or competitive space to one for a different purpose: to expose the crowd to the potentiality of the modulation of hip-hop's power-geometries.

Antiphonal atmospheres at HHIP

At NoCR and HHIP, organisers tried to reconfigure the spaces and times in which audiences mediate hip-hop culture. When we speak about a musical public, we speak about an 'aggregation of the affected' (see Born 2013, 44). This assemblage of bodies is particularly ambivalent particularly when it comes to hip-hop music and culture. S4HH's involvement in NoCR and organising HHIP allowed them to arrange materials, sounds, narratives, and sense to produce a unique hip-hop atmosphere and vibe that opens a potential for genuinely

‘multicultural’ sensibilities. We encounter this potential in the antiphony of ‘Melanin is good y’all... (in the sun, the sun, the sun)’ and the call and response of a poet that invites the audience to be a ‘little queer’. S4HH tried to produce subjectivities that move from ambivalence to active listening and critical sensibility. This is extremely difficult to measure in a music festival space given that it was too loud and far too crowded to ask members of the audience questions that might illuminate their experiences in these atmospheres. What my reading of NoCR and HHIP attempts to do is highlight some of the stakes and sites of sharing hip-hop with the campus and urban community. In the following chapters, I dig deeper into the experiences of becoming *within* the S4HH musical public in order to illustrate how antiphonal relations might empirically affect the ambivalence that many musical publics present. Given the ambivalence of contemporary musical publics, perhaps the point of the festival is to turn listeners on to another side of hip-hop through antiphonal techniques that remind us of an ethical and political register present in the music and culture. Rather than produce subjectivity, perhaps the festival is an encounter that puts the uninitiated in a kind of unease and discomfort that opens up a desire to respond.

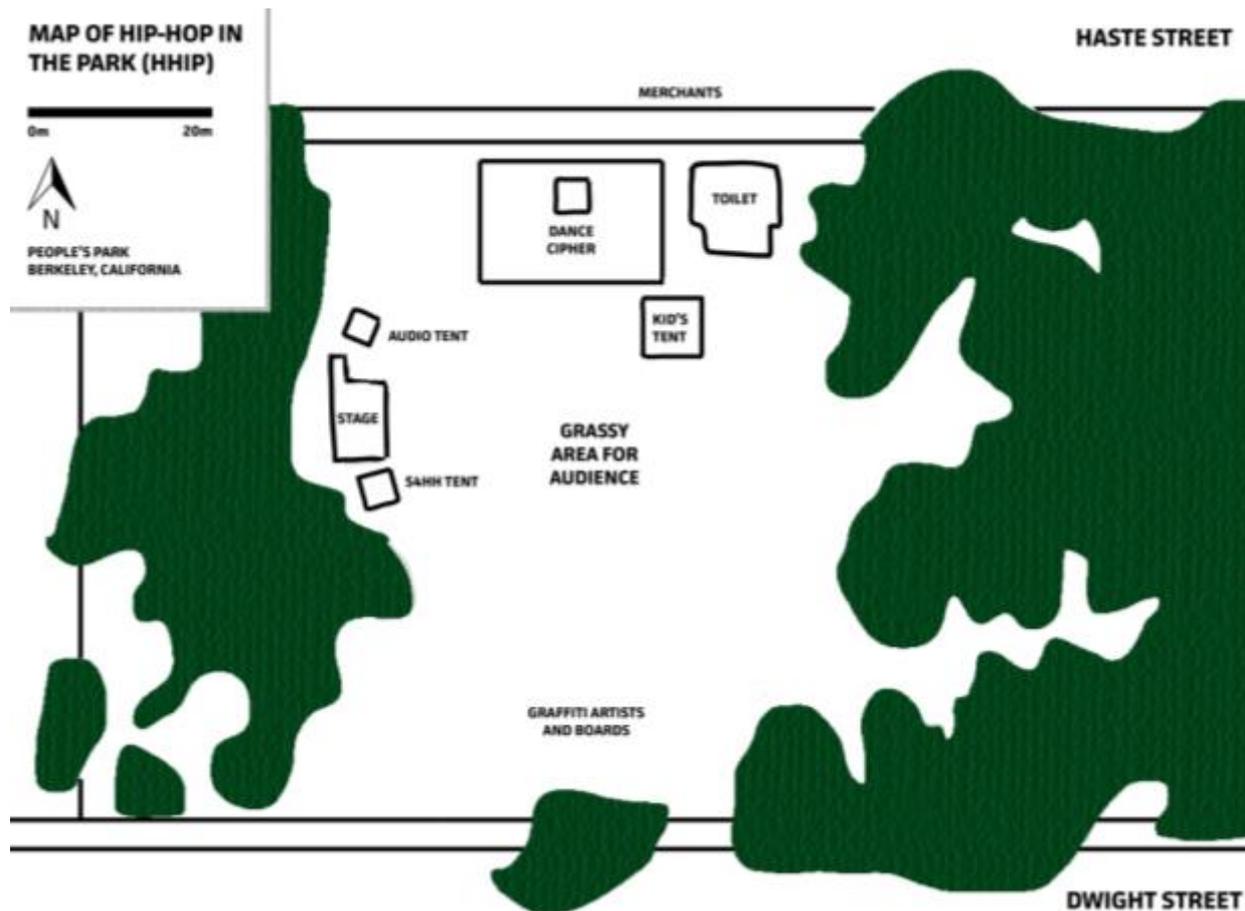
HHIP was designed to open up this unease and encourage people to learn more about hip-hop and to take seriously its potential in opening up new forms of multicultural life. The atmosphere of HHIP was significantly different than NoCR. NoCR was sponsored by the University and held on the campus. This allowed for a significant amount of flexibility in terms of the event going on later in the evening, allowing more people to join and being much louder. HHIP was limited by its location in People’s Park, which (while it is still University property) has a noise curfew at 8pm and is subject to amplified sound controls imposed by the City of Berkeley municipal government. This impeded the affective circulation afforded at NoCR. As Souls of Mischief came on, the headline act, Tajai (one of the members of Souls of Mischief) shouted, ‘we gotta snap this a little bit louder, man’ as he thumped on the speakers on stage

next to him. The previous artists were also limited by the amplified sound limits imposed by the city, preventing the same kind of participation from the audience as I encountered at NoCR. Where the sound at NoCR allowed the artists to move the audience easily, HHIP faced limits that prevented that kind of movement. In a way, it fit with the atmosphere of the day; with the quieter stage, the audience moved between the graffiti on the south end of the park to the dance cipher on the north end. Most of the acts were enjoyed with the audience sitting down on the grass watching and listening to the acts, bobbing and swaying with the rhythms.

In between acts, Alisa brought members of the audience on stage to do *a capella* raps. This changed the atmosphere between musical acts to a more poetry-oriented one where members of the audience freestyled alongside S4HH members. This would not have been possible at an event like NoCR where the stage was closed off to the public by barricades and security guards. HHIP did have some security but given the design of People's Park, the audience was able to get very close to the artists and they also spent the day on the grass in front of the stage mingling with their friends and audience members. This dissolved the stricter hierarchies present between artist and audience typical at gigs. Despite the fact that there were no bouncers nearby, nobody tried to jump on the stage during the performances. The stage itself was only elevated by about a metre, making the performance much more intimate. In improvising around sound limits and showcasing all the 'elements' of hip-hop culture, S4HH created a decentred site of hip-hop culture in which the audience was able to move through the different sections of the park and experience all the elements intimately.

By bringing members of the audience on stage and encouraging them to perform and organising a dance cipher in which anyone could jump in, S4HH produced a site that was antiphonal in structure insofar as it reconfigured the hierarchy between performer and audience. This flattening of the site made HHIP a cipher on its own, an assemblage contingent both on the audience's energy and the contributions of the artists, with those positionalities

shifting through the day. This is the interesting intervention of HHIP: by arranging the park such that audiences would be moving through different stations (such as the stage, the dance ciphers, and the graffiti boards), S4HH created an antiphonal environment and atmosphere to share hip-hop that allowed for audiences to become part of the performance.



In the map above, we see how the different elements were arranged in People's Park. To the north, the dance cipher attracted a large crowd throughout the day. Dancers from the Bay Area and the university performed in the cipher. S4HH had procured linoleum and taped it down to the basketball court. Behind, a DJ played old school hip-hop for the dancers while the crowd around watched the cipher. There was a dense congregation around the dance cipher almost all day until Souls of Mischief took the stage for the last event. The rap ciphers on stage and the dance cipher were organised by S4HH to encourage a non-competitive structure. There were no prizes for the best dancers or best rappers; rather, the ciphers were used to involve the

audience and engage people coming to the festival to engage in artistic production during the day.

The flow of people through the park also demonstrates how the musical public experienced the event as an interactive event. Haste Street to the North was blocked to traffic, ensuring the safety of the dance cipher and providing some space for vendors to sell arts and crafts. S4HH had also organised a local food truck to cater to the event. I also found many S4HH and HHIP visitors one block to the west on Telegraph Avenue throughout the day shopping and buying food. The openness of the park allowed for it to be an encounter for those people and students that might not usually go into the park or enjoy a hip-hop festival to go in for a few minutes. This fits with the goal that Steven, one of the S4HH officers, had, which was to incorporate more people into these events through sharing with the campus community in order to change the perception that some people have about hip-hop music and culture.

Between the stage and the dance cipher, the audience was sprawled out on the green in the centre of the park. The low volume imposed by the amplified sound limits had the audience frolicking on blankets, snacking and mingling. On the north of the green was a tent in which S4HH members guided young children with arts and crafts projects and to the south, audiences watched the graffiti boards get painted through the day. The artists had all started with white boards to paint on and by the end of the day had completed their works. This allowed the audience to watch the graffiti process from start to finish through the day and the artists were happy to speak to the audience members nearby.

HHIP reconfigured the typical concert space and encouraged its audience and musical public to engage with hip-hop differently. Antiphony—figured as structural mechanisms to involve the audience and improvisation given the constraints on sound—ensured that the festival was not a normal concert but indeed rearticulated such separations as ‘performer’ and ‘audience’ by providing the necessities for the dance cipher and bringing different audience

members on stage to freestyle and share written poems and raps between acts. HHIP, then, could be read as an event that destabilises the notion of what ‘hip-hop music’ is for the uninitiated. For those ‘headz’ that have been following hip-hop for years, they were welcomed onto the stage and into the dance cipher to perform the main acts. The artists sat on the green and spoke with their fans and listeners. HHIP hearkens back to what a block party in the early days of hip-hop (before it became a mass commodity and industry) must have felt like, though of course with a much different audience today. What matters about HHIP is that S4HH arranged sound, materials (like primed boards for graffiti artists and linoleum for the dance cipher), and art in order to encourage the audience to participate in new ways in hip-hop music and culture. We can see that this is a priority for members and the leadership of S4HH and to use hip-hop to start a bigger discussion. In this sense, HHIP is about modulating the subjectivities and understandings of hip-hop that the musical public in Berkeley has. In the following chapter, I explore how these subjectivities are created *through* participation in S4HH, adding depth to the effects of these atmospheres on members of a musical public.

8. Private listening, ambivalence, and potentiality

In this chapter, I explore the production of ethical subjectivity in experiences of private listening. Using individual stories and locating modes of listening, taste, and reports of experience in addition to ethnographic observation, I unpack the political ambivalence that I argue characterises hip-hop listening. I develop a critical phenomenology of hip-hop sounds in order to understand how concrete dispositions open up ethical and political potentials in bodies. While many have claimed hip-hop sound to be inherently political (and some have not), I argue that hip-hop sound is profoundly ambivalent and its affect on listeners indeterminate. It is through the processes of sharing music that I observed the emergence and modulation of ethical and political subjectivities. Here I trace how private listening practices were affected by the milieu of a given listener. In the next chapter, I explore how these subjectivities come together in S4HH.

Not all the members of S4HH are just listeners. All of them are students *first*. They are all hip-hop ‘fans’. They go beyond this classification still; they are also advocates for hip-hop in the university community. Some of them rap. Most of the members are in some way involved with producing hip-hop culture, but many of them just appreciate hip-hop as listeners. They are all in some way invested in hip-hop culture in varying degrees of intensity. While most people listen to mainstream rap, exposed to it on the radio, S4HH members dig further. By studying S4HH, I explore how those who do dig further find themselves in a politically charged

terrain that cultivates an antiphonal mindset. The diffusion of these demands—explored through ethnographic description below—in various encounters and events demonstrates that hip-hop culture has the potential to be a site of ethical and political innovation in thinking through the challenge of being-with. Through a mutual exposure and constant sharing, S4HH draws on the potentials within hip-hop culture to develop a critical and politically engaged consciousness.

In this chapter, I study the social mediation of a musical genre through interviews and observation. Their listening practices reveal tensions around listening as a politically ambivalent practice, dependent on vibe and mood at certain times. Listening can be politically active or politically apathetic. In its ambivalence, listening often *fails* to be political. I explore how ethics displace politics in listening when hip-hop culture is consumed collectively and shared, rather than individually. This chapter draws on the experiences of a few S4HH members with hip-hop listening to unpack how being a part of S4HH affected their tastes and understanding of hip-hop music and culture.

Peter and Brad: form, sound, and ambivalent listening

Peter, an incisive and wiry young man of Japanese descent, is an extreme case of a listener: his listening practices cross between an empiricist scientism, an aloof criticism, and an analytical sensibility. He was hesitant at best to consider hip-hop political despite being extremely well-informed on the history of hip-hop music and culture. A student in molecular biology, Peter is quick and consistent in reminding me that he is a *scientist* and that frames how he views hip-hop. He first got into hip-hop in high school by looking through general interest online forums and debating what ‘good music’ is with his friends.

So, uh—to be honest, when I first, when I was growing up, me and my friends, we were like the classic rock group of friends, right and we’d listen to these hip-hop songs and we’d make fun of it, like ‘oh this is stupid’, you know the whole like ‘bitches and hos’ kind of thing.

Peter found that this type of music—what he calls ‘pop hip-hop’, designed for dance floors and nightclubs—lacking in the critical ‘lyricism’ that eventually attracted him to hip-hop. He had developed a more discerning musical taste by avoiding that ‘hip-pop’ on the radio as he got into the Rolling Stones and classic rock by exploring his parents’ small music collection. For Peter, listening to hip-hop music was not about politics but taste and his appreciation for certain sounds. In this sense, Peter’s hip-hop listening is profoundly ambivalent in terms of politics (but he is not an apathetic person). Rather, his identity as a scientist framed his appreciation and understanding of hip-hop.

The highly successful artist group Gorillaz’ second album, *Demon Days*, was what got Peter into hip-hop, changing his opinion of the genre. His encounter with Gorillaz opened him up to searching for more information about hip-hop and music in general:

from there I was just kind of into [an] alternative—not quite rock, not quite hip-hop sound. And then eventually, I started browsing a lot of internet forums...[I found] recommended music guides to make myself more culturally literate I guess...I wanted to be able to know what good books are, good movies are, know what good music is. So I just listened to recommended jazz songs and...I eventually got to recommended hip-hop songs. [...] I really like listening to albums over individual songs. I feel like albums are more like cohesive stories...I really fell in love with certain albums.

Peter espouses a highly rational approach to which artists and sounds he exposed himself to, relying on research on recommended music on online forums. His desire to *know* what good books *are* or what good music *is* suggests that Peter took seriously the notion that certain seminal works can be qualified on an objective basis. Further, Peter saw hip-hop and certain albums as ‘texts’ in themselves and attempting to learn about the background of different artists and the larger culture that characterises hip-hop. His desire for objective understandings of cultural literacy stems, most likely, from his self-identification with empiricism: ‘I think that one thing [that] I am really passionate about [is] empirical [study]’. He developed a critical hip-hop literacy through highly clinical study of albums, songs, and artists and had specific criteria for what made for ‘good’ hip-hop in his perspective. It was Peter’s interest in rhyme schemes, voice and narrative, flow, production, hooks, topics, and subject matter that informed

his appreciation of hip-hop: ‘if you can hit all these things for me, that’s what great hip-hop is to me.’ In time, Peter became able to discern specific influences on different rappers, having explored ‘grids’ of recommended music guides and related albums, armed with a deep and thorough knowledge of different rappers. Peter can give a genealogy of an album’s sound off the top of his head; it was these types of conversations that motivated him to join S4HH:

One thing is I really like reviewing albums. I like saying like ‘hey, what did you think about this album?’ [...] So here [are] some examples: there’s like Freddy Gibbs and Mad Lib’s new album, [called] *Cocaine Piñata*. So I like saying, ‘oh okay, what did you think about Mad Libs’ production style?’ (which is really analogue heavy and mixed with Freddy Gibb’s gangsta style). Freddy Gibbs has an impeccable flow. He has one of the best flows in the game. The subjects he spits about are incredibly unique. You can tell that what he says is very authentic, right? So I like being able to have that kind of conversation. Those kind of [analytical] things. So I was analysing like literal rhyme schemes. I mean like oh, did you realise that Freddy Gibbs uses an internal rhyme scheme in this song or that he makes a reference to song x over here, that kind of stuff.

Peter’s commitment to hip-hop (thus far) appears profoundly disembodied; his investment seems entirely cerebral. Peter shared hip-hop through communication and debates with his friends as a high school student about analysis of rhyme schemes, flow styles, production, and beats. He joined S4HH upon coming to university to continue these conversations. While he may have enjoyed hip-hop in its embodied aspects through a pure, isolated appreciation of sound, hip-hop was as much a discursive field for Peter.

Upon joining S4HH and learning more about hip-hop, Peter consciously distanced himself from the notion that hip-hop (and music generally) could be evaluated through an objective framework (though *discourse* on hip-hop, for him, ought to continue with reference to empirically observable expressions, such as flow, beats, and rhyme schemes). His perception about what makes good hip-hop changed as he listened to hip-hop more and more:

I definitely started out [as] the uh, ‘there’s real hip-hop and there’s fake hip-hop’ kind of guy. So you know this club hip-hop, that’s not real hip-hop. That’s pop hip-hop. But I think the more I listen to hip-hop the more I appreciate it. The more I understand that hip-hop serves different purposes for different people. [...] Hip-hop started with Kool Herc, right? With the scratching on the turntables, right? So hip-hop started as like a party music. So you can’t say that mainstream hip-hop isn’t the real hip-hop. That connection doesn’t make sense to me anymore. Because I *was* under the impression that real hip-hop was NWA, Public Enemy, you know Wu-Tang Clan, it was these people that spoke about original topics, political subjects, but that’s not entirely true. I think that real hip-hop is—I think it is—I think it doesn’t exist. Hip-hop is hip-hop. I think anything that, assuming that its a hip-hop beat, you’re rhyming, I think that’s hip-hop.

Peter began to account for subjectivity in his thought about hip-hop and realised that even his own listening habits could not be objectively standardised; rather, they were contextually specific. When I asked Peter about the moods and spaces where he listened to hip-hop, things became to look much more embodied. There are moments of solitary listening are where Peter wants to sit down and ‘actively [listen] to every single word an artist says’. On the other hand, Peter refers to ‘groove’, referring to language that suggests a more embodied relation with music. He is concerned with groove in social situations: sites of shared listening.

When you want to listen to it, to kind of groove with...when I want to groove to hip-hop that's when I'm driving down the street with my friends, the car's thumping and we're having a good time. This is like when we're going to a party and we're all dancing together, the atmosphere is loud...it's like the same thing with a concert for me, right? So these are things where, uh, it's more a whole body experience rather than the mental aspect of hip-hop. I think when that happens, the voice just becomes another instrument and we just like to have fun.

Over time, Peter enjoyed the more embodied aspects of hip-hop music and learned to appreciate different kinds of hip-hop that appealed to affectual circuits above and beyond representational and perceptual ones, captured in his references to appreciation for ‘catchy’ tracks and ‘infectious’ beats. He would not usually opt to listen to that kind of music on headphones, but in social situations, a ‘mainstream’ or even ‘hip-pop’ track is still fun and activates Peter in a different relationship with hip-hop, one that appeals to multiple relations of sensation involved in *shared listening sites* rather than his desire to share hip-hop through criticism and debate. Encounters with groove and the affective atmospheres of shared listening displaced his earlier criteria for criticising hip-hop, exposing him to the demands to tolerate and understand *other* tastes for hip-hop, complicating his original, binary thinking on ‘real’ and ‘fake’ hip-hop.

Like Peter, Brad listens to hip-hop based on the different moods he wishes to evoke in private spaces. While Brad does have a similar appreciation of hip-hop as a text, its literary devices, and its complexities, for Brad, listening is a much more embodied and affective experience than it is for Peter. Brad, a white student from Northern California, first got into

West Coast rap as a young high school student. The first artists he explored were Tupac and Kottonmouth Kings—what he calls the definition of ‘stoner rap’. Indeed, partying and ‘being a badass’ was part of what got Brad interested in hip-hop in the first place: ‘when I actually started listening to hip-hop was probably when I turned 15 or 16 and I started smoking weed and like drinking and that kind of is what got me into it’. While a juvenile proclivity for smoking pot and feeling like a ‘badass’ got Brad interested in hip-hop as a teenager, as a student in his early twenties, he reminisces about the Kottonmouth Kings: ‘they’re like the definition of stoner rap, that’s pretty much all they talk about, is weed. It’s kind of corny now that I’m a little bit older, but when you’re 16 it’s really fun.’ As Brad got older and began to explore hip-hop in more depth, his tastes changed. When he started listening to hip-hop, in the mid-2000s, he did not listen to much of the music that was being made at the time because it was all about ‘bling’ and ‘money’:

All those artists who were popular [between 1995 and 1999] like Big L and Wu-Tang Clan and Biggie and Pac...all of them were gone. And now there was like this new crowd, people who kind of probably got raised on some of that stuff but I don't think that was the stuff that sold. It was all about like bling and money and cars...back then that was the only kind of thing you had an option for. That's why I didn't listen that much maybe, but I was also young.

Brad mentions the period between 1999 and 2005 as a time when hip-hop being made did not compare to the ‘Golden Age’ of hip-hop in the 1980s and early 1990s. He does agree that some artists making music in that period made legitimately ‘dope’ music, but he feels that a kind of ‘resurgence’ of hip-hop happened in the late 2000s, citing Top Dawg Entertainment, a label that features well-known artists such as Kendrick Lamar, Ab-Soul, and Schoolboy Q. According to Brad, this more recent hip-hop more effectively straddles the line between mainstream success where he felt that those mid-2000s artists ‘sold out’ completely.

Brad has a complex and formalist subjectivity around what counts as ‘good’ hip-hop, but this is entirely mood-specific. In a sense, Brad uses different types of hip-hop from various times (though he avoids the ‘mainstream’ mid-2000s stuff) dependent on the atmospheres he wishes to create.

I guess it is probably just a subjective thing, but I feel like...there's a lot of different reasons why I listen to hip-hop, sometimes I listen to trap music which is I'm just trying to get rowdy like maybe its Friday night and we're drinking and we're just having a good time partying. And then there's other times when I want to listen to like a more lyrical...most of the time what I consider 'real' rap, what I consider 'lyrical' flow, like um, Big L, Guru, Ab Soul nowadays...R.A. the Rugged Man, he has a good flow nowadays.

In Brad's formalist taste, we see how political ambivalence operates. His decision to listen to hip-hop has never been political. For more private situations, Brad prefers a 'lyrical' rapper with 'flow'. What is interesting is what Brad considers *real* rap is that which is 'lyrical', while other forms such as trap music represent different genres of music for other moods. In this move, he pays a certain respect to the poetic qualities of hip-hop, implying that well-written flows are more 'true' to hip-hop than the more 'fun' or even 'badass' tracks he listens to for a party or tunes for the car. Though he does not treat hip-hop lyrics with the same scrutiny that Peter employs, he thinks through the difference between 'mainstream' rap and 'real' rap through an affective mediation of content: what Brad hears as 'flow'.

For Brad, flow—as the delivery of the poetry—matters more than the content itself. In this sense, Brad is more concerned with the formal properties of hip-hop music than its lyrical or political content. For him, listening to hip-hop is not about plugging in to a political consciousness, but a means of managing his moods. As he listens, he selects particular rappers with the specific moods that he wants to create. Flow is the primary frame through which he selects *what* hip-hop sounds he wants to expose himself to.

I always have a hard time defining what flow is, but the best way I always can explain it is how the words fall out of [a rapper's] mouth, if you could like visualise that. I think flow is the most important thing. [...] Flow is the most important thing, but that's not always why you listen. Then the beats and the overall music are next. Then after that the actual lyrics—what are they really saying. There's like probably five or six types of hip-hop that I like to listen to for different reasons. Some because...[they're about] drinking and smoking and partying, some cause...[...]...trying to think of the other types of...I mean, yeah, a lot of times it depends on the mood I am in. If I want to feel like a player then I listen to the hip-hop music that talks about being a player. [He laughs, grinning]. You know whatever...[He continues to laugh].

Content matters for Brad in so far as it creates a particular kind of mood. What is interesting in this is that Brad is able to dissociate the significance of a rapper's flow because of its sound. Brad likes to freestyle, and consequently, it makes sense that he appreciates the form of a flow because it is an exposure that interests and inspires his own freestyling. For him, the words

being said do not matter as much as they do for some of the other students we will encounter below. Brad's ability to dissociate the representational meanings within a rapper's flow and appreciation of an immediate sensation presents a challenge to his engagement in 'politics' with hip-hop. At the same time, Brad is able to take a critical distance from *what* a rapper says even when he chooses to listen to a flow because of its 'awesome' sound. Lyrics are not important to him when he chooses what to listen to:

I don't think the meaning of the lyrics is that important, like some artists, that is what defines them because they have dope lyrics, but really most of the time, they could be saying...like Big L he's talking about robbing people and beating people up in a park and I don't like, if I'm being honest, I don't really think that's cool and I don't even think it's even an appropriate thing to be like saying is a cool thing. But, I still listen to it because it sounds dope and because of the way the words fall out of his mouth sound awesome.

Brad clearly has an apolitical approach in listening to hip-hop, but in reflecting on what he does listen to, he mediates it through an ethical register. By distancing himself from the content in Big L's flow, he demonstrates an awareness of the dissonance of his formal relationship with hip-hop sound: he listens because it 'sounds awesome', not because of the gangsta content. While Peter experiences these flows through discursive, interpretive registers by deconstructing them for rhyme scheme and intricate rhythmic patterns, Brad experiences flow through a haptic register, music as an immediate sensation that produces a particular mood and atmosphere.

Both Peter and Brad represent two forms of hip-hop listening that challenge the notion that hip-hop music has political effects, instead their stories stress the ambivalence of listening. Their listening—Peter's analytical and Brad's affective—is focused on *form* rather than content, concerned with how words and lyrics are used to create a particular flow and sound rather than articulate a political stance. While hip-hop is in many ways a genre that refracts the social and political struggles of African-Americans, its consumption remains ambivalent. Brad's focus on the formal qualities of what he listens to arguably elides more introspective, ethical, and conscious listening. Similarly, Peter's close scrutiny of literary devices, diction,

and rhyme schemes are prioritised above his interpretation of *what* a rapper is actually saying. Their listening practices and modes of listening to hip-hop problematise the notion that hip-hop and politics are neatly connected; rather, an affective politics emerges from the play in choosing what to listen to and who they listen with. In this section, Peter and Brad demonstrated a politically ambivalent listening. I now move to contrasting them with consciously political listeners to hip-hop to illustrate another side of hip-hop listening.

Three forms of politically-inflected listening

Jian started a hip-hop club in secondary school in Beijing before coming to the university as an international student. The first time I met him he had big Sony headphones with the earpieces resting on the base of his neck from which a black Wu-Tang sweatshirt descended. In his first year, Jian felt lucky to have found S4HH as a chance for him to continue sharing hip-hop as he had done in high school. Jian, like others in the group, got into hip-hop to avoid the pop airwaves in China. He got into hip-hop because

it was so different, so different than like the mainstream music that we can see in the Chinese radio, or on the airwaves, or everywhere in the record shop. Actually we don't really have a record shop, just a bookstore that sells CDs. Because music is not really big.

Hip-hop's sonic differences, its aggressive vocals and rhythms as well as its more intense content, attracted Jian to the genre:

Chinese pop music—probably most of it is from Taiwan and Hong Kong—basically, describing love or personal affair[s] or this kind of personal stuff... really, not aggressive. Hip-hop is like the opposite of that. Musically, Chinese pop is centred around melody rather than the rhythm, and hip-hop is really focused on the drum beat and the bass line. It's entirely different. [...] That kind of power just completely grasped me and I just couldn't stop listening to it.

Jian explains this embodied register through a political valence as well. For him, the sonic difference of hip-hop was a kind of inversion ('the opposite' of Chinese pop music) that offered a potential for Jian to define himself as other and take control of constructing his own identity.

Maybe another kind of...reason [for listening to hip-hop] is that like all the other people are listening to the mainstream; I wanted to separate from other people, maybe to have like—maybe to have my own identity. Yeah so, in terms of what I listen to, what I like. I would say it's kind of a rebellion and also to separate from others.

Jian and I explored some of the tensions around form and content in listening. Unlike Peter and Brad, the form of hip-hop was not attractive in its *artistic* form, but rather because the form of hip-hop itself, so distant from Chinese pop music, had a political affect by being a ‘rebellious’ sound that afforded Jian the capacity to assert his own individuality. In a way, we might relate this to Brad’s mode of listening in which he listens to stuff that makes him feel like a ‘player’ as Jian wants to feel ‘rebellious’.

Public Enemy is one of the best known rap groups when it comes to political rap. Their album, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, included such rap anthems as ‘Bring the Noise’ and ‘Fight the Power’. Today these tracks are dated, but at the time, they were innovative and fresh calls to political action and seminal works of politically conscious hip-hop. I asked Jian what he thought about Public Enemy, as one group where flow, production, and form (despite the incredible complexity in the Bomb Squad’s production on the album) are crucial but often unrecognised in relation to the rapper Chuck D’s content and meaning. Jian felt that getting into Public Enemy was difficult, but by understanding the historical context in which they were rapping, he appreciated it:

Public Enemy...at first, one of the hardest artists [for me to get into]. It's not pleasant listening if you don't know the background, the history, like the history of the struggle of African Americans. At the time [when Jian was in high school] I didn't quite get into Public Enemy, but gradually as I read some books about hip-hop history and some books [that give a] social and historical explanation [on] the grand theme of the Black Civil [Rights] movement. [...] But their music is really rough. It's really hard to appreciate their music. But then I think, the Bomb Squad, their production is really unique. They cannot be...surpassed in a way because their production style, this kind of style is perfect for Public Enemy's aggressiveness and their political consciousness, it just like, perfect.

Jian’s experience of Public Enemy is particularly interesting in that it demonstrates how context and awareness of the positionality of a particular rapper can have an impact on taste. Sonically, Public Enemy is difficult for Jian to ‘appreciate’. Jian’s formal relation with the Public Enemy sound is a challenge to his ability to engage with and appreciate the artwork. However, Jian admits that once he became more informed about African American struggles in the twentieth century, he was more able to appreciate *why* a particular form—in the Bomb

Squad's 'rough' production and the aggressive lyricism of Chuck D—'perfectly' fits Public Enemy's style, ethos, and political consciousness.

Jian presents an example of politically inflected listening in opposition to the ambivalence we encounter with Peter and Brad. It is key to understand that his political mediation of hip-hop comes from two vectors or forces at play: a sense of control over his own identity by substituting hip-hop with Chinese pop music and his understanding of the struggle of African Americans in the United States over the twentieth century and before. Jian has been listening to hip-hop for years and followed the different types of hip-hop that have emerged as the genre has developed. It is through his journey of listening to various artists that we see a kind of 'politics' emerging within Jian's listening. As he learned more about hip-hop, he developed what he considered 'a narrow-minded old school mentality': 'I would only listen to like just Public Enemy, Black Moons, Gang Starr, Biggie, this kind of stuff...gritty'. His preference for old school rap came from his focus on lyricism. His appreciation of 'lyricism' is different than Peter's, who is more interested in literary devices, form and flow than in the message that a rapper presents. The lyricism that Jian was interested in when he began getting into hip-hop was about particular, rebellious messages that were interesting and in a way, exotic, to him. Today, as a member of S4HH and hearing newer music with other members in the group, Jian's tastes are more ambivalent:

Now I'm trying to be more and more open minded. I've been discussing with my friend last night, we kind of think that like, 2000s is probably the best era of hip-hop. Because you can see like, in the 2000s, there are a lot of underground acts like coming out, they're kind of [taking] hold of the underground [audiences] and becoming a phenomenon.

In this statement, we find an amorphous political register by which he recognises contemporary, global hip-hop as the 'best era'. Jian's choice to actively try and be more 'open minded' in order to discover contemporary artists and understand 'underground' hip-hop scenes better might be read as an ethical and political one. Rather than consider this choice as

properly ‘political’, we might read his distancing from ‘old school’ hip-hop as a consciously ethical decision.

I read this decision as ethical because it ultimately stems from Jian’s growing appreciation for a ‘diversity’ of hip-hop sounds that forced him out from that ‘narrow minded old school mentality’. Jian feels that the 1990s were a time in which hip-hop sounded the same, as if it were, in a sense, closed: for Jian, in the ‘mid ‘90s, everybody was using the same style of production; West Coast is West Coast and East Coast is East Coast and their styles are basically the same’. By referencing how particular ‘schools’ of hip-hop production and sonic forms were repeating the standards of particular sub-genres, Jian explains how newer sounds challenged the closure of these genres as particular sonic structures. Jian explains that after the mid-1990s, into the 2000s, artists such as ‘J Dilla and Mad Libs were coming out, doing crazy shit’ and the ‘phenomenon of hip-hop going global’ excited him, with British trip-hop and grime artists such as Portishead and Roots Manuva key artists that made him rethink his fidelity to a narrow conception of hip-hop inflected by the ‘old school’. Diversity itself has become the key factor in Jian’s listening, which he conflates with *creativity*. For him, exposure to the new and different is itself the material of what ‘counts’ as creative:

I think diversity is probably—creativity is the most important factor to me. How creative are you in your lyricism? How do you conduct your message in a different way? Rather than just, Chuck D saying—teaching you to do this to do that. Because this kind of stuff...it might have been effective at one time, with like a certain kind of production, but it's not necessarily good in another production. So I think, I think, I definitely want to listen to more like lyricists, lyricists that are really conscious about stuff, that are really trying to say some messages because if I want to be a rapper I want to be this kind of rapper rather than some gangsta rapper. I'm not able to have a gangsta flow...that's not keeping it real. Because I am not able to feel this kind of life. They live this kind of life; they are trying to express their situation. That's a different kind of story [than mine].

For Jian, creativity and difference are inherently connected with *content*. Jian evaluates creativity through the perspective of ‘how’ a ‘message’ is expressed and communicated within a rapper’s flow. Today, he is put off by Public Enemy’s refrain of ‘Fight the Power’, an anthemic sound that is for him more proper to an era with a different sense of production, but today, such an approach seems banal and ineffective. Jian’s interest in lyricism (as the content

of the flow) as opposed to Brad's interest in flow (as the sound of content being expressed) thus becomes ethical through a kind of necessity imposed by his distance to those 'gritty' rappers. Jian must listen to a diversity of rappers because, if he were to be a rapper, he wants to have a real message. He needs to listen to a diversity because if he were to only use an 'old school' and 'gangsta' flow, this would be inauthentic, a failure to 'keep it real' and speak from his own positionality. This stems from a consciousness and an ethos of Jian's own position and his relationship with hip-hop, expressed through a hermeneutics of content and an ethics of performativity within hip-hop spaces.

Arnold, an African-American student aspiring to become a broadcast or video producer, first encountered hip-hop on the radio. Before he got into hip-hop, he was living with his grandmother, a religious woman that frequently played Gospel music at home. Arnold and his grandmother lived in a shared house, and in the kitchen, their housemates often had the radio on in the kitchen. Arnold says he was exposed to hip-hop 'by fluke' because of that radio. He remembers listening to 'Laffy Taffy' (whose lyrics are wonderfully replete candy-based innuendo: 'Shake that Laffy Taffy') and other 'dance songs' he heard on the radio. He did not make a concerted effort at the time to listen to the radio in the kitchen, but when he was in the kitchen, he did consciously listen to what was on 'particularly because of school...the other kids and school, [to avoid] being that one kid that just doesn't know what was popular'. His middle school, in the East Bay Area, was '99 percent black' and hip-hop was a way for Arnold to fit in. This changed when he turned thirteen:

I really didn't start listening to music until I was thirteen. [...] I was given an iPod and an iTunes gift card, and I just went crazy. (B: So what did you buy when you went crazy?) It's very interesting. The first couple songs that I bought were songs that I had heard on the radio, but also songs that I had heard in past years on the radio and I kind of liked [them] and wanted to listen to again. [...] But, very interesting...less than two weeks after I got that iPod, we were headed out and I was like, 'You know what, I want to hear more...I want something I haven't heard before that I want to listen to on this trip'. And that particular day, I hopped on the iTunes store, and there's this new album by J Dilla. I thought 'okay, cool...', and the album's name was *Donuts*. [...] I read the whole review first, as I was listening to [the previews]...you know, this guy literally made this on his deathbed. It was his last project. I listened to it on [my trip], and when I got back, [I] just immediately just started seeking out this guy's music, and then from there, the songs I was listening to where there were like people rapping, I'm going

to go look him up. That's how I found new artists. From there, I started to branch into every sub-genre of hip-hop very quickly.

Donuts is J Dilla's seminal album, a producer from the Detroit hip-hop scene (Fitzpatrick 2011). J Dilla was a highly influential producer and worked on tracks for A Tribe Called Quest, and won a Grammy award for Janet Jackson's 'Got it till It's Gone' (Kangas 2014). J Dilla's collaborations with a wide network of hip-hop artists working in diverse styles opened Arnold up to a multitude of artists whose experimental styles were exciting to him. Arnold got into this music not because it was popular or on the radio, but because he genuinely liked to listen to it. Like many other young teenagers, his tastes quickly changed as he grew up:

I was able to gauge the differences between [mainstream and conscious hip-hop] so fast and because I wanted to...learn. I wanted to listen to things where I felt that I was learning something. At that particular time, I do remember I was huge on Common, Talib Kweli...every real conscious artist at that time, I was listening to. Exclusively, at that point. (B: Did you stop listening to your Lil Wayne and your 50 Cent at that point). Yeah, I totally dropped Lil Wayne. [...] For the most part, I really did stop listening to the radio almost entirely. And Lil Wayne was the reason for that. I had the radio on once, 'A. Milly' came on, and I was like, 'cool'. Half an hour later, it came on a second time. Less than fifteen minutes later, *again*. And I just thought 'Wow, they operate on a sort of ...system where they're going to play the song no matter what if people request it'. And that sucks because you're not hearing the actual good music. So I was like, 'fuck the radio' and stopped listening to it completely.

After his introduction to underground hip-hop with J Dilla and his ability to control the sounds he was exposed to, Arnold began taking on a more performative approach to his listening. Where the radio posits a disengaged audience, with the personal audio player, Arnold was able to learn about different types of artists and hip-hop styles and sub-genres. This has profoundly influenced the way that he evaluates and understands hip-hop. More pertinently to the topic of this essay, Arnold consciously listened to tracks that would teach him something, making the repetitive sounds of the radio uninteresting. His shift in taste, a product of encountering J Dilla and having an iPod through which he could control what he listened to, Arnold began exploring music without the intervention of the radio's 'system'.

Arnold's 'politics' in listening to hip-hop were not about identity as they were for Jian. Both of them, quite interestingly exclusively listened to conscious hip-hop for a certain amount of time and both of them eventually grew out of what Jian described as a 'narrow-minded'

mentality. They both gravitated to ‘underground’ artists that are mainstream names today. I asked Arnold to reflect on the labelling of certain artists as ‘conscious’ and ‘mainstream’ and like others, he recognised the value of the binary but gave examples of how it fails to capture the tensions at play in hip-hop consumption and culture. At the end of high school, Arnold discovered J. Cole who he considered (at the time) an ‘underground’ artist. Today, J. Cole has released numerous albums, multiple nominations for Grammys, BET and MTV awards, and won a Billboard music award in 2015 for ‘Top Rap Album’. His tracks have enjoyed significant radio play and tours internationally. I asked Arnold if it made sense at this point to call J. Cole ‘underground’ anymore:

At this point in time, [J. Cole is] mainstream. Just mainstream. He has the ability to stick to the actual roots of hip-hop, being able to actually, one, rap, and two, say something very clever, and three, even include a message. But at the same time, he does strive for radio play and also trying to get the masses and trying to get the fans and as many record sales as possible.

Arnold still loves J. Cole—when I asked if he still listens to him, he says ‘Definitely’—but he hastens to remind me that being ‘mainstream’ has its own value.

Unlike J. Cole, Lupe Fiasco is an outwardly political artist and is well-known as a widely successful conscious artist. Despite Arnold’s preference for conscious and underground music, he feels that Lupe’s increasing proximity to the record industry has made his music more didactic. His last two albums are much different than his previous albums, such as *The Cool* and *Food & Liquor I*. His 2011 album, *Lasers*, featuring the track ‘Words I Never Said’ starts with the line ‘I really think the War on Terror is a bunch of bullshit/just a poor excuse for you to use up all your bullets’. This album, for Arnold, was less poetic and started to become more didactic, injecting and ‘forcing’ a sense of consciousness where it didn’t feel right. Similarly, on his 2012 release, *Food & Liquor II: The Great American Rap Album Part I*, the track ‘Bitch Bad’, whose refrain repeats ‘Bitch bad/woman good/lady better’ is again, for Arnold, a didactic, overly political approach to tracks that are intended for wide radio play:

I can see him trying to find that balance...like how can I be creative and give my fans what they want but also try to satisfy the label in a sense. With this... [*Food & Liquor II*]...it just seems like, this track

he is taking, it was like he was *pushing* the consciousness on people. Like songs like... 'Bitch Bad', like that I totally felt was forced.

Arnold feels that Lupe has become more didactic by making music that plays to the sensibilities of radio audiences. We might be surprised at this because Lupe's old music is seminal conscious hip-hop listening and given Arnold predilection for conscious hip-hop, I expected him to be a fan of Lupe Fiasco. However, that a *didactic* approach, in which the lyrics are not mystifying but absolutely clear, seems to lose (for Arnold) its poetic character.

Arnold feels that mainstream artists are afforded the space needed to speak out and be heard, and for this reason, he values mainstream sounds for the political potential they afford:

There are a number of mainstream artists because of, you know, the notoriety and having that platform, and also the skill...I guess their particular style, they can get a message across. They can get it across better than some others. In that place, I would use Kendrick Lamar. He—would I classify him as conscious? No. But, do I classify him as a rapper who could, if he wanted to, say something that actually could change a lot of people's minds about whatever topic it is, he is that person. He's got that platform, a lot of people respect his skill...he can use the platform he's at to make changes in a number of different situations.

Arnold refers us to the comportment of an artist and their willingness to take a risk and use the platform that they have. Arnold shows us an interesting demand that folds back on the artist, expecting them to use their platform effectively to speak out on political issues. Taste, for Arnold, becomes mixed up in how a rapper uses the platform they have to change minds without being didactic, 'pushing' a fixed mode of consciousness on listeners. Arnold refers us to antiphony and the demands made by an artist on listeners and the wide publics they can reach with the platforms they have. At the same time, it is also about *how* this is done: consciousness cannot be pushed on listeners, it is an artist's challenge to find the right balance.

Christine, an Asian-American woman studying history, was exposed to hip-hop much more recently than were Arnold, Jian, Brad, and Peter. Before she started Alisa's Tupac class, she would listen to Kendrick Lamar's *Good Kid, M.A.A.D City* on repeat with her friends. She never approached hip-hop in a systematic way, only listening to particular artists here and there as they interested her. She sees hip-hop as a tool for artists to express themselves and selectively listens to political artists. It should be noted that unlike the others mentioned thus far, Christine

does not primarily listen to hip-hop, but when she does, she listens to specific artists. The music that she listens to is driven by her interest in history:

You can approach it kind of historically—I mean, right now that’s what I’m doing. I’ve been listening to a lot of Nina Simone and Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holliday. I think that a lot of the music that I listen to, it is kind of historical—because I’m a history major, that really speaks to me. So I’ll explore like 70s alternative stuff from like the UK or something because my professor mentioned it in class. From the Tupac class, I also explored some music.

Christine is thus quite different to the others who can be classified as serious hip-hop ‘fans’, while her interest in hip-hop is due to its historical position in the progression of 20th century American music. For her, hip-hop is more of a text than it is simple entertainment or popular music. I was surprised when she cited only two artists when I asked her what she liked to listen to. She started with Kendrick Lamar, whom we had already talked about:

I like Kendrick. [She laughs]. I sometimes like Eminem, but I feel like—[She sighs, heavily]. I don’t like how misogynistic he is. That’s one of the big issues I have with hip-hop music, I don’t like how misogynistic a lot of it is. When Eminem is doing what he does best, really good flow and wordplay and stuff like that, you know, that’s cool. Have you listened to his new CD? (B: No, I haven’t). I listened to it and ‘Rap God’ was really good. It was all about like, you know, he’s been in the game so long and who are all these people coming in...that’s something I understand, that’s where he’s coming from. But then he’ll say something about Kim, why are you still angry at her, why can’t you just get over it. It is so stupid. And when he talks about women, I just...I don’t want to hear it.

For Christine, misogyny in hip-hop is a problem and she remains sceptical of the genre at times because of it. Here, we see that sonic qualities—that Peter, Brad, Jian, and Arnold foregrounded as what drives their listening practices—are placed in a secondary position to content. Where we started with an ambivalence about politics in hip-hop with Peter and Brad, and displacements of the political into identity for Jian and a potentiality with Arnold, Christine’s listening is politically engaged. She selects artists for their political content, and avoids artists whose expressions are offensive. This perspective is unsurprising given that she explored hip-hop based on its political context rather than its unique sound:

It comes from, like back in the 80s, with the whole DJ-MC scene, and people having boomboxes and parties and car stereos and stuff, that sounds really fun, that kind of organic movement where you have a lot of people who like—Hip-hop has its origins in earlier forms of black music, right? [...] I feel like mainstream hip-hop is very depoliticised, it’s not that controversial, you know what it’s going to be about. It’s just straight misogynistic—or like straight just, let’s party, take shots and stuff, which is like...It’s fun, there’s a place for that. But all the political, controversial stuff, the stuff that like actually has teeth...that’s really downplayed.

While Christine does feel that hip-hop as party music can be fun, she perceives that the ‘mainstream’ does a disservice to the diversity and power of hip-hop by only focusing on that kind of music. Part of this is a question of taste and affect: the misogynistic (the word she first associates with the mainstream ‘party’ music), banal hip-hop on the airwaves takes space away from the politically-conscious and ‘controversial’ hip-hop artists. What makes hip-hop listening problematic, for her, is the fact that she sees hip-hop as a ‘tool’ or as a kind of technology. This technology is ambivalent, hip-hop can have the impacts that its user or artist chooses to impart. Christine thus makes a demand on the artist to achieve this potential, whereas Arnold does not necessarily articulate it as such.

With Jian, Arnold and Christine, we see that it is difficult to write about politics in hip-hop, or to write about hip-hop as innately political. As we approach the political, it seems to recede, displaced elsewhere: in ethical and performative registers, as a sense of potentiality, and a question of taste and affect. Jian, Arnold and Christine seek out specifically conscious hip-hop, for various reasons: Jian through a process of identity performance; Arnold through an affection for sonic innovation in hip-hop; and Christine through her interest in the history of popular music more broadly. We might think through their listening as an exposure to political potentiality, the extreme side of a continuum on which Peter and Brad are at the other end, interested by the formal and sonic properties of hip-hop above and beyond its political potentiality. While many of those I interviewed were at one point ‘narrow minded’ in their listening, preferring to listen exclusively to conscious hip-hop, upon joining S4HH, their tastes shifted. Though private listening opens up a political ambivalence and ethical potentiality in hip-hop culture, it is from the *sharing* of culture, opinion, taste, and vibe that we encounter the antiphonal demand and response that challenges inactivity in the face of this ambivalence.

9. S4HH and shared listening

So far, I have detailed five different modes of private listening, looking (for example) at how Peter picks apart and critically analyses hip-hop tracks through (what he perceives as) objective and scientific methods that take into consideration rhythm, rhyme scheme, and lyricism. On the other hand, Christine actively exposes herself to particular sounds compatible with her politics and subjectivity. In these situations, listeners have *control* and power over the sounds they are exposed to. This is problematised in the more public space of S4HH club meetings, where taste is negotiated and shared. Though we see the potential for a politics in listening itself—Arnold’s thought of the rapper in a position of power to speak is a case in point—listening to hip-hop remains fundamentally ambivalent. In the case of S4HH, this ambivalence is challenged through the sharing of sound, content, taste, and vibe. The circulation of affect within the group produces S4HH as a space in which ethical experimentation opens up an affirmative politics that displaces and challenges the ambivalence of private listening.

Sharing [*partage*] is a key concept that undergirds Jean-Luc Nancy’s thought of community and his thought of the political. In this section, I unpack how *partage* is at the root of politics and community in Nancy’s thought and discuss its relevance to the study of intersubjective relationships within S4HH. Following Fynsk’s introduction to *The Inoperative Community*, I retain the French ‘*partage*’ as opposed to the English ‘sharing’ due to the insistence that the community and its ‘*logos*’ is ‘irreducibly divided, *partagé*’ (in Nancy 1991,

xxii). Indeed, for Nancy, to *communicate* is to begin the process of *partage* that itself constitutes community. Drawing on Georges Bataille, Nancy argues that the thinking of community should move away from the question of its ‘shared sovereignty’ to the notion that ‘singular beings are themselves constituted by sharing, they are distributed and placed, or rather spaced, by the sharing that makes them others’ (1991, 25). *Partage* helps us understand the quality of antiphonal relations between listeners: to share is to communicate, which is to *articulate* and expose oneself to the other, which is the fundamental experience of community for Nancy (1991, 40). Building on Chapter 4, I argue below that *partage* helps us understand the power of the antiphonal relation in establishing and sustaining community.

In my observations of S4HH, listening was at play through a register of antiphony at all times; the S4HH community came together through the play of demand and response in various sites and modalities. It is in this vein that I deploy Nancy’s theorisation of community as an effective explanation of the process by which a politics of ambivalence is displaced to an ethical and political practice of sharing, communicating, and writing. I do this in order to build a foundation from which the final chapters in Part Five build a notion of the becoming-ecstatic of multiculturalism in shared hip-hop space. The section below, which approaches S4HH from the perspective of *partage* builds on Nancy’s thinking to understand how circuits of affect open up a question of *how* to share, how to *communicate*—an ethical question—that opens up a politics deeply enmeshed in and responding to antiphonal relations.

Alisa’s ‘artivism’ and the political in S4HH

Peter, Brad, Jian, Arnold and Christine joined S4HH in order to perform hip-hop culture socially. Their reasons for doing so are different. Peter decided to join because he wanted to engage in critical debate on hip-hop music with other listeners. Arnold and Christine joined because they were in the student-run course organised by Alisa on Tupac Shakur. In the course,

Alisa—also the President of S4HH—encouraged Christine’s involvement after hearing Christine’s pre-written flow in the end-of-term cipher. Arnold had run into S4HH before on Sproul Plaza. As a Senior, walking to class from South Berkeley always involved dodging the multitude of students ‘tabling’ outside, advertising their clubs and organisations to students passing by. Arnold heard the Notorious B.I.G. on a big speaker one day as he passed through the plaza and investigated. He had a chat with the students representing the club that day but did not immediately make the effort to join. When he found out that the course organiser for the Tupac class was also the President of S4HH, he was inclined to get involved.

By involving themselves with S4HH, listeners mediated hip-hop sounds and hip-hop culture, exposed to a variety of listeners, artists, beatmakers, poets, and dancers. This sharing (as we might expect) modulated both listening habits and ethical subjectivities. The club was charged with an ethical and political valence under Alisa’s leadership. This is a contingency of Alisa’s vision for herself in relation to hip-hop culture: as a campus activist, she works to use hip-hop to engage in a politics of social justice, and as an artist, she brought together a diversity of students by sharing knowledge, leading the club’s discussions and programming, and teaching the Tupac course. Kev Choice, one of the artists for HHIP we encountered in Chapter 7, wore a shirt that read ‘artist’; this might be the best term to define the members of S4HH; they all, in their own way, straddle a line between art and politics. Some write rhymes, some freestyle, others make beats, still others dance, produce graphic art, and some even make their own albums. Not all of them are proper artists or musicians; rather they are something in between hip-hop fans and people that *do something* with hip-hop.

Alisa is the archetype of the ‘artist’. Alisa uses hip-hop culture to share with and engage the campus community in events like NoCR and HHIP as well as in her daily life and commitments on campus. She started by teaching a course on Tupac Shakur because she viewed him as a *political* rapper; his content had meaning that opened a new site to think about

politics that inspired her towards social justice. In teaching about Tupac, Alisa revisits the first time Tupac's music touched her as she was listening with a friend one night in the East Bay:

that was really the changing point for me, when I heard Tupac's 'Blasphemy'...I remember, just like, where I was, I remember how my skin was just like literally crawling, [...] and I had never heard any hip-hop like that before. [...] Pac, he really had a lot of *power*, not in just his music but his ad-libs and these secret messages and these secret things that he would be hinting at...my brother [a friend of her's at the time] would just be pointing them out to me. [...] Pac was really speaking on the corruption that was happening in the Church, way before you had all these newspaper stories about preachers touching little boys. Certain things like that. And it was just like, damn, how did he know about that? [...] It just opened me up to this arsenal of information that really made me question this bigger world that we were living in. [...] That night was when I—when I learned some real hip-hop.

Alisa's encounter with 'Blasphemy' changed her life; the event of hearing Tupac's 'power' and interpreted through her 'brother'—a companion she befriended in rough times while she was living out of a car—had a bodily affect *through* an 'arsenal of information' embedded in the track's background vocals or 'ad-libs'. For Alisa, hip-hop acted through sonic and representational registers. In this sense, hip-hop is not just about sensation: at the same time it can make the skin crawl, the 'information' hidden within the poetry involves political discourses that inspired Alisa to act. This was the beginning of a process by which hip-hop music and culture became an integral part of Alisa's life. She sees hip-hop as a community in itself. Hip-hop is part of her drive and desire, seeing hip-hop culture as a potential for reworking education and pedagogy.

I really feel like [hip-hop is] just a part of me, it's embedded in every part of me. I could not imagine a day without hip-hop. (B: Do you see hip-hop as your future? Do you want to be an MC one day?) Not necessarily. But I definitely want to be involved in hip-hop. [...] The whole idea that hip-hop is a culture, a lifestyle, and a way of thinking...and it's almost like a religion in a lot of ways. I feel like Pac really turned me on to that because of the religious nature of the 7 Day Theory [an album by Tupac released under the stage name Makaveli]...He's like, nailed to a cross [on the album cover] and there's so many references to the resurrection of Jesus, and all of these things and also like mixed with, um, all of these military connotations, just like the war strategy that he was influenced by, by Niccolo Machiavelli, the Italian philosopher. I feel like it's pervasive in all forms of life, so I essentially would like to do, continue on with hip-hop and academia, really using hip-hop to develop new systems for the way we think about education.

Alisa demonstrates the sliding, diffuse registers through which hip-hop actually acts. Indeed, few of the ones that matter to her are actually *sonic*. In a sense, her project is methodologically similar to my present work: to think through and re-write notions of politics (education in Alisa's case) through the consciousness of hip-hop culture. In the interview, she provided a

banal but simple example of how this might work. Alisa is clear that hip-hop involves a bodily discipline and comportment, using Tupac's religious imagery to explain her own everyday commitment to 'living' hip-hop. For Alisa hip-hop is also a starting point to challenge structural inequality and raise consciousness about social justice.

Hip-hop can be used as this tool to educate because it's the universal language. Whatever background that you come from, socioeconomically, racially, etc., I feel like it truly crosses those boundaries. It's something that...even if you don't [listen] to conscious [music], but like you've heard hip-hop on the radio, you've been exposed to it...it's something that everyone can have an opinion on and then start there to get to some deeper stuff.

Hip-hop's accessibility and its ability to connect people and open up communication is what Alisa identifies as its primary potential. Through this, we can read Alisa's vision of hip-hop community as a kind of sharing and a starting point for learning and education. For Alisa this started not with S4HH, but with her experience in the Tupac course. Upon coming to university, Alisa joined the Tupac course, one of many sponsored by a university programme allowing undergraduates and graduate students to design and teach their own courses. Alisa quickly registered for a class on 'The Life and Legacy of Tupac Amaru Shakur':

from what I just told you, this was like, a *huge* thing; there's a class on Tupac, this is going to be amazing, the most exciting class ever. 'How could it not be?' Well, it wasn't. I was so distraught about it.

The course organiser was not engaging, reading monotone passages in front of the class. Frustrated, Alisa committed 'in her heart' that one day she 'was going to come back and [take] over that class.' Alisa ended up redesigning the course to make it more engaging, drawing in a diversity of students (many of whom were introduced to S4HH through her course). She created course materials, lessons on the elements of hip-hop and sessions on how to rap, holding ciphers in the class over the semester, encouraging her students to write creatively and present that to the group. For Alisa setting up this course was a political act, one that allowed her to share her encounter with hip-hop so that others might take up arms alongside her by digging into Tupac's 'arsenal of information'.

This story of Alisa's desire to use hip-hop shows the complexity of studying this phenomenon. We must attend to language itself and account for the poetics of hip-hop at representational, discursive, or linguistic registers, because without doing so, we would risk misunderstanding the sites and registers of political contestation *actually* taking place in hip-hop culture. Alisa, by speaking simultaneously of the affect of sound (crawling skin) and her sense of a demand to step up and reinvent the Tupac course involves active ethical and political responses, showing how hip-hop can be a unique medium that acts on the body and the mind simultaneously in a way that opens up political potential through the conjunction of rhythm and poetry.

Alisa's thought of the 'political' in hip-hop challenges the idea that hip-hop is in some way inherently political. Rather, it is in the milieu in which hip-hop is consumed that it becomes charged with political valences. As Alisa points out, 'exposure' to hip-hop opens listeners up to a 'universal language' and a starting point for 'getting to some deeper stuff'. However, this depth is not achieved in individual isolation. It is in the process of this sharing that this depth is achieved. While for Alisa, this 'deeper stuff' might be politics, racism, and social justice, that is not the case for all members of S4HH. I find that *partage* in this instance of hip-hop culture led to a modulation of ethical and political subjectivity.

Alisa's notion of the ethical in hip-hop is evidenced through her actions as a leader for S4HH and her development of the Tupac course. This form of 'ethics' is not based on a normative code or system of given moralities and rules that guide her behaviour. Alisa's ethics—as do the other examples below—occur in an antiphonal space of demand and response. This disposition, working through affect rather than representation, semiosis, or discourse, acts upon and charges the body to act. As a musical *and* poetic form, hip-hop is an interesting artistic form because it weaves sound and poetry together to grasp the body in a particular way. For Alisa, in the parking lot listening to 'Blasphemy' for the first time, her skin

was crawling because of the affect of an assemblage of Tupac's main flow, his vocals, his ad-libs, the production, and her friend sharing with her, pointing out the hidden messages in the ad-libs. In this (dis)position, she faces a complex demand that acts upon her sensibility. It was when Alisa came to the university campus, became disappointed in the Tupac class and began working with S4HH, that she opened up a response: she redesigned the course and pushed to reorganise S4HH, expanding the membership and making the group more popular and compelling. She co-hosted NoCR and got S4HH involved with a broader range of partners on campus. Alisa's responsibility emerged in an assemblage constituted by communication and sharing.

Sharing and difference in S4HH

Most of the members of S4HH that I interviewed joined the club to share their interest in hip-hop music with others as well as to assist with planning for HHIP. It was Alisa's teaching in the Tupac class that inspired Arnold to join the club.

While I was taking the Tupac [course]...Alisa impressed me, like a lot. She really knows her shit and not only that, she can fuckin' spit too. Cool. I [decided] to stay in the [course]. And then later on, we were talking and she said 'I'm the current President of Students for Hip-hop'. [...] I went to a meeting, met a couple people and it basically was not what I expected. I basically thought it would be a roundtable discussion where we all sit around and talk about the current things in hip-hop. It's the exact opposite. I thought S4HH would be full of people who were trying to learn about hip-hop. I got there... everybody's in to hip-hop, even so much that a lot of folks rap, a lot of folks do all these different things, and I'm like 'you know what, this is exactly what I've been looking for!', because I make beats and everything—it was great to have finally found a group of people that are into the same things for the most part.

It was Alisa's sharing of hip-hop through the Tupac class that she organised that provided the main motivation for Arnold to get involved in S4HH. What is interesting is how Alisa embodied hip-hop through her extensive knowledge about Tupac as well as her ability to rap ('spit', in Arnold's words above). This compelled him to go to an S4HH meeting, and he was surprised to find that instead of a society debating hip-hop, it was a site of sharing and communication of hip-hop culture. Though these debates do happen, what made the club feel like a community was the fact that within the group, people cipher, write and freestyle, and

share this with each other. Others make beats that they bring to the cipher and others are involved in creative work in various other ways. This was the community that Arnold was looking for, disappointed in his first years at university when many of his peers did not know much about hip-hop music, let alone understand much about the ‘underground’ music that Arnold enjoyed. Finding S4HH was a way for him to share with others (and in doing so) constitute himself as part of a hip-hop community.

Living in the dorms with my floormates, I was legitimately the only person on my floor that listened to hip-hop. How do I know this? I asked all of them. [Laughing]. For the most part, that first intro with the dorms: ‘*None* of you guys, *none* of you have heard of this person, *none* of you have heard of that person?’ And a couple of them would be like, ‘Oh we’ve heard of Lil Jon’...the songs that they’re referencing are the ones that you know that are played at parties or songs that *everyone* knows, because its made popular on TV. At the same time, it had a benefit for me. I was able to, from them, get into other kinds of music outside of hip-hop.

Though Arnold was exposed by his floormates to a number of different genres of music (through another mode of sharing entirely), he was surprised that few of them knew much about hip-hop. S4HH was consequently an exciting opportunity for him to share and learn from other members of the group. Where he felt that most of the student population of the campus had a cursory understanding of hip-hop, only really aware of those songs on the radio or television, S4HH offered him a chance to meet people with similar interests in ‘underground’ hip-hop and a place for him to share his beats. Many others had similar stories to Arnold upon entering S4HH.

Nathan, a young white man from the East Bay that raps and got into hip-hop through a digital music production class at his high school, joined S4HH as a place to engage with and share with other students, similar to Arnold. He had grown up around hip-hop music, though in high school, hip-hop was primarily ‘party music’, fat beats for cars and high school dances. However, in his digital music production class in high school, he started to ‘mine’ the roots of hip-hop more deeply, gaining a more conscious understanding of the roots of the genre. He and a few others in the class would get together and make hip-hop beats. On occasion he would freestyle—not necessarily in ciphers, but in order to pump up his baseball team before a game

or just for fun. From that, he began writing lyrics to instrumentals as well as beats that he has made. It was in coming to university, however, that his passions for hip-hop came to the surface: ‘I think high school for me... [it was] transition from it being just like fun to something [I am] really passionate about, that transition happened for me just this past year. I had two raps I made in high school but now I have like a whole book of stuff I’ve been working on in the past year’. Coming into the Tupac class and S4HH was instrumental in facilitating Nathan’s interest and activity in making hip-hop music when he arrived on campus.

[I] didn’t feel super involved with things [on campus]... I was feeling I was doing my own thing just hanging out in my room and then doing homework or whatever, getting by in classes. But I think taking the Tupac course and also it’s the first semester that I’ve gone to a S4HH meeting—I think I’ve made it to almost all of them. I’ve just been really into it, [I] just connect with the people a lot...I definitely feel like more at home [at the university] as a result by having that extra community.

S4HH afforded Nathan the space he was looking for to practice his delivery and flow. He was one of the most active participants in the cipher despite not being the most experienced freestyler in the group. Indeed, Nathan offers an image of what *partage* really looks like in S4HH. As a rapper, he frequently participated in the cipher. During HHIP, before the first acts came on, Nathan and a few other rappers in the group went on stage and freestyled to engage the audience and capture the energy level of the festival’s attendees. In order to help set up HHIP, he helped to drive other students around the Bay Area to market the event. In meetings, he was active in debates and sharing his musical tastes.

I observe that Nathan engages with S4HH through ethical registers. Interestingly, this is mediated through his relative geographic privilege:

There’s sort of a split in [where I grew up] where people appreciate that part of the [hip-hop] culture and view that as a kind of cultural appropriation thing, where they’re taking something that was developed in Oakland out of certain circumstance and just doing the fun part which is just playing the music. I guess I feel like appreciating the music is never a bad thing but some people do act in a way that is sort of ignorant, but I try not to do that when I’m listening to music loud.

Nathan recognises that there is a tension around ‘just doing the fun part’: riding in a car with subwoofers so loud that it is like a ‘massage’. He shows his awareness of the issue of the commodification of hip-hop and how this has (at times) its political significance. However, he

points to an ‘ignorant’ mode of listening rather than criticise artists. While he says he tries ‘not to do that’ or listen in that way, he traverses this tension through the *partage* that he engages in as a member of S4HH. Instead of ‘appropriating’ or ‘just doing the fun stuff’, Nathan commits himself materially—literally sharing his voice in the cipher—by contributing in numerous ways to S4HH. I draw attention to how ‘ignorant’ forms of listening are mitigated and challenged through the kind of consciousness that is developed a shared listening site. We see here that Nathan is not ‘just doing the fun stuff’ but by sharing, he becomes a part of the community and contributes to it with *effort*. This is an ethical engagement and one not unique to Nathan.

The ethical subjectivities that emerge in S4HH *partage* refract individuals’ social processes of identity. For Alisa, sharing Tupac’s sound is a means of engaging other students in discussions around the politics of race and justice. Investing part of her life in hip-hop is based on faith and commitment. In fact, she describes hip-hop as a ‘religion in a lot of ways’. Her philosophy of working through hip-hop and sharing it as a way of thinking rather than simply music allowed S4HH to grow (many of the members joined the group after interacting with her in the Tupac course). For her, this is a response to a particular instance of intense affect. Before coming to UC Berkeley, Alisa was living out of her car, freestyling for hours daily on a laptop in parking lots in the East Bay with other friends and rappers. Hip-hop enchanted her, motivating her as an artist, activist and student.

I draw on Jane Bennett’s conception of ‘enchantment’ to make sense of Alisa’s enchantment with hip-hop as an ethical sensibility, but the notion also applies to the other S4HH members. Bennett considers ‘enchantment’ as ‘a mood with ethical potential’: a ‘model of ethics [that] puts the question of motivation, the “how” of ethics, at its center’ (Bennett 2001, 131). I understand Alisa’s investment in hip-hop from the perspective of an ‘motivation’, a performance of ethics, not responsive to a code, but rather to an experiment *as* she executes

her role in S4HH. Her design is framed through her own interactions with politics, hip-hop culture, and being a driven and hard-working artist and student. Bennett describes ‘enchantment...as operative in a world without telos’ (2001, 131): a world with the potential of a kind of unworking, a moving away from a horizon to a lively, ecstatic, experimental space of *partage*.

Christine joined Students for Hip-hop because Alisa had heard her rap one of her pieces in the Tupac class and wanted her to get involved. Christine felt that the club offered a unique space on campus that was genuinely diverse, unlike many of the other student groups she encountered on campus. The common thread—that everyone likes hip-hop—contributed a vibe that felt open and welcoming.

You have a lot of clubs on campus, if you look at them, it’s just like, ‘wow, that’s an Asian business club’. They’re all Asians, or like, that frat, everyone’s white, you know? Outside the student union, all the black frats do their thing. [...] It’s all very racialised. How diverse are things if people end up self-segregating into their different racial groups and staying within that same comfort zone? [...] There is a value to diversity and that’s what I value about S4HH.

She was motivated to join other clubs on campus that were more diverse, and S4HH offered her a space for that. This had nothing to do with the content of hip-hop tracks but rather was a product of the space that S4HH created on campus. This concretely affected her motivation, her ethical sensibility, to engage with people of a diversity of backgrounds. Concretely, S4HH was open enough that she felt able to participate because of the group’s diverse ethos:

I was really new to it but they were really welcoming, everyone’s there not because they have anything in common with other people but because everybody just likes hip-hop and is interested in hearing what other people have to say. I think after that I’ve become much more critical about what I am doing or who I am talking to or how I am interacting with someone.

That S4HH opened up a space of openness based on mutual exposition and sharing: ‘hearing what other people have to say’, it afforded Christine a space to share and communicate with different, rather than similar, people. In this sense, S4HH opens up a site that produces what Bennett describes as a ‘presumptive generosity’: a disposition of being ‘responsive to other material forms with which one shares space’ (Bennett 2001, 157). S4HH, as an assemblage of bodies, becomes a community through sharing and communication, not because they are ‘in-

common'. Christine helps us consider the becoming-ecstatic of community as S4HH opens a site that is genuinely diverse in contrast to a campus for which many student groups build community around a shared ethnic or racial identity: 'Asianness', 'Blackness', etc. S4HH allowed Christine to open herself up to alterity:

In high school, I only hung out with Asians, even now, there's so many Asians at Berkeley, my whole house is Asian, that bothers me. I'm a lot more critical—like I should talk to different people because it's interesting. I feel that a lot of people that don't want to talk to different people because it's scary. S4HH has really helped with a lot of that. I don't think other people are frightening. It's like, 'oh, what's your story?', you know?

Little of what impacts Christine's ethical sensibilities here has to do with *sound*. Rather, she is motivated by learning about the *between* of difference with others in the club. She quite succinctly sums up the ethos in the club: an inquiry and curiosity in the other's position to negotiate and respond to difference, rather than only approve of it. Christine, through the affordance of a welcoming group, facilitated this curiosity (what she calls 'critical'); she engages with the sharing of others by *listening* to their story. S4HH cultivates a kind of generosity that governs moments of mutual exposition by calling forth a kind of responsibility with an offer. This offering is an extension to another outside, the campus community and the city, that emerges from a sense that hip-hop *should* be shared and in doing it, it modulates how we interact across differences that might seem incommensurable.

Building on this section and Chapter 6, where I explore the dynamics of the shared space of the cipher in more depth, I suggest that shared listening allows hip-hop listeners to challenge ambivalence in hip-hop musical publics and jump-start the production of ethical and political subjectivities. This is contingent on the type of space that is shared. S4HH, under Alisa's direction, encouraged a sharing that is specifically attuned to developing certain subjectivities in hip-hop musical publics that emphasise the political stakes at play in hip-hop culture. In this chapter, I have shown how S4HH opens up ethical subjectivity in the process of sharing listening. By hearing Alisa's inspiration, why Arnold joined S4HH, and the importance of S4HH's diversity, I sketch out the contours of this community and how the

sharing that happens within it leads to the production of ethical subjectivities. With Nathan, we see how he mediates his whiteness and proximity to ‘ignorant’ modes of listening by applying himself as an active member of S4HH and the cipher. For Alisa, setting up spaces like S4HH and the Tupac Shakur course was imperative to her use of hip-hop as a pedagogical tool and a ‘universal language’ that allows people to communicate and come together across differences that are difficult and at times incommensurable. In the following chapter, I explore how this *partage* and the modulation of ethical and political subjectivities in S4HH help us map out a politics of antiphony.

10. Listening and the politics of antiphony

The slaves viewed the civilising process with scepticism and its ethical claims with extreme suspicion. Their hermeneutic agency grounded a vernacular culture premised on the possibility that freedom should be pursued outside of the rules, codes and expectations of colour-coded civilisation. The transgression of these codes was itself a sign that freedom was being claimed. It presented the possibility of an (anti)politics animated by the desire to violation – a negation of unjust, oppressive and therefore illegitimate authority...Music expressed and confirmed unfreedom while evolving in complex patterns that pointed beyond misery towards reciprocity and prefigured the democracy yet to come in their antiphonic forms (Gilroy 1994, 70, emphasis added).

The ‘political’ for S4HH refers more to atmosphere, ethos and mood than it refers to politics, social justice, and the struggle of people of colour. This atmosphere emerges through a process of sharing and a particular ethics of *partage* in hip-hop. Importantly, artists’ content is less relevant than the sharing and communication that happens between bodies in the hip-hop milieu. Selecting conscious artists is about engaging an audience in an atmosphere that is ‘switched on’ rather than pure sensation, spectacle and entertainment. In this sense, HHIP organised and engineered particular affects that invite a conscious listening that has a political valence rather than assembling a consistency of politically like-minded listeners. This is a displacement of the political—understood in its specificity as a field of discourse, ideology, representation—by an affective economy that operates simultaneously on the body through its sensation and on the cerebrum by inviting listeners to ‘switch on’ into a certain kind of

consciousness. In this section, I explore how this displacement of the political by the ethical opens up new relations of community/communication. In this sense, the displacement folds back into a kind of politics *otherwise*. Below, I explore the processes by which this occurs and its consequences on individuals. I find that *partage* in S4HH leads to a certain mentality which, following the interviewees, I term ‘consciousness’. This differs from ‘conscious hip-hop’ which is a labelled genre. Rather, I use the term ‘consciousness’ to unpack an ethos and its corresponding compartments that describes a politics of alterity grounded in responsibility to the other present in the antiphonal relations circulating in S4HH.

I build the notion of consciousness through three encounters that I reflected upon with interviewees. First, I explore Steven’s listening habits as they changed over time, from being a Lil Wayne fan to becoming a hardcore conscious-hip-hop-only listener before joining S4HH. I argue, based on his responses, that genre-specific listening, particularly to hip-hop that is consciously progressive and political invokes its own forms of closure, leading us back to the problem of ambivalence that begins Part 4. There is a tendency as well for political listening to become hyperpolitical, to the point that it is detrimental and produces difference and barriers to effective *partage* and communication. I then explore the problem of race and politics in hip-hop by drawing on the varying, ambivalent ways in which ‘racial’ and ethnic difference are mediated and experienced by different members of S4HH. Finally, I introduce Owen, whose introduction to hip-hop and his private listening practices to identify how he fashions himself into an ethical subject.

Steven: freestyling and moving beyond ‘conscious’ hip-hop

Steven grew up in Georgia, just north of Atlanta, before moving to Los Angeles to attend community college. He felt he had to ‘get the heck out of Georgia’ and was attracted to California because he perceived it as a ‘massive bubble of creative ideas just popping off of

one another'. He was into hip-hop well before he left Georgia. He played football for his high school, listening to Lil Wayne with his teammates before games to get pumped up. Despite his common interest in hip-hop with other students at his school, and even though he could rap, Steven felt that he was limited by closures around ethnicity and culture while he was living in Georgia:

you don't jock on each other's culture in a sense. I don't know if that's a good enough term, but you sort of—um—stick to your own people. I remember I was in to hip-hop but trying to express that while I was there was very difficult. And I was always into freestyling and I had a couple buddies and we would just kick it and freestyle.

Though Steven was into the same music as his black peers, being half Latino and half-white, he was not able to get into hip-hop culture as much as he wanted as a teenager in Atlanta due to the closures he points to about race ('stick to your own people') in his school. He felt liberated from them when he moved to California. At the time, Steven describes himself as 'this liberal, political kid that was in community college listening to all these artists that were flapping their political views onto everybody'. In community college, Steven began to 'hate' Lil Wayne and other music from the Atlanta scene because of its disproportionate focus on 'pussy, money, weed':

For a while I hated southern rap. [...] I got out here [to California] and I just got way more into conscious hip-hop. Not that southern hip-hop isn't necessarily always not conscious, but I got way more into Aesop Rock and Immortal Technique not necessarily west coast hip-hop but artists that had something to say and were conscious about things that didn't necessarily conform to that style that I was used to.

At the same time that Steven started community college, he got deeper and deeper into hip-hop, beginning to write his own lyrics to beats. However, he was exposed to a rather narrow range of hip-hop music, opting to listen to specifically political and conscious artists. Immortal Technique, for example, is a paradigmatic artist in the 'political hip-hop' tradition, whose tracks directly reference political violence and colonialism. It is at this point in Steven's listening practices that he became most focused on the content of hip-hop music. This was a product of a relatively isolated and private listening that Steven was doing at the time. As he said, he was just a 'liberal, political kid' listening on his own, without socially mediating his

musical taste. This lack of diversity and the privacy of his listening led him down a specific route focused on conscious hip-hop.

When I was down there [in Orange County] I started...it was just about conscious hip-hop. I guess part of the reason for that is I was in community college...while it's a great environment and a good way to get to a school of your choice and save money, it doesn't really have the opportunities to really explore all of the...just everything associated with hip-hop. I didn't really get that.

After joining S4HH and coming to Berkeley from Orange County, Steven's tastes changed significantly. He mediated his tastes socially by sharing and rapping with others in S4HH ciphers. He refers to the embodied aspects of freestyling as a kind of sharing that displaced the value of content. While freestyling, Steven could not judge others because they did not express political or conscious lyrics. His evaluation of hip-hop changed, going from a relation of consuming music to a lively one of becoming an active listener by engaging others musically. Steven started *doing* hip-hop rather than listening to it. It was the milieu of Berkeley and S4HH that afforded Steven a new perspective on hip-hop:

My first fall semester, I was exploring more what the (Berkeley) campus had to offer me. I remember one of my first days on Sproul I saw the students for hip-hop thing and I thought, 'Oh that looks cool'. Then, on literally the first day, just as I walk in somebody asked me, 'Yo, do you rap?' Before the meeting even started they said, 'Okay, spit something for me'. Berkeley is so active in everything it does and it got me into it and it got me feeling more confident in how I use hip-hop.

Steven moves to a performative register when reflecting on his first encounter with S4HH. By sharing hip-hop, Steven's mentality changed. Hip-hop was something to be *used* rather than consumed. This shift is from the invitation to 'spit' and freestyle. He was able to freestyle since he did it for fun since he was a teenager in Georgia. Steven was able to engage immediately and share performatively with others in the club. Being a part of the club allowed Steven to mediate listening to hip-hop *with* others rather than on his own. This led to a concrete change to his sensibilities and tastes, eliding his political subjectivity for a more engaged subjectivity proper to the demands of listening and communicating about hip-hop with others. In this process, he revised his notion that good hip-hop is 'conscious' and ought to be evaluated based on its content.

When I got [to Berkeley and S4HH], people were spitting...and I just sort of felt [a sense of] urban expression. I guess [that] is my favourite thing to use when explaining hip-hop to people. I really felt [it] for the first time when I got to Berkeley and started going to Students for Hip-Hop meetings. It got to the point where three or four days a week we would all get together until 10 or 11 at night and just pick a random street corner and just start cipherng. It was just this expression and this feeling that I've never gotten. It kind of took me from writing in my songs about issues that I think affect the world to pretty much anything; I think I could go off on a tangent about coffee cups if I wanted to.

Steven attributes this change in subjectivity to the affective atmosphere and experience of the cipher. The cipher, for Steven, opened up an eventful and lively plane of experience that was facilitated by community. S4HH's affect on Steven was to reterritorialise his energies in *writing* about issues through hip-hop as a genre to sharing and engaging with others in the simpler act of cipherng. Steven thus explains how content becomes secondary, even irrelevant, in the space of hip-hop because through sharing it, he understood it through an affective register: doing hip-hop is about the sense of expression, not the politics of what is expressed.

[S4HH] made me realise what I think the importance of hip-hop is. I don't think that it is necessarily the content of it, I think it's the expression of it. At the end of the day it is art. Hip-hop has that negative stigma, okay there's a lot of curse words there's a lot of violence, you know misogyny in hip-hop...But, at the end of the day, people will go to the art museum and [they will] see a picture of a general wearing a full uniform and right next to it we can see a bunch of naked ladies with their babies lying around, and we accept them both as art. So I think when I got up here it made me realise that no matter what you say in hip-hop it is still art. And it's just an expression, and that's what it is and I've come to accept that, regardless of the content, it's just an expression and it's art and it's beautiful.

Steven's varied experiences with hip-hop reveal the importance of community in the consumption of hip-hop and how community modulates forms of political subjectivity in relation to hip-hop lyrics. As an isolated listener, Steven became more closed to the diversity and complexity of hip-hop music, focusing specifically on artists that suited a particular taste and conviction that good hip-hop *is* political. However, upon embedding himself into a milieu and a community in which sharing *performance* was a demand immediately placed upon him, his taste changed completely. He says that now he is the most open minded he has ever been about hip-hop.

Steven's shift from a passive consumer to an active listener reveals a key dynamic that is at play in black music and aesthetics. At play is a shift in the hermeneutic processes in Steven's relation to hip-hop music. Upon entering the milieu of S4HH, Steven was exposed to

multiple voices expressing others' various tastes. His relation to hip-hop music moved from monophony to a polyphonic one which respects multiple registers of address (see Gilroy 1988, in Chapter 3). In joining S4HH, Steven became more invested in hip-hop as a mode of becoming rather than a kind of consumption. By engaging in the cipher, Steven became a core part of the community and his hip-hop tastes were modulated. Steven's story helps us map out how the antiphonal aesthetics operate on the listener-subject and catalyse a certain cultivation of the self.

Paul Gilroy locates a democratic moment within the antiphonal relation that is simultaneously ethical and political. Understanding this 'democratic' or political moment within antiphony is crucial to considering how politics is displaced within the hip-hop milieu. Antiphonal aesthetics inspire a fresh, vital ethics that responds to the affectivity of being-with. Indeed, the mediation of black music—figured as a performative, embodied, and affectual experience—by non-black audiences is a rich cultural site to explore how antiphonal relation produces ethical and political subjectivities.

It is through performativity and sinking into the immediate, mutually exposed space of *partage* in S4HH that Steven's closed political subjectivity becomes more open and privileges expression over content, displacing his politics with an ethics that depends on a passivity to the other that affirms the polyvocality of their performativity. What becomes 'political' here is inextricable to the ethical; it is a *how* of listening with others, no longer a question of *what* to listen to. In this sense, we see that the spatiality of *partage* into which Steven inserted himself opened out onto a simultaneously ethical, political, and aesthetic horizon. Steven evaded closure in a political, monophonal listening (characteristic of his time in community college) by diving into an antiphonal community in which sharing and listening is a performance that he encountered in S4HH.

Ambivalence, comportment, and appropriation

Antiphonal relations were not limited to the cipher. In fact, phenotypical variation between bodies opened up a number of anxieties that were highly productive and antiphonal in structure. Below I tell the story of two S4HH members, Samuel and Owen, in an antiphonal manner, putting their interviews into dialogue with one another to theorise the kind of comportment that emerges in the demanding space of S4HH. At times, Samuel touched on an ethico-political tension that he felt in the atmosphere at hip-hop gigs in the Bay Area. He has a certain ambivalence toward white listeners based on the kind of consciousness they express. A concert is itself an alienating space despite it being crowded, jammed amongst hundreds of others in front of a stage. He recounts his experience at two shows, explaining two different modes in which ‘race’ and ethnicity play a role in antiphonal atmospheres:

These white kids that at the concerts...there’s certain...when I went to the Iamsu! concert, and any hip-hop concert I’ve gone to, it’s a bunch of white kids from the suburbs because that’s who can afford to go to these concerts for the most part. When I went to the Iamsu! concert, it was a bunch of white kids over here you know, kinda no respect at all...all that ‘nigga, nigga, nigga’ saying it with the song and its like at that point he’s saying it in the song; I don’t know how I feel about you saying it next to me. [Laughing]. But if you go to a Common concert, and it’s a bunch of white kids and they’re all vibing—you hear me?—I’m passing the blunt to these dudes, [loud laughter] I’m like, ‘what’s up, brah?’ (also cited in Ganesh 2015).

The concert itself has a kind of atmosphere that lends itself to certain ways of being-in-common. For Samuel, this is dependent on how he determines how the other is sharing the atmosphere. He senses, in white listeners saying the ‘n-word’, an unethical listening. On the other hand, when he sees white listeners just vibing at a Common concert—who is a canonical conscious rapper—Samuel quite literally shares with them. For Samuel, listening is a collective event and its success depends on others in the space with him: on processes of *partage*. Being-with in this atmosphere demands a kind of performative listening that is respectful and conscious of the roots of hip-hop in the ‘struggles of people of color’.

That some listeners engage in a disavowal of the entanglement of music with these struggles is, for Samuel, a failure of antiphonal relationality. Instead of producing an inviting

space, white listeners rapping along without thought to what they were saying was abrasive and offensive. Samuel felt that he also encountered similar failures in S4HH. He joked in our interview that S4HH was the ‘hip-hop cultural appropriation group’. While he was joking, he did feel that there was a certain distance between himself and other members of the group. Samuel, who is a rapper and joined S4HH to freestyle with others, feels that many members of the group do not share at the same level as others. Because he can rap well, Samuel does have a high level of recognition and visibility in the group. He recognises the diversity of the group, but feels that difference demands specific forms of responsibility.

Hip-hop started in a certain place with not one certain people, but there were multiple people, from Latinos to Blacks. The people in the club now are...there are some people in there that are you know, the privileged folks you get at Cal. There’s a couple folks that you get in there that are not privileged, just like myself. Hip-hop really started as a way to express a struggle that was common for people of colour or for people that were under-privileged.

This is a demand he places on others to contribute and share with the group. The members of S4HH are astute in their understanding of the roots of hip-hop and its relation to inequality and racism in the United States. Samuel calls for others to perform in response to this. Samuel evaluates others’ responses through the space of the cipher, saying,

if you are coming from that other side of things, I just wish you would rap, I just wish you would step into the cipher and contribute to it. I wish you weren’t just here for another club meeting. I wish that you were here to rap with us.

In this sense, quiet members of the cipher were not embodying and fully participating. This failure short-circuits ‘being-with’—but I insist that the response that Samuel might be looking for exist outside of the cipher and *within* those others he is calling out. While Samuel looks to the immediate space of the cipher, I found by speaking with other members of S4HH that response to difference exists in concrete performances of responsibility even outside the cipher as well as within it.

It is through these failures and distancings that I read this response as the production of ethical subjectivity. I explore this in more detail with Owen, who describes himself as a ‘white kid from the suburbs’ who does not rap but does respond to this demand that Samuel articulates

outside the cipher, in the interval between his sense of self and his comportment. In Samuel's expectation of a response *in the cipher*, Owen—who cannot rap—always falls short. However, Owen, like many of the other members of the group that had not freestyled or rapped something in the cipher, took hip-hop very seriously and was interested in it because it made him more conscious of the very struggles that Samuel references. Through Owen, I read a relation of call and response in spatially disparate locations. In doing so, I hope to address the tension that Samuel broaches and the demand he makes on others in the club. He calls for others to 'step in to the cipher and contribute to it'. The cipher is only one space in which the response to this demand occurs. I explore, through Owen, how an antiphonal play of affect opens up an ethical and political consciousness. This speaks usefully to the tensions around ethnic, racial, and class differences that Paul Gilroy examines in an article on ethics, biopolitics, and hip-hop:

The very qualities in Hip Hop that have led to it being identified not as one black culture among many but as the very *blackest* culture – one that provides the scale on which all the others can be evaluated – have a complex relationship to the signs of pleasure and danger that solicit identification from white affiliates and practitioners. Squeamish 'insiderist' criticism cannot face either the extent to which white consumers currently support black culture or the possible implications of transracial popularity for the political struggles against white supremacy that lie ahead (Gilroy 1994, 52).

The tension that Samuel brought out above around his racially and economically privileged others seems to come into a productive friction with Gilroy's point above about the indeterminacy and complexity of the 'pleasure' and 'support' of 'white affiliates'. I argue that by taking an antiphonal, or perhaps '(anti)political', perspective by taking seriously the challenge of one white listener's responsibility, we might think through ethical and political subjectivity in hip-hop culture in a way that opens up an antiphonal politics to come that is not directly embodied and executed in the space of the cipher (as Samuel calls for), but in everyday life and ethical reorientation. It is a displacement of politics for ethics that allows us to think through how criticism of hip-hop might more effectively 'face' white consumers.

Owen's hip-hop 'consciousness' as a mediation of whiteness

Owen hails from a small, 'affluent' town in Sonoma county filled with winemakers known around the world. Though Owen had a comfortable and privileged life as a teenager, he felt that the small town he grew up in was suffocatingly small and homogeneous. As a high-school student, leaving was not an option for him. At the time he was in to rock and classic rock and did not have much knowledge of hip-hop other than the packaged, mainstream sound dominant on the radio. Owen got into Seattle's hip-hop artists and was excited to see Blue Scholars—one of his favourite groups—at NoCR. It was through Seattle hip-hop that Owen learned more about hip-hop more generally, an interesting starting point in comparison to others in S4HH who were first introduced to classics like Nas and Tupac. Like Peter, Brad, Steven and others, Owen was listening privately before sharing music, exploring based on his own taste and his preferences. Hip-hop allowed him to see outside of the small town that he felt confined in:

It seems unfair of me to say but living in that small town with affluence, everything was just close-minded and small and...hip-hop gave me that chance to feel that I was different, to get into [a] kind of consciousness...I was looking for something very different to subscribe to.

Owen's reason for listening to hip-hop is quite different than others. Like Steven, in his community college days, Owen was an actively political listener—it was the 'liberal' and 'progressive' narratives that he locates in hip-hop lyrics that appealed to him the most—and sought out in specific artists. In fact, he had not listened extensively to Tupac Shakur until joining S4HH. Once Owen got into the hip-hop underground scene, he began to branch out and continued consuming conscious hip-hop as well, citing Mos Def in particular. Through Mos Def, whose album *Black on Both Sides* begins with 'bismillah ar-rahman ar-rahim' (citing the first verse of the Qur'an: 'In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful'), Owen began learning about some of hip-hop's contramodernities. It also cultivated a very particular kind of listening:

With Talib [Kweli] and Mos Def, you take in the flow, you take in everything. But I think with [Common's] *Be*, that's when I really started to take in what he was saying. [...] I'll pull up lyrics

sometimes but I don't really like to do that. I'll just replay it, and replay it, replay it and just get more and more of it. Have it all go in my head and then lip-sync it—feel it.

After getting into conscious hip-hop, Owen took on very particular patterns of listening. It is interesting that Owen refuses to take a shortcut by reading lyrics, instead engaging with the music in an antiphonal mode. Owen pushes himself into the music to *learn* it through close attention to its orality. For Owen, listening is something that he has to 'sit down and totally take in'. Thus where Samuel calls for a kind of performativity that is active and engaged, Owen cannot respond in kind because his consumption of hip-hop, is, on the first, immediate level, a cerebral experience. To switch on and listen to hip-hop invokes for Owen a kind of intensive responsibility. What is important to remember is that this is in its own form a kind of conscious listening but lacks the visibility of cipherring and engaging in the ways that Samuel calls for. In this sense, private listening (as we encountered with Peter, Brad, Jian, Arnold, and Christine) despite its ambivalence, can become rich with potential in the particular comportments that listeners bring to their encounters.

Perhaps part of the reason why Owen does not rap with the rest of the group is because he is so new to the club and just 'starting out' when it comes to hip-hop. He looks to the group as a site of learning.

B: How might hip-hop have expanded your political ideas and understandings of the world?

O: I was definitely a liberal person. I was looking for that in hip-hop. [...] It's basically what Alisa's talking about. You're detailing the struggle, the oppression, the empowerment of all peoples, women, people of colour, looking at all these different cultures. By listening to hip-hop, I just...I opened up to a lot of problems that I've never really gotten into, that I've never really known about.

For Owen, cultivating a certain kind of consciousness is what is at stake in listening to hip-hop. This is not a performativity that flows back into sharing but back into Owen's own concept of himself as an ethical subject. By 'opening up' to the problems that he was ignorant of, Owen attempts to push off on a journey that develops knowledge and understanding of the struggles of African-Americans and marginalised communities from whom he feels sheltered and isolated.

To dig further into Owen's sense of consciousness, I asked him how the fact of his whiteness affects the way he communicates and shares with others in S4HH and elsewhere. He felt that the diversity, openness and welcoming space of the group did not force him to be conscious of his ethnicity, but instead affected his sense of responsibility. He pointed to a comment that another participant made at a workshop for students I had helped organise regarding the genealogy of hip-hop:

A comment was made on Monday night, it comes down to the industry and being white, I think the comment was made: 'We don't like black people, we just like their culture'. [B: Alisa said that]. Yeah. And to me, that's definitely true. And I just...[long silence while he finds his words]...This kind of appropriation, this kind of using, is just...It does seem like, it would seem like...I kinda, I just turn my head...it's a perversion to me. I grew angry about it. And [seeing] my friends listening to certain artists. [...] A lot of the mainstream is getting into this whole kind of culture, this 'black' culture but [they are] fake in a way.

Owen's response to this is a certain sensibility. 'Perverse' listening is a bad vibe and a bad affect, it is a kind of failure in sharing. When he heard the comment that Alisa made, suggesting that the music industry is happy to profit from black culture without doing anything to extend relations of love towards black people, Owen completely agreed. At the same time, he cannot represent quite how he felt about it. He expresses his discomfort by referring to a turn of the head after a long silence as he struggled to articulate his feelings. This is that disjunctive event that he experiences through anger, articulated through affect (a turn of the head). However, to articulate what exactly this kind of listening is, Owen hesitates between 'appropriation', 'using' and 'perversion' and his relationship to those forms of listening. He said, interestingly, that the comment made him recall how some of his friends do listen in that way, only taking the culture without the consciousness. He points to how his friends consume hip-hop in the images presented by the music industry, which he regards as 'fake'. He explains this through an ethical register that is rooted in his listening practice. He is conscious that he is

just another white kid getting into hip-hop. I try not to see it as...the race aspect as sort of the primary thing. I don't know, it was one person's struggle with some stuff and maybe connecting to another person's struggle with some stuff and that's how I always saw it. [...] Hip-hop is opening me up to that diversity [in America today]. When I listen to hip-hop, it's that, it's a narrative and I get a not-secondhand understanding of their story. It's awareness, ultimately.

Hip-hop plays a modest role for Owen. We should remember that Owen is new to the club and only just got into hip-hop a year or two before he joined S4HH, and is only in his second semester at university at the time of this interview. He points out, in the last sentence of his comments above, that he listens to hip-hop to get a direct version of a story: ‘not-secondhand’, not tampered by the influence of the ‘industry’. By joining S4HH he puts himself in the place of being exposed to the other and comports himself with a passivity, noting that he is there to learn and to change. In that space, he brings a sense of ethical listening cultivated both in private listening and exposure to antiphonal and polyphonal modes of listening as a member of S4HH. This has left him with a broader sense of responsibility to be conscious of how he listens. This is an ethical response: because he may be unaware of distant struggles but at the same time is conscious of his own privileges, he sees it as a responsibility to recognise and consider multiple modes of address and throw himself into those disjunctive, uncomfortable events. Through S4HH, Owen cultivates a comportment that is simple but an instructive model of the ethical subjectivity that hip-hop can produce.

Later in our conversation, Samuel explained to me some of his frustrations about how mainstream rap gets consumed that better contextualises Owen’s comportment as a hip-hop listener. Samuel explained that it was important to understand that ‘real rap’ comes from a long tradition that references a space of struggle.

Real rap...I was just having this conversation the other day, even the most *ratchet rap*, from Migos to Lil Bussy, Soulja Boy...you hear them talking all this stuff, like ‘oh, I’m getting high to reminisce about my home boy who’s locked away’...you know what I’m saying? Or ‘I’ma ride on this nigga if he do that to me’. It may sound like its senseless, but in reality that is coming from a struggle. And you hear that so commonly through hip-hop because there are so many people that are in that struggle.

Samuel reminds us that hip-hop is coming from a certain place that is often incommensurable with the fans of a particular artist. He uses the term ‘ratchet rap’ to refer to the pop-friendly, fat 808 beats of Southern, Atlanta-based trap music. He admits that a lot of the music ‘may sound like it’s senseless’ but in fact references the vernacular language and landscape of a particular culture. For that reason, he feels that it is important that white listeners listen to

conscious hip-hop and underground hip-hop in place of ‘ratchet rap’ that gets massive airplay on radios and in the club. Reflecting on listeners at mainstream concerts, he feels that it is not the same vibe. He takes a humorously dismissive tone when he talks about the atmosphere at a mainstream concert. He describes it as ‘over here,’ circling his forearms about in choppy jerks, ‘doing this kind of motion, but at the Common concert, it’s different’. He feels that black listeners understand the mainstream in a different way (cf. Noble 2000, 149), and this affects Samuel’s ability to share in the atmosphere in these spaces:

you know; Black people already understand certain shit. You go over to the mainstream, the stupid shit, why not? To the rest of the world that doesn’t understand it, the mainstream is perpetuating the stupidity and ignorance, [and] that’s not what hip-hop is about.

Samuel is calling for an ethics from ‘privileged’ others that listen to the mainstream without having a consciousness of hip-hop’s roots and where it comes from. It is about displacing ‘stupidity’ not with political discourse but with ethical modes of appreciation.

Owen presents us with a model of this ethical appreciation. As a listener, Owen tries to go beyond just listening to hip-hop because it is ‘fun’. He is learning to recognise the antiphonal demand that is placed on him to share and respond to the rich affective atmospheres he finds himself in when sharing hip-hop with S4HH members. Owen reminds us that this recognition and capacity to respond is something that has to be developed and takes time. However, Owen—following in the ethos of antiphony—recognises that he is on a journey as well. He is happy to plunge into the demands of antiphony and is trying to learn how to respond to it. He mediates his responsibility through his skin; his whiteness in fact opens up responsibility and helps him approve of ethical demands. This approval emerges through his interaction with members of the S4HH musical public and the debates had around hip-hop. From Owen, we get an image of how ‘race’ or rather, phenotype, plays a role in the development of ethical and political subjectivities in hip-hop. At the same time, we see that racial or phenotypical difference is traversed through the disjunctive and uncomfortable positions that Owen finds himself in at times. This traversal, this movement, shatters Owen’s ‘white’ identity and thrusts

him on an antiphonal plane of movement in which he is responding to the others' calls as part of a larger process of learning. We might look to Owen to think of an early mode of an antiphonal comportment, a comportment attentive to the demands placed on the self and the modes of self-criticism and responsibility that he cultivates in the face of these demands.

11. Conclusion: antiphony, creolisation, and multiculturalism

My study of S4HH demonstrates that antiphonal aesthetics rewrite forms of multicultural subjectivity. Antiphony is the primary affective circuit in the cipher, which I argue is a blueprint for understanding the space and time of identity production in S4HH, a hip-hop musical public. The cipher is a demanding space in which the participant is constantly exposed to the call of the other. In Chapter 6, Sonia and Samuel describe the cipher as an event that brings people out of their ‘shells’, where they take the risk of rapping in order to contribute to the cipher. In the dispositions of participants in the cipher, I follow an affective politics of responsibility towards alterity: the words another rapper says, how they act in the cipher, or the anxiety of constriction over bodily incapacity to rap. The cipher demonstrates to us that antiphony is not only present in the aesthetics of the artist but also structures how bodies interact with one another in shared hip-hop spaces.

Listening to hip-hop is politically ambivalent. We can easily listen to hip-hop and not feel any responsibility to the people that make it. At the same time, this sense of responsibility can drive us to dig deeper and share with others to discover new music and the cultures that have brought it to us. My goal has been to demonstrate that this ambivalence opens up an ethical experience in the encounters we have with other members of the musical public. Sharing hip-hop in antiphonal modes (as in the microsocialities present in S4HH) opens up a negotiation that challenges the ambivalence of hip-hop listening. We literally face the other: I

make the rather polemical argument that it is only in the face-to-face encounter with others that we respond in a way that opens the full spectrum of the ethical self in antiphonal events. The power of this argument is limited in that I have not studied online hip-hop musical publics. At the same time, we can turn to Peter who tells us in Chapter 8 that he discovered hip-hop online and listening was a very private experience for him until he had conversations and discussions with others in S4HH. Ultimately these conversations changed the way that he understood hip-hop, making him more open and interested in the breadth of types of hip-hop subgenres. It is the other's full presence—the face—that opens the circuit of ethical subjectivity.

Ethical subjectivity becomes a counterpoint to ambivalence in this study. Antiphony has a peculiar operation on the ethical subject. By insisting on polyvocality and the notion of the ethical 'good' as the act of sharing itself (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 for further discussion), antiphony opens an event that shatters identity across the plane drawn between the lines of a past and future. Articulation—speech, but also movement and comportment—'digs' the 'ritual history' of the past and present and experimentally projects contramodern spaces and times in an antiphonal ethos. This is how I would describe Christine's response to the rapper in a cipher that used sexist and misogynistic language in a freestyle. That rapper represented a horizon that she wanted to leave behind. By spitting lines back at him, Christine moves beyond the present aesthetic violence and 'destroys' the other rapper and calls on him to be better than that going forward. It was an act which restored the atmosphere of the cipher but also illustrates the ethics of responding to such an event. The iterated response to these events opens a subject that cultivates 'critical sensibilities', 'personal accountability' and responsibility (see West 2009 in Chapter 1). These critical sensibilities emerge from the histories and contramodernities present in hip-hop culture that signify on ethical and political modernity. Performances like the cipher displace and reconfigure ethics and politics. The ethics of the cipher emerge in the articulations and comportments of the bodies that are present there.

Ethics and politics happen on a certain border between our self and our identity and our exposition and sharing of this with another. Difference remains but it is mediated through a different logic. We encounter this when Owen, for example, recognises that he is a ‘white kid from the suburbs’ but gets a bad affect when he thinks about ‘fake’ ways in which other white kids listen to hip-hop. It drives him to be more conscious and more exposed to hip-hop (see Chapter 10). For Jian, a Chinese student studying at the university, his exposition to other members of S4HH allows him to appreciate and engage with other modernities in his time in the United States. He may have started out liking hip-hop in order to feel rebellious, but being a part of S4HH and sharing with others in the group, his musical tastes expanded. By learning more about hip-hop and the history behind it, he was better able to appreciate the artistic decisions behind certain hip-hop sounds (see Chapter 8).

In my discussion of NoCR and HHIP (Chapter 7), I demonstrated how S4HH members participated in the broader multicultural movement at the university. Alisa, the President of S4HH, used her platform at NoCR ethically to make her performance entertaining at the same time that it tried to inform a critical sensibility. In this sense, she was playing the role of the Critical Organic Catalyst in Cornel West’s cultural politics of difference. When she ignored the audience’s vote for a song instead of her Vagina Monologue, she made a demand on them to listen to a poetic monologue in which she details the shattering and instability of her own identity, forcing the audience to become a bit less ambivalent and hear her story. The poet that called out to the audience, ‘where the queer people at?’ and said to those with and without their arms raised, ‘it’s okay, we’re all a little queer sometimes’ used antiphonal aesthetics to produce a multicultural space based not on an affirmation of similarity but the fact that we share in difference.

I refer to S4HH as an example of the becoming-ecstatic of multiculturalism because of the way in which it weaves antiphony between the self and alterity into the core of how it

constitutes community. HHIP intended to expose people to the potential for hip-hop culture to create spaces that energise the ambivalence of listening to various modes of response. My study of the cipher shows us as well that the community is constituted by an affective politics of sharing that resembles the ecstatic and unworking (inoperative) community that Jean-Luc Nancy proposes and that I develop in Chapter 4. In this ecstasy what I witness is the cultivation of an ethical subject that comports itself with a critical sensibility to alterity.

In various examples in chapters 6-10, I detail the ways in which various differences, such as gender, phenotype, and bodily capacity are mediated by ethical subjects. I demonstrate how private and shared listening experiences open up a process by which we might see the production of an ethical self that is constituted through antiphony and alterity. As I review in Chapter 3, antiphony is an aesthetic as much as it constitutes community and contramodern times and spaces. Antiphony forces us to suspend our own identity in the face of difference. We find ourselves in a passivity, a comportment in which we allow the other to take hold of us. In the cipher, the rule is passivity until you have the floor. In hip-hop and antiphonal relations, discourses such as ‘authenticity’, ‘mainstream’, and ‘underground’ are distracting because they posit an identity that makes hip-hop immanent to a particular essence. What antiphony reminds us is that hip-hop is what is brought *to* the cipher; it is in response to the other, the outside, in which antiphony circulates and arranges materials into an affective, ethical, and political milieu.

The becoming-ecstatic of the multicultural

What I discovered in S4HH is not another ‘multiculturalism’ or political logic for governing difference. Because the antiphonal aesthetic is inherently connected to different modalities of the ethical and political, I argue that we find a different *manner* of relating to alterity in the subjectivities of S4HH members. In this sense, I develop the notion of the multicultural as the

assemblage of various demands, responses, and comportments that occur between differentiated and separate bodies. Instead of an ideology or principled approach to the multicultural, what I detail in this study is a series of constantly experimental bodily responses to difference in the atmospheres of hip-hop musical publics. Relating to alterity becomes a negotiation of conflicts and tensions—such as Christine’s frustration with sexist freestyles or Samuel’s discomfort that he intimidates others in the cipher—to which we respond in experimental and incomplete ways. I argue that this process suspends ‘identity’ as we might understand it in the political sense (such as an ethnicity, race, or class that might be the subject of a representation or belonging), turning identity into an event that is always constituted *with* and in the face of another body. The antiphonal process by which difference is negotiated by members of S4HH and hip-hop musical publics suspends the ‘proper names’ that multicultural recognition depends on: Black, Asian, Jewish, or Muslim (to name just a few). The multicultural emerges as a product of contestation in the sites where we are effectively forced to be with others. The distribution of this alterity, when negotiated in antiphonal modes, destabilises the possibility of recognising an ethnically, racially, or otherwise complete ‘identity’; rather, I locate the multicultural in the liminal, disjunctive sites of enunciation in which one body is constricted by what makes it different (its sex or phenotype, for example) and is called upon by another. Facing the call of call and response, we are constantly disposed to difference and comport ourselves in a certain way. It is from this anarchic, non-principled structure that I broach the becoming-ecstatic of the multicultural.

Ecstasy, if we turn back to Jean-Luc Nancy in Chapter 4, refers to the notion that the self, body, and community are constituted by their sharing rather than through their immanence to a particular essence. I observe this throughout my empirical observations on S4HH presented in Chapters 6 through 10. The ecstatic refers to a kind of sharing that involves the shattering and dissolution of identity and exposition to alterity. It is a sharing that suspends the self in the

disjunctive event of relation and enunciation. Antiphony is an aesthetic practice and a social structure that hosts such an ecstatic relation. Antiphony offers a kind of intimacy but also a site that does not shy away from conflict, tension, and discord. Instead, antiphonal relations attempt to call the listener into a new subjectivity and a new comportment that is always an experiment in traversing and sharing difference *in situ*.

To speak of the becoming-ecstatic of the multicultural refers to a way of constituting the multicultural not through means of representation, recognition, and incorporation of ‘Other’ identities but through experience and the affective circuits at play in diverse spaces. Hip-hop musical publics are an extremely useful example to begin thinking through the becoming-ecstatic of the multicultural. In addition to the ‘democratic moment’ that antiphony hosts (see Gilroy 1988, 1993b, 1994, 2000 in Chapter 3 and Chapter 10), the fact that hip-hop musical publics like S4HH involve listeners from all backgrounds, classes, and ethnicities demonstrate that hip-hop musical publics are rich sites for thinking about multiculturalism. S4HH is, of course, a particular case in a highly diverse student community, but these concerns about diversity in hip-hop musical publics are important in the various contexts and places of which they are a part. Further, hip-hop culture operates within contramodern times and spaces that rearrange and re-evaluate the ethical and political through antiphonal aesthetics. This generates a spatiality that allows us to glimpse a form of Western multiculturalism that is not codified by liberal multiculturalism or cosmopolitanism, remaining different but entangled with these assemblages. I conceive of a uniquely hip-hop multiculturalism—an antiphonal multiculturalism—structured by the ethics, aesthetics, politics, and contramodernities of the African diaspora.

By producing an ethical subject, the antiphonal relation allows new articulations of the ethical and political. These articulations happen in concrete atmospheres that are shared by bodies in a musical public. We find a reconfiguration of the logic of the ethical and political in the affective economies of hip-hop sites such as the cipher or the HHIP festival. This

reconfiguration occurs through shared modes of listening. I review these reconfigurations conceptually in Chapters 3 and 5, exploring how antiphony, as it has emerged in African diasporic and African-American writing, rearticulates the ethical as specifically anarchic and rooted in the body itself and its response to others rather than in a series of principles. This is evident in Wole Soyinka's Fourth Stage in which the 'antiphonal refrain' is the metaphor that illustrates how Yoruba tragic music casts both the performer and the audience on a journey into a transitory abyss. I use Deleuze to explore this further as he suggests that ethics is how we comport ourselves to this disjunctive and uncomfortable event. In Chapter 5, I draw out a speculative genealogy of the cipher to demonstrate how the term cipher signifies a contramodernity rooted in a Black Atlantic spiritual tradition that articulates a different ontology (represented by the Supreme Mathematics) and the inversion of Western modernity by sacralising blackness. Hip-hop's contramodernities propose new notions of the ethical, political, and the social.

I argue that antiphony gives us a tangible, generative, and rich starting point to think through the becoming-ecstatic of the multicultural. It is essential to start this inquiry from the position of alternative ontologies and modernities. It is crucial that we turn to African diasporic and other encounters with modernity to theorise the multicultural. This move allows us to put alternative orderings at the forefront of rethinking multiculturalism by taking seriously the displacement of modern notions of 'ethics' and 'politics' and to signify on them, *syncopating*, as Cornel West puts it, the past and future of Diaspora to construct alternative modernities in the age of global cosmopolitanism. Through the stories I have relayed about S4HH, we can see how antiphony becomes a starting point for the multicultural. This is not a contemporary development, but rather a product of the entanglement of African diaspora knowledges, modernities, and aesthetics in the racial and colonial regimes of Western modernity.

Creolisation as the becoming-ecstatic of multiculturalism

Ecstasy is a state that refuses closure. The word itself stresses this point; its Greek root is ‘ekstasis’, referring to ‘any situation in which (part of) the mind or body is removed from its normal place or function’.¹⁷ It connotes movement and interminability in addition to joy. The becoming-ecstatic of multiculturalism is its displacement and rendering into a tentative, rather than completed, process (with regard to cosmopolitanism, see Jazeel 2011, Derrida 2001). We might consider the multicultural ‘adjectivally’ as Stuart Hall does (Hall 2000, 209), referring as much to the ‘substantive’ question of managing diverse societies in political logics (2000, 209) as it does to the ‘play’ and ‘weave’ of ‘similarities and differences that refuse to separate into fixed binary oppositions (2000, 216). Drawing on Derrida’s *différance*, Hall gives an image of the multicultural as a conflictual, incomplete, and tentative terrain:

différance does prevent any system from stabilising itself as a fully sutured totality. It arises in the gaps and aporias which constitute potential sites of resistance, intervention and translation. Within these interstices lies the possibility of a disseminated set of vernacular modernities...they continue to inflect, deflect, and ‘translate’ its imperatives from below (2000, 216).

Hall proposes a notion of the multicultural that is inherently ecstatic: meaning is deferred and unfinished (in opposition to total and ‘sutured’). That this process plays out in a distribution of vernacular modernities stresses that it is from the challenges to and dissent within ‘westernizing techno-modernity’ (Hall 2000, 216) that this play in the multicultural proceeds. Becoming-ecstatic then is the rewriting and the play of difference expressed in vernacular modernities or contramodern times and spaces. This is the ex-static movement: the shattering and rewriting of elements of modernity in contramodern time and space whose arrangements are rooted in the entangled histories between the peripheral and subaltern and the modern.

What took place in the Caribbean, which could be summed up in the word *creolization*, approximates the idea of Relation for us as nearly as possible. It is not merely an encounter, a shock...a *métissage*, but a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry. [...] Creolization seems to be a limitless *métissage*, its elements diffracted and its consequences unforeseeable. [...] Its most obvious symbol is in the Creole language, whose genius consists in always being open, that is, perhaps, never becoming fixed...the explosion of cultures does not mean they are scattered or mutually diluted. It is the violent sign of their consensual, not imposed, sharing (Glissant 1997, 34).

¹⁷ See entry for ‘ecstasy’ in *Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World* (2007), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This quote helps us think about creolisation and ecstasy together. For Nancy, Levinas, and Glissant, the event of the other and the disjuncture between my ipseity and my enunciation opens from a poetic and ethical relation with alterity. My becoming, my loss of a proper name (see Deleuze 1990 in Chapter 4), happens in a kind of ‘sharing’ that is violent but not imposed. This paradox is particularly interesting when we reflect on the experiences of S4HH members; often music, words, and copresence are conflictual and disharmonious sites that are grating and anxious. At the same time by putting ourselves in that position, we ‘consent’ to the operation of aesthetic violence and the other’s demand on us: we comport ourselves with a passivity to alterity. In this ‘explosion of cultures’ we commit ourselves to the possibility of our dissolution as an ethical good. The antiphonal relation becomes a creolising relation specifically in its reordering of the good in polyvocality and the open-ended, tentative, and experimental ethics of response/responsibility that it invokes. Thus, I read antiphony as a modality of creolisation.

Glissant’s thinking is explicitly related to the thought of a politics, culture, and multicultural ‘otherwise’, it is

a crucial re- or dis-orientation, for theorising the Americas requires a very different sense of knowing and being. This shift in epistemology and metaphysics, of course, requires another sense of poetics and aesthetics. Or perhaps the poetics and aesthetics begin epistemology and metaphysics (Drabinski 2013, 291).

This is precisely how I position antiphony and hip-hop contramodernities, arguing throughout that they generate their own ethical subjectivities and ontological propositions. Hip-hop’s contramodernities or vernacular modernities become a starting point from which we might conduct the kind of rewriting that we encounter in Glissant, a rewriting (here) of the multicultural as a re/dis-orientation. Antiphony is a generative movement that disorients, rewrites, and transforms the multicultural through its call and response between a performance and its celebrants. Glissant prioritises (as does Nancy) being-with as ontology but reminds us of the entanglements of this ‘with’ in the violent history of Western modernity, whose inception is in the moment of enslavement, racism, and coloniality. Both Glissant and Nancy rely on the

‘with’, but the notion of being-with and its entanglement in Black Atlantic cultures and power hierarchies requires engagement with a particular ethics that opens Nancy’s thought on becoming-ecstatic to a horizon that takes seriously the *global* entanglements and violence of Western modernity and their refraction in contemporary multiculturalism.

Glissant’s ‘Relation’, which is also creolisation, implies an ethics:

thought of the Other is sterile without the other of Thought.

Thought of the Other is the moral generosity disposing me to accept the principle of alterity, to conceive of the world as not simple and straightforward, with only one truth—mine. But the thought of the Other can dwell in me without making me alter course...without changing me within myself. An ethical principle, it is enough that I not violate it.

The other of Thought is precisely this altering. Then I have to act. That is the moment I change my thought, without renouncing its contribution. I change, and I exchange. This is an aesthetics of turbulence whose corresponding ethics is not provided in advance. [...] The other of Thought is always set in motion by its confluences as a whole, in which each is changed by and changes the other. (1997, 155).

Glissant’s other of Thought brings us on to the anarchic and relative account of ethics that we encountered in Levinas (Chapter 1) and Deleuze and Nancy (Chapter 4). What matters is that thought of the Other and the other of Thought are simultaneously evident in the relation. The other of Thought is what calls me and demands my response often articulated by an other that I face. The other of Thought happens in the disjunctive temporality between the other (whose body I face) and their enunciation and expressions that cause me to act and ‘alter course’. The cipher—my example of antiphony *par excellence*—arranges a site for the intervention and resonance of this other of Thought: it is epistemic, metaphysical, and ontological exchange.

Alterity becomes an event in antiphonal relation between my passivity to alterity and my response to it. It is not enough to simply exhibit the passivity to the other that we encounter as an ‘ethical principle’ that I may not ‘violate’. This passivity must be met with a response in which the ‘I’ that I am is suspended. As an ethical principle, my moral consciousness to alterity is half: Glissant insists that only with the intervention and the event of the other of Thought that I participate in a contramodern ecstasy. The moment of ontological disturbance is rooted in an ‘aesthetics of turbulence’, the point of my own suspension and the limit of (my) modernity, a site where I am forced but also consent to the event of my change and dissolution

in the ‘exchange’ with alterity that I face. If we go back to Nancy’s notion of love as that which shatters us (see Chapter 4), creolisation in an antiphonal mode is also a kind of love in which I *allow* the other of thought to change, shatter, or alter me as a product of my sharing and relationality. As Glissant notes, the ethics of creolisation are not given in advance—each time we are present, our ethics are tentative and experimental.

Perhaps the best way to better understand the creolisation evident in the antiphonal multiculturalism that I am trying to develop is to turn to my own transformation as a researcher of hip-hop culture and musical publics. In sharing my own research with S4HH and in my own work on antiphony, my theoretical notions and starting points changed, rewritten by the temporality and spatialities that I encountered in the Bay Area. As I began to understand antiphony more closely through my exchange with S4HH members, I cultivated a passivity to the ‘subjects’ of my ethnography and a suspension of my belief about the ‘politics’ of hip-hop (which I had initially positioned in the narratives and sonic landscapes sketched by artists). In this suspension and passivity, I allowed the contramodern ‘Thought’ of S4HH spaces to allow for a perspective to emerge rather than define it and provide evidence for it. This, for me, was an antiphonal approach to research itself, rendering ontology inconsistent and contingent in the spaces and contramodernities that I observed. I was always presented with the other of Thought and I had to learn to allow it to write me. In focusing on antiphony—rather than other aesthetics in hip-hop—I learned (a process still incomplete) how to remain confident in my own contribution to the community at the same time that I retained and developed a passivity to difference. This became a comportment to doing the research itself and writing it up. In struggling to conclude, my readings of Glissant, Nancy, Deleuze, Gates Jr, Morrison, Soyinka, and Levinas remind me that the conclusion is always in a process of arriving, infinitely deferred: a mirage. The ecstasy that I found myself in was always a kind of creolisation, another alterity that challenged and repositioned my thought and findings. What I can conclude is to

decide on a fixed point of opening: hip-hop musical publics make available a contramodern temporality of ontological dissent and displacement. I learned that what counts is to comport myself to my own dissolution, to allow myself to be creolised (or transformed) rather than to appropriate. This became a project of antiphonal writing—not in my style of presentation (which is standardly academic)—but in the structure of my thought and struggle to write through an always-arriving displacement (see Derrida 2001, 23). Antiphony, for me, becomes an ontology as much as an aesthetic and a sociality. It becomes the core of my own politics of rethinking multiculturalism as forever displaced, conflicted, tentative, and iterative. This project of trying to understand antiphony, ecstasy, and creolisation in hip-hop helps me to think of an opening for a writing of the multicultural that refuses its closure.

I find that the politics of hip-hop are also to be found in the antiphonal moments of creolisation that occur within the musical public. Creolisation is inherently political in that it insists on the ‘incidence of raciality-coloniality in the institution of the political’ (Hesse 2011, 59); ‘raciality-coloniality’ is implicit in the political as it is configured in modernity:

If creolisation emerges from the vocabularies and grammars, sonics and oralities, representations and performativities, ruptured and transformed from the colonialities of European modernity, is it really possible to understand the political outside of these entanglements? (Hesse 2011, 39).

Barnor Hesse goes on to suggest that the meaning of the political as ‘unitarily European, American, and Western’ (2011, 42) is really an illusion: ‘perhaps we should also consider the West as always already creolised by virtue of its modernity and coloniality’ (2011, 41). This is what we might think of the ‘entanglement’ of the ‘political’ in the ‘subaltern aspects’ of Western raciality-coloniality (see 2011, 59). To think the political is to engage with ‘the meaning of black politics’ as ‘the irruptive challenge to the disavowal of these creolised entanglements’ (2011, 59). Hesse argues that the political (and by extension) liberal multiculturalism depends on the ‘disavowal’ of its constitution *with and through the* subaltern subject. This disavowal allows for a kind of closure and completion that allows the discourse

of liberal multiculturalism to become a progressive end when in reality it is already a product of a creolisation and exchange; consequently, the multicultural cannot be a closed totality.

My turn to the ethical in hip-hop is to acknowledge and build on a politics already entangled and responsive to this Western raciality-coloniality. The politics of hip-hop bears the truth of the creolisation of the political and of (multi)culture. The ethical emerges as a comportment open to its creolisation and infinitude, a passivity that is at the same time a willingness to transform or be transformed. Following on from Glissant and Hesse, in this study I reviewed an affective politics and a politics of ethical self-constitution that allows us to think the multicultural *otherwise*. Multiculture re-emerges as the site which is already creolised but its process is incomplete: it is also always *creolising*. From the contramodernity of hip-hop, we might conceive of the inherent creolisation of our culture and instead of its disavowal, hip-hop—and antiphony—encourages this recognition and the possibility of sharing, engaging, and exchanging in a process of mutual transformation with burying or effacing differences, but by exposing ourselves to the discomfort and constriction that this sometimes requires. This is a multiculturalism not based on liberal principles but on our comportment and willing capacity to share and be altered in the process. I assert that the antiphony between members of S4HH gives us a tentative framework for the affirmation of this other, ecstatic, antiphonal multiculturalism.

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